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Choice Architecture in Shakespeare's Public Meetings: Nudge Theory and *Richard III*, *Coriolanus*, and *Julius Caesar*

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Most meetings in Shakespeare's plays occur between the elite, coming together to fix deals in private.¹ There are not that many genuinely open public assemblies, where the people can make decisions (or at least are called on to give formal approval to a plan presented to them). This article argues that two areas of recent research on decision making (the ethnography of public meetings, and behavioural economics on how to influence choosers) can illuminate the detail of the tactics used by Buckingham and Richard when gathering support from Londoners in *Richard III* (1592-93), by Antony in dealing with the plebeians in *Julius Caesar* (1599), and by the tribunes in handling the citizens of *Coriolanus* (1608).² Speakers use what behavioural economics call choice architecture (presenting options in a way which increases the likelihood that a decision will go one way rather than another) to change the status quo.

Jürgen Habermas's concept of a public sphere was of a bounded time and space, where state officials could discuss issues of public concern with citizens, whose entry into the conversation depended on their command of reason and the facts rather than their rank. This concept was originally modelled using eighteenth-century institutions, but it was rapidly taken up by early modernist historians to accommodate a number of earlier contexts where such exchange could take place (such as preaching, pamphlets, rumour, speeches, and appeals to the people). In these spaces, participants were not (or not only) appealing to, or performing before, their monarch, but exchanging views with fellow subjects, including allies, opponents, and clients.³ Chris Fitter's collection of essays shows how often, and in how many ways, authorities anxiously and frequently sounded the mind of the lower ranks through

granting them free speech on an issue, or at least by listening to critical subcultures expressing themselves in seemingly a-political modes, such as prophetic Protestant poetry. Fitter endorses the common sense of listening to nudges by the commons, given ‘a state strong on fear, but frequently unsure of policy enforcement’.⁴

Literary critics have made a pitch for viewing plays and playhouses as public spheres. Jeffrey Doty has pointed out how ‘Shakespeare’s effective politicians learn to address, persuade, and impress “the people”’. His plays dramatize the strategies used in public relations, expressing an emerging sense that, whether the powerful liked it or not, their actions would be scrutinized by all ranks, not just the elite. Doty argues that the playgoer gets privileged insights into the tactics of publicity used by the powerful, and so becomes part of a public sphere. Individual responses by audience members to issues and actions presented on stage could give politicians a sense of what public opinion, in the aggregate, might be.⁵ Alison Findlay shows how the bounded nature of ceremonies in Shakespeare’s plays, as well as the act of attending a play, may create a public sphere in which diverse individuals come together, for a brief period, to respond freely about issues of state.⁶ Thomas Cartelli demonstrates how, in the sources to *Richard III*, citizens dissent from Buckingham’s propositions about the succession through their murmurs, the ‘hidden transcript’ of lower rank defiance, which are translated by Shakespeare into stubborn silence.⁷ There are a number of analyses of the technical skills in demonstrative or deliberative rhetoric deployed by the politicians in the plays before the crowd.⁸

My own contribution to this discussion is to highlight how one aim (legitimacy through the form of free choice) but six nudges (constraining that free choice) are common to politicians holding public meetings in *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III*. The convenors of these meetings are anxious to gain legitimacy by creating the impression that

their hearers may decide freely, even while secretly urging them in one direction rather than another by taking advantage of pervasive biases in the human psyche.

As early modern schoolboys learned from Quintilian's warning, 'proofs... may induce the judges to regard our case as superior to that of our opponent, but the appeal to the emotions will do more, for it will make them wish our case to be the better. And what they wish, they will also believe'.⁹ There are indications that conscientious seventeenth-century officials sought to manage meetings to focus on facts and reasons, so removing potential friction in how the process of consideration ran. Thus Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Counsell' advises circulating material in advance, contrasting the results of whole-group and individual consultations on an issue, allowing experts to speak first, delaying the chair's intervention until others have spoken, and varying seating plans depending on the aim of the meeting (such issues 'seem Things of Forme, but are Things of consequence'). The essay 'Of Dispatch' proposes that the chair of a committee often reiterates the point at issue in a discussion, and orders the parts of each question, using brevity or circumlocution depending on the predisposition of those present. A few people should be used to prepare a debate and finalise a decision, but many should be invited to the intervening consultation, to ensure all angles are covered.¹⁰ Published standing orders on how to conduct the Court (the highest decision-making body) of both the East India Company and the Virginia Company are likewise shrewd about setting up mechanisms to gauge the sense of attendees and to preclude actions which might derail proceedings. To ensure that communal rather than private interests are consulted, significant news about trading conditions is to be read out publicly by the Secretary (not leaked selectively); Court members are to stand up when speaking and only address the Governor (not factions in the Court); private conversations during Court are barred; a member may only speak three times to an issue (to avoid unrepresentative debate or even filibustering); no one may interrupt another while he is speaking; at each meeting, the

Secretary is to remind the Court of the agenda and take notes during it, offering his 'collections' (the minutes) at the next.¹¹ Such rules aim to create a public sphere: a bounded period in which a considered decision is made through rational and orderly discussion between well-informed and equal parties. The advice does not, however, dwell on impediments to this, and (as Machiavellian officials realised) it is more effective to appear to deal fairly than to do so.¹²

On the conflict between the real and the ideal, recent ethnography about meetings is helpful since it is interested in the frequent resort, in practice in meetings, to framing devices around the options being debated, in order to skew the opinion of attendees. Today's civic-minded public officials mull over how to make their public meetings more productively open. Assemblies need not be a matter of form alone, they point out hopefully: in them, the public can provide new information, or show support for or against a policy, or shame officials into action, or set an agenda (especially early on in the process), or delay the implementation of a decision for further reconsideration, or network with experts.¹³ The ideal meeting would allow the public to participate directly as amateur administrators, giving them shared authority with officials in a choice of actions, especially where there can be face-to-face interaction over an issue between the two groups for an extended period of time.

Yet, as Katherine McComas shows, by carefully calculating such apparently neutral factors as the meeting's timing, format, complexity, and formality, an unscrupulous convenor can limit the public's engagement with the discussion, or segment it into fractions with different access. Starting a meeting with a complex briefing note, or providing lecture-style seating, or holding the meeting at a time when workers or care-givers would be unable to attend, or dressing more formally than are members of the public are beginners' tactics. A more sophisticated instance might be substituting for an open meeting (where opposition to official proposals could be strengthened by being recognised as a group position) an 'open

house' or poster meeting, in which individuals could only drop in to comment as individuals (dissipating opposition, even while looking like an especially egalitarian and friendly mode of consultation). Even then, though, caution is needed: if a process is viewed as grossly unfair it may serve to catalyse community protest.¹⁴

Ethnographers find a meta-discursive element in many public deliberations. There is much talk about how to talk: about who can speak when and about what.¹⁵ Catherine Alexander notes how the legitimacy of a meeting depends on it being spoken about 'as if' its discussion was rational and open to all, using a 'subjunctive aesthetic'. However, in practice strong verbal forces control free speech, separating the meeting from daily life by such tactics as the use of people's job titles rather than their names, a high degree of courtesy in speech, gaining legitimacy for current decisions by referring to past choices (whether real or imagined), and upholding invariable procedures over the order of speech, how long and how often each attendee may speak. Moreover, since meetings are never one-off oral events (their papers and agenda are planned and circulated in advance and reported on after), there are many opportunities for verbal finessing. These are, concludes McComas, discursive rituals which make it difficult to rebut an authority's position.¹⁶

However, the public is not entirely defenceless against such top-down manoeuvres. Sometimes such rituals can be turned by amateur 'skilful players [who] can subvert the form in different ways, using the public setting and formal legitimacy to give [their own] informal knowledge the weight and potency of revelation', or using indecorous 'rancour and humour' to rupture official orderliness.¹⁷ They may incorporate digressions and grand-standing, so that the proceedings can become rhetorical or even theatrical. They may supplement argument with personal stories to illustrate the impact of a proposal, to critique the assumptions of the experts on an issue, and to present different perspectives, with an emotion or humour which often gain support from other attendees. Many speakers take up recognizable roles, Laura

Black points out, such as ‘concerned member of the public’, ‘victim of a plan’, and ‘dispassionate reviewer of evidence’.¹⁸

Studies in behavioural economics surged in the 1990s, focusing on irrational choices. A subset of this research, nudge theory, starts with the assumption that most people have limited time, energy, and knowledge to devote to complex decisions, especially where these are about unfamiliar situations or where there is an appreciable time lag between decision and outcome. Accordingly, mental short-cuts limit the amount of attention needed, and these give policy makers the opportunity to nudge choosers to prefer, subconsciously, one option rather than another. In 2008 Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein presented an influential catalogue of apparently insignificant presentational designs (a ‘choice architecture’), which can be used by institutions to affect their publics’ choices. Thaler and Sunstein are particularly interested in techniques which affect a wide portion of the population, including those they call ‘the least sophisticated fraction’. They argue that choice architecture helps the public make ‘better’ choices, such as would be made by an ideal decision-maker who is paying full attention, and has complete information, iron self-control, and massive cognitive ability.¹⁹

These theories (which earned Thaler a Nobel prize for economic sciences) rapidly gained traction among members of the UK government and civil service, who were already primed by the introduction of New Public Management to prefer steering to rowing, and self-help to direct provision. As the Minister for Planning and Decentralisation explained in 2011, when deference for the state is low then issuing directives rather than involving people in decisions is likely to fail. Moreover, he added, nudging someone to act is cheaper than acting on their behalf.²⁰ In 2010, the UK government set up a Behavioural Analysis Team to solve policy issues by nudges to the bottom rather than directives from the top. Now a think tank part-owned by the government, the team’s website lists a wide range of situations in which

nudges are used: from handling coronavirus anxiety, to reducing plastic pollution in the Pacific, to promoting diversity in the police.²¹

Nudging is widely acknowledged to be powerful, but is criticised for a potential opacity, worrying both in terms of personal agency and in terms of open-minded scrutiny of the options presented. Thaler and Sunstein argue that the defence against both charges is to ensure that all nudges are presented transparently, and there is accurate monitoring of their effect on behaviour. Later theorists argue that these defences can be combined with group deliberation to encourage the ‘boundedly rational’ average citizen to assess the choices offered and own the final decision.²² This is the point where meeting theory merges with nudge theory, and provides a useful new perspective to analyse the tactics of public speakers in Shakespeare.

Cartelli argues of Buckingham and Richard that ‘remain invested in their own fabrications’, for instance by taking ‘literally the Mayor’s mitigating explanation’ about the silence of the citizens after Buckingham speaks.²³ However, in the light of meeting theory it seems to me that the pair join the tribunes and Antony in having to work very hard indeed to keep the form of a genuinely open meeting – knowing that the legitimacy of its outcome depends on maintaining this face-saving impression – while at the same time trying to nudge the outcome in one direction. To adopt the words of *Coriolanus*’s Third Citizen, the convenors want to put citizens into a position where they have apparently have the power to choose, but which, in fact, they ‘have no power to do’ (2.3.5). It does not matter whether the audience onstage (or indeed off it) are persuaded by the performance, it matters whether the performance is credible enough to allow politicians to go on to the next stage of a state procedure. Thus, the stress is on the number of formalities to go through before the final decisions are made, ostensibly put in place to aid rational, considered, and open discussion. Meeting convenors repeatedly state that their role is only to guide the people through these

formalities, so that the popular will is voiced. Far be it for these officers to have an opinion of their own, they insist.

Coriolanus manages the difficult task of making bureaucratic systems gripping. Coriolanus's candidature for consul (the commanding role in Roman government) must first be vetted by the Senate. This body's members file into an 'after-meeting' (2.2.39) on the issue, signalled as an official occasion by the presence of the lictors, and with the two tribunes in attendance as observers on behalf of the people. Cominius provides a summary curriculum vitae of the candidate's service to Rome, whose facts are confirmed by others present, and the Senate then approves Coriolanus as consul on this basis. The next stage of the selection process is that by the people, where, the Third Citizen explains, the applicant is to 'make his requests by particulars, wherein every one of us has a single honour in giving him our own voices with our own tongues' (2.3.44-46). This is, perhaps, a more searching procedure than the group-choice mode used by the Senate. Each plebeian may question the candidate privately about his deeds and attitudes, before individually voicing a decision to accept or reject the applicant. Moreover, the face-to-face situation of candidate and questioner tends to ensure that more consideration is given to counter-perspectives than would be the case if the choice was made in the abstract.²⁴ Finally, the two selection panels are to be brought together in a meeting of 'approbation' (2.3.145), which is intended to confirm to both groups their decisions, to themselves and to the other group.

Menenius, highly sensitive to the affordances of debate, points out that Rome benefits if all 'proceed by process' and 'answer by a lawful form' when there are disputed positions to be discussed (3.1.315, 327). Almost all Romans seem aware of the discursive protocols which, if used carefully, can serve to direct inchoate or diverse political feelings into coherent interaction. It is, for instance, the Third Citizen and not the tribunes who first suggests that the plebeians have not yet 'confirmed' (2.3.209) their choice, so may over-turn it. The odd

man out is Coriolanus. He takes the two customs of reciting a candidate's merits and requesting the consent of the citizens to be legal rituals rather than substantive devices to cohere support for a decision, one way or another. While being tried for treason, he tussles with Sicinius over who has the power to ask the questions, as though their relative position, as accused and judge, is a bureaucratic irrelevance. Coriolanus's declaration of banishing his banishers is bathetic to official ears.

By contrast, when speaking to the plebeians, the tribunes emphasise that they are there to provide procedural advice and facts about the implications of the options available. Though they confer together in private about how to make the people 'perceive' the real 'intent' of Coriolanus (2.2.157), they do not openly state their opposition to his appointment as consul before the trial, and apparently accept the citizens' initial approval ('the people do admit you', 2.3.144). They talk merely of how they must 'suggest' to the plebeians or (barely more strongly) how they have 'lessoned' and 'fore-advised' them (2.1.242, 250; 2.3.177, 191) about potential problems with approving Coriolanus's candidature. As Sicinius comments, this ensures that the decision 'shall seem, as partly 'tis, their own,/ Which we have goaded onward' (2.3.262-63).

Buckingham and Richard hold a two-part selection meeting with Londoners, at the Guildhall and then at Baynard's Castle. The first, without the candidate present, gives reasons for why Edward's sons should not be crowned (two generations of bastardy, and character flaws in the father). The two convenors expect this meeting to be short (Richard is primed to get his clergy into place at Baynard's Castle within the hour), so presumably they do not anticipate the hitches Buckingham then runs into. When he and Richard snatch a pre-meeting before the second event, Buckingham reports on the first: he not only covered all the items on the agenda, he added an extra item (Richard's face and character, as York's legitimate son). Despite having conscientiously 'left nothing fitting for your purpose/ Untouched' (3.7.18-19),

Buckingham reports that he got no reply to his concluding ‘God save Richard, England’s royal king’ (3.7.22), so had to try again, even more formally, through the Recorder. Another lacklustre response causes him to try a different route at Baynard’s Castle: here, he claims to speak on behalf of the people, not to them, and repeats this until he gets an ‘Amen’ from ‘All’ (Folio only) to his ‘Long live kind Richard, England’s worthy king’ (3.7.2430-31). Richard makes sure to clarify this official position as he moves from refusal to acceptance: ‘you will buckle fortune on my back,/... whe’er I will or no’, ‘Your mere enforcement shall acquittance me’, ‘you will have it so’ (3.7.218-19, 223, 233). The Mayor shows himself aware that the whole point of these meetings is that he reports elsewhere on their outcomes: ‘I’ll acquaint our duteous citizens/ With all your just proceedings in this cause’, and ‘we see it, and will say it’ (3.5.63-64, 3.7.227).

Brutus (whose model of management is a top-down decide-announce-defend) informs Antony of the process to be followed for delivering the funeral oration for Caesar: the content of the speech (reasons for Caesar’s death, praise for his character; the fact that Antony speaks by permission as part of the ‘true rites and lawful ceremonies’ due to Caesar, 3.1.243), where it will take place (the market place pulpit), and the order of speaking (Brutus then Antony). This, Brutus insists over Cassius’s protests, will show that the conspirators’ action was reasonable, not savage. In front of the people, he repeats the terms on which the oration can proceed. Equally punctilious about the formalities around public consent, Antony also states that he is there by permission, and that he speaks ‘not to disprove what Brutus spoke,/ But... to speak what I do know’ (3.2.101-02). When Antony gets to the nub of his speech (inciting mutiny), his modal verbs are tentative at first: they disclaim what he is implying, then turn his statements into questions about what the crowd wants, not statements about what he wants. ‘If I were disposed’, he says, to raise the rage of the plebeians, ‘I should’, but ‘I will not’, but ‘I will’, but ‘I do not mean to’, for ‘they would’, so ‘I must not’, for ‘if you should, O what

would come of it'. Such self-addressed worries about form test whether he can risk asking leading questions without getting answers he does not want. Once satisfied on this count, Antony can transfer authority to the people: 'Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?', 'You will compel me then to read the will?', 'Shall I descend? And will you give me leave?' (3.2.122-161).

In short, the convenors of all these meetings are clear that they want *de jure* as well as *de facto* authority, conferred when the public voice their final decision openly, which then makes it a matter of public duty and not personal interest for convenors act on the choice made.

Yet such formalities, there to keep discussion fair, open, and rational, are nudged by 'players' in these meetings. Thaler and Sunstein's menu of techniques shows how the speakers take advantage of pervasive biases in the human psyche. The first sort of nudge used by Shakespeare's officials, that of 'anchoring and adjustment', arises when a decision is made about a relatively unknown situation by starting with a known factor, an 'anchor', then adjusting this appropriately. Biases come about because the choice-maker's mind dwells on features of the anchor, even if these are irrelevant to the issue in hand. Richard and Buckingham offer an anchor point to the Mayor of London in their pre-meeting with him: by appearing 'in rotten armour, marvellous ill-favoured' (3.5.0 SD) and cutting short their own opening remarks with sudden alarms, they suggest there is a national state of emergency. The Mayor is swift to agree that, given 'the extreme peril of the case' (3.5.44), their execution of Hastings was a moderate and even necessary response to this crisis.²⁵ Brutus uses the same technique: by emphasizing how Roman liberty was threatened by Caesar's ambition, it becomes a thing of course to slay him ('not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more', 3.2.21-22). So, too, do the tribunes, when they repeat (six times) their verdict that Coriolanus 'Deserves th'extremest death', then add that 'since he hath/ Served well for

Rome' (3.3.87-88) they are prepared to settle for banishment instead, as a reasonable concession.

A second nudge is an appeal to the 'availability concept', which depends on how readily examples come to mind. Vivid images of improbable outcomes tend to rise and stick more easily than dull images of usual outcomes. The plebeians are so struck by the misery ahead should Coriolanus turn out to be a tyrant that they fail to appreciate the improbability of him having the guile to achieve this. They respond eagerly to the tribunes' suggestion that Coriolanus is contriving 'to take/ From Rome all seasoned office, and to wind/... into a power tyrannical' (3.3.66-68), ignoring their experience of Coriolanus, which suggests he is unlikely to do anything so politically sophisticated. The tribunes sketch out the usual behaviour of a tyrant in keeping for himself the spoils of war, even though everyone knows at the back of their mind that Coriolanus has already 'kicked at' this practice (2.2.124). Likewise, because Buckingham gives such a lengthy and vivid image of a lustful Edward, 'lolling on a lewd day-bed/... dallying with a brace of courtesans/... sleeping to engross his idle body' (3.7.72-76), Londoners more easily take to the improbable idea that Edward's wife was unfaithful to him (so his sons are illegitimate), and that his mother was also (and, even more improbably, only in Edward's case, not that of Richard).

A third nudge is to work with the 'representativeness concept', where options available chime with attitudes or opinions already held. This sort of stereotyping and character profiling confuses random parallels with causal patterns in the mind of the decision-maker. When Antony lists the actions of Caesar (a faithful and just friend, whose victories filled the public coffers, who wept with the poor, and who repeatedly refused to be crowned), the first three clauses cue the plebeians to take the fourth as a genuine gesture, even though the first three have nothing to do with whether Caesar was or was not ambitious.

A fourth nudge is ‘priming’ the decision-makers with images or words (even ones which are unrelated to the decision), so they are tempted to make one choice rather than another. Richard and Buckingham are good with such props: the bloodied head of Hastings, say, or the prelates and prayer book deployed by Richard (and helpfully itemized by Buckingham, for emphasis). Antony’s memory of seeing Caesar wear a particular mantle one summer’s evening, while resting in his tent after winning for Rome another battle, should have no effect on the crowd’s opinion of whether Caesar was ambitious. But it does: it brings to mind the image of an essentially private and serviceable man, as does Antony’s elaboration on where he found Caesar’s will (in his closet). Like Buckingham, Antony comments on what the spectators are seeing: the rent mantle, then the body itself: ‘in this place ran Cassius’ dagger through./ See what a rent the envious Casca made./ Through this, the well-beloved Brutus stabbed’, then ‘Here is himself, marred’ (3.2.1724, 195). By contrast, Coriolanus is reluctant to prime his electors even with the robe and hat of humility, let alone the sight of his wounds (Doty argues that, in such choices, Coriolanus chooses to make himself popularly hated, mirroring in reverse the aim of the opposing side).²⁶

A fifth nudge is to take advantage of a state of arousal in decision-makers, who may make irrational choices while in a ‘hot’ state that they would not consider when ‘cold’.²⁷ The tribunes agree to keep the citizens in a furore, to preclude any cool balancing of Coriolanus’s service to Rome against his attitude to class (reasoning which had marked the citizens’ earlier debate about whether to give him their voices). An aedile is instructed to ensure that when the people begin to shout ‘Let them not cease, but with a din confused/ Enforce the present execution’ of the sentence (3.3.20-21). Brutus’s speech numbers the reasons for Caesar’s execution, to lower the emotional temperature. Antony heightens it by using an upward spiral of repeating references, each displacing the next with more and more heat: the body, but do

not mutiny, but the will, the body, but do not mutiny, but the will, the body – and then the plebeians reach the decision to mutiny.

The final nudge used by the convenors of the three meetings is to make an appeal to a ‘group norm’, working on a human (and evolutionary) desire to fit in with what most of the other people present think. Having learned how fairly and reasonably the citizens respond when speaking one-by-one with Coriolanus, the tribunes decide to mass them instead ‘by tribes’ (3.3.11) when it comes to the next stage in the process, his confirmation as consul. Brutus asks individual objectors to step forward, to be shamed by the group as a ‘bond-man’ or even un-Roman, leaving a ‘pause for a reply’ (3.2.29-34) which it would take courage for an individual to break into. Group judgements can, moreover, be nudged by consistent and unwavering expressions of opinion, which give the impression of group solidarity. Buckingham tries this tactic by sowing his followers among the crowd at the back of the Guildhall, to lead the way in acclaiming Richard as king. This is enough to desist others from shouting against this cry, so Buckingham can take ‘the vantage of those few’ (3.7.37) to go on to the next stage, the citizen’s embassy to Richard.

There is a strong focus on the transparency of the nudges in Edward Hall’s description of the repeated speeches before the Londoners, and on how they refuse to co-operate, standing like ‘stones’, ‘mute’, silent ‘as midnight’, irresponsive as though ‘amazed’. A ruse to have Richard appear while a preacher spoke of legitimate rule, as though God had inspired him, fails for logistical reasons. Buckingham’s lengthy speeches are punctuated by private side-meetings with other nobles and the Mayor, to work out what the next tactic should be. Assent, when it comes, is not necessarily from the citizens; Hall uses the passive voice: ‘there was a greate cry and shoute, cryng kyng Richard, and so the lords wente vp to the kynge’. The fact that the Londoners have been co-opted into the empty reciprocity of political meetings is highlighted by Hall’s choice to make this the moment to end the life of Edward

V, and start that of Richard III. Hall finishes by noting how, as the citizens depart, they mutter about

this maner of dealyng, that the matter was on bothe partes made so straunge as though neuer the one parte had commaund with the other parte thereof before, when they wiste that there was no manne so dull that hearde them, but he perceyued well ynough that all the matter was made betwene them. Howbeit, some excused that again, saynge: all thyng muste bee doen in good ordre, and menne muste sometyme for the maner sake not bee a known what they knowe. For at the consecracion of a bishoppe, euery manne perceiueth by paiment of his bulles that he entendeth to bee one, yet when he is twise asked whether he will be a bishop, he muste twise saye naie, and at the thirde tyme take it vpon hym as compelled thereto.²⁸

Tactics for subtly manipulating a public meeting do not feature largely appear in the source for the two Roman plays, Plutarch. His plebeians initially approve, then reject, Coriolanus in a relatively orderly way, without the interference of the tribunes. Only when Coriolanus speaks passionately in the Senate about the political implications of the insult offered him do the tribunes see an opportunity of using his words to enrage the people: they keep the latter in an uproar, and ensure that the final decision over Coriolanus's banishment is made by tribe (though Plutarch explains this as a way to include the lowest fraction, with little vested interest in peaceful order). Plutarch's life of Julius Caesar represents the tumult after Caesar's death as the choice of the people alone, after they heard the will and viewed the body. Though his life of Antony mentions that Antony spoke movingly, there are no details of the arguments used, bar him pointing out the rents in Caesar's robe.²⁹

Perhaps the experience of dramatizing influencers of meetings in *Richard III* (the earliest play of the three) helped Shakespeare expand on Plutarch's slighter indications of their dark art. There is a conservative aspect to his changes: Shakespeare's citizens show little of the weary awareness about civic politics which Hall's citizens demonstrate (and for which literary critics search so hopefully in the plays). Admittedly, citizens are increasingly heard from, rather than talked at or about, over the course of the three plays, suggesting some movement in Shakespeare's assessment of the possibility of opposition. Yet even in *Coriolanus* their discussions rarely bear fruit when the meeting is in progress - the convenors' nudges always work then, regardless of how sceptical the audience has been beforehand. Choice architects defend themselves against accusations of paternalism by arguing that all choices are framed in some way, so it is an official's duty to set out the alternatives in ways which endorse the most beneficial course (as judged by experts). As Shakespeare's procedural games-players show, though, convenors of meetings do not necessarily work for the public good. Their meetings do not form a public sphere; they are struggles to get people's voices, not their considered and real opinions. These three plays warn their audiences not to believe any politician's rhetoric about how a public decision must be in the public interest because it is what the public voted for.

¹ Many thanks to the anonymous readers of *English* for their shrewd and knowledgeable comments on the draft article.

² Quotations and dating for the three plays are taken from W. Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. S. Wells, G. Taylor, J. Jowett, and W. Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

³ P. Lake and S. Pincus, 'Introduction: rethinking the public sphere in early modern England', in P. Lake and S. Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-30.

⁴ C. Fitter, ed., *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), especially pp. 1-27, 163-79, 180-216.

⁵ J. Doty, *Shakespeare, Popularity, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 2, 19, 23.

⁶ A. Findlay, 'Shakespeare, ceremony, and the public sphere of performance', *Shakespeare* 14.1 (2018), pp. 26-37.

⁷ T. Cartelli, 'The speaking silence of citizens in Shakespeare's *Richard III*: hidden and public transcripts', in Fitter, ed. *Politics of Commoners*, pp. 102-24.

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⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1921-36), 6.2.6.

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