

Peter N. Stearns

Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture

Author(s): E. P. Thompson

Source: *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer, 1974), pp. 382-405

Published by: Peter N. Stearns

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786463>

Accessed: 15/05/2010 15:43

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://dv1litvip.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=pns>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Peter N. Stearns is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Social History*.

PATRICIAN SOCIETY, PLEBEIAN CULTURE

I

The relations between the gentry and the laboring people in eighteenth-century England are often characterized as "paternalist." (This is, one should note, a characterization seen "from above.") If we enter this discussion with an ill-defined notion of "popular culture" we will end up trading instances against each other: this evidence of paternalist control here, that evidence of riot or disturbance there. It may be helpful, before we attempt to examine "popular culture," to attend to certain aspects of what is *not* "culture."

What were the institutions, in the eighteenth century, which enabled the rulers to obtain, directly or indirectly, a control over *the whole life* of the laborer, as opposed to the purchase, *seriatim*, of his labor power?

The most substantial fact lies on the other side of the question. This is the century which sees the erosion of half-free forms of labor, the decline of living-in, the final extinction of labor services and the advance of free, mobile, wage labor. This was not an easy or quick transition. Hill has reminded us of the long resistance made by the free-born Englishman against the pottage of free wage labor. One should note equally the long resistance made by their masters against some of its consequences. These wished devoutly to have the best of both the old world and the new, without the disadvantages of either.

Mr. Thompson is author of *The Making of the English Working Class*. He wishes to apologize for the absence of footnotes. This paper combines material, all of which is in active preparation for publication. A study of anonymous letters will appear in a collective volume on *Crime and Society in England in the 18th Century* (to be published in 1974), edited by Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh and Mr. Thompson. Other material on anonymous agrarian protest will appear in his study of the origins of the "Waltham Black Act" of 1723, 9 George I. c. 22 (forthcoming); and the main argument of this paper, on paternalism and deference, will be presented in his forthcoming volume of studies in eighteenth-century social history, entitled *Customs in Common*.

They clung to the image of the laborer as an *unfree* man, a “servant:” a servant in husbandry, in the workshop, in the house. (They clung simultaneously to the image of the free or masterless man as a vagabond, to be disciplined, whipped and compelled to work.) But crops could not be harvested, cloth could not be manufactured, goods could not be transported, houses could not be built and parks enlarged, without labor readily available and mobile, for whom it would be inconvenient or impossible to accept the reciprocities of the master-servant relationship. The masters disclaimed their paternal responsibilities; but they did not cease, for many decades, to complain at the breach of the “great law of subordination,” the diminution of deference, that ensued upon their disclaimer:

The Lab’ring Poor, in spite of double Pay,
Are saucy, mutinous, and Beggarly.

The most characteristic complaint throughout the greater part of the century was as to the indiscipline of working people, their irregularity of employment, their lack of economic dependency and their social insubordination. Defoe, who was not a conventional “low wages” theorist, and who could on occasion see merit in higher wages which increased the consuming power of “manufacturers” or of “artificers,” stated the full case in his *Great Law of Subordination Consider’d; or, the Insolence and Unsufferable Behaviour of Servants in England duly enquir’d into* (1724). He argued that through the insubordination of servants:

Husbandmen are ruin’d, the Farmers disabled, Manufacturers and Artificers plung’d, to the Destruction of Trade . . . and that no Men who, in the Course of Business, employ Numbers of the Poor, can depend upon any Contracts they make, or perform any thing they undertake, having no Law, no Power . . . to oblige the Poor to perform honestly what they are hir’d to do.

Under a *stop of Trade*, and a general want of Work, then they are clamorous and mutinous, run from their Families, load the Parishes with their Wives and Children . . . and . . . grow ripe for all manner of mischief, whether publick Insurrection, or private plunder.

In a *Glut of Trade* they grow saucy, lazy, idle, and debauch’d . . . they will Work but two or three Days in the Week.

Paternalist control over the whole life of the laborer was in fact being eroded; wage assessment fell into desuetude; the mobility of labor is manifest; the vigor of eighteenth-century hiring-fairs, “statutes” or “statties,” proclaim the right of the rural (as well as urban) laborer to claim if he so wished, a change of master. Moreover, there is evidence (in the very refusal of laborers

to submit to the work-discipline demanded of them) of the growth of a newly-won psychology of the free laborer. In one of Defoe's moralistic anecdotes, the J.P. summons the cloth worker upon a complaint from his employer that his work was being neglected:

Justice. Come in Edmund, I have talk'd with your Master.

Edmund. Not my Master, and't please your Worship, I hope I am my own Master.

Justice. Well, your Employer, Mr. E —, the Clothier: will the word Employer do?

Edmund. Yes, yes, and't please your Worship, any thing, but Master.

This is a large change in the terms of relations: subordination is becoming (although between grossly unequal parties) negotiation.

The eighteenth century witnessed a qualitative change in labor relations whose nature is obscured if we see it only in terms of an increase in the scale and volume of manufacture and trade. This occurred, of course. But it occurred in such a way that a substantial proportion of the labor force actually became *more* free from discipline in their daily work, more free to choose between employers and between work and leisure, less situated in a position of dependence in their whole way of life, than they had been before or than they were to be in the first decades of the discipline of the factory and of the clock.

This was a transitory phase, with three prominent features. First was the loss of non-monetary usages or perquisites, or their translation into money payments. Such usages were still extraordinarily pervasive in the early eighteenth century. They favored paternal social control because they appeared simultaneously as economic and as social relations, as relations between men not as payments for services or things. Most evidently, to eat at one's employer's board, to lodge in his barn or above his workshop, was to submit to his supervision. In the great house, the servants who were dependent upon "vails" from visitors, the clothing of the mistress, the clandestine perquisites of the surplus of the larder, spent a lifetime ingratiating favors. In the unenclosed village, access to common rights depended partly upon expressed status within the social economy (whether a copyholder or cottager), partly upon unexpressed or informal status—a laborer who had won the good opinion of neighbors and who was unlikely to fall on the poor rates was more likely to get away with erecting a cottage at the roadside or grazing the odd beast where he had no statutory "right." Even the multiform perquisites within industry, increasingly being redefined as "theft," were more likely to survive where the workers accepted them as favors and submitted to a filial dependency.

On occasion, one catches a glimpse of the extinction of a perquisite or service which must have induced a shock to paternal control out of all proportion to the economic gain to the employer. Thus when Sir Jonathan Trelawney, as Bishop of Winchester, was seeking to increase the revenue of his see, he employed as Steward one Heron, a man strongly committed to ruthless economic relationalization. Among accusations brought against Heron, in 1707, by tenants and subordinate officials of the Bishop's Courts were that:

He breakes old Customes . . . in Minute and Small matters, which are of Small value to your Lordshipp, . . . he has denyed to Allow five Shillings at Waltham to the Jury att the Court . . . to drinke your Lordshipp's health, a Custome that has beene used time out of Mind, . . . he has denyed your Lordshipp's Steward and Officers a small perquisite of haveing their horses shoo'd att Waltham According to an Antient usage which never Exceeded above Six or Seven Shillings, . . . he denied your Lordshipp's Tennants Timber for the repaire of Severall Bridges and Common pounds.

To this Heron replied, somewhat testily:

I own, I affect sometimes to Intermit those minute Customs as he calls them because I observe that your Predecessor's favours are prescribed for against your Lordship & insisted on as Rights, & then your Lordship is not thanked for them; Besides though they are Minute, yet many Minute Expences . . . amount to a Sume at the end.

In such ways economic rationalization nibbled (and had long been nibbling) through the bonds of paternalism. The other leading feature of this transitional period was of course the enlargement of that sector of the economy which was independent of a subject relationship to the gentry. The "subject" economy remained huge: not only the direct retainers of the great house, the chambermaids and footmen, coachmen and grooms and gardeners, the gamekeepers and laundresses, but the further concentric rings of economic clientship—the equestrian trades and luxury trades, the dressmakers and pastry cooks and vintners, the coach makers, the innkeepers and ostlers.

But the century saw a growing area of independence within which the small employers and laborers felt their client relationship to the gentry very little or not at all. These were the people whom the gentry saw as "idle and disorderly," withdrawn from their social control; from among these—the clothing workers, urban artisans, colliers, bargees and porters, laborers and petty dealers in the food trades—the social rebels, the food or turnpike rioters, were likely to come. They retained many of the attributes commonly ascribed to "pre-industrial labor." Working often in their own cottages, owning or hiring their own tools, usually working for small employers,

frequently working irregular hours and at more than one job, they had escaped from the social controls of the manorial village and were not yet subject to the discipline of factory labor.

Many of their economic dealings might be with men and women little higher in the economic hierarchy than themselves. Their "shopping" was not done in emporiums but at market stalls; and the cottager or small farmer's wives would trudge in at dawn to the market town, and set their baskets of eggs, fruit and vegetables, butter and poultry, at the side of the square. The poor state of the roads made necessary a multitude of local markets, at which exchanges of products between primary producers might still be unusually direct. In the 1760s,

Hard-labouring colliers, men and women of Somersetshire and Gloucestershire, travelled to divers neighbouring towns with drifts of horses . . . laden with coals. . . . It was common to see such colliers lade or fill a two bushel coal sack with articles of provisions . . . of beef, mutton, large half stript beef bones, stale loaves of bread, and pieces of cheese.

Such markets and, even more, the seasonal fairs provided not only an economic but a cultural nexus.

In many regions, the people had not been shaken altogether from some sketchy tenure of the land. Since much industrial growth took the form, not of concentration into large units of production, but of the dispersal of petty units and of by-employments (especially spinning) there were additional resources for "independence." This independence was for many never far from mere subsistence: a bountiful harvest might bring momentary affluence, a long wet season might throw people onto the poor rates. But it was possible for many to knit together this subsistence, from the common, from harvest and occasional manual earnings, from by-employments in the cottage, from daughters in service, from poor rates or charity. And undoubtedly some of the poor followed their own predatory economy, like "the abundance of loose, idle and disorderly persons" who were alleged, in the time of George II, to live on the margins of Enfield Chase, and who "infest the same, going in dark nights, with Axes, Saws, Bills, Carts and Horses, and in going and coming Rob honest people of their sheep, lambs and poultry" Such persons appear again and again in criminal records, estate correspondence, pamphlet and press; they appear still, in the 1790s, in the agricultural country surveys; they cannot have been wholly a ruling-class invention.

Thus the independence of labor (and small master) from clientage was fostered on the one hand by the translation of non-monetary "favors" into payments; and on the other by the extension of trade and industry on the basis of the multiplication of many small units of production, with much by-employment (especially spinning) coincident with many continuing forms of petty land tenure (or common right) and many casual demands for manual labor. This is an indiscriminate picture, and deliberately so. Economic historians have made many careful discriminations between different groups

of laborers. But these are not relevant to our present enquiry. Nor were these discriminations commonly made by commentators from among the gentry when they considered the general problem of the "insubordination" of labor. Rather, they saw beyond the park gates, beyond the railings of the London mansion, a blur of indiscipline—the "idle and disorderly," "the mob," the "populace"—and they deplored—

their open scoffings at all discipline, religious as well as civil: their contempt of all order, frequent menace to all justice, and extreme promptitude to tumultuous risings from the slightest motives.

It is, as always, an indiscriminate complaint against the populace as a whole. Free labor had brought with it a weakening of the old means of social discipline. So far from a confident patriarchal society, the eighteenth century sees the old paternalism at a point of crisis.

II

And yet one feels that "crisis" is too strong a term. If the complaint continues throughout the century that the poor were indisciplined, criminal, prone to tumult and riot, one never feels, before the French Revolution, that the rulers of England conceived that their whole social order might be endangered. The insubordination of the poor was an inconvenience; it was not a menace. The styles of politics and of architecture, the rhetoric of the gentry and their decorative arts, all seem to proclaim stability, self-confidence, a habit of managing all threats to their hegemony.

We may of course have overstated the crisis of paternalism. In directing attention to the parasitism of the State at the top, and the erosion of traditional relations by free labor and a monetary economy at the bottom, we have overlooked intermediate levels where the older economic household controls remained strong, and we have perhaps understated the scale of the "subject" or "client" areas of the economy. The control which men of power and money still exercised over the whole life and expectations of those below them remained enormous, and if paternalism was in crisis, the industrial revolution was to show that crisis must be taken several stages further—as far as Peterloo and the Swing Riots—before it lost all credibility.

Nevertheless, the analysis allows us to see that ruling-class control in the eighteenth century was located primarily in a cultural hegemony, and only secondarily in an expression of economic or physical (military) power. To say that it was "cultural" is not to say that it was immaterial, too fragile for analysis, insubstantial. To define control in terms of cultural hegemony is not to give up attempts at analysis, but to prepare for analysis at the points at which it should be made: into the images of power and authority, the popular mentalities of subordination.

Defoe's fictional cloth worker, called before the magistrate to account for default, offers a clue: "not *my Master*, and't please your Worship, I hope I am *my own Master*." The deference which he refuses to his employer, overflows in the calculated obsequiousness to "your Worship." He wishes to struggle

free from the immediate, daily, humiliations of dependency. But the larger outlines of power, station in life, political authority, appear to be as inevitable and irreversible as the earth and the sky. Cultural hegemony of this kind induces exactly such a state of mind in which the established structures of authority and even modes of exploitation appear to be in the very course of nature. This does not preclude resentment or even surreptitious acts of protest or revenge; it does preclude affirmative rebellion.

The gentry in eighteenth-century England exercised this kind of hegemony. And they exercised it all the more effectively since the relation of ruler to ruled was very often not face-to-face but indirect. Absentee landowners, and the ever-present mediation of bailiffs apart, the emergence of the three-tier system of landowner, tenant farmer and landless laborer, meant that the rural laborers, in the mass, did not confront the gentry as employers nor were the gentry seen to be in any direct sense responsible for their conditions of life; for a son or daughter to be taken into service at the great house was seen to be, not a necessity, but a favor.

And in other ways they were withdrawn from the polarities of economic and social antagonism. When the price of food rose, the popular rage fell not on the landowners but upon middlemen, forestallers, millers. The gentry might profit from the sale of wool, but they were not seen to be in a direct exploitive relation to the clothing workers.

In the growing industrial areas, the gentry J.P. frequently lived withdrawn from the main industrial centers, at his country seat, and he was at pains to preserve some image of himself as arbitrator, mediator or even protector of the poor. It was a common view that "wherever a tradesman is made a justice a tyrant is created." The poor laws, if harsh, were not administered directly by the gentry; where there was blame it could fall upon the poor-rate paring farmers and tradesmen from among whom the overseers came. Langborne presents the idealized paternalist picture; exhorting the country justice to

bend the brow severe
 On the sly, pilfering, cruel overseer;
 The shuffling farmer, faithful to no trust,
 Ruthless as rocks, insatiate as the dust.
 When the poor hind, with length of years decay'd,
 Leans feebly on his once subduing spade,
 Forgot the service of his abler days,
 His profitable toil, and honest praise,
 Shall this low wretch abridge his scanty bread,
 This slave, whose board his former labours spread!

And, once again, at least a ghostly image of paternal responsibilities could be maintained at very little real outlay in effort. The same J.P. who in his own closed parish aggravated the problems of poverty elsewhere, by refusing settlements and by pulling down the cottages on the common, could at quarter sessions, by granting the occasional appeal against the overseers of

other open parishes, or by calling to order the corrupt workhouse master, place himself above the lines of battle.

We have the paradox that the credibility of the gentry as paternalists arose from the high visibility of certain of their functions, and the low visibility of others. A great part of the gentry's appropriation of the labor value of the poor was mediated by their tenantry, by trade or by taxation. Physically they withdrew increasingly from face-to-face relations with the people in village or town. The rage for deer parks and the threat of poachers led to the closure of rights of way across their parks and their encirclement with high palings or walls; landscape gardening, with ornamental waters and fish ponds, menageries and valuable statuary, accentuated their seclusion and the defenses of their grounds, which might be entered only through the high wrought iron gates, watched over by the lodge. The great gentry were defended by their bailiffs from their tenants, and by their coachmen from casual encounters. They met the lower sort of people mainly on their own terms, and when these were clients for their favors; in the formalities of the bench; or on calculated occasions of popular patronage.

But in performing such functions their visibility was formidable, just as their formidable mansions imposed their presence, apart from, but guarding over, the village or town. Their appearances have much of the studied self-consciousness of public theatre. The sword was discarded, except for ceremonial purposes; but the elaboration of wig and powder, ornamented clothing and canes, and even the rehearsed patrician gestures and the hauteur of bearing and expression, all were designed to exhibit authority to the plebs and to exact from them deference. And with this went certain significant ritual appearances: the ritual of the hunt; the pomp of assizes (and all the theatrical style of the law courts); the segregated pews, the late entries and early departures, at church. And from time to time there were occasions for an enlarged ceremonial, which had wholly paternalist functions: the celebration of a marriage, a coming-of-age, a national festival (coronation or jubilee or naval victory), the alms-giving to the poor at a funeral.

We have here a studied and elaborate hegemonic style, a theatrical role in which the great were schooled in infancy and which they maintained until death. And if we speak of it as theater, it is not to diminish its importance. A great part of politics and law is always theater; once a social system has become "set," it does not need to be endorsed daily by exhibitions of power (although occasional punctuations of force will be made to define the limits of the system's tolerance); what matters more is a continuing theatrical style. What one remarks of the eighteenth century is elaboration of this style and the self-consciousness with which it was deployed.

The gentry and (in matters of social intercourse) their ladies judged to a nicety the kinds of conspicuous display appropriate to each rank and station: what coach, how many footmen, what table, even what proper reputation for "liberality." The show was so convincing that it has even misled historians; one notices an increasing number of references to the "paternal responsibilities" of the aristocracy, upon which "the whole system rested." But we

have so far noted gestures and postures rather than actual responsibilities. The theater of the great depended not upon constant, day-by-day attention to responsibilities (except in the supreme offices of State, almost every function of the eighteenth-century aristocracy, and many of those of the higher gentry and clergy, was held as a quasi-sinecure whose duties were farmed out to subordinates) but upon occasional dramatic interventions: the roasted ox, the prizes offered for some race or sport, the liberal donation to charity in time of dearth, the application for mercy, the proclamation against forestallers. It is as if the illusion of paternalism was too fragile to be risked to more sustained exposure.

The occasions of aristocratic and gentry patronage certainly deserve attention: this social lubricant of gestures could only too easily make the mechanisms of power and exploitation revolve more sweetly. The poor, habituated to their irrevocable station, have often been made accessories, through their own good nature, to their own oppression: a year of short commons can be compensated for by a liberal Christmas dole.

But such gestures were calculated to receive a return in deference quite disproportionate to the outlay, and they certainly don't merit the description of "responsibilities." These great agrarian bourgeois evinced little sense of public, or even corporate, responsibility. The century is not noted for the scale of its public buildings but for that of its private mansions; and is as much noted for the misappropriation of the charities of previous centuries as for the founding of new ones.

One public function the gentry assumed wholly as their own: the administration of the law, the maintenance, at times of crisis, of public order. At this point they became magisterially and portentously visible. Responsibility this certainly was, although it was a responsibility, in the first and in the second place, to their own property and authority. With regularity and with awful solemnity the limits of tolerance of the social system were punctuated by London's hanging days; by the corpse rotting on the gibbet beside the highway; by the processional of Assizes. However undesirable the side-effects (the apprentices and servants playing truant from service, the festival of pickpockets, the acclamation of the condemned) the ritual of public execution was a necessary concomitant of a system of social discipline where a great deal depended upon theater.

III

If the great were withdrawn so much, within their parks and mansions, from public view, it follows that the plebs, in many of their activities, were withdrawn also from them. Effective paternal sway requires not only temporal but also spiritual or psychic authority. It is here that we seem to find the system's weakest link.

It would not be difficult to find, in this parish or in that, eighteenth-century clergy fulfilling, with dedication, paternalist functions. But we know

very well that these are not characteristic men. Parson Adams is drawn, not to exemplify the practices of the clergy, but to criticize them; he may be seen, at once, as the Don Quixote of the eighteenth-century Anglican Church. The Church was profoundly Erastian; had it performed an effective, a psychologically compelling paternalist role, the Methodist movement would have been neither necessary nor possible.

All this could no doubt be qualified. But what is central to our purpose is that the "magical" command of the Church and of its rituals over the populace, while still present, was becoming very weak. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Puritanism had set out to destroy the bonds of idolatry and superstition—the wayside shrines, the gaudy churches, the local miracle cults, the superstition practices, the confessional priesthood—which, as one may still see in Eire or in parts of southern Europe today, can hold the common people in awe. The Restoration could not restore a tissue of papist idolatry for which, in any case, England had never been notably disposed. But the Restoration did loosen the new bonds of discipline which Puritanism had brought in its place. There can be little doubt that the early eighteenth century witnessed a great recession in Puritanism, and the diminution in the size of the popular Puritan following even in those artisan centers which had nourished the Civil War sects. In the result, there was an accession of freedom, although of a negative kind, to the poor—a freedom from the psychic discipline and moral supervision of priesthood or of presbyters.

A priesthood with active pastoral care has usually found ways of co-existing with the pagan or heretical superstitions of its flock. However deplorable such compromises may appear to theologians, the priest learns that many of the beliefs and practices of "folklore" are harmless; if attached to the calendar year of the Church they can be to that degree Christianized, and can serve to reinforce the Church's authority. What matters most is that the Church should, in its rituals, command the rites of passage of personal life, and attach the popular festivals to its own calendar.

The Anglican Church of the eighteenth century was not a creature of this kind. It was served not by priests but by parsons. It had, except in unusual instances, abandoned the confessional. It recruited few sons of the poor into the priesthood. When so many priests served as temporal magistrates and officered the same law as the gentry, they could scarcely present themselves convincingly as the agents of an alternative spiritual authority. When bishops were political appointments, and when the cousins of the gentry were placed in country livings, where they enlarged their vicarages and adopted the gentry's style of life, it was only too evident from what source the Church's authority was derived.

Above all, the Church lost command over the "leisure" of the poor, their feasts and festivals, and, with this, over a large area of plebeian culture. The term "leisure" is, of course, itself anachronistic. In rural society where small farming and the commons economy persisted, and in large areas of manufacturing industry, the organization of work was so varied and irregular

that it is false to make a sharp distinction between "work" and "leisure." On the one hand, social occasions were intermixed with labor—with marketing, sheep shearing and harvesting, fetching and carrying the materials of work and so on throughout the year. On the other hand, enormous emotional capital was invested, not piecemeal in a succession of Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, but in the special feasts and festival occasions. Many weeks of heavy labor and scanty diet were compensated for by the expectation (or reminiscence) of these occasions, when food and drink were abundant, courtship and every kind of social intercourse flourished, and the hardship of life was obliterated. For the young, the sexual cycle of the year turned on these festivals. These occasions were, in an important sense, what men and women lived for; and if the Church had little significant part in their conduct, then it had, to that degree, ceased to engage with the emotional calendar of the poor.

One can see this in a literal sense. While the old saints days were scattered liberally across the calendar, the Church's ritual calendar concentrated events into the months of light demands upon labor, from the winter to the spring, from Christmas to Easter. While the people still owed tribute to the last two dates, which remained as days of maximum communion, the eighteenth-century calendar of popular festivity coincides closely with the agrarian calendar. The village and town feasts for the dedication of churches—or wakes—had not only moved from the saints' days to the adjacent Sunday, but in most cases they had also been removed (where necessary) from the winter to the summer solstice. In about 1730, the antiquarian, Thomas Hearne, made a note of the feast day of 132 villages or towns in Oxfordshire or on its borders. All fell between May and December; 84 (or more than three-fifths) fell in August and September; no fewer than 43 (or almost one-third) fell in the last week of August and the first week of September. Apart from a significant group of some twenty, which fell between the end of June and the end of July, and which in a normal year might be expected to fall between the end of the hay harvest and the commencement of the cereal harvest, the weight of the emotional festive calendar fell in the weeks immediately after the harvest was gathered in.

Dr. Malcolmson has reconstructed a calendar of feasts for Northamptonshire in the later eighteenth century which shows much the same incidence. Along with the secularization of the calendar goes a secularization of the style and the function of the occasions. If not pagan, then new secular functions were added to old ritual; the publicans, hucksters and entertainers encouraged, with their numerous stalls, the feasts when their customers had uncustomary harvest earnings in their pockets; the village charity and benefit clubs took over the old church ales of Whitsuntide. At Bampton Whit-Monday's club feast included a procession with drum and piper (or fiddler), morris dancers, a clown with a bladder who carried the "treasury" (a money box for contributions), a sword bearer with a cake. There was, of course, no crucifix, no priest or nuns, no images of virgin or saints: their absence is

perhaps too little noticed. Not one of the 17 songs or melodies recorded had the least religious association:

Oh, my Billy, my constant Billy,
When shall I see my Billy again?
When the fishes fly over the mountain,
Then you'll see your Billy again.

Bampton, that living museum of folklore, was not an isolated rural village, but a sturdy center of the leather industry; just as the Middleton and Ashton of Bamford's boyhood were centers of domestic industry. What is manifest, in many such districts, and in many rural regions also in the eighteenth century, is that one could never for a moment sustain the view which (for example) Paul Bois is able to assert of the eighteenth-century French peasant of the West, that "c'était l'église, à l'ombre de laquelle se nouaient toutes les relations." Of course, the religious and the secular (or pagan) had co-existed uneasily, or conflicted, for centuries: the Puritans were concerned to keep morris dancers out of the church, and huckster's stalls out of the church-yard. They complained that church ales were defiled by animal baiting, dancing, and all manner of "lewdness." But there remains a sense in which the Church was the hub around which the spokes of this popular tradition turned; and the Stuart Book of Sports sought to confirm this relationship against Puritan attack. In the eighteenth century, the agrarian seasonal calendar was the hub and the Church provided none of the moving force. It is a difficult change to define but without doubt it was a large one.

The dual experience of the Reformation and of the decline in Puritan presence left a remarkable dissociation between the polite and the plebeian culture in post-Restoration England. Nor should we underestimate the creative culture-forming process from below. Not only the obvious things—folk songs, trades clubs and corn dollies—were made from below, but also interpretations of life, satisfactions and ceremonials. The wife sale, in its crude and perhaps exotic way, performed a function of ritual divorce both more available and more civilized than anything the polite culture could offer. The rituals of rough music, cruel as they might sometimes be, were no more vengeful and really no more exotic than the rituals of a Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer.

The legend of the revival of "merry England" after the Restoration is one which historians have perhaps been too impatient to examine. Even if some of the more sensational claims are discounted (Defoe, as a good accountant, assures us that 6325 maypoles were erected in the five years after the Restoration) there is no doubt that there was a general and sometimes exuberant revival of popular sports, wakes, rush bearings and rituals. "Help, Lord!" exclaimed the Rev. Oliver Heywood, the ejected minister, when recounting the cockfighting, horse racing and stool-ball endemic in the Halifax district in the 1680s: "Oh, what oaths sworn! What wickedness committed!" And recounting the May Day celebrations of 1680 he had

lamented: "There never was such work in Halifax above fifty years past. Hell is broke loose."

We are more accustomed to analyze the age in terms of its intellectual history, and to think of the decline of hell. But the breaking loose of this hell of a plebeian culture quite beyond their control was the waking nightmare of the surviving Puritans. Pagan festivals which the Church had attached to its calendar in the middle ages (although with incomplete success) reverted to purely secular festivities in the eighteenth century. Wake nights came to an end; but the feasts of the following day or week became more robust with each decade. The ceremony of strewing rushes in the churches lingered here and there; but the feasts of rush bearings went from strength to strength. Near Halifax again, the incumbent (a Reverend Witter) attempted to prevent these feasts in 1682, at which (he complained) the people make great provision of flesh and ale, come from all parts, "and eat and drink and rant in a barbarous heathenish manner." Mr. Witter's doors were broken down and he was abused as a "cobbler." The rush-bearing ceremony continued in this district for at least a further 150 years. But, as in most districts, it had lost any sacred significance. The symbols on the richly-decorated carts became bells and painted pots. The picturesque costumes of the men and the white dresses and garlands of the women appear more and more pagan. The pageants pay a mere passing obeisance to Christian symbolism: Adam and Eve, St. George and the Dragon, the Virtues, the Vices, Robin Hood and Maid Marian, hobbyhorses, sweeps on pigs, morris dancers. The festivities ended with baitings, wrestling, dancing and drinking, and sometimes with the tour of the houses of the gentry and of wealthy householders for drink, food and money. "I could not suppress these Bacchanals," wrote the Rev. John William de La Flechere of the Shropshire Wakes: "the impotent dyke I opposed only made the torrent swell and foam, without stopping the course." Moreover, the people had found patrons outside the Church: if La Flechere preached against drunkenness, shows and bullbaiting, "the publicans and maltsters will not forgive me. They think that to preach against drunkenness and to cut their purse strings is the same thing."

But the resurgence of this culture cannot be put down to the commercialization fostered by publicans alone. The gentry had means, through Quarter Sessions, to harry them in their licenses if they had wished. This efflorescence of festivities can scarcely have taken place without a permissive attitude on the part of many of the gentry. In one sense, this was no more than the logic of the times. The materialism of the eighteenth-century rich and the Erastianism of their Church were met by the materialism of the poor. The race meetings of the rich became the poor's popular holidays. The permissive tolerance of the gentry was solicited by the many taverns which—as inn signs still proclaim—sought to put themselves under the patronage of the great. The gentry could make no convincing missionary expeditions to reform the manners and morals of the poor if they were unwilling to reform their own ostentatious and pleasant vices.

But as explanation this is not finally convincing. Only a ruling class which feels itself to be threatened is afraid to flaunt a double standard. Mandeville is

only unusual in pressing to the point of satire the argument that private vices were public benefits. In more softened form the same argument, as to the valuable function of luxury in providing employment and spectacle for the poor, was part of the economic cant of the time.

Indeed, we have seen that the conspicuous display of luxury and "liberality" was part of the theater of the great. In some areas (wages theory, the poor laws, the criminal code), the materialism of the rich consorted without difficulty with a disciplinary control of the poor. But in other areas—the permissive attitude to the robust, unchristian popular culture, a certain caution and even delicacy in the handling of popular disturbance, even a certain flattery extended to the poor as to their liberties and rights—in these areas we are presented with a problem which demands more subtle analysis. It suggests some reciprocity in the relations between rich and poor; an inhibition upon the use of force against indiscipline and disturbance; a caution (on the part of the rich) against taking measures which would alienate the poor too far, and (on the part of that section of the poor which from time to time rallied behind the cry of 'Church and King') a sense that there were tangible advantages to be gained by soliciting the favor of the rich. There is some mutuality of relationship here which it is difficult not to analyze at the level of class relationship. And yet, have we not been often told that it is premature, in the eighteenth century, to speak of a "working class?"

Of course, no one in the eighteenth century would have thought of describing their own as a "one-class society." There were the rulers and the ruled, the high and the low people, persons of substance and of independent estate and the loose and disorderly sort. In between, where the professional and middle classes, and the substantial yeomanry, should have been, relations of clientage and dependency were so strong that, at least until the 1760s, these groups appear to offer little deflection of the essential polarities. Only someone who was "independent" of the need to defer to patrons could be thought of as having full political identity: so much is a point in favor of the "one-class" view. But class does not define itself in political identity alone. For Fielding, the evident division between the high and the low people, the people of fashion and of no fashion, lay like a cultural fissure across the land:

whilst the people of fashion seized several places to their own use, such as courts, assemblies, operas, balls, &c., the people of no fashion, besides one royal place, called his Majesty's Bear-Garden, have been in constant possession of all hops, fairs, revels, &c. . . . So far from looking on each other as brethren in the Christian language, they seem scarce to regard each other as of the same species.

This is a world of patricians and of plebs; it is no accident that the rulers turned back to ancient Rome for a model of their own sociological order. But such a polarization of class relations doesn't thereby deprive the plebs of all political existence. They are at one side of the necessary equation of the *respublica*.

A plebs is not, perhaps, a working class. The plebs may lack a consistency of self-definition, in consciousness; clarity of objectives; the structuring of

class organization. But the political presence of the plebs, or “mob,” or “crowd,” is manifest; it has been chronicled, for London, by George Rudé; it impinged upon high politics at a score of critical occasions—Sacheverell riots, excise agitation, Cider Tax, the patriotic and chauvinistic ebullitions which supported the career of the elder Pitt, and on to Wilkes and beyond. Even when the beast seemed to be sleeping, the tetchy sensibilities of a libertarian crowd defined, in the largest sense, the limits of what was politically possible. There is a sense in which rulers and crowd needed each other, watched each other, performed theater and countertheater to each other’s auditorium, moderated each other’s political behavior. This is a more active and reciprocal relationship than the one normally brought to mind under the formula “paternalism and deference.”

It is necessary also to go beyond the view that laboring people, at this time, were confined within the fraternal loyalties and the “vertical” consciousness of particular trades; and that this inhibited wider solidarities and “horizontal” consciousness of class. There is something in this, certainly. The urban craftsman retained something of a guild outlook; each trade had its songs (with the implements of the trade minutely described), its chapbooks and legends; some trades, like the blacksmiths and the wool combers, maintained their ritual saint’s days and processions. So the shoemaker’s apprentice might be given by his master *The Delightful, Princely and Entertaining History of the Gentle-Craft*, and there read:

never yet did any know
A shoemaker a Begging go.
Kind they are one to another,
Using each Stranger as his Brother.

He read this in 1725, and he would have read much the same in the time of Dekker. At times the distinctions of trades were carried over into festival and social life. Bristol, in the early eighteenth century, saw an annual pugilistic combat on Ash Wednesday between the blacksmiths, and the coopers, carpenters and sailors, with the weavers sometimes joining in on the side of the smiths. And in more substantial ways, when defining their economic interests *as producers*, craftsmen and workers—Thames-side coal heavers, London porters, Spitalfields silk weavers, west of England clothing workers, Lancashire cotton weavers—organized themselves tightly within their trades, and petitioned the State or corporate authorities for their fading paternalist favors.

Indeed, there is substantial evidence on this side; and the degree to which a guild or “trade” outlook and even vestigial continuity of organization contributed to the early trade unions was understated by the Webbs. But to suppose that such trade fraternity was necessarily at odds with larger objectives or solidarities is quite false. The trade consciousness of London craftsmen in the 1640s did not inhibit support for John Lilburne. What trade

consciousness may inhibit is economic solidarities between different groups of producers as against their employers; but if we lay aside this anachronistic postulate, we will find among eighteenth-century workmen abundant evidence of horizontal solidarities and consciousness. In the scores of occupational lists which I have examined of food rioters, turnpike rioters, riots over libertarian issues or enclosure of urban commons, it is clear that solidarities were not segregated by trade; in a region where clothing workers, tanners or colliers are predominant, these obviously predominate in the lists of offenders, but not to the exclusion of other working occupations. I hope to have shown, in another place, that all these groups, during food riots, shared a common consciousness—ideology and objectives—as petty consumers of the necessities of life. But these people were consumers also of cultural values, of libertarian rhetoric, of patriotic prejudice; and on these issues they could exhibit solidarities as well. When, in the quiet 1750s, Princess Amelia tried to close all access to Richmond New Park, she was opposed by a vigorous horizontal consciousness which stretched from John Lewis, a wealthy local brewer, to Grub Street pamphleteers, and which embraced the whole local “populace.” When, in 1799, the magistrates attempted to put down Shrove Tuesday football in the streets of Kingston, it was “the populace” and “the mob” who assembled and triumphantly defied their orders. The mob may not have been noted for an impeccable consciousness of class; but the rulers of England were in no doubt at all that it was a horizontal sort of beast.

Let us take stock of the argument to this point. It is suggested that, in practice, paternalism was as much theater and gesture as effective responsibility; that so far from a warm, household, face-to-face relationship we can observe a studied technique of rule. While there was no novelty in the existence of a distinct plebeian culture, with its own rituals, festivals, and superstitions, we have suggested that in the eighteenth century this culture was remarkably robust, greatly distanced from the polite culture, and that it no longer acknowledged, except in perfunctory ways, the hegemony of the Church.

This plebeian culture was not, to be sure, a revolutionary nor even a proto-revolutionary culture (in the sense of fostering ulterior objectives which called in question the social order); but one should not describe it as a deferential culture either. It bred riots but not rebellions: direct actions but not democratic organizations. One notices the swiftness of the crowd’s changes in mood, from passivity to mutiny to cowed obedience. We have this in the satirical ballad of the “Brave Dudley Boys”:

We bin marchin’ up and deown
 Wo boys, wo
 Fur to pull the Housen deown

And its O the brave Doodley boys
 Wo boys, wo
 It bin O the brave Doodley boys.

Some gotten sticks, some gotten steavs
 Wo boys, wo
 Fur to beat all rogues and kne-avs
 But the riot reaches its appointed limit, and—
 . . . the Dra-gunes they did come,
 And it's devil take the hindmost whum.

We all ran down our pits
 Wo boys, wo
 We all ran down our pits
 Frietened a' most out of our wits
 And its O the brave Doodley boys
 And thence to the reassertion of deference:
 God Bless Lord Dudley Ward
 Wo boys, wo
 He know'd as times been hard

He called back the sojermen
 Wo boys, wo
 And we'll never riot again
 And its O the brave Doodley boys.

It is easy to characterize this behavior as child-like. No doubt, if we insist upon looking at the eighteenth century only through the lense of the nineteenth-century Labor Movement, we will see only the immature, the pre-political, the infancy of class. And from one aspect, this is not untrue: repeatedly one sees pre-figurements of nineteenth-century class attitudes and organization; fleeting expressions of solidarities, in riots, in strikes, even before the gallows; it is tempting to see eighteenth-century workers as an immanent working class, whose evolution is retarded by a sense of the futility of transcending its situation. But the "to-fro lackeying" of the crowd itself a history of great antiquity: the "primitive rebels" of one age might be seen, from an earlier age, to be the decadent inheritors of yet more primitive ancestors. Too much historical hindsight distracts us from seeing the crowd as it was, *sui generis*, with its own objectives, operating within the complex and delicate polarity of forces of its own context.

I have attempted elsewhere to reconstruct these crowd objectives, and the logic of the crowd's behavior, in one particular case: the food riot. I believe that all other major types of crowd action will, after patient analysis, reveal a similar logic: it is only the short-sighted historian who finds the eruptions of the crowd to be "blind." Here I wish to discuss briefly three characteristics of

popular action, and then to return once again to the context of gentry-crowd relations in which all took place.

First is the anonymous tradition. The anonymous threat, or even the individual terrorist act, is often found in a society of total clientage and dependency, on the other side of the medal of simulated deference. It is exactly in a rural society, where any open, identified resistance to the ruling power may result in instant retaliation—loss of home, employment, tenancy, if not victimization at law—that one tends to find the acts of darkness: the anonymous letter, arson of the stack or outhouse, houghing of cattle, the shot or brick through the window, the gate off its hinges, the orchard felled, the fish-pond sluices opened at night. The same man who touches his forelock to the squire by day—and who goes down to history as an example of deference—may kill his sheep, snare his pheasants or poison his dogs at night.

I don't offer eighteenth-century England as a theater of daily terror. That was reserved for John Bull's *Other Island*. But historians have scarcely begun to take the measure of the volume of anonymous violence. The notorious "Waltham Black Act" of 1723 arose out of exactly such a background of unusually organized actions in the forests of Hampshire and Berkshire. Successive capital statutes, spaced across the century, were in response to similar local outbreaks. And a bizarre record of the march of literacy is to be found in the columns of the *London Gazette*. This publication of August Authority, in whose pages appeared the movements of the Court, promotions and commissions in the services, and official notices of every kind, there also appeared advertisements of rewards and proffered pardons. In pursuit of the authors of anonymous letters, these letters were often published in full, with their original orthography.

What these letters show is that eighteenth-century laboring men were quite capable, in the security of anonymity, of shattering any illusion of deference and of regarding their rulers in a wholly unsentimental and unfilial way. A writer from Witney, in 1767, urged the recipient: "do not suffer such damned wheesing fat gutted Rogues to Starve the Poor by such Hellish ways on purpose that they may follow hunting horse racing &c and to maintain their familys in Pride and extravagance." An inhabitant of Henley-on-Thames, who had seen the volunteers in action against the crowd, addressed himself to "you gentleman as you are please to call Yourselves—Altho that is your Mistakes—for you are a sett of the most Damnable Rougs that Ever Existed." (An Odiham author, writing on a similar theme in 1800, remarked "we dont care a Dam for them fellows that Call Themselves Gentlemen Soldiers But in our opinion the Look moore like Monkeys riding on Bears.") Sometimes the lack of proper deference comes through merely as a brisk aside: "Lord Buckingham," a handbill writer in Norwich remarked in 1793, "who died the other day had Thirty Thousand Pounds, yearly For setting his Arse in the House of Lords and doing nothing."

These letters show—and they are dispersed over most parts of England, as well as parts of Wales—that deference could be very brittle indeed, and made up of one part of self-interest, one part of dissimulation, and only one part of

the awe of authority. They were part of the countertheater of the poor. They were intended to chill the spine of gentry and magistrates and mayors, recall them to their duties, enforce from them charity in times of dearth.

This takes us to a second characteristic of popular action, which I have described as countertheater. Just as the rulers asserted their hegemony by a studied theatrical style, so the plebs asserted their presence by a theater of threat and sedition. From the time of Wilkes forward the language of crowd symbolism is comparatively "modern" and easy to read: effigy burning; the hanging of a boot from a gallows; the illumination of windows (or the breaking of those without illumination); the untiling of a house which, as Rudé notes, had an almost ritualistic significance. In London the unpopular minister, the popular politician, needed the aid of no pollsters to know their rating with the crowd; they might be pelted with obscenities or chaired in triumph through the streets. Not only the condemned trod the stage at Tyburn: the audience also proclaimed vociferously their assent or disgust with the book.

But as we move backward from 1760 we enter a world of theatrical symbolism which is more difficult to interpret: popular political sympathies are expressed in a code quite different from that of the 1640s or of the 1790s. It is a language of ribbons, of bonfires, of oaths and of the refusal of oaths, of toasts, of seditious riddles and ancient prophecies, of oak leaves and of maypoles, of ballads with a political *double-entendre*, even of airs whistled in the street. We don't yet know enough about popular Jacobitism to assess how much of it was sentiment, how much was substance; but we can certainly say that the plebs on many occasions employed Jacobite symbolism successfully as theater, knowing well that it was the script most calculated to enrage and alarm their Hanoverian rulers. In the 1720s, when a censored press veils rather than illuminates public opinion, one detects underground moods in the vigor with which rival Hanoverian and Stuart anniversaries were celebrated. The *Norwich Gazette* reported in May 1723 that Tuesday last, being the birthday of King George, was observed in the city "with all the usual demonstrations of joy and loyalty":

And Wednesday being the Anniversary of the Happy Restauration of King Charles II, and with him of the royal family, after a too long and successful usurpation of sanctified tyranny, it was celebrated in this city in an extraordinary manner; for besides ringing of bells, fring of guns, and bonfires, the streets were strown with seggs, oaken boughs set up at the doors, and in some streets garlands and pictures hung out, and variety of antick and comick dances . . . (with) bumpers to the Glorious Memory of Charles II.

Manifestly disloyal as this was, not only to the King but also to the Great Man in his own county, it provided no handle to the law officers of the Crown.

This was a war of nerves, now satirical, now menacing. The arrows sometimes found their mark. In 1724 the King's ministers were poring over

depositions from Harwich where the loyal Hanoverian caucus had been insulted by a most unsavory rough music:

while the Mayor and other Members of the Corporation were assembled in the Town Hall to commemorate His Majesty's Most happy accession to the Throne by drinking His Majesty's and other most Loyal Healths, he this Deponent . . . did see from a Window . . . a person dressed up with horns on his head attended by a mob.

This "said Infamous Person," John Hart, a fisherman, was being chaired about the town by one of two hundred others of equal infamy. They were "drumming a ridiculous Tune of Roundheaded Cuckolds &c, and [Hart] came to the Mayor's and this Deponent's door and made signs with his hands intimating that We might kiss his Arse."

If some of the crowd's actions can be seen as countertheater, this is by no means true of all. For a third characteristic of popular action was the crowd's capacity for swift direct action. To be one of a crowd, or a mob, was another way of being anonymous, whereas to be a member of a continuing organization was bound to expose one to detection and victimization. The eighteenth-century crowd well understood its capacities for action, and its own art of the possible. Its successes must be immediate, or not at all. It must destroy these machines, intimidate these employers or dealers, damage that mill, enforce from their masters a subsidy of bread, untile that house, before troops came on the scene. The mode is so familiar that I need only recall it to mind with one or two citations from the state papers. At Coventry, 1772:

On Tuesday evening . . . a great Mob to the Number of near 1,000 of the . . . lower class of People . . . assembled by Fife and Beat of Drum on Account, as they pretended, of a Reduction of Wages by . . . one of the principal Ribbon Manufacturers . . . They declared their intention to . . . pull down his House, & to demolish him, if they could meet with him . . . Every gentle Means was made use of . . . to disperse them, but without Effect, and by throwing Stones and breaking his Windows, they began to carry their Purpose into Execution.

In Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1740, during the triumphant phase of a food riot:

About two on Thursday morning a great number of Colliers and Waggoners, Smiths and other common workmen [the horizontal beast again] came along the Bridge, released the prisoners, and proceeded in great Order through the Town with Bagpipes playing, Drum beating, and Dirty Clothes fixed upon sticks by way of Còlours flying. They then increased to some thousands and were in possession of the principal Streets of the Town. The Magistrates met at the Guild Hall and scarce knew what to do.

In the result they panicked, scuffled with the crowd on the Guild Hall steps, and fired a volley into it killing more than one. In retaliation:

Stones flew in among us . . . through the windows like cannon shot . . . at length the mob broke in upon us in the most terrible outrage. They spared our lives indeed but obliged us to quit the place, then fell to

plundering and destroying all about 'em. The several benches of justices were immediately and entirely demolished, the Town Clerk's Office was broke open, and all the books, deeds, and records of the town and its courts thrown out of the window.

They broke into the Hutch and took out fifteen hundred pounds, they . . . broke down everything that was ornamental, two very fine capital Pictures of King Charles second and James second . . . they tore, all but the faces . . . and afterwards conducted the Magistrates to their own houses in a kind of Mock Triumph.

Once again, one notes the sense of theater even in the full flush of rage: the symbolic destruction of the benches of justice, the Clerk's books, the Tory corporation's Stuart portraits, the mock triumph to the magistrates; and yet, with this, the order of their processions and the restraint which withheld them (even after they had been fired upon) from taking life.

Of course, the crowd lost its head as often as the magistrates did. But the interesting point is that neither side did this often. So far from being "blind" the crowd was often disciplined, had clear objectives, knew how to negotiate with authority, and above all brought its strength swiftly to bear. The authorities often felt themselves to be faced, literally, with an anonymous multitude. "These men are all tinnors," a customs officer wrote from St. Austell in 1766 of local smuggling gangs, "seldom seen above ground in the daytime, and are under no apprehensions of being known by us." Where "ringleaders" were detected, it was often impossible to secure sworn depositions. But solidarity rarely went further than this. If taken, the leaders of the crowd might hope for an immediate rescue, within twenty-four hours; if this moment passed, they could expect to be abandoned.

Other features might be noted: but these three—the anonymous tradition; countertheater; and swift, evanescent direct action—seem of importance. All direct attention to the unitary context of class relationship. There is a sense in which rulers and crowd needed each other, watched each other, performed theater and countertheater in each other's auditorium, moderated each other's political behavior. Intolerant of the insubordination of free labor, nevertheless the rulers of England showed in practice a surprising degree of licence towards the turbulence of the crowd. Is there some deeply embedded, "structural" reciprocity here?

Contrary to cherished legends, England was of course never without a standing army in the eighteenth century. The maintenance of this army, in Walpole's years, was a particular cause of the Hanoverian Whigs. But for purposes of internal control this was often a small and emergency force. It was, for example, seriously over-stretched and inadequate to the needs of the situation during the riot year 1766. The permanent quartering of troops in populous districts was always impolitic. There was always delay, and often delay of several days, between the onset of disturbance and the arrival of the military. The troops, and equally their officers (whose powers to act against

civilians could be challenged in the courts) found this service "odious." Jealousy of the Crown, seconded by the avarice of the aristocracy, had led to the weakness of all the effective organs for the enforcement of order. The weakness of the State was expressed in an incapacity to use force swiftly, in an ideological tenderness towards the liberties of the subject, and in a sketchy bureaucracy so riddled with sinecurism, parasitism and clientage that it scarcely offered an independent presence.

Thus the price which aristocracy and gentry paid for a limited monarchy and a weak State was, perforce, the licence of the crowd. This is the central structural context of the reciprocity of relations between rulers and ruled. The rulers were, of course, reluctant to pay this price. But it would have been possible to discipline the crowd only if there had been a unified, coherent ruling class, content to divide the spoils of power amicably among themselves, and to govern by means of their immense command over the means of life. Such cohesion did not, at any time before the 1790s, exist, as several generations of distinguished historical scholars have been at pains to show.

The tensions—between court and country, money and land—ran deep. Until 1750 or 1760 the term "gentry" is too indiscriminating for the purposes of our analysis. There is a marked divergence between the Whig and Tory traditions of relations with the crowd. The Whigs, in those decades, were never convincing paternalists; but in the same decades there developed between some Tories and the crowd a more active, consenting alliance. Many small gentry, the victims of land tax and the losers in the consolidation of great estates against the small, hated the courtiers and the moneyed interest as ardently as did the plebs. And from this we see the consolidation of the specific traditions of Tory paternalism—for even in the nineteenth century, when we think of paternalism, it is Tory rather than Whig which we tend to couple with it. At its zenith, during the reigns of the first two Georges, this alliance achieved an ideological expression in the theatrical effects of popular Jacobitism.

By the fifties this moment is passing, and with the accession of George III we pass into a different climate. Certain kinds of conflict between Court and country had so far softened that it is possible to talk of the calculated paternalist style of the gentry as a whole. In times of disturbance, in handling the crowd, one may now forget the distinction between Whig and Tory—at any rate at the level of the practicing J.P.—and one may see the magistracy as a whole as acting within an established tradition. To maintain a hold over the poor they must show themselves to be neither papists nor puritans. They must, at least in gestures, offer themselves as mediators. During episodes of riot, most J.P.s, of whatever persuasion, hung back from confrontation, preferred to intervene by moral suasion before summoning force.

This stance flowed sometimes from an element of active sympathy for the crowd, especially where the gentry felt themselves to be aggrieved at the profit which middlemen were making out of their own and their tenants' corn. A riot in Taunton in 1753 (Newcastle was informed) had been provoked by "one Burcher who has the town mills, & who instead of corn

grinds the poor, in short he is generally thought to deserve punishment, in a legal way, for malpractices of this kind . . .” Earl Poulett, the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, clearly found men like Burcher to be a damned nuisance. They made work for him and for the bench; and, of course, order must be maintained. A general “rising” or state of riot brought other ill consequences in its train—the crowd became unmannerly, the locus for disloyal speeches and seditious thoughts, “for they will all follow one another sooner than listen to gentlemen when they are once risen.” Indeed, on this occasion “at last some of them came to talk a levelling language, viz. they did not see why some should be rich and others poor.” (There were even obscure murmurings about aid from France.)

But the maintenance of order was not a simple matter:

The Impunity of those Rioters encouraged . . . subsequent ones. Gentlemen in the Commission here are affraid to act, nor is it safe for them as their are no troops at Taunton, Ilminster &c & only a grass guard . . . at Crewkerne without any officer. But it seems to be in general the disposition of those towns & of these gentlemen to let the spirit subside & not to provoke them for fear of the consequences.

The consequences feared were immediate ones: more damage to property, more disorder, perhaps physical threats to the magistracy. Earl Poulett was clearly in two minds on the matter himself. He would, if so advised by your Grace “get some of the principle Ring leaders convicted,” but “the disposition of the town, & neighbouring gentlemen (was) against it.” There is in any case, neither here nor in hundreds of similar exchanges in 1740, 1753, 1756, the 1760s and later, any sense that the social order as a whole was endangered: what was feared was local “anarchy,” the loss of prestige and hegemony in the locality, relaxing social discipline. It is usually assumed that the matter will, in the end, subside, and the degree of severity to be shown—whether a victim or two should or should not swing from the gallows—was a matter of calculated example and effect. We are back in a theater once more. Poulett apologized to Newcastle for troubling him with these “little disturbances.” A Harwich fisherman giving a lewd Jacobite gesture had worried the King’s ministers more than many hundreds of men and women marching about the country thirty years later, demolishing mills and seizing grain.

In such situations there was a practiced technique of crowd appeasement. The mob, Poulett wrote,

was appeased . . . by gentlemen going out & desiring to know what they wanted & what they wd have, apprising them of the consequences, & promising them the millers & bakers shd be prosecuted, that they wd buy up the corn & bring it to market themselves & that they shd have it in small quantities as they wanted it.

But where the crowd offered a more direct threat to the gentry themselves, then the reaction was more firm. In the same year, 1753, West Yorkshire was disturbed by turnpike riots. Henry Pelham wrote to his brother that Mr. Lascelles and his turnpike had been directly attacked; “at the head of his own

tennants and followers only," Lascelles had met the rioters and "gallantly thrashed them & took 10 prisoners," The Recorder of Leeds had been threatened, "and all the active part of the magistrates with pulling down their houses, and even taking away their lives." Against this, nothing but a maximum display of ruling-class solidarity would suffice:

I have endeavoured to persuade the few gentlemen that I have seen to be themselves more active This affair seems to me of such consequence that I am persuaded nothing can entirely get the better of it but the first persons in the country taking an active part in defence of the laws; for if these people see themselves only overpowered by troops, and not convinced that their behaviour is repugnant to the sense of the first people of this country, when the troops are gone, hostilities will return.

It is a text worth examination. In the first place, it is difficult to recall that it is the Prime Minister of England who is writing, and to the "Home Secretary." What is being discussed appears to be the requisite style of private men of great property in dealing with an offense to their order: the Prime Minister is endeavoring to persuade "the few gentlemen that I have seen" to be more "active." In the second place, the incident illustrates superbly the supremacy of cultural over physical hegemony. Troops afford less security than the reassertion of paternalist authority. Above all, the credibility of the gentry and magistracy must be maintained. At an early stage in disturbance, the plebs should be persuaded *above all* to abandon an insubordinate posture, to couch their demands in legitimate and deferential terms: they should learn that they were likely to get more from a loyal petition than from a riot. But if the authorities failed to persuade the crowd to drop their bludgeons and await redress, then they were willing on occasion to negotiate with them under duress; but in such cases it became far more probable that the full and terrible theater of the Law would later perform its ghastly matinées in the troubled district. Punitive examples must be made, in order to re-establish the credibility of order. Then, once again, the cultural hegemony of the gentry would resume.