SHAKING HANDS AND THE POLITICS OF TOUCH IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND*

In 1639 a defamation case in the Court of Chivalry hung on a handshake. Sir Henry Mynne claimed that a bitter dispute with Baron Sherard of Leitrim had been settled by arbitration, after which 'they shooke hands with each other and were made fr[i] ends'. Sherard angrily refuted Mynne's claim:

> Such pretended shaking of hands was in this insuinge manner and noe otherwise . . . Mynne, without any invitation or consent of mine, laid his hand upon the back of one of my hands, whereuppon I presently drew away my hand from his hand and refused to take him by the hand.[1]

Conventional arguments in the social sciences about the handshake representing a claim to mutual worth and social solidarity depend in part on the reading of an act that demands co-operation between the parties for its successful completion: 'the meaning of the handshake is to be found in co-ordination and completion'.[2] Inspired by the work of Erving Goffman on 'access rituals'

* Earlier versions of this article were given at the 2008–9 *Society, Culture and Belief, 1400–1800* seminar, Institute for Historical Research; the Universities of Hong Kong (2009); Birmingham (2010), Exeter, and York Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies (both 2013). I am grateful to audiences there for questions and suggestions, and to the many friends and colleagues who offered helping hands.

[1] Court of Chivalry, case 593, Sherard v Mynne, available at *British History Online*, Version 5.0, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/court-of-chivalry/593-sherard-mynne>. For discussion of the case, see Richard Cust, 'A Rutland Quarrel, the Court of Chivalry and the Irish Peerage during Charles I's Personal Rule', *Midland History*, xxxv (2010).

[2] Deborah Schiffrin, 'Handwork as Ceremony: The Case of the Handshake', *Semiotica*, xii (1974), 192; Peter M. Hall and Dee Ann Spencer Hall, 'The Handshake as Interaction', *Semiotica*, xlv (1983), 256–7.

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https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtae007 Advance Access published on 17 July 2024

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and their role in constructing the 'social interactive order', studies in the social sciences have analysed the role of what they term 'handwork' in indexing identities and regulating relationships.[3] These emphasise the technical complexity and semiotic depth in the handshake as both physical gesture and social performance. Seldom a simple gesture because of the depth of information it carries and the amount of work it does, the handshake needs to be read as a scripted, sequentially-structured ritual that transforms the proffering of a hand into a request for access and the hand's reception into the granting of the request. It is this dramatization of respect found in the mutual denial of deference and mutual expression of worth that underpins the reading of the handshake as signifying social solidarity and friendship. It was this reading that Mynne claimed and Sherard angrily denied.

There has been relatively limited historical work on the handshake. Usurping other forms of hierarchically-structured 'access rituals' — kissing the hand, bowing the knee and uncovering the head — shaking hands has come to be associated with what a recent general history of the gesture calls 'egalitarianism and warmth'.[4] But to the extent this reading captures the social meaning attached to the modern handshake, it misreads the more nuanced conclusions to work in the social sciences on the handshake and the complexity of meanings to shaking hands in pre-modern society.

[3] Richard Handler, 'Erving Goffman and the Gestural Dynamics of Modern Selfhood', in Michael J. Braddick (ed.), *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives* (Past and Present Supplement no. 4, Oxford, 2009); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1956); Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour* (New York, 1967); Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (London, 1971); Erving Goffman, 'The Social Interaction Order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address', *American Sociological Review*, xlviii, no. 1 (1983). On 'handwork' see, in particular, Adam Kendon and Andrew Ferber, 'A Description of Some Human Greetings', in Richard P. Michael and John H. Crook (eds.), *Comparative Ecology and Behaviour of Primates: Proceedings of a Conference held at the Zoological Society, London, November 1971* (London, 1973); Paul E. Greenbaum and Howard M. Rosenfeld, 'Varieties of Touching in Greetings: Sequential Structural and Sex-Related Differences', *Journal of Non-Verbal Behavior*, v (1980); Sheryl N. Hamilton, 'Rituals of Intimate Legal Touch: Regulating the End-of-Game Handshake in Pandemic Culture', *The Senses and Society*, xii (2017); Artem Melnyk and Patrick Henaff, 'Physical Analysis of Handshaking Between Humans: Mutual Synchronisation and Social Context', *International Journal of Social Robotics*, xi (2019).

[4] Ella Al-Shamahi, *The Handshake: A Gripping History* (London, 2021), 81–2.

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In his pioneering essay on the 'hand of friendship', Herman Roodenburg offers a history of the gesture, primarily in the Netherlands. He initially dates its role as 'access ritual' to its adoption as a form of greeting by the Quakers in mid-seventeenth-century England. Subsequently, he suggests that it *must* also have occurred earlier in other parts of Europe, and he finds evidence for its use (but for different purposes) in the Netherlands from the sixteenth century on. However, he argues that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'and probably for a good deal of the eighteenth century', shaking hands 'had a very different meaning from the ritual act we know today'. 'It looks', he suggests, 'as if the gesture was not part of any greeting or parting behaviour at all but . . . had quite different connotations which centred around such concepts as friendship, brotherhood, peace, reconciliation, accord, or mutual agreement'.[5] While Roodenburg's distinction might imply the beginnings of a more prosaic attitude to the act of shaking hands (which may help to explain his dating of its origins as greeting in the later eighteenth century), his separation of the handshake as a greeting from the handshake as an expression of friendship seems to empty the gesture of the meaning attributed to it both by early modern contemporaries and by work in the social sciences.

Roodenburg's dating of the introduction of the handshake as greeting ritual receives some support from work by Penelope Corfield on forms of salutation in eighteenth-century English society. Corfield offers evidence for the growing practice of shaking hands on meeting which she dates to the *earlier* eighteenth century. Like Roodenburg, she acknowledges antecedents for the practice of the handshake, but she too suggests that these do not include its role as access ritual.[6] A more recent contribution,

[5] Herman Roodenburg, 'The "Hand of Friendship": Shaking Hands and Other Gestures in the Dutch Republic', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1991), 153, 174, 177–8.

[6] P. J. Corfield, 'From Hat Honour to the Handshake: Changing Styles of Communication in the Eighteenth Century', in P. J. Corfield and Leonie Hannan (eds.), *Hats Off, Gentlemen! Changing Arts of Communication in the Eighteenth Century/ Arts de Communiquer au Dix-Huitième Siècle* (Paris, 2017); Penelope J. Corfield, 'Fleeting Gestures and Changing Styles of Greeting: Researching Daily Life in British Towns in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Urban History*, xlix (2022); Penelope

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drawing on Roodenburg's work, makes the larger claim that the handshake as greeting was largely unknown in European elite circles before 1800.[7]

Drawing inspiration from the work of Goffman on the significance of gestures in enacting the social order, this article seeks to recover the role of the handshake as gestural greeting in early modern England. Establishing the chronological, spatial and social contours of the handshake, it proposes an earlier date and much longer history for its practice as a greeting ritual. The article analyses the social, gendered and age relationships defined in its practice and performance. Recovering the social and cultural meanings attached to touch and the hand in early modern England and contextualising the handshake in the situational and spatial structures that frame it, the article examines the micro-politics of shaking hands. In doing so, it offers a critical historical assessment of the changing significance of the handshake as a 'status-regulated' gesture in both confirming and challenging the 'social interaction order' of early modern society. Historicizing the role the handshake could play in the micro-politics of a hierarchically structured society complicates, I argue, the modern reading of the handshake as a simple gesture signalling friendship and social solidarity.

I

TOUCH AND EARLY MODERN CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE HAND

Although opinion in early modern society varied as to where touch ranked in the five senses, contemporaries recognised the central importance of the hand in their apprehension of self and the negotiation of their worlds.[8] From Aristotle on, it was

(n. 6 cont.)
J. Corfield, 'The History of the Hand-Shake', <https://www.penelopejcorfield.com/the-history-of-the-hand-shake/> and 'The History of the Handshake', <www.penelopejcorfield.com/PDFs/3.2.4-2019-History-of-Handshake-Report-For-East-China-Univ.pdf>.

[7] Bjarke Oxlund, 'An Anthropology of the Handshake', *Anthropology Now*, xii (2020).

[8] Elizabeth D. Harvey (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia, 2003); C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London, 2006), 29–62; Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford, 2007), 93–116; Stephen Thayer, 'History and Strategies of Research on Social Touch', *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, x (1986); David J. Linden, *Touch: The Science of Hand, Heart, and Mind* (London, 2015).

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the hand that was seen as the most characteristic *human* part in the topography of the body.[9] That in the late sixteenth century a London parish felt the need to record the burial of a woman's hand in consecrated ground offers striking testimony to the powerful identification made between hand and human. Punishments that involved the severing and public display of hands made the same point more forcefully.[10]

An 'epistemological tool', the meaning-making hand was 'a densely textualised site'.[11] The entanglement between touching and feeling that was woven into the figurative language of everyday early modern speech made the hand, as George Chapman's translation of Ovid's *Banquet of Sense* had it, the 'Feeling organ'.[12] Early modern literature is littered with references to what we might call the *adjectival* hand. In Shakespeare's plays, descriptions of hands ran the gamut from physical (strong, nimble, martial) through active (charitable, reverent, honour-giving, violent) and emotional states (desperate, true, guilty) to social identities (rude, ragged, dainty, noble). Thus, the hand served as a synonym for both physical and psychological states of feeling, encoding individual, class and gendered identities.[13] The hand acting as the index of the social self, skin texture (and temperature), gloves, rings, scent and smell all helped the reading of social identity in haptic contact. Touching, and the quality of the touch, were central both to the presentation of self and to the performance of social identity.

[9] For early modern thinking on the hand, see Michael Neill, '"Amphitheaters in the Body": Playing with Hands on the Shakespearian Stage', *Shakespeare Survey*, xlviii (1996); Farah Karim-Cooper, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch and The Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London, 2016), 11–68; Anne Sophie Haar Refskou and Laura Søvsø Thomasen, 'Handling the Theme of Hands in Early Modern Cross-Over Contexts', *Early Modern Culture Online*, v (2014); Laura Seymour, 'Actions that a (Hu)man Might Play: A Cognitive Study of Gesture in Shakespeare's Plays' (Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis, 2016).

[10] London Metropolitan Archive, P69/BOT2/A/019/MS09234/006, fos. 22^{v}, 28^{v} (my thanks to Tim Wales for this reference); Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660–1714* (Woodbridge, 2012), 28.

[11] Neill, '"Amphitheaters in the Body"', 27.

[12] Harvey (ed.), *Sensible Flesh*, 10, 15.

[13] Joe Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 2014), 5–6.

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The direct line thought to run from heart and head to the hands made the hand a site of powerful energies in early modern understandings of touch and tactility. Galenic medical theory and the folk medicine of cunning men and women stressed the importance of touching and being touched in healing; witchcraft beliefs the malevolent power of the witch's touch; and Christian doctrine the sacred power in the consecrated hands of the clergy and monarchs.[14] Thus, in the protocols surrounding various forms of early modern 'handwork', gloves were to be removed to allow for skin-on-skin and palm-to-palm touching.[15] As a seventeenth-century Scottish rebel condemned for treason and facing execution urged a well-wisher, 'Pull off my glove, and take me by the bare hand'.[16] A belief in the permeability of the hand made Shakespeare's 'paddling palms' important for lovers (and seducers) and touch a problematic source of erotic pleasure as well as a vector of disease.[17] It rendered hands a source of danger. Henrietta Maria, Charles I's French Catholic wife, was said to have refused the 'heretical hand' of a Protestant bishop at her husband's coronation ceremony.[18]

Within the early modern topography of the human body, it was the *right* hand that was the locus of all that was good, the use of the left stigmatised. That anti-Catholic propaganda depicted the assassin with a knife in his left — sinister — hand and that a parishioner who put forward his left hand to receive the bread at communion was dismissed as a 'puppy' by his vicar suggests how deeply ideas of the pre-eminence of the right hand cut in early modern society.[19] Drawing on the lateral symbolism of left

[14] The classic study is Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1973).

[15] Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Ill., 2012), 4.

[16] J. G. Fyfe, *Scottish Diaries and Memoirs, 1550–1746* (Stirling, 1928), 330–1.

[17] William Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale*, Act I, scene 2, line 190; Margaret Healy, 'Anxious and Fatal Contacts: Taming the Contagious Touch', in Harvey (ed.), *Sensible Flesh*; Robert Jenison, *Newcastles Call, To Her Neighbour and Sister Townes and Cities* (London, 1637, STC, 2nd edn 14492); John Armstrong, *A Synopsis of the History and Cure of Venereal Disease* (London, 1737), 7.

[18] Anon., *Veritas Odiosa* (Brussels, 1626), sigs. A3^{v}, C1^{r}, D2^{v}, D3^{v}.

[19] John White, *The First Century of Scandalous, Malignant Priests* (London, 1643), 6; Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c.1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993), 91.

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and right hands, the proper — only — hand with which to shake hands was therefore the right hand.

Hands were both transmitters of feelings and agents of communication. Cognitive processes were embedded in the communicative language of the hand's discoursing gestures. For William Austen, writing in 1637, the hand was 'the chief agent and best interpreter of our words and meaning, which with lively actions it sets forth'.[20] These beliefs made the hand a synecdoche for self and for human agency. They help to explain the elaborate codes that governed touching people, places and things in early modern society. These norms of touching (and non-touching) provide an important context for the handshake and for understanding the meaning of the gesture.

II

RECOVERING THE HANDSHAKE IN THE ARCHIVE: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

That we lack a history of the handshake in early modern England reflects the difficulty of recovering evidence of its practice from the historical record. This is the more general problem that confronts the attempt to write the *history* of a gesture. As Roodenburg cautions, 'More than in any other field, that of the study of gesture is one in which the historian has to make the most of only a few clues'.[21] To the extent that gestures were a quotidian practice and, moreover, often took place out of focal awareness, they were less likely to be recorded or recorded regularly. If an everyday practice, most handshakes were then likely to have gone largely unremarked or unrecorded.

Work addressing past gestures has drawn heavily on the evidence of conduct books, but while seductive in the apparent guide these offer to manners they are not without their problems. Prescribing a normative, rule-bound world, conduct books were more properly evidence of precept than practice. Moreover, since some of the better-known works were translations from Italian or French courtesy literature they reflect the

[20] William Austin, *Haec Homo: Wherein the Excellency of the Creation of Woman is Described* (London, 1637, STC, 2nd edn 14492), 116.

[21] Roodenburg, '"Hand of Friendship"', 177.

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rules of societies with more formally articulated social hierarchies, societies in which for example the handshake as greeting between classes was not practised. Reading widely in English conduct books dating from the later fifteenth to the later seventeenth century reveals that while they pay detailed attention to the importance and mechanics of baring the head, bending the knee and kissing the hand in salutation, they offer no discussion of the handshake. Only in the early eighteenth century, and then only in one or two conduct books, do they reference the handshake.

Since gesture lacks its own archive, in searching for evidence of social *practice* the historian has to work from incidental references across a very wide range of public and private records. Where gesture is not the focus, then such references may render the gesture as little more than the immediate physical act. Since work in the social sciences emphasises the importance of technical complexity, temporality, plasticity and whole bodily movement in performing the handshake, freezing the gesture in the historical record can hamper the recovery of its meaning. Visual representations may offer clues to the staging of a handshake's performance, but not to its temporal and bodily fluidity.

Problems in the language used to describe the gesture compound the difficulty. When not obscuring the particular gestures used by referring only to saluting and salutation, contemporaries talked of holding, taking (or having), giving or shaking the hand. George Cavendish's sixteenth-century *Life* of his former master Cardinal Wolsey, offering first-hand observation of gestural exchanges in Henry VIII's court, exemplifies the problems in deciphering the language used to describe the handshake. Cavendish only occasionally explicitly uses *shaking* the hand, using instead to *take* by the hand to describe both holding and shaking hands. His narrative of Wolsey's arrest, for example, mixes holding and shaking: Wolsey 'took my lord of Northumberland by the hand and led him up into the chamber'; there Wolsey asks leave 'to take these gentlemen your servants by the hands. And when he had taken them all by the hands . . . he led the Earl by the hand into his bedchamber'.[22]

[22] George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (New Haven and London, 1962), 158–9, 97, 107, 143, 150, 165, 178.

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Where taking and holding the hand was not recorded in the context of taking-and-leading it is not clear what was being described. Holding the hand was not the same as shaking hands. In 1640, meeting with the victims of Charles I's savage punishment of his critics, Sir Simonds D'Ewes wrote 'I there had both Mr Burton and Mr Prinne by the hande and discoursed with them'. In early modern society men held hands in public.[23] When in 1554 the London chronicler Henry Machyn recorded Wyatt's rebellion and noted that 'divers of his men *took* the Queen's men by the hand as they went towards Ludgate', did this imply walking hand-in-hand or a shaking of hands that suggested fraternization between rebels and the forces of the state?[24]

The language used to describe various forms of early modern 'handwork' can then make it difficult to distinguish the act of giving the hand in a handshake. Over time, changes in the meaning given to these terms complicates matters. If at the beginning of the period to take the hand mostly described holding the hand, by the eighteenth century, if not before, it was apparently increasingly used as a synonym for a handshake. Distinguishing between these early modern forms of 'handwork' is important because, in contrast to the meanings of friendship and social solidarity attributed to the mutual coordination in the act of shaking hands, they could imply relationships of domination and subordination. When, for example, Sir John Oglander recorded that Charles I on his visit to the Isle of Wight 'took me by the hand and held mee a long tyme rydinge together', the occasion was an attempt by the king to persuade Oglander to continue to billet unpopular Scottish troops there.[25]

However, that the handshake played a significant role in the negotiation and construction of the public world of the social and political order helped to ensure its recording. This was not

[23] *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell, 2 vols. (London, 1845), ii, 252; Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, *The Polite World: A Guide to English Manners and Deportment from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1965), 122.

[24] Richard W. Bailey, Marilyn Miller and Colette Moore, 'A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550–1563 by Henry Machyn', fo. 28^{r}, available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/machyn/>.

[25] *The Oglander Memoirs: Extracts from the Manuscripts of Sir John Oglander*, ed. W. H. Long (London, 1888), 40.

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least the case in the observations of overseas travellers, a group for whom participation in a 'social interactive order' foreign to them was paramount, but problematic without an understanding of the (unwritten) rules of social interaction. The important (and sometimes quasi-legal) functions fulfilled by the performance of a handshake in the micro-politics of both everyday and more formal social and political contexts ensured that courts and contemporaries paid its occurrence attention and recorded it. The frequent role of the handshake in early modern social exchanges meant handshakes were also to be found in the imaginative literature of the stage and popular print. When particular handshakes were noted, contemporary comment was often informed by a concern to contextualise and to understand their meaning. And as the legal dispute that opened this article suggests, the denial or misperformance of a handshake discloses the otherwise invisible norms governing the gesture.

III

ACCESS RITUALS AND THE MEANING OF THE HANDSHAKE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

In 1644, a specialist work appeared specifically addressed to the hand's gestures. John Bulwer's *Chirologia, Or, The Natural Language Of The Hand* offered an exhaustive analysis of the role of the hand in communicating feelings, ideas, attitudes and actions. Running to some 350 pages, and listing near 200 uses of the hand, *Chirologia* was, in effect, a comprehensive guide to 'handwork' in the early modern 'social interactive order'.[26]

Chirologia's discussion of early modern 'handwork' underlines the complexity of meanings recognised by contemporaries in the seemingly simple gesture of the handshake. Declaring the hand 'the chiefest seat of Fidelity', Bulwer discusses the importance of the touch 'of the *insuring Hand*' to promissory acts, both personal and political, in early modern society.[27] As Bulwer observed, the handshake's significance as a symbol of friendship

[26] J[ohn] B[ulwer], *CHIROLOGIA, OR, THE NATURAL LANGUAGE OF THE HAND Composed . . . digested of the Speaking Motions, and Discoursing Gestures thereof . . . EXEMPLIFIED Out of Authentique Registers of Common Life, and Civill Conversation* (London, 1644), 9–10.

[27] *Ibid.*, 93–108 (quotation at 104–5).

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made it especially important in the early modern culture of reconciliation.[28] It gave it a role in both the informal (inter-personal) and formal (legal) resolution of disputes in ecclesiastical and secular courts. In the London guilds too, these public displays of reconciliation served to reinforce the values of the harmonious associational brotherhood that defined early modern corporate life. Thus, a 1576 case of angry words was to be settled in the Drapers' Company in the language of friendship when 'eyther of them toke thother by the hande frendely, promising the continuance of a godly and brotherly love between them . . . not with outward signe of handes shaking onely, but also even with their very hartes'.[29]

Although a civil lawyer argued that handshakes in resolution of disputes carried greater weight for an elite for whom honour was a key value, this understanding of the handshake was to be found operating at all levels of society.[30] In Durham in 1570 two men, implored by neighbours 'to be frends and lovers together', ended their dispute by 'shakinge merilye hands', while in 1560 two squabbling citizens in the Wiltshire town of Devizes agreed with a drink and a handshake to set aside all differences, 'from the beginning of the world unto this day'.[31] Appropriation of the handshake in fisticuffs and duels confirmed popular understanding of its meaning as a sign of friendship. As the wrestler in Middleton and Rowley's *A Faire Quarrel* (1616) declares, 'we shake hands ere we begin. Now that's to avoid the law, for then

[28] *Ibid.*, 116, 119.

[29] Jennifer Bishop, 'Speech and Sociability: The Regulation of Language in the Livery Companies of Early Modern London', in Justin Colson and Arie van Steensel (eds.), *Cities and Solidarities: Urban Communities in Pre-Modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2017), 219–20. My thanks to Jennifer Bishop for discussing this with me.

[30] Cust, 'Rutland Quarrel, the Court of Chivalry and the Irish Peerage', 155. For examples, see Catherine Wright, 'The Spatial Ordering of Community in English Church Seating, *c.*1550–1700' (Univ. of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 2002), 113; Arthur J. Willis, *Church Life in Kent: Being Church Court Records of the Canterbury Diocese, 1559–1565* (London, 1975), 25; Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven and London, 2002); Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, *The Polite World*, 242, 252–4.

[31] Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998), 190; James Raine, *Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings from the Courts of Durham, Extending from 1311 to the Reign of Elizabeth* (Surtees Society, xxi, 1845), 205.

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if he throw him a furlough into the ground, he cannot recover himself upon him [i.e. go to law], because 'twas done in cold friendship'.[32]

When Bulwer specifically discusses the handshake as 'access ritual' he describes it as 'an expression usuall in *friendship*, *peace-full love*, *benevolence*, *salutation*, *entertainment*, and *bidding wel-come*; *reconciliation*, *congratulation*, *giving thanks*, *valediction* and *well[l]-wishing*'. Calling the hand 'the tongue of *hearty goodwill*', he offers an elaborate reading of what he calls 'a natural forme very rich in signification':

> The minde of man naturally desirous by some symbol or sententious gesture to utter and disclose herself in the affections of *love*, doth man-ifestly set forth her disposition by the *courtly* declaration of the *Hand*, a natural compliment wherewith she commonly sweetens her affection-ate respects to others . . . This natural expression seems to result from the sympathy between the will and the Hand . . . For nature . . . seems to have ordained the hand to be the general instrument of the minde, and endowed it with a *courteous* appetite of closing with another. Therefore when the minde would disclose the virtue, strength, and forcible operation of her *favour* and *good-will*, out of her abundance of her *love*, she puts forth that Hand, and in that as it were the *heart* it self, with *affectionate love*, and receives them againe by a natural bill of exchange in the *Hand* of another, which verily is a signe of *mutuall agreement* and of a *perfect conjunction*.[33]

Bulwer's analysis of the moral and social meanings of the hand-shake as 'access ritual' — the participants signifying 'that they are both content that their work shall be common' — comes sur-prisingly close to that to be found in the sociology of the modern handshake.[34] It was the collaborative handshake's signalling of friendship that gave the gesture its creative possibilities in the presentation of self and negotiation of the social order.

IV

ACCESS RITUALS AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE HANDSHAKE AS GREETING

Complaining that 'salutation' had now become 'so full of cer-emonie and vanitie . . . [with] apish toies of bowing downe to

[32] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A Faire Quarrel* (1616–17), in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor *et al.*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 2007), i, 1235.

[33] B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 109, 110–11.

[34] *Ibid.*, 110.

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euerie mans shoe', James Cleland in 1607 advocated instead what he called 'our good olde Scottish shaking of two right hands together at our meeting'.[35] Cleland's acknowledgement that, in the English gentle society for which he wrote, shaking hands was not yet the preferred form of salutation raises questions about the chronology of the handshake as greeting in early modern England. Writing of the eighteenth century, and in sharp contrast to the dating favoured by Roodenburg and Corfield, Paul Langford suggested, 'shaking hands was *for long* considered a specifically English form of greeting'.[36]

While the handsel (bargaining) and handfasting at contracting marriage had long been practised, the handshake as greeting was not to be found, it has been suggested, in medieval England.[37] A fifteenth-century visitor from Germany reported that to take a kiss in England was the equivalent of shaking hands elsewhere, 'for with them to offer a kiss is the same as to hold out the right hand, for they do not shake hands'.[38] If so, Cavendish's eye-witness to Wolsey's gestural interactions suggest things had changed at least by the early sixteenth century. From then on, there is growing evidence for the practice of shaking hands both in the social performance of salutation and in textual metaphor. Hands were metaphorically shaken in letters, speeches, sermons and verse, enacted on stage, celebrated in ballads, and

[35] James Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia, Or The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (Oxford, 1607, STC, 2nd edn 5393), 176–7, 178.

[36] Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650–1850* (Oxford, 2000), 276 [my emphasis].

[37] Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*, 33; Peter Collett, *The Book of Tells: How to Read People's Minds From Their Actions* (London, 2003), 148. I am grateful to Justin Colson, Chris Dyer and Sharon McSheffrey for discussion on this point. Neither of the following mention the handshake: Charles V. Phythian-Adams, 'Rituals of Personal Confrontation in Late Medieval England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, lxxiii (1991); Michael Foster, 'From Courtesy to Urbanity in Late Medieval England', *Parergon*, xxix (2012). On handsel, see Mary Batson, *Borough Customs, vol. II* (Selden Society, xxxi, 1906), lxxx; Horst K. Lucke, 'Striking a Bargain', *Adelaide Law Review*, i (1960–1962); on handfasting, Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), 10, 40, 64, 71, 82.

[38] *The Travels of Leo of Rozmital through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, 1465–1467*, ed. Malcom Letts (Hakluyt Society, 2nd. ser., cviii, 1957), 54.

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depicted in woodcuts.[39] Handshakes as greetings were recorded in autobiographies, diaries and letters, and cited in depositions in legal proceedings.[40] Bilingual dictionaries took their practice as standard.[41] In a late sixteenth-century Anglo–Spanish grammar taking the form of a dialogue between two Englishmen and two Spaniards, when one of the Spaniards is asked, 'what is your opinion of this custome, which wee haue in England to shake hands one with another?', he is made confidently to reply, 'Two hands fastened together, always hath beene a token of friendship'.[42]

Foreign observers, at Court or in public spaces such as the inn, where it was evidently customary for guests to exchange handshakes with their host, recorded shaking hands as part of their description of local customs and gestures.[43] In 1557, a Venetian visitor reported that 'when Englishmen meet they shake hands in the German fashion'.[44] That shaking hands on meeting was particularly a North European custom, a belief shared by Bulwer, received endorsement from the English writer George Puttenham who noted a little over thirty years later, 'to congratulate and salute . . . with us here in England, and in Germany, and all other Northerne parts of the world [is] to shake hands'.

[39] David Hillman, '"O, These Encounterers": On Shakespeare's Meetings and Partings', *Shakespeare Survey*, lxii (2009); English Broadside Ballad Archive, searched by 'shaking hands', available at <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>; The Court of Chivalry, 1634–1640, available at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/court-of-chivalry>. My thanks to Angela McShane for advice on hands in ballads.

[40] For examples, see *The Diary of Robert Woodhouse, 1637–1641*, ed. John Fielding (Camden Society, 5th ser., xlii, 2012), 179; *The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, 1663–74*, ed. William L. Sachse (New Haven, 1938), 42–3; *The Diary of Edmund Harrold, Wigmaker of Manchester 1712–1715*, ed. Craig Horner (Aldershot, 2008), 33; The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), SP 1/143/247.

[41] See, for example, Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (London, 1611, STC 5830), sub. 's'Entreprendre par les mains'.

[42] John Minsheu, *A Spanish Grammar, first collected and published by Richard Percival*e (London, 1599, STC, 2nd edn 1962.2), 51.

[43] Thomas Nash, *QUATERNIO OR A FOURFOLD WAY TO A HAPPIE Life* (London, 1633, STC, 2nd edn 18382), 196; Thomas Welde, *The Perfect Pharisee . . . manifesting himselfe in the Generation of men called Quakers* (Gateside, 1653), 32–3.

[44] *Cal. State Papers, Venetian* [hereafter *CSPV*], *1557–1581*, 171.

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The handshake — both congratulating and commiserating — was especially visible at moments of religious persecution and political tension, the greeting offering confirmation of shared identities and solidarities. When in 1637 the puritan martyrs William Prynne and Henry Burton were being moved to exile after their trial and judicial maiming, they were met on the streets and highways by those who shook their hands and said 'God be with you'.[45] Similarly, in the face of growing political tensions in the early 1640s, Sir Edward Dering told his wife how many in the crowds outside the Parliament took me by the hand 'whom I knew not . . . and [said] "God Blesse your worship"', while in a later political crisis a Whig MP, Sir John Trenchard, released from imprisonment in the Tower in 1682, was 'publicly caressed in the streets' by crowds with whom he shook hands.[46]

From the sixteenth century on, multiplying examples confirm the handshake as 'access ritual' with its own norms of greeting. Shaking hands on meeting was to be conventionally accompanied by enquiries as to news, well-being or wishes for God's blessing. In 1543, for example, William Gardiner reported that the Dean of Canterbury 'took me by the hand and asked how I did', while an Epworth man in the seventeenth century meeting one come from London, 'gave the hand and asked how he did'.[47] By 1662 a minister comparing handshakes with the biblical Jewish kiss could confidently assert, 'it is the fashion among us for men meeting with their friends, to shake hands'.[48] By the second half of the seventeenth century this ritual was common enough for readers to recognize the joke told by Humphrey Crouch in his *England's Jests* of debtors who, pretending to meet their victim by accident, shake them by the hand and ask what news, and before answer can be given, try to dun them for

[45] *Cal. State Papers, Domestic* [hereafter *CSPD*], *Apr.–Nov. 1637*, 434.

[46] *Proceedings, Principally in the County of Kent in Connection with the Parliament Called in 1640*, ed. Lambert B. Barking (Camden Society, lxxx, 1862), 47; *CSPD, 1683–1684*, 286.

[47] *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, vol. 18, pt. ii, 338; *The First Meeting Book of the Gainsborough Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 1669–1719*, ed. H. W. Brace, 3 vols. (Lincoln Record Society, xxxviii, Hereford, 1949), i, 57.

[48] Henry Hibbert, *Syntagma theologicum, or Treatise wherein is concisely comprehended THE Body of Divinity* (London, 1662), 280; B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 115.

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money.[49] By the end of the seventeenth century, a French émigré could declare, 'the People of *England* when they meet never salute one another than by giving one another their Hands, and shaking them *heartily*'.[50]

While the episodic nature of the evidence makes it difficult to measure change over time in the handshake, if the handshake as greeting became increasingly the norm in salutation over the eighteenth century, its function as access ritual began much earlier. The accumulation of evidence suggests that shaking hands was already well-established and becoming practiced across wider social (and perhaps gendered) contours well before Bulwer's mid-seventeenth-century *ex cathedra* declaration that the handshake was 'an expression usuall in . . . *salutation* . . . and *bidding welcome*'.

V

THE 'HANDSHAKE ENTITLEMENT' AND THE SOCIAL CONTOURS TO SHAKING HANDS

In the early modern world, touch was an important marker of social and political power. In *Chirologia*, Bulwer had stressed the compulsion that prompted shaking hands and the obligations of friendship and love that governed the early modern handshake. However, as Raymond Firth has argued, the handshake was 'status-regulated'. Providing a code by which the standing of the participants could be simply and economically expressed, the possession (or want) of a 'handshake entitlement' was therefore a significant marker of social status.[51] In a world which was adopting the handshake more widely, it is important therefore to establish the social contours to the presence (or absence) of the handshake as greeting in early modern England.

Monarchs exhibited unreciprocated touch. Royal ceremonies and court ritual projected and protected the sanctified hand of a divinely ordained monarch.[52] Kings might shake hands with

[49] Humphrey Crouch, *England's Jests Refin'd and Improv'd, Being a Choice Collection Of The Merriest Jests* (2nd edn, London, 1687), 157.

[50] *M. Misson's Memoirs and Observations In His Travels Over England. With Some Account of Scotland and Ireland* ([France 1698], London, 1719), 283 [my emphasis].

[51] Raymond Firth, 'Bodily Symbols of Greeting and Parting', in *Symbols: Public and Private* (London, 1973), 321, 324–5.

[52] John Walter, 'Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England', in Braddick (ed.), *Politics of Gesture*, 108–9.

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each other, but only in the make-believe world of the ballad or Jacobean stage did fictional kings-in-disguise shake hands with their subjects.[53] We do not know when this changed, but it remained the case until at least well into the eighteenth century. In 1765, the Anglo-American army officer, Henry Timberlake, presenting the native American Ostenaco at St James Court, told him 'he must neither offer to shake hands or smack [hands] with the king, as it was an honour for the greatest of our nation to kiss his hand', to which Ostenaco was said to have replied, 'You are in the right . . . for he commands over all . . . and nobody's his equal'.[54]

Kissing the royal — ungloved, right — hand was the only form of touch permitted to subjects, an access ritual entirely dependent on royal grant and a form of patronage carefully deployed to signal the status of its recipient. Kissing the hand also regulated interactions with and between an aristocratic elite, though this did not exclude their sometimes shaking hands.[55] Gentlemen shook hands with gentlemen, but on occasion they too could also shake hands with subordinates. As the advice to a son attributed to the Elizabethan William Cecil counselled, 'towards thy superiors be humble yet generous, with thy equals familiar yet receptive, towards inferiors shew much humility and some familiarity, as to bow the body, *stretch forth the hand . . .*'.[56]

[53] Samuel Rowley, *When you see me, you know me. Or the famous chronicle historie of King Henry the eight* (London, 1605, STC, 2nd edn 21417), sig. E2^{r}; Anon., *A Pleasant New Ballad of the Miller of Mansfield in Sherwood and of King Henry the Second* (London,?1640, STC, 2nd edn 17262). My thanks to Chris Marsh for this reference.

[54] Henry Timberlake, *The Memoirs of Lieut. Henry Timberlake (Who Accompanied the Three Cherokee Indians to England in the Year 1762)* (London, 1765), 126.

[55] Brian Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access* (Woodbridge, 2003), 75. John Evelyn's diaries offers a telling glimpse of how frequent the gesture was in the post-Restoration court, but he also records shaking hands: *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray, 4 vols. (London, 1881), i, 253, 262, 268, 356, 385, 390, 408, 424; ii, 2, 31–2, 60, 142, 165, 219, 241, 246, 257, 279, 307 (kiss); ii, 81, 93; iv, 387 (shake).

[56] William Cecil, *The Counsell of a Father to his Sonne in ten seuerall Precepts. Left as a legacie at his death* (London, 1611, STC, 2nd edn 4900.5), single sheet [my emphasis]. See also Walter Darrell, *A Short Discourse of the Life of Servingmen, plainly expressing the way that is best to be followed* (London, 1578, STC 2nd edn 6274), 52.

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Beyond elite circles, as Corfield's work suggests, it was perhaps at the level of urban mercantile and middling society that shaking hands became the norm in salutation. When, for example, Samuel Pepys was made a member of the brotherhood of Trinity House in 1662, he noted with a little surprise in his diary that 'after I was sworne, all the elder Brothers shake me by the hand, it is their custom it seems'. Admitted as a burgess at Portsmouth only two months later, he was able merely to note that they 'did by custom shake me all by the hand'.[57] Beyond middling society, the evidence thins but suggests that the handshake on greeting was the norm between plebeian males. But even at this level class might have placed otherwise invisible boundaries, enabling handshakes between roughly social equals, but denying the handshake to those whose poverty and social exclusion were reflected in the outstretched *begging* hand.[58]

Gender and age also determined who could claim a handshake. Cleland, without specifying age, believed it 'a signe of childrens affection towards their father, whe[n] they give their hands', and at Little Gidding a set of seventeenth-century precepts drawn up by Nicholas Ferrar to instruct his children apparently included giving the hand (but along with baring the head and bowing, to honour old age).[59] A handshake entitlement, however, may well have been one of the markers of social adulthood. A 1578 conduct book advised that 'Neyther be y^t^ [that] self same *Ceremonies* semelly [seemly] for young me[n] respecting their Age: y^t^ ould [i.e. older] me[n] do use together', and into the eighteenth century conduct books continued to emphasise the submissive gestures expected of children when interacting with their betters.[60] As late as the 1760s in Scotland, the presbyterian John Ronald on joining a prayer group did not expect to be included in the handshake: 'The members of the

[57] *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 10 vols. (London, 1970–83), iii, 29, 73.

[58] Walter, 'Gesturing at Authority', 125.

[59] Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia*, 178; Joyce Ransome, '"Courtesy" at Little Gidding', *The Seventeenth Century*, xxx (2015), 416, 430.

[60] Darrell, *Short Discourse of the Life of Servingmen*, 51; *The Schoole of Vertue, and Booke of good Nurture, teaching Children and Youth their duties* (London, 1621, STC 2nd edn 22137.7).

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meeting used to shake hands with them that first join them, but they did it not with me that night, being young'.[61]

Work in the social sciences on the gendering of the handshake continues to suggest that women shake hands less frequently than men, with men more likely to be the initiators and women the recipients.[62] The few conduct books specifically for girls and young women contented themselves with giving mostly unspecific advice about the manners needed to maintain modesty, but a harsher reality meant, especially where class and gender intersected, that unwelcome touch challenged women's own control of their bodies.[63] There is, however, some evidence to suggest that early modern women could shake hands with each other, but its typicality given our present state of knowledge is hard to assess. A Venetian observer had reported in 1513 that when English women meet friends in the street 'they shake hands, and kiss on the mouth', while a later Venetian account mentions only women kissing each other.[64] Evidence in witch trials shows accusations arising from suspected witches shaking hands with women, while witches in covens supposedly shook hands with each other.[65]

Unsurprisingly, much of the evidence for the female handshake comes from moments of contention. In a dispute at Chester in 1681 a court heard how a married woman, Sarah Gibbons, and a young apprentice 'drank to one another and shook hands in token of friendship mutually one with the other'. But other evidence suggests this was a more complicated exchange, the case having been set on vexatiously by the apprentice's master

[61] John Ronald, *The Reality and Efficacy of the Works of the Spirit of God* (Edinburgh, 1767), 44.

[62] Nancy M. Henley, *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977), 110, 129; Firth, 'Bodily Symbols of Greeting and Parting', 303.

[63] For the problems touching and being touched posed for women, see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2003). My thanks to Laura Gowing, Helen Berry and Mark Philp for discussing this with me.

[64] *CSPV, 1509–1519*, 90; *CSPV, 1557–1558*, 1668.

[65] John Gaule, *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts* (London, 1646), 63; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London, 1996), 149; *The Salem Witchcraft Papers*, SWP nos. 87.2, 101, available at <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/category/swp.html>.

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and Sarah, having made repeated overtures to the apprentice to withdraw the charge, finally taking 'up his hand which laid upon his knee and so shaked hands'.[66] Popular literature too has women shaking hands, but noticeably at men's instruction.[67]

We know even less before the mid eighteenth century of how common it was for women to exchange handshakes with men. By the later seventeenth century, the aristocratic Lady Anne Clifford made regular entries in her diaries of entertaining her humbler neighbours, frequently noting she 'kist the women and *took* the Men by the hand'.[68] If this was an example of shaking hands then class as much as gender may have permitted female initiation of a handshake. Scattered examples suggest that cross-sex handshakes by women appear to have become more common, or at least more visible, by the later seventeenth century. On the arrival of the Prince of Orange into London in 1688, 'divers ordinary women' were seen to have 'shook his Soldiers by the hand as they came by and cryed welcome', while an early eighteenth-century convert to the Quakers noted approvingly, 'they do not use the ceremonies and salutations of the Church of England, but shake hands freely and converse together as brothers and sisters'.[69] Catholic priests too might then shake hands with women.[70] By the middle of the eighteenth century, the diaries

[66] Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester, EDC 5/168/21 (unfol.), Jackson v. Totty c. Gibbons, 1681. My thanks to Tim Wales for this reference.

[67] For examples, see Henry Porter, *THE PLEASANT HISTORY OF the two angry women of Abington* (London, 1599, STC, 2nd edn 20122), sigs. A4v–B1r; Thomas Deloney, *THE PLEASANT HISTORY OF Thomas of Reading. OR, The six worthy Yeomen of the West* (London, 1636, STC, 2nd edn 6572), sig. B3r.

[68] We might assume handshakes here, but where she offers more detail — 'I had him into my chamber and took him by the hand and talked with him' — it is perhaps less certain: *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford*, ed. D. J. H. Clifford (Stroud, 1990), 232–44, 249–55, 256–63 (quotations at 232, 263) [my emphasis].

[69] George Keith, *The Magick of Quakerism* (1707), 48; Samuel Crisp, *Two Letters writ by Samuel Crisp, About the Year 1702, . . . upon his Change from a Chaplain, of the Church of England to ioyne with the People called Quakers* (London, 1722), 11; Gerardus Croese, *The General History of the QUAKERS* (London, 1696), 184. Whether this had always been the practice amongst Quakers remains as yet unknown. My thanks to Adrian Davies and Naomi Pullin for discussing this with me.

[70] *The Entring Book of Roger Morrice, 1677–1691*, ed. Mark Goldie, iv, *The Reign of James II, 1687–1689*, ed. Stephen Taylor (Cambridge, 2007), 416; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of Allan George Finch of Burley-On-The-Hill, Rutland*, ii, *1670–1690*, 195–6.

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of mainly elite women begin to record women receiving handshakes from men, a displacement perhaps of the traditional kiss as greeting that reflected the problems posed to polite society by what has been seen as the eroticizing of the kiss.[71] By the 1770s *The Young Gentlemen and Lady's Private Tutor* could now counsel both young men and women to shake hands with acquaintances (while continuing however to order bowing to those whose 'Rank requires such Respect').[72] It is perhaps telling of this shift in the gendered contours to the handshake that when in the 1730s the writer Henry Blunt wanted to satirize women's threatened usurpation of men's position in society he chose to describe in the pages of the *Universal Spectator* how his fictional heroine 'shook me by the Hand, and saluted me with, *How do'st old Hal*?'[73]

Acknowledging that there was not one uniform gestural code in a society with increasing social differentiation allows for the possibility that differing gestural practices in forms of salutation co-existed, dictated by class, age and gender, but that over time the relationship between these and the handshake shifted in favour of the latter. If so, where handshakes were not between social equals then the semiotics and feel of the hand still allowed for recognition of class differences in its performance. As Lord Chesterfield counselled his son in the mid eighteenth century, he was 'particularly [to] attend to the graceful motions of your arms; which, with the manner of putting on your hat, and giving your hand, is all that a gentleman need attend to'.[74] At the level of plebeian society there were sub-cultural differences in a more energetic performance of the handshake by clapping, striking or slapping the hands.[75] Nevertheless, if class largely determined

[71] Karen Harvey (ed.), *The Kiss in History* (Manchester, 2005), 66, 93, 192, 193, 196, 197. For examples, see *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delaney*, 3 vols. (London, 1861), i, 225; *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (1778–1840)*, ed. Charlotte Barrett, 6 vols. (London, 1904), i, 230, 401, 502&n.

[72] Matthew Towse, *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Private Tutor* (London, 1770), 169.

[73] *Universal Spectator*, 15 July 1732.

[74] *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son and Others*, ed. R. K. Root (New York, 1963), 13.

[75] Erasmus Jones, *The Man of Manners: Or, Plebeian Polish'd* (London, 1737), 4; Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785), 61; George Parker, *Life's Painter . . . A Dictionary of modern Flash and Cant . . . so much in use with the Swells of the Town* (London, 1789), 126.

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the social contours to the performance of the handshake as greeting, its quasi-obligatory nature gave it the potential to disrupt social hierarchies and boundaries.

VI
THE MICRO-POLITICS OF SHAKING HANDS IN EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

Analysing the micro-politics of salutation, Cleland had drawn a sharp contrast between the deferential gestures of uncovering the head, bowing the knee and kissing the hand, and the meaning signalled by shaking hands. Uncovering the head to another, he noted, 'signifieth that we wil[l] obey his commandements and yield him authority over us', while 'the bowing of the knee declareth that we submit our selves unto him, and that we wil[l] humble, and make our selves inferior'. But 'when we ioine hands together, it is a token of friendship'.[76] Firth's concept of the 'handshake entitlement' nevertheless draws attention to the inequalities in who can initiate and who can participate in a handshake.[77] As he notes, the degree of spatial and bodily disturbance involved in the gesture provides an index of the degree of equality (or inequality) between the parties to the handshake.[78] Since the *embodied* framing of a handshake coded the status of participants in the handshake, recovering its performance can throw fresh light on the micro-politics of the early modern social order.

In the calculus of social exchange, the wider the social boundaries the handshake crossed, then presumably the greater was its impact. There were however boundaries that a handshake should not cross. 'True friendship', declared one writer in 1658, cannot stoop to shake hands with a servant, 'not only because too low, but because disproportionable', and as we have seen the intersection with gender relations could be problematic.[79]

[76] Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia*, 176–7, 178.

[77] Firth, 'Bodily Symbols of Greeting and Parting'.

[78] Raymond Firth, 'Postures and Gestures of Respect', in Jean Pouillon and Pierre Maranda (eds.), *Échanges et communications: melanges offerts á Claude Lévi-Strauss á l'occasion de son 60ème anniversaire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1970), i.

[79] Samuel Crook, *TA DIAPHERONTA, OR, Divine Characters IN TWO PARTS* (London, 1658), 340. See also Henry Fielding, *An Essay on Conversation* (1741), in *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.*, 16 vols. (New York, 1902–3), xii, 295–6.

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Entanglements between class and race offered another boundary. When in 1767 the Honourable James Murray, Lieutenant Governor of the British colony of Minorca, was accused of treating the inhabitants like slaves, his secretary demanded: 'can you expect a governor shall make companions of your attorneys, notaries, tinkers, tailors and shoemakers, shake hands with them, when he meets them . . . you betray your ignorance of the world: no gentleman will *stoop* to it'.[80]

Writing in the 1670s, Obadiah Walker had instructed young gentleman that 'the inferior salutes first out of duty'.[81] Firth too suggests it is the social subordinate who advances to meet the superior, who might hardly move his arm to meet the other's hand.[82] If, however, inferiors shook hands with their 'betters', it was uncertain whether they were to initiate the handshake, and they might be required to observe other norms that could undercut or constrain a reading of the handshake as an expression of friendship. An eighteenth-century poem neatly captures the tension uncertainty over entitlement to a handshake might produce. A vicar and a barber-surgeon wait in the alehouse where the village club is to meet when the local squire arrives: 'awkward they stand/Anxious who first shall shake his hand', but on arrival the squire gives them only a nod and 'keeps aloof, to show he's better bred'.[83]

If, as Firth suggests, the amount of bodily displacement is inverse to the proportion of social status, then elites in shaking hands could display their dominance through bodily relaxation, while subordinates were expected to display bodily formality in interactions with their superiors. Recognising that the handshake was an embodied gesture meant that both bodily posture and dermal pressure could underwrite or undercut the meaning of a handshake. At one extreme, the 'digital' handshake, offering only fingers or finger to be shaken was something sometimes

[80] Edward Clarke, *A Defence Of The Lieutenant Governor Of The Isle of Minorca in reply to a PRINTED LIBEL* (London, 1767), 53 [my emphasis]. For the background to this conflict, see David Whamond Donaldson, 'Britain and Menorca in the Eighteenth Century', 3 vols. (Open Univ. Ph.D thesis, 1994), i, 168–81.

[81] Obadiah Walker, *Of Education, Especially of Young Gentlemen* (Oxford, 1673), 227.

[82] Firth, 'Bodily Symbols of Greeting and Parting', 308–9.

[83] [Charles Shillito], *The Country Book-Club* (London, 1788), 19.

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used by superiors with their subordinates. In early seventeenth-century Ireland, for example, Sir George Carew was said to have seduced a woman with a promise to save her kinsman from the gallows sealed by shaking only her little finger.[84]

Bulwer thought the handshake obligatory — 'he seems to be disarmed of all humanity, and to want the affability of expression, who doth (when there is occasion for it) omit the *benevolent insinuation* of the *Hand*'.[85] Since giving the hand was an 'obligatory exchange process' — a total prestation of giving, receiving, and returning the hand — to refuse the given hand in the micro-politics of the handshake was a political act. In 1539 a man examined on suspicion of having betrayed William Tyndale, translator of the Bible into English, offered to shake hands on meeting, only to be made to kneel and told by his examiner, 'I shake no hands with you'. When later offered his inquisitor's hand to shake, the man's reported response suggests something of the political force of a refused handshake: the inquisitor's handshake 'pulled a thousand pound weight out of his harte'.[86] Thus, when Archbishop Cranmer, en route to his execution, was shaking hands with well-wishing bystanders, a Marian priest drew back his hand and refused, declaring that it was 'not lawfull to salute heretickes'. Similarly, an Elizabethan puritan encountering a religious opponent who offered to shake his hand later reported how as he 'stretched out his hand to salute me, I shrank from him as if he had bene a serpent, because I knew him to be a notorious, corrupte, prophane, proude, nonresident, pluraliste pseudo hierarchist, &c.' Within the micro-politics of the handshake, refusing the offered hand, as Bulwer declared, could be 'a sign of enmity'.[87]

[84] *The Lismore Papers of Richard Boyle, First and "Great" Earl of Cork*, ed. A. B. Grosart, 10 vols. (London, 1886–8), i, pt. 2, 103–4.

[85] B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 110, 114, 120.

[86] TNA, SP 1/143, fos. 33–35v.

[87] John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments Online* (hereafter *TAMO*) (1570 edn), Bk. I, xi, 2105, available at < https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/>; *Seconde Parte of a Register Being a Calendar of Manuscripts under that Title Intended for Publication by the Puritans about 1593*, ed. Albert Peel, 2 vols. (London, 1915), ii, 246; B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 110, 114, 120.

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VII

GESTURAL DISSIDENCE AND THE HANDSHAKE IN THE EARLY MODERN STATE

In early modern society, the potential within a handshake for promoting political thinking informed the use of a favourite scriptural text for protestants, *Galatians* 2:9: 'And when James, Cephas, and John, . . . perceived the grace that was given unto me [Peter], they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship'. John Foxe's discussion of the text in his *Acts and Monuments*, one of the most popular and frequently republished works of the Reformation, brought out the levelling potential in the handshake. Foxe used Peter's performance of 'the right hand of societie' to challenge the Petrine basis to papal supremacy: 'what taking of hands is there betweene subiectes & theyr prince in waye of fellowship? Or where fellowship is, what maistership is there?' he demanded.[88] The gestural politics encoded in a handshake could therefore provide a space for political dissidence.

The most famous episode of this is provided by the handshake performed by Wat Tyler, leader of the 1381 English Rising. At his meeting with the king, Tyler had failed to adopt the proper postural form in kneeling as a petitioner to the monarch. Instead he initiated and, as the chroniclers noted, overperformed a handshake: he 'half bent his knee and took the king by the hand, shaking his arm forcefully and roughly, saying to him, "Brother, be of good comfort and joyful, for you shall have . . . forty thousand more commons than you have at present, and we shall be good companions"'. Tyler's performance of a fraternal handshake can be read as a deliberate gesture to the new polity of king and commons dreamed of in the 1381 Rising.[89]

Shaking hands which — in spatially and situational regulated interactions — the elite permitted (or denied) could be subverted especially at a time of political crisis by independent claims to a 'handshake entitlement' from subordinates. As a 1578 conduct book cautioned, it did not become 'men of meane

[88] Foxe, *TAMO*, Bk. I, 43

[89] R. B. Dobson (ed.), *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London, 1970), 164; Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1973), 222–5.

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and base condition to use the very same yt gentleme[n] & greate men may use one to another . . . it is not lookt for in such'.[90] As Esther Goody has suggested, overperformance of a handshake could be coercive, seeking to establish a 'respect debt' against which to claim subsequent favour.[91] Insubordination by troops reluctant to fight in Charles I's unpopular war against the Scots saw subordinates claim a handshake. The complaint of one officer that each morning his soldiers 'shake mee so heartily by the hand that I was once in doubt I should have had my arme shouke off in kuatesie [sc. courtesy]' captures the transgressive nature of subordinates invading their superiors' social space, initiating and overperforming a handshake with an officer corps recruited from a landed class who expected to be 'worshipped with cappe and knee'. Physical violence in which officers were killed by their troops was to follow this transgression of the gestural order.[92]

The refusal to shake hands might carry larger social and political consequences. In Scotland, a country where the handshake was apparently the norm in salutations even between classes, it has been suggested that it was Charles I's insistence that his Scottish nobles kneel to him that alienated his opponents and helped set in train events that led to the collapse of his regime.[93] By contrast, in the later Revolution of 1688 the gestural politics of William of Orange, later William III, won him political support.[94] Coming from a dynasty where his predecessor Maurice

[90] Darrell, *Short Discourse of the Life of Servingmen*, 51.

[91] Esther Goody, '"Greeting", "Begging", and the Presentation of Respect', in J. S. La Fontaine (ed.), *The Interpretation of Ritual: Essays in Honour of A. I. Richards* (London, 1972), 40–1, 45.

[92] TNA, SP 16/460/47; John Walter, 'Killing (Catholic) Officers No Crime? The Politics of Religious Violence in England in 1640', in Peter Lake and Jason Peacey (eds.), *Insolent Proceedings: Rethinking Public Politics in the English Revolution. Essays in Honour of Ann Hughes* (Manchester, 2022); Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), 79.

[93] David Stevenson, 'The English Devil of Keeping State: Elite Manners and the Downfall of Charles I in Scotland', in Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall (eds.), *People and Power in Scotland: Essays in Honour of T. C. Smout* (Edinburgh, 1992).

[94] Jasper van der Steen, '"This Nation was not Made for Me": William III's Introduction to Etiquette, Ritual and Ceremony at the English Court, 1688–1691', *Dutch Crossing*, xxxiii (2009).

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of Nassau's 'winning kind of familiarity' had been to shake hands 'with the meanest boor in the country', William's 'hearty' handshakes and reports of his refusal to allow his hand to be kissed had a part to play in the successful overthrow of James II.[95]

The refusal of a handshake also throws light on the grievances that led to the Irish rising of 1641. It was said of the Irish insurgent Hugh Mac Mahon that 'he was mightily troubled with the proud and Haughty carriage' of a member of the New English, a fellow Justice of the Peace, 'that gaue him not the right hand of fellowship'. To deny a handshake was to deny the worth of the other. To the extent that it was publicly witnessed, it might be taken to deny even their social existence.[96] The refusal of a former English vintner publicly to shake hands with the colonial 'other', in reality an Irish gentleman, offered a concise gestural confirmation of the fears of the Gaelic Irish that they were being ousted by English social upstarts which drove them into the Rising.[97]

In the world turned upside down by the mid-seventeenth century English revolution, the handshake could offer a concise expression of the claim to a new political and social order. Bulwer writing in the midst of the Revolution was critical of those who sought to appropriate what he called 'an expression of state' — a kiss of the hand. Labelling these '*proud* and *scornfull* persons who affect the garbe of great ones, and are willing to afford a *sleight respect* to one they think unworthy of a higher touch', he singled out 'proud prelates' who had 'improperly usurped' a 'symbol of subjection'.[98] Politically, the handshake was to be adopted in the Revolution by radicals such as the Leveller leader John Lilburne, who sought 'that every good man will give us the right hand of fellowship'.[99] Even England's new ruler, Oliver Cromwell — who as Lord Protector did not allow

[95] James Howell, *Epistolae Ho-elianae* (London, 1650), 17–18; *CSPV*, *1660–1670*, 301; Edward Maude Thompson, *Correspondence of the Family of Hatton*, 2 vols. (Camden Soc., ns. xxii–xxiii, 1878), ii, 152; *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time*, 2 vols. (London, 1840), ii, 500.

[96] Goody, '"Greeting", "Begging", and the Presentation of Respect', 50.

[97] Trinity College, Dublin, MS 840, fo. 1^{r-v}.

[98] B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 130–1.

[99] John Lilburne, *A Manifestation from Lieutenant Col. John Lilburne* (London, 1649), 4; Jon Vallerius, 'Radical Movements and Body Politics in the English Revolution' (Univ. of Essex Ph.D thesis, 2015).

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his hand to be kissed — used the language of the handshake to gesture at a new order in the English revolution, claiming in 1658 to have appointed to the second house in Parliament 'men, that can me[e]t you wheresoever you goe, & shake hands with you, & tell you it is not titles, it is not Lordshipp . . . that they value, but a Christian & an English interest'.[100]

Famously, it was the Quakers in the English revolution who — denouncing polite forms of salutation as worshipping man not God, and refusing therefore to observe the postural norms of lowering the body and baring the head — adopted the handshake.[101] For other puritan groups in the English revolution, too, giving 'the right hand of fellowship' became an important statement of self-identification, a means of appointing ministers and of establishing new churches, practices carried over into New England congregationalism.[102] That, after the Revolution, there was a quieter cultural revolution taking place amongst the middling and mercantile sections of society from which religious non-conformity recruited, helps to explain why the author of a 1702 satirical take on the emerging form of the advice book could have his 'Cambridge Scholar' pun, 'let's shake hands at Meeting, 'tis the Fashion' before declaring 'I'm no Non-Con[formist]'.[103]

There was then a larger political role for the handshake. The handshake's association with friendship could be employed to form radical associations (including secret societies whose members recognised each other by special handshake or by shaking with the left hand).[104] Combined with the disavowal of

[100] *The Letters, Writings, And Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2022), iii, *16 December 1653–2 September 1658*, ed. Joel Halcombe, Patrick Little and David L. Smith (Oxford, 2022), 493. My thanks to the late Colin Davis and John Morrill for discussing this with me.

[101] Walter, 'Gesturing at Authority', 108–9. When the Quakers' failure to observe the conventional forms of salutation brought fierce criticism, it was on hats, not hands, that their critics focussed.

[102] Tower Hamlets Local Studies Library, London, W/SMH/A/1/1, fo. 1r (my thanks to Ann Hughes for this reference); *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630–1702: His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote and Event Books*, ed. J. Horsfall Turner, 4 vols. (Bingley, 1881–3), ii, 243, 21, 22, 210–11; iii, 130; *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, ed. Sargent Bush, Jr. (Chapel Hill and London, 2001), 236, 371.

[103] *The Post-Angel; or, Universal Entertainment*, iv (London, 1702), 15.

[104] David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry in Scotland, 1590–1710* (Cambridge, 1988), 133, 143; James Weldon, *A Report of the Proceedings in Cases of High Treason* (Dublin, 1796), 39, 45.

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older, deferential forms of salutation, performing a handshake could enact rejection of a deferential or colonial society and signify claims to a new political order with aspirations for social solidarity and political equality. The use of the handshake in the seventeenth-century English revolution anticipated the iconic status it was to take on in future republican, revolutionary and working-class movements.[105]

VIII

HISTORICIZING THE HANDSHAKE

In early modern England the handshake as greeting was universally recognised, if not yet universally practised. Arguments for the 'advent' of the handshake as greeting in the long eighteenth century need revision, perhaps radical revision. The literary scholar J. A. Burrow raised the possibility that Wat Tyler's rough handshake might be taken as evidence of a plebeian form of access ritual that had yet to gain acceptance amongst the medieval elite.[106] It certainly serves as a reminder that we need to establish whether the absence of the handshake as access ritual in medieval England was an absence of performance or an absence of evidence at a social level where everyday behaviour is harder for the historian to recover.

Over time, a cumulative change in shaking hands provides evidence of a broader change in social relations. If there was increasing informality in body language in the eighteenth century, a wider acceptance of the handshake as a form of address might be (mis)taken to signal 'a society of equality and mutual self-respect'. But as Keith Thomas has cautioned, the handshake represented 'a *more* egalitarian, *less* deferential' society than the embodied rituals of deference: bow, knee, curtsey and hat honour.[107] When in the most recent history of the handshake we are

[105] For examples, see Gottfried Korff, 'From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker's Hand', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, xlii (1992), 70–2; John Gorman, *Banner Bright: An Illustrated History of Trade Union Banners* (London, 1973, 1986); Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911–1929* (Oxford, 2000), 63–4. My thanks to Steve Smith for the latter example.

[106] J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge, 2002), 38.

[107] Langford, *Englishness Identified*, 276; Keith Thomas, 'Introduction', in Bremmer and Roodenburg (eds.), *Cultural History of Gesture*, 10 [my emphasis].

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told that the handshake 'is not about power and status and to treat it as such subverts its very nature', this offers a misleading guide to its *past* performance.[108] It ignores the lessons of Firth's concept of the 'handshake entitlement'.

Isolating the physical act of shaking hands from the social, spatial and bodily contexts within which it is performed risks oversimplifying the performance of a dynamic, embodied and socially situated gesture. It is important therefore to pay attention to the differing demands that can be placed on participants in the performance of the gesture by a wider set of protocols, including speech, posture and situational space. Within the micropolitics of the handshake, who initiated and who granted access to it were important statements of the relative distribution of status and power. So too was territoriality. In which settings and in whose spaces were handshakes permitted and performed? The wider social and gendered inequalities that framed gestural interactions meant that in performing an *embodied* gesture, subordinates might be expected to adopt bodily postures (and observe other conventions, for example in modulations of voice, face and gaze), routinized gestures that encoded superiority and subordination and constrained the ideas of friendship and equality that the gesture might otherwise suggest. Despite Bulwer's emphasis on the 'mute vocallitie' of the hand, shaking hands was also accompanied by speech, including correct forms of address, and by the spatial deference meant to frame meetings between subordinates and elites. Cleland's advocacy of the handshake recognised this. Declaring shaking hands 'a token of friendship', he had however gone on to say that, 'when the superior presents his hand unto the inferior he giveth him an assurance of his good wil[l], and a token of his favour . . . And the inferior receiving the superiors hand, And offering him his owne, would saie thus much unto him, by this little part of my body I make you master of the whol[e]'.[109]

Differing forms of salutation flowed along lines of class (and gender), but we should see elites in early modern English society as 'ambidextrous' in gestural exchanges. Kissing the hand and performing a bow, they could also shake hands with equals and,

[108] Al-Shamahi, *Handshake*, 82.

[109] Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia*, 177-8.

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as we have seen them counselled, opt on occasion for a strategic handshake with subordinates. The informality to their rule that the English elite liked to claim with a handshake doubtless had a part to play in their everyday interactions with the people as well as in the more formal theatre of rule (though by the eighteenth century, the willingness of canvassing politicians, foremost among them Robert Walpole, to shake the hands of their inferiors could prompt cynicism about the meaning of the handshake).[110] In shaking hands with (chosen) subordinates, elites (and eventually English monarchs) could hope strategically to mobilise its association with the ideas of mutual worth and respect. By contrast, the plebeian claim to a handshake entitlement with its denial of deference and assertion of self-worth might challenge a new social order. Performing a handshake in early modern England could register both identification *and* differentiation. The intersection between gesture, space and body language meant that, in performance, the meaning and function of the handshake as greeting at any point in its past was highly contextual, situationally variable and, as a result, potentially ambiguous in intent and meaning.

The important work done by the handshake in political and social interactions was reflected in the close attention early modern contemporaries could pay to noting its performance (or absence). What made understanding the gesture important to them makes it important also for the historian. Freighted with notions of mutual worth and friendship, it was contemporary understanding of the handshake's meaning which gave it its power to structure social and political exchanges. Its quasi-obligatory nature could make its claims in performance problematic. When, for example, the Duke of Buckingham, the king's favourite, came to Ipswich in 1625 it was gleefully reported that he was welcomed by the captain of the local militia, 'a proper fellow, but not skilful in court ceremonies, as appeared when he took the duke by the hand, when he should have kissed it'.[111]

[110] Paul Langford, 'Politics and Manners from Sir Robert Walpole to Sir Robert Peel', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xciv (1997), 115.

[111] Thomas Birch, *The Court and Times of Charles the First*, 2 vols. (London, 1848), i, 61.

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Central to Goffman's work on non-verbal communication and the 'social interaction order' is the argument that larger-scale patterns of social structuring depend on everyday forms of gestural interaction and the social reality performed and acknowledged within those interactions. Embodied gestures not only signify, but actively enact social relations. In early modern England, the micro-politics of gesture helped both to construct and to challenge social and political order. Attending to the work done by the handshake can therefore open up new areas for historical investigation. It can make accessible, through the meanings encoded in the act of shaking hands, aspects of the habitus of everyday living and otherwise inaccessible notions of the self of social groups poorly represented in the historical record. Since the possession (or absence) of a 'handshake entitlement' provides a concise coding of the status and relative power of the participants to the act, then the politics of the handshake offers another window into the negotiation of social and political order in early modern society, extending and deepening the analysis of more familiar terrains of historical investigation. As the episode of the disputed handshake which opened this article demonstrates, the absence of a handshake or the disruption prompted by its denial can make visible otherwise unwritten norms of social and political identities and relationships in early modern society. Hands talked.

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on work in the social sciences on the handshake, this article examines the role of the handshake as a form of gestural communication and traces the changes in its relative importance in the 'access rituals' of early modern England. We lack a history of the handshake for early modern England. Such work as there is, is chronologically discontinuous and largely blind to the sociology of its performance. Working across the period from the later fifteenth into the eighteenth century, the article seeks to recover the chronological, spatial, social and gendered contours to the handshake. Discussing early modern understandings of the social and cultural meanings of touch and the hand, the article explores how performing a handshake could play a part in the representation, reproduction and negotiation of social and political relationships. Examining the micro-politics of shaking hands, the article offers a critical *historical* assessment of modern readings of the handshake as signalling friendship and social solidarity, analysing the changing significance of the 'handshake entitlement' as a '*status-regulated*' gesture that helped both to enact and to challenge early modern social and political order.

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