

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Wilde shamrock manners’: anglicisation and the politics of gesture in early modern Ireland

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Abstract

Historians continue to debate what form colonial rule took in early modern Ireland. This article explores how the reception and resistance to anglicisation, located in the everyday body language of submission and subordination encoded in gesture, might be understood in the experience of colonial rule. Exploring the gestural code operating in early modern Ireland, this article examines the role of body politics in the reception of and reaction to English rule. English ‘manners and apparel’ were central to the project of anglicisation. The body played a central role in representing and articulating social hierarchies in the early modern world. Body language offered a troubling everyday reminder of the inequalities signalled in the — non-reciprocal or non-reciprocated — gestures expected of ‘subordinates’ towards ‘superiors’. If the enforcement of the gestural order was important to the establishment of English rule, this also made gesture a focus for resistance and opposition. A body politics that exploited a shared understanding of the meaning of particular gestures could be drawn on in both everyday politics and collective protests to subvert, resist and retaliate against the political agenda of anglicisation. Looking forward to the eighteenth century and beyond state action, the article calls for more work on gesture.

Seeking to recover the gestural code(s) operating in early modern Ireland, this article examines evidence for gestural exchanges between the Old English, Gaelic Irish and New English and the role the enforcement of what might be seen as an English gestural code played in the extension of English rule. Historians continue to debate the question of colonial rule in Ireland and what form it took.¹ Within the broader agreement of the appropriateness of the concept at least for early modern Ireland, the article explores how the reception of an anglicisation, located in the everyday body language of submission and subordination encoded in gesture, might be understood in the context of the experience of colonial rule. The article argues that it was no coincidence that in rebellion, Irish resistance often took gestural form. As events in the 1641 rebellion in particular were to show, incorrect performances were intended to subvert or deny gestures within the code

¹ John Gibney, ‘Early modern Ireland: British Atlantic colony?’ in *History Compass*, vi, no. 1 (2008), pp 172–82 offers a useful introduction and bibliography. For the title, see John Derricke, *The image of Irelande with a discoverie of woodkarne . . . 1581*, ed. John Small (Edinburgh, 1883), p. 8.

by which power and status were affirmed and they reflected the psychic costs of performing gesture under English rule in the project to anglicise Ireland.

After briefly establishing the theoretical importance of gesture in structuring social and political identities and relationships, this article sets out the archival constraints on recovering empirical evidence of gestures in early modern Ireland, the limits to our present knowledge of the role of everyday gesture, especially at the level of Gaelic society, and the consequences for the subsequent analysis. The following section sketches the project of anglicisation in state, church and society, exploring the relationship it demanded between manners and material culture, notably of dress. It considers to what extent an early modern gestural code was shared by, and to what extent imposed upon, Irish society. Subsequent sections focus on gestures within the gestural code by which hierarchies were acknowledged and analyses their role in securing submission to English rule. What were the social and cultural contours to embodied performances – notably the handshake – that celebrated social solidarities and were these practised inter-culturally? The penultimate section examines how gestural dissidence in rebellion and in 1641 was intimately linked to the use of gesture in the anglicisation project to contest and subvert an English rule that also employed gestural violence. In conclusion, the article emphasises the importance and purchase of the *everyday* nature of gestural interaction and calls for more work on the role body politics played in establishing and maintaining English rule in Ireland.

I

As Keith Thomas has famously observed, ‘to interpret and account for a gesture is to unlock the whole social and cultural system of which it is part’.² Work in the social sciences has shown how larger-scale patterns of social structuring depend on everyday forms of social interaction.³ In social performance and textual metaphor, the body as social fact and discursive construction played a central role in representing and articulating social hierarchies in the early modern world. Both in the routinised gestures of everyday exchanges and in ceremonial ritual, gesture provided a powerful code by which to index identities and interactions. Gestures could affirm, acknowledge or appropriate social (and gendered) identities and the spaces in which they were performed. Gestures framed the communitive interaction in social and political exchanges, giving meaning to the event, registering degrees of intimacy or hierarchy, and calibrating the statuses and distribution of power at play in those exchanges. The proper performance of appropriate gestures could represent an acknowledgement of shared solidarities or an (apparent) acceptance of inequalities in power and status. Refusal could deny them.

Only relatively recently have historians become interested in the role of gesture in the negotiation of the social and political order in early modern societies.⁴ To date, there has been little explicit work on this for early modern Ireland. The observation that there has been no analysis of the rituals and gestures by which the state attempted to project its power or of the Gaelic and Catholic alternatives used to undermine it remains broadly true.⁵ With a notable exception, little attention has been paid to the significance of

² Keith Thomas, ‘Introduction’ in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds), *A cultural history of gesture: from antiquity to the present day* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 11.

³ Key here is work in the field of ‘micro-sociology’ associated with Erving Goffman, for which see Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (London, 1969).

⁴ For an introduction, see the essays in the collections in Bremmer & Roodenburg (eds), *Cultural history of gesture* and Michael J. Braddick (ed.), *The politics of gesture: historical perspectives* (Past & Present Supplement, iv, 2009).

⁵ Hiram Morgan, *Political ideology in Ireland, 1541–1641* (Dublin, 1999), p. 20. But see now Dougal Shaw, ‘Thomas Wentworth and monarchical ritual in early modern Ireland’ in *Historical Journal*, xlix, no. 2 (2006), pp 331–55.

references to gestures that nevertheless break through the histories of early modern Irish politics or religion.⁶ The lacunae is perhaps easily understandable. The comparative absence of records for early modern Ireland, in particular the absence of the often loquacious secular and church court examinations and depositions so profitably used by social historians of early modern England, poses a familiar problem. Work on gestural codes in early modern England has a corpus of printed books of manners on which to draw. As works of prescription, rather than practice, these are not without their problems, but we know that copies were in circulation in Ireland.⁷ We do not know whether similar works were available in Irish, at least in manuscript. To the familiar problem of recovering a social history of the people told not in their own words, but too often in the observations of a literate elite, is added the ‘silence’ of those whose lives were lived in another language. Reports by ‘outsiders’ can be important sources for the history of gesture, but the colourful and sometimes fantastical descriptions of local customs suggest something of the distorting trope of barbarism (and superstition) through which the native Irish were too often seen.

What follows can be only a preliminary attempt to address this absence in the literature. The evidence here is drawn from English-language, or Irish-language (and Latin) sources in translation, and the potential of the important body of Gaelic and Latin manuscript sources remains to be explored. Since the focus is on an exploration of intercultural gestural exchanges to examine the reception of, and reaction to, English rule(s), it is also necessarily partial, doubly so since the attempt to recover the *gendering* of everyday gestural practices faces the additional problem of women’s ‘fractured and fragmented presence in the historical record’.⁸ But the hope is that the article will extend our understanding of the importance of the evidence of gesture to some of the larger questions of Irish history in this period, not least in the negotiation of English rule in a *colonial* context. An attention to body language can help to restore a voice to those otherwise speechless in the extant historical record.

II

Acculturation was central to the project of anglicisation. Dismissing the ‘meere Irish’ as brutish and barbarous, English lawmakers and commentators recognised the importance of a change in what they termed *manners* to the successful establishment of a new social and political order.⁹ This required regulation of the body. The 1537 ‘Act for the English Order, Habits and Language’ made clear the political project behind the intended process of anglicisation. Referring to what it called ‘rude and ignorant people’, the act called for ‘a conformitie, concordance, and familiarity in language, tongue, in manners, order and

⁶ For a perceptive sensitivity to the significance of gesture in the 1641 rising, see Eamon Darcy’s pioneering essay, ‘The social order of the 1641 rebellion’ in Eamon Darcy, Annaleigh Margey and Elaine Murphy (eds), *The 1641 depositions and the Irish rebellion* (London, 2012), pp 97–111.

⁷ John Walter, ‘Gesturing at authority; deciphering the gestural code in early modern England’ in Braddick (ed.), *Politics of gesture*, pp 102–03. For evidence of the importation of English books of manners from at least the 1570s, see Susan Flavin, ‘Food, drink and society in sixteenth-century Ireland’ in Eve Campbell, Elizabeth Fitzpatrick and Audrey Horning (eds), *Becoming and belonging in Ireland AD c.1200–1600: essays in identity and cultural practice* (Cork, 2018), p. 238.

⁸ Frances Nolan and Bronagh McShane, ‘Introduction: a new agenda for women’s and gender history in Ireland’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xlvii, no. 170 (Nov. 2022), p. 212.

⁹ Jane Ohlmeyer, ‘“Civilizing of those rude partes”: colonization within Britain and Ireland, 1580s–1640s’ in Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford history of the British empire* (5 vols, Oxford, 1998), i, 131–2; John Patrick Montano, *The root of English colonialism in Ireland* (New York, 2011); Falkiner C. Litton, *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly in the seventeenth century* (London, 1904), pp 308–11; David Heffernan, ‘Robert Crowley’s “A discourse of the cause of the evil state of Ireland and the remedies thereof”, c.1526’ in *Anal. Hib.*, xlviii (2017), pp 3–30.

apparel, with them that be civil people'.¹⁰ The distinction between 'civil' and 'uncivil' was to drive the anglicisation project.¹¹ Successive governments sought (unsuccessfully) to use the law to administer cultural change.¹² In the 1630s, the introduction of new rules of conduct by Thomas Wentworth, the lord deputy, banning those wearing Irish dress from admittance to Dublin castle, the centre of English rule, represented a continuation (in a characteristically more authoritarian form) of the enforcement of these policies.¹³

Baffled and angered however by the failure of legal persuasion or social emulation to bring about a reformation of manners, politicians and pamphleteers repeatedly complained about the failure of the 'meere Irish' to be drawn 'to any civility in manners'.¹⁴ Thus, the anonymous author of an early-seventeenth-century tract complained that after the successful defeat of earlier rebellions the state should have

broken the Irishry from their barbarous customs and compelled them to change their habits & language (which are the true ribs of a perfect conquest) . . . If they had all been compelled to use the English language, habit & apparel the society and familiarities of civil men might have brought those rude & savage people in love with our fashions and would have made them in one age think themselves all Englishmen . . . whereas retaining still their own language, habit & customs they were strangers to the English, [and] hated them as enemies.¹⁵

The hostile accounts of English administrators and commentators, disappointed by their failure to achieve a cultural revolution, however, provide poor evidence of the reality of lived experience in early modern Ireland. Despite worries that the Anglo-Norman Old English were going native and becoming more 'Irish' in dress and deportment,¹⁶ the reality was increasingly different. In a world in which, as recent work has shown, there was a growing adoption of English forms in architecture and dress, this doubtless contributed to the cultural hybridisation that, it has been argued, challenged the 'essentialist ethnic categories' of Gaelic Irish, Old and New English.¹⁷ As Brendan Kane has recently reminded us, there was 'a long history of cultural affinity and interplay between the two [Irish and English] societies'.¹⁸ This was undoubtedly most pronounced, and certainly easiest to recover in the historical record, at the level of the elite where, for example, aristocratic and amphibious figures like the earls of Thomond, Clanricarde and Ormond slipped

¹⁰ *The statutes at large, passed in the parliaments held in Ireland* (Dublin, 1786), i, 120; *Calendar of state papers Ireland* [hereafter *CSPi*], 2, pt. iii, p. 309.

¹¹ Mairead Dunlevy, *Dress in Ireland* (London, 1989), p. 28; Brid McGrath, 'Looking the part: dress and civic status and ethnicity in early-modern Ireland' in *Jn. of the Royal Soc. of Antiquaries of Ireland*, cxlviii (2018), pp 101–21; Edward M. Hinton, *Ireland through Tudor eyes* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp 51, 85.

¹² Raymond Gillespie, 'Three tracts on Ireland, c.1613' in *Anal. Hib.*, xxxviii (2004), p. 32. See the priority given to enforcing English dress in instructions to the provincial lord presidents: Margaret Curtis Clayton, *The council book for the province of Munster c.1599–1649* (I.M.C., Dublin, 2008), pp 249, 378, 461.

¹³ Shaw, 'Wentworth and monarchical ritual', p. 352.

¹⁴ Fynes Moryson, 'The commonwealth of Ireland' in Litton, *Illustrations*, p. 322; Graham Kew, 'The Irish sections of Fynes Moryson's unpublished *Itinerary*' in *Anal. Hib.*, xxxvii (1998), pp 50–51, 107; Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fion-Ghael: studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the nineteenth century* (Cork, 1997), pp 32–61; David Heffernan, "'Not Christian, civic or human creatures, but heathen or rather savage and brute beasts": Andrew Trollope and 'reformation' of Ireland in the 1580s' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, lix (2022), pp 30–46; *Ireland through Tudor eyes* (Philadelphia, 1935); *Image of Irelande*, ed. Small.

¹⁵ Gillespie, 'Three tracts', p. 12.

¹⁶ On which, see Sparky Booker, 'Moustaches, mantles and saffron shirts: what motivated sumptuary law in medieval English Ireland?' in *Speculum*, xcvi, no. 3 (2021), pp 726–70.

¹⁷ Marc Caball, 'Culture, continuity and change in early seventeenth-century south-west Munster' in *Studia Hibernica*, xxviii (2012), p. 38.

¹⁸ Brendan Kane, *The politics and culture of honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541–1641* (Cambridge, 2010), pp 278, 26.

between the social and cultural worlds of Ireland and the English court.¹⁹ Gaelic lords who had to move in the world created by the institutions of English rule also had increasingly to comply.²⁰ The evidence suggests that by the later sixteenth century, if not before, they were donning English dress and hats. Forced to wear trousers to attend the 1585 parliament, Turlough Lyneach O'Neill was said to have suggested that his chaplain do likewise so the boys might laugh at him, 'as at me'. If true, it suggests something of the costs to Gaelic lords of adopting English dress.²¹

The complaints of English administrators and commentators were undoubtedly inflected by considerations of class as well as ethnicity. Civil and 'metely well man[n]ered' people were to be found within the English Pale, in the major Old English port towns and increasingly in the smaller towns that were a product of plantation.²² It was the 'meaner sort' who were rude, rustical and uncivil. However, although the adoption of English dress and manners probably happened at a slower pace among other social groups, a series of changes in the worlds of education, law and office-holding, commerce and agrarian 'improvement' (with the changes this last brought in relationships between Gaelic lords and followers) promoted growing social interactions which underwrote a more silent change in dress and manners. By the early seventeenth century, Fynes Morison acknowledged that 'for the most part' the Irish were 'attired after the English manner'; by 1620, Luke Gernon could report the 'better sorte' 'apparelled at all poynts like the English'; and by the 1650s, Sir James Ware that 'the Irish universally conform to the English dress in the general, except some few of the meaner Sort of People'.²³ Evidence from the later seventeenth/early eighteenth century suggests the continuing downward reach of English dress.²⁴

The increasing adoption of English dress, together with the extension and increasing reach of English institutions, multiplied sites and occasions for the performance and enforcement of gestural protocols, underlining the connection between ceremony and civility in the anglicisation project.²⁵ In what has been called the 'political aesthetics' of public rituals, Wentworth, as lord president, publicised and promoted a form of body politics intended to underwrite a culture of obedience and hierarchy.²⁶ This was paralleled in the use of sacred space by the introduction of Laudian ceremonialism to enforce, as in England, forms of bodily worship that sought to signal and secure greater order in church and state.

Necessarily, gesture (with or without speech) provided a medium for triangulating the increasing interactions between the native Irish, Old and New English and Scots. Old and New English shared socialisation in a specifically English gestural order. By comparison, the Scottish gestural code, it has been suggested, was marked by greater informality,

¹⁹ Bernadette Cunningham, *Clanricarde and Thomond, 1540-1640: provincial politics and society transformed* (Dublin, 2012).

²⁰ Agreements of 'surrender and regrant' of land between lords and royal government, for example, could require lords to commit to wearing English clothes: Hiram Morgan, 'The end of Gaelic Ulster: a thematic interpretation of events between 1534 and 1610' in *I.H.S.*, xxvi, no. 101 (May 1988), pp 23-4.

²¹ Cyril Falls, *Elizabeth's Irish wars* (London, 1950), p. 156.

²² Gerard Farrell, *The 'mere Irish' and the colonisation of Ulster 1570-1641* (Cham, 2017), p. 38; James Buckley (ed.), 'A vice-regal progress through the south and west of Ireland in 1567' in *Jn. of the Waterford and South-east of Ireland Arch. Soc.*, xii (1909), p. 76; Gillespie, *Three tracts*, p. 16; Rolf Loeber, David Dickson and Alan Smyth, 'Journal of a tour to Dublin and the counties of Dublin and Meath in 1699' in *Anal. Hib.*, xliii (2012), p. 64.

²³ Dunlevy, *Dress*, pp 80-81.

²⁴ T. C. Barnard, 'The world of goods and county Offaly in the early eighteenth century' in William Nolan and Timothy P. O'Neill (eds), *Offaly history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1998), pp 371-92.

²⁵ See, for example, Bríd McGrath, *The operation of the Irish House of Commons, 1613-48* (Dublin, 2023), chapter 6.

²⁶ Shaw, 'Wentworth and monarchical ritual', pp 348-9.

particularly across class boundaries.²⁷ The evidence has not yet been identified that would allow us to recover pre-conquest Gaelic gestural codes. Intriguing evidence from the late medieval Gaelic resurgence with the elite's deliberate gestural cultivation of a warrior code suggests a self-knowing ability to deploy this to counter English 'civility'.²⁸ However, a common genealogy in the *mores* of the classical, biblical, and Renaissance worlds offered *potentially* shared readings of the human body and its panoply of meaning-making gestures. In a clash between the earl of Tyrone and Phelim McTurlough O'Neill in 1593, in turning his back on O'Neill, Tyrone demonstrated a shared knowledge of a gestural code that ruled such behaviour disrespectful.²⁹ An Ulsterman summoned before Stranraer presbytery in 1649 for actions in Ireland showed his contempt by 'turning his backe disdainfullie, & putting on his cappe'.³⁰ Ulster Presbyterians uncovered their heads as a mark of respect at the reading of the bible.³¹ At the end of the sixteenth century, hat honour was involved in a jurisdictional dispute at Limerick over garrisoning and taxes to pay the troops, with the mayor accused of pulling off and trampling the hats of officers and gentlemen.³² In religion, a shared biblical gestural inheritance informed the performative nature of religious violence by both Catholics and Protestants in the 1640s.³³ If particular gestures were not universally practised in early modern Ireland, their meanings were, however, commonly understood in the overlap of gestural codes. The didacticism of the gestural order that state and church ceremonies sought to impose could, therefore, draw on a shared understanding of the topography of the human body.

In theory, the gestural code current in England imposed obligation on all. However, in a hierarchical and unequal society structured by age, gender and, above all, class, gesture could serve to underline differences in status and power in gestural exchanges that were either non-reciprocal or unreciprocated. Between social equals, gesture might work smoothly, though even here performance — who, for example, gestured first and in whose space? — might sometimes betray the competitive edge to social exchange to be found between social groups experiencing either upward or downward social mobility. But the greater the differences in status, then gestural exchanges were less likely to be reciprocal or reciprocated. Writing in the early seventeenth century for an English readership, (the Scot) James Cleland set out the meanings of various gestures: uncovering the head to another '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'.³⁴ For those lower down the social scale from whom deferential gestures were expected, forms of domination might then be inscribed on the body. Unsurprisingly, since notions of superiority and subordination could be acted out with the economy of a single gesture, gesture was to play a part in

²⁷ See the comments in 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), pp 126–44.

²⁸ Katharine Simms, 'The barefoot kings in literary imagination and reality in later medieval Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, xxx (2010), pp 1–21.

²⁹ *CSPI*, 5, Oct 1592–June 1596, p. 107; *ibid.*, 8, Apr 1599–Feb 1600, p. 144.

³⁰ National Records of Scotland, CH2/341/1, f. 210. My thanks to Robert Armstrong for this reference.

³¹ Raymond Gillespie, *Devoted people: belief and religion in early modern Ireland* (Manchester, 1997), p. 75.

³² Clodagh Tait, 'Broken heads and trampled hats: rioting in Limerick in 1599' in Liam Irwin and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh (eds), *Limerick history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2009), pp 96, 104–06.

³³ John Walter, 'Performative violence and the politics of violence in the 1641 depositions' in Micheál Ó Siochrú and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Ireland, 1641: contexts and reactions* (Manchester, 2013), pp 134–52; Joan Redmond, 'Conquering the idols: English iconoclasm in Ireland, 1642–1660' in *Church History*, xci, no. 3 (2022), pp 535–54.

³⁴ James Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia, Or the institution of a young noble man* (Oxford, 1607, STC, 2nd ed., 5393), pp 176–7.

securing acceptance of English rule. However, as the forms Irish resistance were to show, a body politics that exploited a shared understanding of the meaning of particular gestures could also be drawn on to subvert, resist and retaliate against the political agenda of anglicisation.

III

Height indexed hierarchy in the early modern gestural code. The upright body was a concise expression of superiority, the lowered body of subordination. Within that code, prostration, representing an extreme of physical disarrangement, acknowledged submission and subjugation and performed supplication. It had a central role to play in negotiating royal authority and the restoration of order after rebellion. A proclamation issued during the Nine Years War threatened all in rebellion with the sword unless with ‘expedition, penitence, and humility’ they ‘prostrate themselves to our mercy’.³⁵

Many of the sixteenth-century rebellions ended in gestural submission.³⁶ The gestures of penitential submission were appropriated for the act of political submission. Rebel lords were required to perform submission, prostrating themselves before the queen or, in Ireland, publicly before her representatives, in what has been called a ‘simulacrum of physical defencelessness’.³⁷ The gesture was accompanied by supplications for mercy and tearful protestations of remorse and loyalty. In 1562, Shane O’Neill (‘Shane the Proud’), permitted to travel to the court to seek mercy, was said to have ‘howled’ and fallen at the queen’s feet.³⁸ Proclaimed a traitor in 1567, he thought again to seek the queen’s pardon by prostrating himself at the lord deputy’s feet with a halter around his neck to signal submission, an ominous symbol both adopted by and forced on later rebels.³⁹ Where prostration was publicly required of lords, the English crown and its representatives deliberately upended the normal gestural protocols, exacting submission from those otherwise accustomed to receiving gestures of respect.⁴⁰ In 1573, James fitz Maurice Fitzgerald was forced publicly to submit — on both knees — before Sir John Perrot, president of Munster and an audience of a multitude of people in the church at Kilmallock. Surrendering his own sword, he offered to kiss Perrot’s sword as a sign of vassalage to the queen, afterwards lying prostrate and kissing the ground. In 1603, the earl of Tyrone, in the first of three submissions he was to be made to make, prostrated himself, ‘grovelling to the earth’, before the lord deputy, Lord Mountjoy and a ‘great presence’ of people at

³⁵ CSPI, *Tudor Period*, 7, Jan 1598-Mar 1599: SP63/203/25, 25/1/1598/9.

³⁶ William Palmer, ‘That “Insolent Liberty” honor, rites of power, and persuasion in sixteenth-century Ireland’ in *Renaissance Quarterly*, xlvii, no.2 (1993), pp 308–27; Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan conquest of Ireland: a pattern established 1565–76* (Hassocks, 1976), pp 141–53. For the often more complex causes, for which anglicisation provided an emotive shorthand, see David Edwards, ‘The Butler Revolt of 1569’ in *I.H.S.*, xxviii, no. 111 (May 1993), pp 228–55.

³⁷ Mary O’Dowd, *Power, politics and land: early modern Sligo 1568–1688* (Belfast, 1991), p. 27; Lambeth Palace Library, Carew MS 632, p. 92a; CSPI, 1571–1575, p. 672; CSPI, 1586–1588, p. 76; CSPI, 1600, p. 150; Raymond Firth, ‘Bodily symbols of greeting and parting’ in idem, *Symbols: public and private* (London, 1973), p. 325.

³⁸ Derek Hirst, *Dominion: England and its neighbours 1500–1707* (Oxford, 2012), pp 75–7; Christopher Maginn, ‘O’Neill, Shane [Sean O’Neill] c.1530–1567’, *O.D.N.B.* (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20785>) (25 May 2025).

³⁹ George Oppitz-Trotman, ‘“Into the geere the rope”: notes on the early modern halter’ in *Sixteenth Century Jn.*, xlvii, no. 1 (2016), pp 57–8; Willy Maley, ‘“The name of the country I have forgotten”: remembering and dismembering in Sir Henry Sidney’s *Irish Memoir* (1583)’ in Thomas Herron and Michael Potterton (eds), *Ireland in the Renaissance c.1540–1660* (Dublin, 2007), p. 66; Earl of Cork’s letter book, p. 253 (Chatsworth House, Hardwick MS 578) (my thanks to Bríd McGrath for this reference); Canny, *Elizabethan conquest*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Colm Lennon, *The lords of Dublin in the age of Reformation* (Dublin, 1989), pp 197–8.

Mellifont Abbey. Made to kneel for an hour and humiliated on learning that the queen to whom he had made submission was already dead, Tyrone was described by one of those present as ‘one of the most deplorable sights that euer I saw’.⁴¹

Words and signs gave added emphasis to the gestural act of submission. After the Butler revolt, the earl of Clancar had appeared before the lord deputy and council in the Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle and submitted himself ‘in the most lowly manner that might be devised’. Invited to stand ‘after being long prostrate on his knees’, he refused saying ‘he was not worthy to stand’ but only to make his submission ‘lying prostrate in the vilest dunghill in his own country’.⁴² Such protestations were perhaps not to be taken literally. But by reference to the anatomical calibrations of the gestural code and by drawing upon the etymological association between *humus* and humility, they were intended to be taken seriously.⁴³

Submission was, therefore, carefully choreographed. The final woodcut in John Derricke’s 1581 *Image of Ireland*, an account of his patron, the Lord Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney’s campaigns against Irish rebels, depicts the submission of Turlough Luineach O’Neill.⁴⁴ Since it is thought likely that Derricke was present at the event, the evidence encoded in the woodcut is especially valuable. Derricke’s illustration showed the elaborate gestural and spatial order expected of all those in the royal presence and the role this played in the construction of royal authority. Sir Henry sits, raised on a dais, under the canopy of state, with his hat on. His officers stand grouped beside, but below him, bare-headed and girded with their swords. At a little distance away, O’Neill kneels (on one knee) to Sidney, without his sword, bare-headed with his hat in his hand. Behind him are grouped his followers, also kneeling, without hats and bare-headed. Behind the scene of his submission is shown O’Neill’s surrender. Watched over by a group of halberdiers, and again with hat in hand, he kneels to Sir Henry and his officers, all of whom wear their hats.

English rebellions in the late fifteenth century had ended with penitent rebels lying prostrate on the ground seeking royal mercy. Thereafter, English rebels increasingly knelt to beg pardon (though as in 1549 rebellions with halters around their necks).⁴⁵ Prostration in England slipped from performed body language to a metaphor in speech and the written word for abasement.⁴⁶ Irish rebels too knelt, though the experience of English rebels offers no parallel for the episode during the Nine Years War in which the Burke brothers were forced, perhaps in mockery of the practice of Irish pilgrims, to *creep* upon their knees to Sir George Carew mounted on his horse.⁴⁷ Holinshed’s *Chronicle of Ireland* told the story of how the lord deputy took charge of the earl of Desmond and reduced him to ‘conformitie in

⁴¹ CSPI, 1571–1575, p. 272; CSPI, 1603–1606, p. 14; William Montgomery, *The Montgomery manuscripts (1603–1706)* (Belfast, 1869), pp 45–6n; David Edwards, ‘Political change and social transformation, 1603–1641’ in Jane Ohlmeyer (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland*, ii, 1550–1730 (Cambridge, 2018), p. 50; Richard Berthlet, *The twilight lords: an Irish chronicle* (New York, 1978), p. 292; Thomas Gainsford, *The true exemplary, and remarkable history of the Earl of Tirone* (London, 1619), p. 41.

⁴² CSPI, *Tudor Period*, rev. ed., 2, 1568–1571, p. 262; Ciaran Brady, ed., *A viceroy’s vindication? Sir Henry Sidney’s memoirs of service in Ireland 1556–1578* (Cork, 2002), pp 79–80.

⁴³ For the significance of performing prostration as an act of humility on bare earth, see the stimulating discussion in Lucy Donkin, *Standing on holy ground in the middle ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2022), pp 278–392.

⁴⁴ For Derricke, see Andrew Hadfield, ‘Derricke, John (fl. 1578–1581)’, O.D.N.B. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7537>) (25 May 2025); James A. Knapp, “‘That most barbarous Nacion’: John Derricke’s “Image of Irelande” and “the delight of the well disposed reader”” in *Criticism*, xlii, no. 4 (2000), pp 415–50.

⁴⁵ K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and authority in the Tudor state* (Cambridge, 2003), pp 159–60, 167, 180, 182–3.

⁴⁶ CSPI, 1600, pp 59, 418, 424, 418; 1615–1628, p. 484; 1660, p. 562.

⁴⁷ [Thomas Stafford], *Pacata Hibernia. Or a history of the wars in Ireland*, ed. Standish O’Grady (2 vols, London 1896), i, 61 [my thanks to Clodagh Tait for this reference]; J. S. Brewer and William Bullen (eds), *Calendar of the Carew manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth 1575–1588* (London, 1869), p. 330; CSPI, 1589–1600, pp 7, 225, 238, 274, 330.



John Derrick, *The image of Ireland with a discoverie of woodkarne* (1581), plate XII.

maners, apparell and behaviour’ by making him ‘to kneel upon his knees, sometimes an hour together, before he knew his duty’.⁴⁸ Performing prostration seems to have continued longer in Ireland. Only gradually do offers by rebel Irish lords to prostrate themselves (later copied, *inter alia*, by disgraced administrators and impoverished clerical petitioners and poets)⁴⁹ seem to have become a synonym for — often lengthy — kneeling on both knees.⁵⁰

Kneeling drew on a complex of ideas that lent the act meaning. Kneeling as a mark of respect was a widely practised gesture in early modern Ireland. In the everyday gesture of children kneeling to their parents to get their blessing (as English children were meant to do every day), tenants to their lord, followers to their chief or servants to their master, each were helping to construct early modern society as a series of interrelated but hierarchically structured dependencies. Kneeling too was an act of supplication. Prayers were made kneeling. So too were curses (and toasts). In the 1641 depositions, a gentleman testified how his father-in-law on learning of the death of his tenant and wife had knelt to curse the attackers.⁵¹ That kneeling was central to religious worship among Catholics — in kneeling to images and at sacred sites,⁵² at marriage,⁵³ in confession, prayer or taking mass

⁴⁸ Ralph Holinshed, *The second volume of chronicles: containing . . . the description of Ireland* (London, 1586), p. 324.

⁴⁹ CSPI, *Tudor Period*, 4, August 1588–Sept. 1592, p. 587; CSPI, 1606, p. 424; CSPI, 1615–1625, pp 484, 568; CSPI, *Charles II*, 4, Sept. 1669–Dec. 1670, p. 560; Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), *The Lismore papers* (2nd ser. 5 vols., London 1887–8), iv (1888), 68; Andrew Carpenter, ed., *Verses in English from Tudor and Stuart Ireland* (Cork, 2003), p. 267.

⁵⁰ For the frequency with which kneeling was imposed, see H.M.C., *The manuscripts of Charles Haliday, Esq., of Dublin. Acts of the privy council in Ireland, 1556–1571* (London, 1897), *passim*.

⁵¹ Thomas Waters, ‘Irish cursing and the art of magic, 1750–2018’ in *Past & Present*, no. 247 (2020), p. 247; Examination of Brian Modder McHenry O’Cahan (T.C.D., MS 838, f. 29r).

⁵² Michael P. Carroll, *Irish pilgrimage: holy wells and popular Catholic devotion* (Baltimore and London, 1999), pp 79–80, 85–7; Gillespie, *Devoted people*, p. 92; Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Confessionalism and mobility in early modern Ireland* (Oxford, 2021), pp 233–4; *The tour of the French traveller M. de la Boullaye Le Gouz in Ireland, A.D. 1644*, ed. T. Crofton Croker (London, 1837), p. 35.

⁵³ Charles McNeill, ‘Harris: collectanea de rebus Hibernicis’ in *Anal. Hib.*, vi (1934), pp 359–60.

and to priests, bishops, and God⁵⁴ — constructed the gesture as one of reverence and respect. In acknowledging God's supremacy, kneeling also carried notions of subordination and submission. Depending then on context and occasion, the meaning of kneeling could run from reverence and respect through supplication and invocation, to submission and punishment. To kneel, and more so to be made to kneel, was to humble oneself. When, after the 1603 recusancy revolt, the priest Francis White 'humbled himself upon his knees' before the lord deputy in a plea for the exercise of the Catholic religion, his gesture was doubtless intended to draw on the interplay of the meanings of 'to kneel'.⁵⁵

The obligation to kneel had an increasingly important role to play in English rule in Ireland. Office and oaths, including those of the homage, were to be taken kneeling.⁵⁶ Petitions were to be delivered kneeling at the council board. The Castle Chamber and provincial courts imposed kneeling as part of the punishments they administered.⁵⁷ Offenders knelt in acknowledgement of wrongdoing; subordinates in supplication to, and acceptance of, established social and political hierarchies. In the Caroline church, kneeling was imposed as part of a programme of acknowledgement of God's special presence. For Puritan reformers in Ireland, however, hostile to what John Bale, bishop of Ossory, had called 'the old apish toys of Antichrist in bowings and scrapings, kneelings and knockings', kneeling at or to the altar was controversial, especially with Presbyterian Ulster Scots who sat at the communion table, 'like good fellows'.⁵⁸ Above all, in what has been called the 'transmigration of the sacred' — the deliberate appropriation of gestures associated with divinity and Christian worship — kneeling to the monarch mingled meanings of reverence and humble submission.⁵⁹

To kneel, and more so to be made to kneel, was also to humble oneself. In a society obsessed with protocol, precedence and honour, the obligation to kneel to a superior could generate conflict at all levels of society.⁶⁰ A dispute between Wentworth and Adam Loftus, lord chancellor and keeper of the great seal, in which Loftus twice refused to kneel before Wentworth and the council, offers striking evidence of the shame that being made to kneel could bring. Complaining that it should not be required of one of his rank and quality since 'the Great Seal ought not to creep on knees and elbows to any subordinate person in the world', Loftus was reported to have said that he would rather die than kneel.⁶¹ In early modern society, only a thin line existed between kneeling in humility or humiliation.⁶²

⁵⁴ John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, ed. Matthew Kelly (3 vols, Dublin, 1848–1851), iii (1851–2), 121 & n.

⁵⁵ T.N.A., SP 63/215/53.

⁵⁶ For examples, see James P. Meyers, *Elizabethan Ireland: a selection of writings by Elizabethan writers on Ireland* (Hamden, CT, 1983); Mark Empy (ed.), 'The diary of Sir James Ware, 1623–1666' in *Anal. Hib.*, xlv (2014), p. 86; Grosart, *Lismore papers* (2nd ser.), ii, 107–08; *ibid.*, iv, 156; CSPI 1669–1670, p. 112; J. T. Gilbert (ed.), *A contemporary history of affairs in Ireland, from 1641 to 1652* (3 vols, Dublin, 1879–80), i, pt. 1, appx. xxxviii.

⁵⁷ CSPI, 1637–1660, p. 314; Jon G. Crawford, *A star chamber court in Ireland: the court of castle chamber, 1571–1641* (Dublin, 2005), appx 1; Grosart, *Lismore Papers* (2nd ser.), ii, 76–7; James Hardiman, *The history of the town and county of Galway* (Dublin, 1820), p. 105.

⁵⁸ *Harleian Miscellany*, vi, 446; Pat Kilroy, 'Sermon and pamphlet literature in the Irish Reformed church' in *Archiv. Hib.*, xxxiii (1975), p. 111; Ó hAnnracháin, *Confessionalism*, pp 230–31, 233–4; M. Perceval-Maxwell, 'Strafford, the Ulster Scots and the Covenanters' in *L.H.S.*, xviii, no. 72 (Sept. 1973), p. 531; Alan Ford, *James Ussher, theology, history and politics in early-modern Ireland and England* (Oxford, 2007), pp 188–91; Gillespie, *Devoted people*, pp 92–3. For conflicting positions on kneeling at communion and confession, see CSPI, *Charles I, 2, 1633–1647*, pp 87, 186.

⁵⁹ John Adamson (ed.), *The princely courts of Europe: ritual, politics and culture under the ancien régime 1500–1750* (London 1999), p. 30.

⁶⁰ CSPI, 1633–1647, p. 184; Richard Bagwell, *Ireland under the Stuart and during the Interregnum* (3 vols, London, 1909), i, 265–6.

⁶¹ CSPI, 1633–1647, 184; H.M.C., *9th Report*, pp 170–73; Kane, *Politics and culture of honour*, pp 264–5.

⁶² On the potential complexity of ideas informing early modern constructions of humility, see Jennifer Clement, *Reading humility in early modern England* (Farnham, 2015).

IV

Hat-honour was central to the early modern English gestural order.⁶³ In John Derricke's woodcut, Sir Henry Sidney sits as a direct representative of the queen, under the canopy of state ('in honors seate') and remains covered, while everybody else is expected to acknowledge the royal presence with heads bared. In early modern society, who was allowed to remain covered and who had to bare the head could offer an infinitely fine-grained representation of gradations of power and status. As Lawrence Stone observed, the hat was 'forever being doffed and donned to emphasise the complex hierarchy of ranks and authorities. Everyone, everyday, many times a day, by removing his hat or by putting it on, gave visible proof of his acceptance of the great principle of subordination.'⁶⁴

Included among the illustrations to John Speed's 1610 map of Ireland were contrasting images of 'The Wilde Irish man' hatless and 'The Civill Irish man' wearing a hat.⁶⁵ Wearing *English* hats may have been one of the cultural markers that separated the Old English from the Gaelic Irish. In the Old and New English towns, hats were commonly worn. An account of the reception at Youghal of the proclamation of Charles I's accession described the people clapping their hands and 'throwing up of their hatts'. However, a 1605 report of the reception of the pardoned Conor O'Neill by his friends and followers noted that the 'gentry' wore woollen bonnets, while 'perhaps not one of the concourse had a hat' and wore only 'sorry scull caps'. It was, thus, 'in reverence and of necessity', the letter writer scoffed, that they went 'cheerfully pacing or trotting bare-headed'.⁶⁶

How deep the practice of hat-honour ran amongst the native Irish in early modern Ireland remains unclear. Earlier commentators agreed that hat-wearing was not common among the native Irish. In 1537, Robert Crowley had reported to Thomas Cromwell that they 'neither can speke thenglishe tonge ne were capp or bonet'.⁶⁷ Since, as Fynes Morison observed, the native Irish wore their hair exceedingly long, they had no use of either cap or hat. John Goode was one among many English commentators when he noted in 1566 that the Irish generally go bare-headed.⁶⁸ In Derricke's woodcut, Turlough Lyneach O'Neill's followers are shown hatless, while a 1602 map incorporating an image of the inauguration of Hugh, second earl of Tyrone as the O'Neill has all eight participants bare-headed and with their hair falling over their forehead.⁶⁹ However, although English commentators showed their dislike of the mantles (cloaks) worn by the native Irish that on occasion were fashioned as a hood, it was not necessarily the case that some form of hat was not worn. Both skullcaps and woollen bonnets might be worn. But for English commentators like Derricke, skullcaps were not 'civill Cappes'.⁷⁰

Given its importance in most European societies, increasing knowledge of which would have come from the networks that trade and confessional links spun, not least among a growing Irish diaspora, hat-honour was clearly more widely practised in Irish society. When in 1603 the lord primate appealed for the release of a man arrested for saying he hoped to witness the restoration of the Mass, it was noted that, though a bishop, he

⁶³ See Penelope J. Corfield, 'Dress for deference and dissent: hats and the decline of hat honour' in *Costume*, xxiii (1989), pp 64–79.

⁶⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The crisis of the aristocracy 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), pp 34–5.

⁶⁵ John Speed, *The kingdome of Irland* (1610), available at the British Museum (http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1870-0514-2830-) (accessed 20/6/2023).

⁶⁶ Grosart, *Lismore Papers* (1st ser., 5 vols, London, 1886), ii, 378; *Montgomery manuscripts*, pp 37–8.

⁶⁷ T.N.A., SP 60/4/32.

⁶⁸ Kew, 'Fynes Moryson', p. 111; *Image of Irelande*, plate 1; Litton, *Illustrations*, pp 261, 321.

⁶⁹ Montano, *Roots of English colonialism*, pp 310–13; G. A. Hayes-McCoy, 'The making of an O'Neill: a view of the ceremony at Tullahoge, Co. Tyrone' in *Ulster Jn. of Archaeology*, 3rd ser., xxxiii (1970), p. 91 and plate viii. Rebels on surrender were forced to cut their glybbes: T.N.A., SP 63/30/4; *CSPI, 1509–1573*, p. 425.

⁷⁰ *Image of Irelande*, p. 49.

appeared 'with his hat in his hand'.⁷¹ Amongst both Catholics and Protestants, hats honoured the dead as well as the living: for example, in a 1607 funeral in County Down, the local abbot rode on a horse before the corpse, 'with his hat in his hand'.⁷² Witness testimony from the 1640s suggests that hat-honour amongst officers and towards their generals was practised in the Catholic Confederate camp. A prisoner at Charlemont, County Armagh later testified that the northern Irish commanders and gentry, from the meanest to the greatest, Sir Phelim O'Neill only excepted, gave the Ulster general Owen Roe O'Neill 'great respect and reverence', 'standing bare and uncovered before him'.⁷³ The fact that Neill remained covered showed that gesture informed by precedent was also at play amongst the Gaelic Irish.

A considerable political effort was made to force the Gaelic Irish to wear hats. Henrician legislation, for example, had called on every man who reputed himself to be the king's subject to wear a bonnet.⁷⁴ In the 1580s, the efforts of the lord deputy, Sir John Perrot were said to have left both ladies and gentlemen 'somewhat grieved', but to have had some success in securing their wearing hats 'after the English manner'.⁷⁵ The growing adoption of the (English) hat was doubtless most marked at the level of the Gaelic elite.⁷⁶ Meeting with the lord lieutenant in the later sixteenth century, the earl of Tyrone was reported to have treated him with 'much reverence', removing his hat and speaking 'a good while barehede[d]'.⁷⁷ Hat-wearing clearly changed over time with the increasingly wider adoption of English sartorial standards, but how soon and how far this extended down the social scale remains to be established.⁷⁸ It was said of Scots Ulster in 1659 that the English 'in all fairs and markets see a hundred bonnets for one hat'.⁷⁹ By the late seventeenth century, however, a visitor to Ireland could report that 'now the men are come to the use of hats, instead of their usual capps (made of firze of the country)'. By the later eighteenth century, wearing a hat was near universal enough for the inspector of prisons to argue that executing criminals without a cap would 'tend to render the punishment more exemplary'.⁸⁰

As the practice of hat-wearing spread, hat-honour doubtless created the sort of everyday conflicts that were to be found in early modern England. A disputed election at Trinity College, for example, saw the disappointed candidate defiantly replace his hat and tell the provost, 'he was as much a Senior Fellow as the Provost was Provost'.⁸¹ As in England, Quakers in Ireland recorded the abusive words, blows and stone-throwing that their principled refusal to remove their hats produced.⁸² But hat-honour became an increasingly important part of the political protocols of church and state in early modern

⁷¹ CSPI, 1603–1606, p. 17.

⁷² Brian MacCuarta, 'A Catholic funeral in County Down, 1607' in *Archiv. Hib.*, lx (2006/7), pp 323, 324; *Montgomery manuscripts*, pp 142, 253.

⁷³ Gilbert, *Contemporary history*, i, pt. 1, appx. lxvi, 546; Wells, 'Proceedings of the high court', pp 95, 141; Deposition of Francis Sacheverell (T.C.D., MS 836, f. 110r).

⁷⁴ Montano, *Roots of English colonialism*, pp 299, 310.

⁷⁵ CSPI, 8, Apr 1599–Feb 1600, p. 144.

⁷⁶ *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (6 vols, London, 1808), vi, 370.

⁷⁷ CSPI, 5, Oct 1592–June 1596, p. 107.

⁷⁸ For evidence of the increasing importation of hats, see Flavin, 'Food, drink and society', p. 217.

⁷⁹ Robert Armstrong, 'The Scots of Ireland and the English republic, 1649–60' in David Edwards with Simon Egan, *The Scots in early Stuart Ireland: union and separation in two kingdoms* (Manchester, 2016), p. 251.

⁸⁰ Evelyn Philip Shirley and John P. Prendergast, 'Extracts from the journal of Thomas Dineley, Esquire, giving some account of his visit to Ireland in the reign of Charles II' in *Jn. of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Arch. Soc.*, iv (1856–7), p. 180; James Kelly, 'Punishing the dead: executions and the executed body in eighteenth-century Ireland' in Richard Ward (ed.), *A global history of execution and the criminal corpse* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 57.

⁸¹ CSPI, 1633–47, 146.

⁸² *A journal of the life, travels, sufferings, and labour of love in the work of the ministry, of that worthy elder, and faithful servant of Jesus Christ William Edmundson* (London, 1715), pp 12, 47.

Ireland.⁸³ A 1621 pamphlet described how in the Presence Chamber at Dublin Castle, all stood uncovered — ‘at all times’ — except for the lord deputy who sat beneath the cloth of state and who, when he rode out, had a knight, bare-headed, to carry the sword of state before him.⁸⁴ Additional orders stipulated that, with the exception of the lord deputy, no man was to speak covered at the council board. All noblemen’s servants were to be restricted to the Great Chamber, and they and all others were to go ‘bare’ there as in the Presence Chamber, ‘there being a state in both alike’.⁸⁵ In the church, Wentworth, as part of his wider procedural reforms, gave orders to regulate the wearing and removal of hats during services in Christ Church Cathedral, ordering that no person of ‘what degree so ever’ should presume to put on their hat during the services.⁸⁶

To doff the cap was to acknowledge hierarchy. The politics of the hat was clearly well enough understood for disputes over hat-honour to contribute to growing tensions between Catholic Gaelic and Old Irish and Protestant New English. After his grovelling submission, Tyrone had been allowed to approach the lord deputy, but made to stand uncovered for some two hours.⁸⁷ During the 1603 recusancy revolt, Sir Thomas Herbert had been reviled in the streets of Cork by a social inferior for failing to put off his hat and to do reverence to the cross that was being processed by Catholic laity and clergy through the city’s streets.⁸⁸ At the level of the state and its institutions, tussles over precedence could also take the form of disputes over the right to wear the hat and to remain covered. Since the English parliament claimed legislative superiority over the Irish parliament, the procedural problems posed by the arrival of two English M.P.s in Dublin in 1641 had to be resolved by allowing them to sit *covered* on their own form, while when members in the Irish parliament of 1666 refused to uncover in the presence of the Lords, this was met with the enquiry, ‘Gentlemen, you would all be lords?’⁸⁹

V

In the politics of early modern gesture, the handshake represented a contrast (and sometimes a challenge) to the embodied hierarchical language of submission and subordination. Readings of the meaning of shaking hands have emphasised its more egalitarian nature, seeing the mutual denial of deference in a handshake as signifying social solidarity and friendship.⁹⁰ As James Cleland had declared at the turn of the seventeenth century, ‘when we ioine hands together, it is a token of friendship’.⁹¹

We lack a history of the early modern handshake for Ireland. The quotidian nature of the gesture meant that, if an everyday practice, most handshakes were likely to have gone unremarked or unrecorded. As a pioneer of the history of the handshake notes, ‘More than in any other field, that of the study of gesture is one in which the historian

⁸³ *French traveller*, ed. Croker, p. 86.

⁸⁴ Henry Morley, *Ireland under Elizabeth and James the First* (London, 1890), p. 351.

⁸⁵ *CSPI, 1616–1660 (1647–1660)*, addenda.

⁸⁶ Raymond Gillespie, ed., *The first chapter act book of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin 1574–1634*, pp 202–03; Ware, ‘Diary’, p. 96; Jack P. Hunningham, ‘John Bramhill’s other island: a Laudian solution to an Irish problem’ in *I.H.S.*, xxxvi, no. 141 (May 2008), p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Montgomery manuscripts*, pp 45–6n.

⁸⁸ Charles Smith, *Antient and present state of Cork . . .* (2 vols, Dublin, 1750), ii, 94n.

⁸⁹ Jane Ohlmeyer, *Making Ireland English: the Irish aristocracy in the seventeenth century* (New Haven and London, 2012), p. 340; Ware, ‘Diary’, p. 113.

⁹⁰ Deborah Schiffrin, ‘Handwork as ceremony: the case of the handshake’ in *Semiotica*, xii (1974), pp 189–202; Peter M. Hall and Dee Ann Spencer Hall, ‘The handshake as interaction’ in *Semiotica*, xlv (1983), pp 256–7.

⁹¹ Cleland, *Hērō-Paideia*, p. 178.

has to make the most of only a few clues'.⁹² Shaking (or refusing to shake) in bargaining for land, goods or brides was seemingly commonplace. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, a proposed marriage between families did not take place because the father of the intended bride 'would not touch'.⁹³ And there was clearly a wider understanding of the gestural significance of the lateral symbolism in 'the *right* hand of fellowship'. In recounting an incident in Dublin in which mocking laughter subverted an attempt to coerce Catholic participation in the communion, Philip O'Sullivan Beare noted that it began when the first man to take the bread deliberately took it in his *left* hand. As the bible taught, the right hand was the locus of all that was good, the left of all that was problematic.⁹⁴

By the early modern period, shaking hands in greeting appears to have been practised by both the Old and New English. A contemporaneous woodcut of Sir Henry Sidney entering Dublin in 1581 shows Sidney on horseback, hat in hand, shaking the hands of the mayor and aldermen who are lined up in their gowns of office, bare-headed and inclining the knee.⁹⁵ Disputes among office holders in the Dublin administration were ordered by royal command to be settled by a handshake, while shaking hands on agreement was at least common enough also to appear as a literary metaphor in repeated accusations of treasonable shaking hands with disloyalty.⁹⁶ At the level of the Gaelic elite, shaking hands was to be found, especially among those who moved between Ireland and the English court. Sir Robert Cecil could write to Tyrone that he looked forward to shaking his hand in England, while in 1601, a correspondent told the lord deputy that on meeting him, Tyrone had taken him by the hand in welcome.⁹⁷

Whether the handshake as salutation was widely used among the native Irish is, as yet, uncertain. There are references from the sixteenth century at least to the practice of shaking the hands on meeting and farewells. For example, it appears to have been the practice to shake the hands of martyrs before their execution. We have a record of this only because something unusual happened at the execution of Dermot O'Hurley, archbishop of Cashel in 1584, where a friend found that after the bishop had seized and squeezed his hand, he was left with the sign of the cross on his hand.⁹⁸ By the mid seventeenth century, eyewitnesses reported the Gaelic Irish shaking hands with the Old English at the decision to join forces at the meeting at Hill Crofty in the 1640s, while when the sons of Donnell-Mac-Murtough O'Connor joined forces with Sir Phelim O'Neill, they 'gave their hands into his hand'.⁹⁹ These were still examples of shaking hands on agreement, but the Scottish minister, George Creighton, taken captive in the 1641 rising, recorded shaking hands in salutation with several of his captors (though interpretation of

⁹² 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), p. 177.

⁹³ Grosart, *Lismore Papers* (1st ser.), ii, 4; *ibid.*, iv, 32–3, 73, 172; *The journal of the Very Rev. Rowland Davies, LL.D. Dean of Ross (and afterwards Dean of Cork)*, ed. Richard Caulfield (Camden Soc., lxxviii, 1857), p. 84.

⁹⁴ Robert Hertz, *Death and the right hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham (Aberdeen, 1960), pp 89–113; *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 2292n; Byrne, ed., *Ireland under Elizabeth*, p. 45.

⁹⁵ *Image of Irelande*, plate 10.

⁹⁶ *CSPI, 1625–1632*, p. 474; *Calendar State Papers Domestic Charles I, 1625–1632*, pp 474, 479; Gilbert, *Complete history*, i, 77, 133; *ibid.*, ii, 129, 161; *ibid.*, v, 61, 64, 77, 80, 141.

⁹⁷ T.N.A., SP 63/209/42(a).

⁹⁸ Mathew J. Bryne (ed.), *Ireland under Elizabeth: chapters towards a history of Ireland in the reign of Elizabeth being a portion of the history of Catholic Ireland by Dom Philip O'Sullivan Bear* (Dublin, 1903), p. 36; Constantia Maxwell, *Irish history from contemporary sources* (London, 1923), p. 142; Clodagh Tait, 'Adored for saints: Catholic martyrdom in Ireland c.1560–1655' in *Journal of Early Modern History*, v, no. 2 (2001), pp 147–8.

⁹⁹ Aidan Clarke, *The Old English in Ireland 1625–1642* (London, 1966), pp 181–2; John T. Gilbert, *The history of the Irish Confederation and the war in Ireland, 1641–1643* (2 vols, Dublin, 1882), i, 280. (My thanks to Robert Armstrong for this reference); *Annals of the Four Masters*, p. 888.

the more general significance of this needs to take account of the fact that Creighton came from a country where the handshake had long been practised).¹⁰⁰

The dramatisation of respect found in the mutual denial of deference and mutual expression of worth in the handshake underpins the reading of the gesture as signifying social solidarity and friendship. The early modern handshake was, however, a ‘status-regulated’ gesture.¹⁰¹ What has been called the ‘handshake entitlement’ draws attention to the inequalities in who can initiate and who can participate in a handshake.¹⁰² Touch or its absence mapped the distribution of power and status. The royal body, for example, was a no-contact area, making the act of *kissing* the royal hand (and in Ireland the hand of royal representatives) an important marker of access and favour.¹⁰³ The association of the handshake with the recognition of mutual worth and contrasting concept of the ‘handshake entitlement’ raises important questions of how far in early modern Ireland intercultural handshakes crossed lines of ethnic division. These are difficult to answer given the nature of the Irish archive and in our present state of knowledge. But the 1641 depositions offers a troubling example of the consequences of the offer of an Irish handshake being rejected.

Shortly after the outbreak of the 1641 Irish rising, Owen O’Connolly was examined about what he knew of the plan to surprise Dublin Castle. O’Connolly was to say that he had been told of the intended seizure by his ‘neer kinsman and Intimate friend’, Hugh MacMahon. But — significantly — he had chosen to begin his deposition with the information that Hugh had told him,

that he was mightly troubled with the proud and Haughty Carriage, of one Mr Aldriche that was his neighbour in the County of Monnoughan, which was a Justice of the peace, and but a vintner or Tapster few yeers before[,] that he gaue him not the right hand of fellowship neither at the As[sizes] nor Sessions, he being also in [the] Com[m]ission with him.¹⁰⁴

That anger over the refusal of a handshake should be offered as an explanation of support for an armed rising perfectly captures the focus of this article. James Bulwer, the author of a mid-seventeenth-century book on the communicative meanings in various hand gestures, 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*.’¹⁰⁵ To deny a handshake was to deny the worth of the other. To the extent that it was publicly witnessed — in MacMahon’s case in the court room — it might be taken to deny even their social existence.¹⁰⁶ In gestural terms, in what Raymond Gillespie has called the acutely status-conscious society of Ulster, the refusal of a former vintner (or tapster) to offer ‘the right hand of friendship’ to a

¹⁰⁰ Deposition of George Creighton (T.C.D., MS 833, f. 229r).

¹⁰¹ On the role of the handshake in articulating early modern social and political relationships, see John Walter, ‘Shaking hands and the politics of gesture in early modern England’ in *Past & Present*, no. 267 (May 2025), pp 48–79.

¹⁰² Firth, ‘Bodily symbols’.

¹⁰³ For examples, see Gilbert (ed.), *Contemporary history*, i, pt 2, 752, 753; *ibid.*, ii, 317; *ibid.*, iii, 184, 212, 280, 358; Grosart, *Lismore Papers* (1st ser.), ii, 263; *ibid.*, iv, 185; *ibid.*, v, 112; *ibid.*, 2nd ser., iii, 185.

¹⁰⁴ O’Connolly’s relation of the plot to seize Dublin Castle (T.C.D., MS 840, f. 1r). For the context to this exchange, see Raymond Gillespie, ‘The murder of Arthur Campion and the 1641 rising in Fermanagh’ in *Clogher Record*, xiv, no. 3 (1993), pp 58–9; Andrew Robinson, ‘Owen Connolly, Hugh Og MacMahon and the 1641 rebellion in Clogher’ in Darcy, Margey & Murphy (eds), *The 1641 depositions*, pp 7–20.

¹⁰⁵ J[ames] B[ulwer], *Chirologia, or, the natural language of the hand* (London, 1644), p. 114.

¹⁰⁶ 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), p. 50.

prosperous landowner and fellow justice of the peace provided a concise confirmation of the fears of the Gaelic Irish (and Old English) that they were being ousted by English 'churls' and social upstarts, fears that drove many to rebellion.¹⁰⁷

VI

If the politics of gesture played an important role in constructing and representing English authority, then gestures could challenge as well as confirm authority in both state and church. Given the investment placed in the correct performance of gestures by those whose superiority they acknowledged, the failure to perform the expected gesture, at the appropriate time and in the appropriate space could offer a political challenge to English rule. Philip O'Sullivan Beare told the story of Brian O'Rourke, executed by the English. Brought before the English privy council in 1591, he had refused to kneel. Asked why he would not do so since the Irish genuflected to images, he answered that 'between God and his saints and the Council he had ever thought there was a great difference'.¹⁰⁸ In the Nine Years War, negotiations with the rebel baron of Cahir broke down because the negotiators reported that his fellow rebel Bishop Creagh, 'in a very great fury thundered out . . . that we were so proud and puffed up, as we knew not God nor manners . . . for that we did not salute him'.¹⁰⁹ A Gaelic and Old English landed class shared, with their English and European contemporaries, a jealous concern about protocol and precedence. In what has been called *proxemic* space, the spatial distance between participants to an interaction was meant to measure social distance. When Lord Mountgarret had complained that 'he was not regarded *according to his calling*' since 'when the Justices of Assize came to the country he was seated among inferior persons', his complaints had been dismissed as 'trifling matters'. Turned rebel, in 1599 he too had been forced to make his submission on his knees before the earls of Ormond and Essex at Kilkenny Castle.¹¹⁰

If then the enforcement of the gestural order was important to the establishment of English rule, this could make body language a focus for resistance and opposition. During the Nine Years War, it was said of Hugh Maguire, lord of Fermanagh, that he would not 'suffer a man to pass that wears a hat on his head or a cloak on his back, or that speaks a worde of English withoute taking his head from his shoulders'.¹¹¹ It was no coincidence that leaders in the sixteenth-century revolts frequently reverted to wearing Irish dress, adopting the apparel and 'savage manners' of the 'Irishry', nor that, as in the 1569 Butler revolt, particular venom was reportedly directed 'against furtherers of civilitie'.¹¹²

In his conversation about the refused handshake, Hugh MacMahon was reported to have gone on to say 'that he hoped that wee should soone be deliivered from bondage and slaverie under which we groaned'. O'Connolly claimed that in response, he had advised MacMahon that he 'would not thinke of that and that he wo[uld] Consider, that the Irish weer *subordinate* unto the English in regard they were Conquered by them'.¹¹³ If O'Connolly's report of his advice was perhaps made with an eye to his examiners, it serves as a reminder that, for those implicated in the rising, to testify before the 1641 commissioners was in itself to experience a form of subordination. (Ironically, the absence

¹⁰⁷ Raymond Gillespie, 'The trial of Bishop Spottiswood 1620–40' in *Clogher Record*, xii, no. 3 (1987), pp 330–31. For a pithy expression of these concerns, see *The copy of a letter sent from the earl of Traquere in Ireland . . . third of October 1641* (London, n.d.), p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Bryne (ed.), *Ireland under Elizabeth*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ CSPI, 7, *January 1598–March 1599*: SP 63/202/pt iii, p. 161.

¹¹⁰ CSPI, 8, *April 1599–February 1600, May 1599*.

¹¹¹ T.N.A., SP 63/173/64.iv.

¹¹² Nicholas P. Canny, *The Elizabethan conquest of Ireland: a pattern established 1565–76* (Hassocks, 1976), pp 142–3, 145; Maginn, 'O'Neill, Shane'.

¹¹³ Examination of Owen O'Connolly (T.C.D., MS 840, f. 1r) (my emphasis).

of eyewitness accounts means that we lack any description of the gestural interactions that must have accompanied being examined). But if true, O'Connolly's reference to the conquest also offers an important reminder of that other gestural economy which shaped relationships between the Irish and their conquerors in the anglicising project.

The emphasis on repression in a state that made increasing use of judicial and extra-legal political violence also offered sites — notably the pillory and the gallows — for a very different form of gestural display.¹¹⁴ As an insurgent in the 1641 rising demanded of the Protestant parson, John Gouldsmith, 'doe you remember how your English have served us[.] Howe they slitt our noses and scarrd our faces.'¹¹⁵ More elaborate in the execution of priests and others for treason, doubtless more perfunctory in deaths under martial law, punishments too left their mark on the use of gesture to challenge the English authorities. As O'Sullivan Beare recorded, among the offences for which Brian O'Rourke was to be executed was dragging an image of Queen Elizabeth at his horse's tail and destroying it by having it hacked to pieces. It does not take much imagination to recognise a parody of the English state's punishment for treason in which traitors in were roughly dragged on a horse-drawn hurdle to the place of their hanging, cut down while still alive and their bodies eviscerated and quartered.¹¹⁶ We need to recognise the possibility that this other gestural economy shaped the appalling acts of violence — the hangings, beheadings and body mutilation — too often abbreviated in the depositions of the 1641 rising simply as murder.¹¹⁷

The thousands of depositions created in the aftermath of the rising reveal something of how violence was negotiated and marked by a use of gesture. The voices in the 1641 depositions are overwhelmingly those of the rising's Protestant victims. The episodes they record, when not recycling second-hand accounts and rumour, all too often reduce the complicated processes by which violence could occur to the immediate, brutal fact of its occurrence, and the recording of their testimonies doubtless misses the many angry (or placatory) gestural exchanges that gave violence its communicative force. However, where interactions between attackers and their victims transgressing or inverting the protocols thought to govern gesture emphasised the performative nature of the violence, then both victims and witnesses were attentive to its performance. Since, as in the larger society, gestural interactions between insurgents signposted the relative distribution of status and authority, noting its performance was also used by witnesses and courts to attribute degrees of guilt.¹¹⁸ As the Scottish minister, Dr Maxwell testified, when a prisoner he had seen the rebels drink healths upon their knees to Sir Phelim O'Neill as the earl of Tyrone and king of Ulster.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ David Edwards, 'Beyond reform: martial law and the Tudor reconquest of Ireland' in *History Ireland*, v, no. 2 (summer 1997), pp 16–21; idem, 'Some days two heads and some days four' in *History Ireland*, xvii, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2009), pp 18–21; Patricia Palmer, 'A horse load of heads: conquest and atrocity in early modern Ireland' in idem, *The severed head and the grafted tongue: literature, translation and violence in early modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2014), pp 12–35.

¹¹⁵ Deposition of John Gouldsmith (T.C.D., MS 831, f. 193r).

¹¹⁶ Bryne (ed.), *Ireland under Elizabeth*, p. 6; Christopher Higley, 'The royal image in Elizabethan Ireland' in Julia M. Walker (ed.), *Dissing Elizabeth: negative representations of Gloriana* (Durham, NC & London, 1998), pp 67–70; Hiram Morgan, 'Extradition and treason-trial of a Gaelic lord: the case of Brian O'Rourke' in *Irish Jurist*, ns., xxii, no. 2 (1987), pp 293–4.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, the discussion of the range of possible meanings implicated in early modern hangings in Oppitz-Trotman, "'Into the geere the rope'".

¹¹⁸ For example, a witness noted that the man who came to McCarthy Reagh to ask what should be done with the English captives did so with his hat in his hand: T.C.D., MS 826, f. 6r.

¹¹⁹ Deposition of Robert Maxwell (T.C.D., MS 809, f. 7r); Deposition of Francis Sacheverel (T.C.D., MS 836, f. 110r); Joseph Cope, 'The experience of survival during the 1641 Irish rebellion' in *Historical Jn.*, xlvi, no. 2 (2003), pp 245–316; Jennifer Wells, 'Proceedings of the high court of justice at Dublin and Cork 1652–1654, part 2' in *Archiv. Hib.*, lxvii (2014), pp 95, 141.

Kneeling was the gesture most commonly cited in the depositions arising from the 1641 rising. Rebels knelt to acknowledge their leaders and to take their oath of association and, on capture, to try to mitigate punishment.¹²⁰ Witnesses deposed how one Philip mac Mullmore Rely, accused of joining an ‘ill work’, had ‘with his hatt off[f] . . . bowed his kneese to the ground’ and with curses on his soul had claimed that he had been tricked into joining by false news of a proclamation from the king to disarm all the English.¹²¹ But the most commonly cited form kneeling took in the 1641 depositions was when victims of the rising knelt or were made to kneel to their attackers.¹² Victims knelt, either individually or collectively, in an act of submissive intercession to save goods or lives.¹²³ Strikingly, kneeling in supplication appears very much a gendered gesture, since it was overwhelmingly women in the depositions who knelt to intercede.¹²⁴ Examples can be found of men begging on bended knee, usually at the point of death, but notions of male honour embedded in the gestural code perhaps help to explain the otherwise gendering of the gesture. At the point of death, victims also knelt in prayer or to ask to be allowed to pray before they were killed.¹²⁵ Witnesses paid attention to where victims kneeling to be allowed to pray before were refused or killed while kneeling in prayer since these gestural infractions were thought to magnify the crime.¹²⁶ Whether a Mrs Scott had begged on her knees for the lives of some ‘poore English people’ was important enough to feature in the trial of Edward Butler at the High Court in 1652, and for him to deny it.¹²⁷

Forcing the victims of violence in 1641 to kneel before being hanged mimicked its role in the state’s judicial violence.¹²⁸ A gentleman, Edward St Lawrence, was taken from his horse, stripped to his shirt and drawers, and made to kneel to his murderer, mounted on horseback, before being beheaded and his body trampled under the horse’s hooves.¹²⁹ As the series of reversals in this episode showed, by drawing on the meanings attributed to lowering the body, the insurgents in performing violence against a *gentleman* were appropriating a gesture that had been used to enforce their subordination. Thus, at the siege of Limerick Castle, the Irish attackers were said to have posted a proclamation on the gates which, denouncing all Protestants as rebels, declared that ‘as stoute as they were they would make them bowe and kis[s] the popes foote’. This was a gestural threat that deliberately played upon the revulsion felt by Protestants at what they saw as the abject behaviour of Catholics in their willingness to adopt the lowest form of prostration to kiss the papal foot.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ Depositions of Michael Vine (T.C.D., MS 828, f. 209v) and Thomas Fleetwood (T.C.D., MS 817, f. 37v).

¹²¹ Deposition of Richard Castledine (T.C.D., MS 833, f. 115r).

¹²² Examinations of Lt. David German (T.C.D., MS 826, f. 143); Martha Piggot (T.C.D., MS 815, f. 421v).

¹²³ Depositions of: Alice Poore (T.C.D., MS 810, f. 248r); Evan Jones (T.C.D., MS 811, f. 67r); Philip Sergeant (T.C.D., MS 815, f. 351r and MS 838, ff 836); examinations of Peter Rickebee, Daniell MacThomas O’Gilmore, Jennett Minnis and Daniell MacThomas Gilmore (T.C.D., MS 833, 296r); Walter Fraser, Jane Stewart, Ann Smith and Margaret Clark (T.C.D., MS 836, ff 35r–v, 73r); Richard Slabogh (T.C.D., MS 826, f. 42r and MS 838, ff 83r–v, 249v).

¹²⁴ Deposition of Philip Sergeant (T.C.D., MS 815, f. 351r).

¹²⁵ Deposition of Henry Skelton (T.C.D., MS 814, f. 193v).

¹²⁶ Depositions of Martha Piggot, William Earns, John Shrewley, Edward Saltonstall, and George Littlefield (T.C.D., MS 815, f. 376r; MS 823, f. 157r; MS 831, f. 75r; MS 836, f. 71v); information of Margaret Rolricke (T.C.D., MS 830, ff 166r–7v); Ralph Walmisley (T.C.D., MS 814, f. 268v); deposition of Elizabeth Price (T.C.D., MS 836, f. 104v).

¹²⁷ Examination of Edward Butler (T.C.D., MS 812, f. 328r).

¹²⁸ Deposition of John Powell (T.C.D., MS 821, ff 198r–v); deposition of John Gouldsmith (T.C.D., MS 831, f. 193r).

¹²⁹ Deposition of Alonder [Arlander] Usher (T.C.D., MS 810, f. 355v); examination of Richard Randall (T.C.D., MS 810, ff 399r–v).

¹³⁰ Deposition of Mary Dannter (T.C.D., MS 829, f. 47r); Walter ‘Politics of gesture’, p. 107. For an example of Protestant distaste, see the later seventeenth-century ballad, *News from London-Derry in a packet of advice from Room* [i.e. Rome], in Carpenter, ed., *Verse*, pp 527–8.

Centuries of efforts to impose English dress and manners made hats and clothes another focus for gestural dissidence. In 1641, it was reported that ‘after the Irish had gotten the victory, all the women in Ireland should as formerly go only in smocks, mantles and brooughs as well as ladies as others and the English fashions to be quite abolished’.¹³¹ Stripping English victims of their clothes in the 1641 rising was doubtless intended to shame and humiliate them (as well as to inflict further bodily suffering in the hard winter of that year), but we need also to see in the near ubiquity of these actions a reaction to a century and more of a policy to force the wearing of English dress.

The importance attributed to the importance of (correct) hats, and in their rich elaboration to the coding of class as well as of cultural difference, made hats another focus for gestural dissidence in the 1641 rising.¹³² Before Edward St Lawrence was killed, his murderer had removed his English ‘New Castor [beaver] hatt’ and ‘clapt on him an ould Cullord [felt] Hatt’.¹³³ Rebels sought to deny the imperatives in hat-honour. Giving evidence of a gestural exchange he had witnessed during the parley for terms after surrender between John Mazy and Patrick Purcell, a general in the insurgents’ army and a member of an Old English landed family, a New English gentleman recalled hearing Purcell, say — ‘peremptorily’ — to Mazy, who was standing with his hat on, ‘Sir I would have you understand before whome you stand & learn better manners’.¹³⁴ They also sought to invert the hierarchy. At the siege of Dysart, Major John Piggott, on first encountering the rebels, had his hat taken off his head.¹³⁵ Words they were reported to have spoken made explicit the meaning-making in this performative violence. Owen Kelly, a Dublin cook, denied saying that he would see ‘the heads of the best Lords in Ireland cut off within a fortnight’. But ‘true witnesses’ testified that he had said, ‘that those to whom hee belonged & to whom he had putt off his cappe should come cappe in hand to him and call him Mr Kelly’. That Kelly had chosen to express his political aspirations in gestural terms was highly significant. It suggested the everyday psychic costs that the anglicisation project imposed in the daily demands for hat-honour from Irish subordinates to their superiors.¹³⁶ Another rebel, Luke Toole from Wicklow, was heard to say ‘he would have his owne religion set[t] led in this Kingdome. And that he would pull the Lord Parsons hatt from his head.’ Sir William Parsons, lord justice of Ireland, was a leading hardliner in the Dublin administration and a major advocate of anglicisation.¹³⁷ The significance in the semiotics of hat-honour of being required to bare the head to superiors rendered Toole’s aspiration an economical gestural expression of the larger political aims in the 1641 rising.

VII

If the violence by which English rule was attempted has received recognition, we need also recognise the more insidious processes by which submission and subordination were

¹³¹ T.N.A., SP 63/173/64.iv; on which see, Heidi J. Coburn, ‘The built environment and material culture of Ireland in the 1641 depositions, 1600–1654’ (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Cambridge, 2016), pp 103–59.

¹³² On the semiotics and material culture of hats, see Maria Hayward, ‘“The sign of some degree?”: the financial, social and sartorial significance of male headwear at the courts of Henry VII and Edward VI’ in *Costume*, xxxvi (2002), pp 1–17; Sarah Bendall, ‘Adorning masculinities? The commissioning and wearing of hats during the Hapsburg and Valois Italian wars’ in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, lii, no. 3 (2021), pp 539–70.

¹³³ Deposition of Alonder [Arlander] Usher (T.C.D., MS 810, f. 355v); examination of Richard Randall (T.C.D., MS 810, ff 399r–v).

¹³⁴ Deposition of William Andrewes (T.C.D., MS 829, f. 347v). Purcell was subsequently to beg for his life ‘on his knees’ to the parliamentary forces: Gilbert, *Contemporary history*, iii, 258.

¹³⁵ Deposition of Isabell Smith (T.C.D., MS 815, ff 381r–v).

¹³⁶ Information of Owen Kelly (T.C.D., MS 809, f. 200r).

¹³⁷ Examination of Richard Cleybrooke (T.C.D., MS 818, f. 59r); Terry Clavin, ‘Parsons, Sir William’, *D.I.B.* (www.dib.ie/biography/parsons-sir-william-a7219) (accessed 28 June 2023).

sought. As in other societies, gestures played a larger and more varied role in early modern Ireland than it has been possible to discuss here and which it is to be hoped further work can establish. But attending to gesture can enlarge our understanding of the processes of enforcing and experiencing colonial rule in early modern Ireland, raising important questions about its comparative role in other early modern European empires. Recognising the central importance of English ‘manners, order and apparel’ to the project of anglicisation helps to explain why a concern for the adoption of English dress and gestural order played such a significant part. English dress was needed for the performance of English address, a reminder that work on gesture as non-verbal communication nevertheless needs to recognise that speech, correct forms of address and the spatial distance expected between social unequals often framed gestural interactions. Once hats were worn, then hat-honour could be expected and imposed, and with it at least an outward acceptance of the relationship of superior and subordinate signalled in the gesture. Drawing on oral testimony in his early-nineteenth-century history of Galway, James Hardiman could report that, ‘during the rigour of the penal laws, it is said, that no Catholic dare enter here [the town hall] with his hat on, but should remain uncovered, as a mark of his subjection to his Protestant towns-men’.¹³⁸

In seeking to impose an acceptance of superiority and subordination, the potential of gesture lay in the fact that gestural exchanges took place as much in the everyday as in the episodic ‘ceremonies’ of Court or courts. As such, body language offered a troubling *everyday* reminder of the inequalities signalled in the — non-reciprocal or non-reciprocated — gestures expected from Irish ‘subordinates’ towards English ‘superiors’. That the aspirations of the 1641 insurgents, echoing earlier gestural resistance, could be ‘voiced’ in gestural forms of inversionary performative violence can be seen as a response to the hidden (and not so hidden) injuries that acculturation exacted. In turning the gestural world upside down, the insurgents revealed something of the everyday psychic costs of conformity to the gestural code of anglicisation. As an insurgent in the 1641 rising was heard to say, ‘hee thought the worse of himself the day that he sawe any of the Englishe walke along the streetes’.¹³⁹

In our present state of knowledge, there is much still to discover about the continuing work done by body politics under the ascendancy. Gestures served to structure status interactions within as well as between ethnic categories. Moving beyond the state and attending to the social and intercultural contours of gestural performance might help to map the cultural hybridisation for which recent work has argued and to show how it was handled. It might also help to establish how the growing complexity in social relationships, identified in other work, was registered by with whom gestures were exchanged or denied.¹⁴⁰ If, for example, as in England there was a wider adoption of the handshake in greeting by this period then it gave scope for the gesture to mark both wider inclusion and exclusion.¹⁴¹ By the later seventeenth century, the adoption of English dress and address, further promoted by the vogue for English manners and language after the appointment of the duke of Ormond as viceroy, was to multiply the occasions for the display of gestural dominance and deference under the ascendancy, not least in the development of a court

¹³⁸ Hardiman, *History*, p. 299n.

¹³⁹ Deposition of William Collis (T.C.D., MS 813, f. 286r).

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Louis Cullen, ‘Catholic social classes under the penal law’ in T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Endurance and emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the eighteenth century* (Dublin, 1990), pp 57–84; S. J. Connolly, *Religion, law, and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 1992), pp 41–73, 103–43; T. C. Barnard, ‘The gentrification of eighteenth-century Ireland’ in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr*, xii (1997), pp 137–55.

¹⁴¹ On which, see Walter, ‘Shaking hands’, pp 12–16; Penelope J. Corfield, ‘Egalitarian greetings: the social spread of the handshake in urbanizing Britain, 1700–1850’ in *Urban History*, First View, May 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926824000385>) (26 May 2025).

culture.¹⁴² In the eighteenth century, the new norm of politeness was to add its own pressures; as even a member of the Dublin administration complained, after courting the votes of M.P.s, ‘my back is almost broke with bowing’.¹⁴³ The emergence of politeness serves as a reminder that the language of manners and civility was inflected by the prejudices of class and that class mediated gestural politics.

Further research might establish whether after the collapse of collective protest in rebellion and the 1641 rising, gestural dissidence offered a form of resistance under the ascendancy. The deniability of intended meaning created by the gap in non-verbal communication between the meaning given off and received, and the plasticity of a gesture either in its under- or over-performance, could open a space for silent dissent. Did body language in eighteenth-century Ireland continue to play a part in what has been called ‘the weapons of the weak’, a concept developed in the crucible of studies of colonial societies?¹⁴⁴ Class and ethnicity, however, continued to intersect under the ascendancy to oblige ‘inferiors’ to acknowledge their ‘betters’ through deferential gestures. In the many hundreds of letters home from emigrants he had been shown, the Presbyterian physician John Gamble, a man sympathetic to both Catholics and Protestant dissenters, noted that the ‘comfort of comforts’ was that ‘they could there speak to man as man, and that they were not obliged to uncover the head, or to bend the knee, to any stern Lord, arrogant Squire, proud Vicar, or, above all, upstart Agent’.¹⁴⁵ It was surely no coincidence that when in 1791 the Dublin Society of United Irishmen drafted a letter to be circulated through the country, they too employed the language of gesture. ‘Is it reasonable to govern and bind the nation of a country by strangers and slaves[?],’ they demanded. ‘We are not raised from being prostrate to our knees. We must stand upright & walk.’¹⁴⁶

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¹⁴² Tony Crowley, *Wars of the word: the politics of language in Ireland 1537–2004* (Oxford, 2005), p. 58.

¹⁴³ Connolly, *Religion, law, & power*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁴ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven and London, 1985); idem, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven and London, 1990).

¹⁴⁵ John Gamble, *Views of society and manners in the north of Ireland in a series of letters written in the year 1813* (London, 1819), p. 367. For Gamble, see C. J. Woods, ‘Gamble, John’, *D.I.B.* (<https://www.dib.ie/biography/gamble-john-a3416>) (accessed 20 Jan. 2024).

¹⁴⁶ R. B. McDowell (ed.), ‘Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishman’ in *Anal. Hib.*, xvii (1949), p. 8.

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