

CEREMONIE, THEATRE, ET POLITIQUE  
AU XVII<sup>e</sup> SIECLE

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After prophylactically claiming incompetency in the field of literary studies in the Seventeenth Century, Mr. Foucault briefly outlined the focus of his informal presentation, the phenomenon of the political ceremony in the Seventeenth Century.

The political ceremony in the Seventeenth Century was an immensely popular "genre" of a very definite nature. Every utterance and gesture of these ceremonies was carefully planned and regulated according to a particular procedure or *étiquette*. They were rituals with their own code or particular set of rules and ritual formulas.

Their functioning can be analyzed on three different levels: first, the level of a ritual in which everything is pre-ordained; second, the level of theatrical manifestation in which various discourses are created with some degree of freedom; and finally, the level of a match, duel, or joust in which there is confrontation and coercion between two parties or forces.

Before attempting the specific analysis, Mr. Foucault explained that this analysis of the political ceremony in the Seventeenth Century would ultimately become part of a larger study of the ceremonial manifestations of political power from the debates in the Greek and Roman *agoras* to the ceremonies at the end of the Eighteenth Century. This will be a study of how political power takes on visible or theatrical forms and imprints itself on the imagination or behavior of a people. It would really be an ethnology of the manifestations of political power, a study of the system of demarcation of power within a society.

To begin his analysis, Mr. Foucault chose a political ceremony which took place at the end of 1639 and the beginning of 1640 in Rouen immediately following the particularly violent\* peasant and urban revolts of the preceding year in Normandy. The ceremony represented the reassumption of power by the apparatus of the monarchical government.

This ceremony is particularly interesting because it takes place almost immediately after the military defeat of the rioting factions. Each element of the ceremony was thus extremely important, for each had polemic and strategic value. Beneath the ritual forms of the *étiquette*, a total redistribution of monarchical power was taking place, a vast centralization of power creating new institu-

tions and profoundly modifying old ones. The ceremony was like a prefiguration in microcosm of what the monarchical regime would be under Louis XIV (what is roughly called "absolute monarchy"). It represented the *mise en jeu* of fundamental theories of political authority which had been elaborated a century before and finally formulated by Sessel. Literary historians have looked for manifestations of this revolt of the *Nu-pieds* (or *L'Armée de la Souffrance*, as the rioters called themselves) in Corneille's *Cinna*. It is not there, however, but rather in the political ceremonies that the theatrical manifestation of these events appear.

(Mr. Foucault then uses the theatrical comparison to organize his own description of the ceremony into acts.)

Act I: Military Repression (before the ceremony itself)

In November of 1639, Normandy is entirely in the hands of rioters. Richelieu sends an army under the protestant Gassion who treats the rioters as if they were traitors or foreign enemies but certainly not as royal subjects. The *Nu-pieds* try to maintain the distinction between the fiscal agents whom they had attacked, and the King whom they continue to insist they respect. The government, however, refuses to accept this distinction, maintaining that the fiscal agents and the army are mere extensions of the King and thus if one attacks the agents, one attacks the King. One then ceases to be his subject, losing all a subject's privileges in the process. Gassion thus billets his troops on the property of certain subjects who would have been exempt from such treatment. Normans are massacred exactly like enemies of the kingdom or traitors. Some even are hung and then cut into pieces which are then hung at the city gates according to the medieval ritual for the execution of a traitor.

Act II: The Last Judgement

The Chancellor Séguier is named in the beginning of December to proceed to



Rouen and, in his own words, "faire régner la justice armée". He proceeds as slowly as possible in order to make his ominous presence hang over the Normans and to make the three orders of society come to him to offer their acts of submission. It is at this point that the ceremony begins. The *notables* appear before Séguier--first the *Parlementaires*, then the mayor of Rouen, and finally the archbishop, de Harlay. In each of their acts of submission, they refuse to recognize Séguier as the agent of unlimited power. Their attitudes within the framework of the *étiquette* manifest the traditional political theory of the three *freins* or checks on monarchical power which were religion, the judiciary, and the administration or *police*. Séguier replies to these acts of submission in such a way as to make it clear that he refuses to accept their ideological premisses.

First, he will not accept the *Parlement's* refusal to ratify the government's decrees. He forbids Godard, the mayor of Rouen, to go to Paris to confront the "person of the king since the king in his decision has already manifested himself and there is no recourse." Finally, he refuses archbishop de Harlay's pretensions to be the principal "shepherd of his sheep" and therefore ultimately responsible for them. In accordance with the theory that God speaks through the King (outlined by Budé and Gracian), the Chancellor maintains that the King is the voice of God in the domain of justice and God's will manifests itself in the will of the King. The King thus fulfills the function which God will fulfill on Judgement Day.

#### Act III: Séguier's entrance into Rouen

Gassion's army enters Rouen on Christmas Day, the day of Christ's advent on earth. Séguier himself enters the city on January 1 and Gassion and his army pass (through their own act of submission) under Séguier's control. This was a monstrosity, according to tradition (*Histoire de la Grande Chancellerie 1670-1674*). Nevertheless, it was formulated within the code of the *étiquette* by transferring the white flags of command from Gassion to Séguier and then having the officers meet each evening with the Chancellor Séguier who, as representative of the King, now also represented both the civil and military authority in the province. He punished civilians according to military procedure without hearing the accused or accepting any other oral or written testi-

mony. Gorin, for example, one of the principle seditioners in Rouen was condemned in this way by Séguier. Séguier also received military honors normally only accorded to the King. Thus, in Séguier, a new character appears in political ceremony, the visible body of the state. Kantorowicz has distinguished two bodies of the King, the physical and the spiritual. In the Rouen ceremony a third body appears, the body of the state apparatus made up of functionaries, with the number one functionary at its head. The state becomes the source of all hierarchies, of all authorities, and of all regulations. The army and the judiciary are only two facets of this new body.

#### Act IV: Two of Séguier's acts after making his entrance

He first suspended all the constituted authorities of the city like the *Parlement* and the municipal government and replaced them by other constituted bodies, other "actors". The *Parlementaires* become only royal agents rather than checks on the royal power.

#### Act V: The underlying strategy

The political power allied itself to the economic interests of the kingdom's *notables*. All arms were confiscated and redistributed to the *notables*, and a fine was levied on the town which was advanced by the town's richest elements. They become the creditors of the other elements of the society. Thus an equilibrium was established beneath the ceremony, a sort of contract between the rich and the poor. This equilibrium was to be thrown into question of the time of the Fronde, but the form of the power, fixed in the ceremony, would remain the same.

\* *La Révolte des Nu-pieds*. After the Fronde this was probably the second most important revolt of the whole century.