

## ‘What say the citizens’ in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*?

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### *Abstract*

Shakespeare’s residency in London coincided with a period in which the City underwent unprecedented demographic growth and commercial expansion. By the 1590s two thirds to three quarters of the adult males resident in the City were citizens, at the time a uniquely urban identity that denoted a person who possessed ‘the freedom’ and was thereby entitled to the economic and political privileges of enfranchised inhabitants of a city or borough. These phenomena were transforming urban popular culture, yet their impact is largely unregistered in studies of Shakespeare and popular culture. The article seeks to direct attention to the presence and significance of the citizen, citizen languages and the culture of citizenship in *Richard III*, the play in which the word ‘citizen’ appears more often than in any other Shakespearean drama yet is rarely the focus of critical enquiry. The relative critical neglect of the citizens and of ‘citizen language’ more generally in *Richard III* stems from the widespread perception that its freemen are ultimately complicit in Richard’s tyranny. The paper challenges such views and focuses attention on Richard’s sustained effort to play the citizen to secure the crown.

*Keywords:* Citizens, Commerce, Consent, Election, Urbanisation.

### 1. *Citizenship and Popular Culture*

The culture of citizenship in late Elizabethan England marks an intersection between urbanisation and commercial expansion, two interrelated forces which were transforming contemporary popular culture.<sup>1</sup> The mounting pace of urbanisation was particularly acute in London, which experienced a growth rate about three times that of the national population in the last half of the sixteenth century (Boulton 1987, 2). Although estimates of the inhabitants of the City of London in 1550 vary considerably, most place the population at between 61,000 and 80,000, rising to about 200,000 in 1600 and approaching 400,000 by 1650, more than quadrupling in the span of a hundred years.<sup>2</sup> To put this in context, whereas London was Europe’s seventh or eighth largest city in 1550, fifty years later only two cities (Paris and Naples) outstripped it, by 1650 Paris alone exceeded it and by 1700, with a population exceeding half a million, it had become Europe’s biggest metropolis (Boulton 1987, 1; Sacks 2000, 22; Newman 2007, 2). London’s unprecedented demographic growth between 1550 and 1650 was linked to its burgeoning market economy which drew increasing numbers of migrants to the city, many of them young men who aspired to become citizens.<sup>3</sup> In sixteenth-century England ‘citizen’ was a specifically urban identity

and denoted someone who had been admitted to 'the freedom' and was entitled to the economic and political rights and privileges of enfranchised inhabitants of an incorporated city or borough. By stipulating that all freemen 'be of some mystery or trade', the charter granted to London by Edward II in 1319 effectively ensured that the prescribed route to the civic franchise was via membership of one of the city's corporate organisations – its trade and craft companies or 'guilds' – and that only guild members would exercise political power in the city (see Rappaport 1989, 31-35). Consequently, virtually all London citizens were also guild members, the two identities being so closely entwined as to be virtually inseparable with the two oaths of admission frequently being sworn in separate ceremonies on the same day.<sup>4</sup> Given the duplex nature of early modern citizenship, the urban freeman of the 1590s is perhaps best understood as a 'corporate citizen' and the freedom as a form 'corporate citizenship'.<sup>5</sup>

Steve Rappaport has described the freedom as 'the most important criterion upon which was based the distribution of urban privileges in the sixteenth century' (1989, 29; see also Selwood 2010, 39). Shakespeare, however, was unlikely to have benefited from those privileges during his time in London (see also J.M. Archer 2005, 1). London-born sons of freemen were entitled to apply for company membership and thereby citizenship by inheritance (or 'patrimony'), some obtained it through marriage to a freeman's widow or daughter, others purchased it by paying a fine in a process known as 'freed by redemption', and a few were granted it through city or royal patronage, but of the various routes to corporate citizenship completion of a lengthy apprenticeship in London was by far the most common.<sup>6</sup> As a married adult migrant to London, Shakespeare was ineligible for the first and second, appears not to have resorted to the third, been a recipient of the fourth or pursued the fifth. In time he would purchase a coat of arms, style himself a gentleman, become one of the 'King's Men' and be expected to wear royal livery on ceremonial occasions, yet in London he remained a 'foreigner', as adult English migrants from beyond the City were termed (overseas immigrants were 'aliens' or 'strangers').<sup>7</sup> Whether his outsider status influenced how Shakespeare viewed the emerging culture of citizenship in the capital we can only speculate; however, not being a freeman of the City no more prevented him from writing about citizens than his not being a king prevented him from writing about monarchs. As Shakespeare's status as a foreigner in London illustrates, citizens could be said to constitute 'a privileged group'<sup>8</sup> in that they possessed economic and political rights and privileges from which strangers, foreigners, non-free Englishmen and the overwhelming preponderance of women were excluded. Yet as an estimated two thirds to three quarters of the male population of the City of London in the 1590s were citizens and enjoyed the privileges of the freedom, the culture of citizenship was also an integral part of urban popular culture in London by the close of the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> An examination of Shakespeare and popular culture must therefore include some consideration of the impact on his writing of the increasingly self-conscious

and assertive culture of citizenship within the rapidly expanding metropolis in which he resided for much of his life and his plays were chiefly staged.<sup>10</sup>

*Richard III* may seem an odd choice of play for such a study. Asked to nominate the Shakespearean drama in which the word 'citizen', in its singular and plural forms, appears most frequently in the dialogue how many would answer *Richard III* (c. 1592)?<sup>11</sup> Yet it occurs nearly twice as often in this English history play (eleven occurrences in total) as it does in *Coriolanus* (the play with the second highest number of occurrences at six) and over five times as often as in *Julius Caesar* (two), a pair of plays set at the time of the Roman republic which turn on highly charged encounters between members of the governing elite and citizens of Rome. A survey of criticism would suggest that the lexical prevalence of citizens in *Richard III* is a statistical aberration, for while commentary on the citizens in the two Roman plays is commonplace those in *Richard III* typically receive only glancing attention despite the fact that key members of the ruling elite make a determined effort to sway the political sympathies of citizens at a crucial moment in *Richard III* as they do in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and like their counterparts in *Coriolanus* the citizens in *Richard III* participate in a process of popular election. However the outcome of popular political participation in *Richard III* appears, at first glance, to be the inverse of that in *Coriolanus*, for whereas Rome's citizens eventually block Coriolanus's nomination as consul and their tribunes secure his exile,<sup>12</sup> the initial refusal by London's citizens to proclaim Richard 'England's royal King' (3.7.18) is subsequently overturned by their mayor in the first quarto version and by the mayor and his companions in the First Folio text.<sup>13</sup> The comparative critical neglect of the citizens and of 'citizen language'<sup>14</sup> more generally in *Richard III* stems from the widespread perception that its freemen are meek at best and at worst ultimately complicit in Richard's tyranny. The view that London's citizens are marginal players in the drama of state and the play of history in *Richard III* has distracted attention from Shakespeare's broader engagement with citizen culture and discourse, which this paper will argue is much more extensive in *Richard III* than is generally recognised. Shakespeare's Richard of Gloucester commits his first major political blunder when he miscalculates the willingness of London's citizens to endorse his succession to the throne. A similar underestimation of the extent to which the emergent civic culture of 1590s London permeates the drama and inflects Richard's speech is commonplace in critical commentaries on *Richard III*.<sup>15</sup> The growing body of research on urbanisation and commercial exchange in early modern England makes this a timely moment to reappraise the intersection of citizens with history in Shakespeare's play.

## 2. *Political Capital*

*Richard III* is set predominantly in the City of London and its immediate environs, and the relationship between the City and the crown, citizens and

monarchs (both actual and potential) is an important consideration in the duke of Gloucester's bid to become king. Toward the end of act four, Richard marches from London never to return (4.4.448-451). Buckingham is executed in Salisbury at the outset of act five, and the remainder of the fifth act centres on the battle at Bosworth Field near Tamworth in Staffordshire where Richard encounters the armies of Richmond as they march 'towards London' (4.5.14). But apart from the execution of Rivers, Vaughan and Grey at Pomfret Castle (3.3), the first four acts of *Richard III* unfold in and about the city, and by the second scene of the fourth act Richard is enthroned. Richard Gloucester delivers his opening speech in a London street where he encounters first Clarence and then Hastings before intercepting Lady Anne as she accompanies Henry VI's hearse from St Paul's cathedral. Moments after promising Anne to see Henry's body interred at Chertsey monastery in Surrey (1.2.201-203), Richard redirects the pallbearers to Whitefriars priory in Fleet Street just beyond the city walls. Richard invites Anne to await him and instructs Clarence's executioners and later Catesby to report to him at Crosby Place, his London residence. Meanwhile, the royal court is resident in the palace of Westminster alongside the Thames, a short distance upriver from the City, and after the death of her husband Edward IV and the arrest of her brother Lord Rivers, Queen Elizabeth seeks sanctuary in nearby Westminster Abbey. On his first appearance Prince Edward is formally welcomed to London (3.1) and exits the stage '[w]ith a heavy heart' (3.1.149) for the royal Tower of London where he will be smothered alongside his brother, his uncle Clarence and Hastings already having been executed there. When Buckingham unexpectedly fails to persuade the citizens to elect Richard as their king at the Guildhall, the seat of London's municipal government, Richard launches a second attempt to secure the City's support for his coronation, this time at Baynard's Castle, the stronghold and former royal residence which lent its name to one of London's twenty-six wards.

Given the play's focus on how Richard becomes king, the fact that the majority of the action unfolds within the vicinity of London underscores the City's importance to the crown. Ever since the Great Rising of 1381 during the reign of Richard II,<sup>16</sup> England's sovereigns had been periodically reminded of the need to win and maintain the loyalty of Londoners to secure their hold on the throne. Long reliant on the municipal government's capacity to muster trained bands of militia to defend the capital and prosecute their wars, by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries successive Tudor and Stuart monarchs were also critically dependent on loans from the City to fund their reign (Bucholz and Ward 2012, 20, 83). Shakespeare's Richard too has every reason to court the favour of London's citizens and to seek to prevent the forces of Richmond from converging on a vital source and conduit of power in the kingdom. For it is above all as a locus and nexus of political capital that London features in Shakespeare's play. As is typical of plays

written before the printing in 1598 of John Stow's landmark work of urban chorography *A Survey of London* and remains characteristic of Shakespeare,<sup>17</sup> the evocation of material London in *Richard III* is sketchy at best. The clutch of well-known buildings which figure in the drama – the Tower of London, Westminster, Westminster Abbey, Crosby Place, Baynard's Castle and the Guildhall – do not serve to conjure up an intimate sense of the city's vicinities, neighbourhoods and communities. Rather than sharply differentiating London's constituent parts, each site functions as a metonym for a strand of power and authority – royal, religious, aristocratic and civic – which Richard seeks to spin into a single 'deadly web' (1.3.238-239), not neglecting to extend its tracery to the city's streets where he undertakes his bold seduction of Lady Anne and tries to persuade Elizabeth to support his espousal to her daughter. In each he finds willing agents to assist him in his designs – that is until Buckingham returns from the Guildhall to report that '[t]he citizens are mum and speak not a word' (3.7.3), stonily refusing to voice their assent to Richard supplanting Prince Edward as their future king. To determine what their silence signifies, we need to examine the culture of citizenship and its expression in the play more closely, for the importance of London's citizens is figured in Richard's language.

### 3. *Engendering the City: Wife/Royal Mistress/Whore*

For all his and Buckingham's assiduous courtship of citizens later in the drama, Richard's undisguised scorn for and hostility towards the first Londoner to feature in the dialogue is revealing of his true regard for the City. Long before the first citizens appear on stage in *Richard III* an infamous city-wife has made her presence felt at court. Directly after Richard confides to the audience that he has plotted to have his brother George, the duke of Clarence 'mewed up' in prison '[t]his day' (1.1.38), Clarence enters on cue 'with a guard of men' (1.1. sd.) who are escorting him to the Tower. 'Why this it is', Richard remarks disapprovingly, 'when men are ruled by women' (1.1.62). The audience well knows that Gloucester is the source (and proper subject) of the 'G' prophecy which prompted Clarence's arrest (1.1.32-40); however, 'Simple, plain Clarence' (1.1.118) believes Richard's allegation that the queen and her brother are behind his and Lord Hastings' imprisonment respectively (1.1.63-68), and extends the list of those with undue influence at court to include one 'Mistress Shore', the royal concubine to whom Hastings successfully sued for his liberty. Clarence's emphasis on the frequency with which heralds nightly 'trudge betwixt the king and Mistress Shore' (1.1.72-73; added emphasis) signals his contempt for an erotic thralldom which he implies has transformed King Edward (whose sexual caprice the heralds serve) into a figurative 'night-walker'<sup>18</sup> who prostitutes his majesty to satiate his lust for a commoner's wife. Clarence similarly mocks Hastings' debasing plea

to Mistress Shore to use her influence to win his 'delivery' from the Tower (1.1.74-75), the wordplay on childbirth emphasising the supposed gender reversal at Edward's court. To someone as acutely status and gender conscious as the duke of Gloucester that a lord chamberlain sued to a citizen's wife turned royal mistress for his release is held by Richard to be symptomatic of a world turned upside-down: to tolerate such topsy-turvydom would make liveried servants of royal princes and a deity of a common adulteress (1.1.76-80). Nevertheless as a Machiavellian rhetorician Richard aims solely at success, so although he too scorns Hastings' demeaning adoption of the posture of a 'humble suppliant' (1.1.74) to Mistress Shore, Richard is also quick to note that the stratagem worked and promptly presents himself as a 'poor devoted suppliant' (1.2.194) to effect Anne's seduction in the very next scene (1.2). Derision does not preclude transgressive simulation so long as such simulation advances Richard's political objectives.

In a play where most attempts to persuade or dissuade fail, except those undertaken by Richard and Buckingham, it is striking that we never hear the woman credited with winning Hastings' release from prison speak. The marginalization of Mistress Shore in *Richard III* runs counter to the play's most important sources and to her treatment in writings by several of Shakespeare's contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> Shore's wife is portrayed at length and relatively sympathetically by Thomas More in his *History of King Richard III*, by Thomas Churchyard in the tragedy of 'Shore's Wife' which he contributed to the expanded edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates* (printed in 1563), and in the Queen's Men's play *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (printed in 1594). Churchyard's poem was widely imitated in the plaintive literature in vogue in the 1590s which saw new laments of Shore's wife penned by Anthony Chute (1593), Michael Drayton (1597) and the anonymous author of the 'Wofull Lamentation of Mistress Jane Shore' (c. 1597), the success of Chute's *Bewtie Dishonoured* prompting Churchyard to issue an augmented version of his original poem in *Churchyard's Challenge* (1593). The subject of several ballads, including one by Thomas Deloney (1593), 'Jane' Shore (as the historical Elizabeth Shore is lastingly re-named) is also central to Thomas Heywood's two-part drama on *Edward IV* (1599). By contrast, Mistress Shore has no lines and does not appear on stage in either version of Shakespeare's play unless directors contrive to give her a mute walk-on part.<sup>20</sup>

In recounting Mistress Shore's socio-sexual rise and fall, these writers do not so much transcribe her history as construct an account of London's moral and political culture by means of her affecting story. Their rival estimations of Shore as injured wife, royal concubine and serial adulteress likewise offer alternative perspectives on the relationship between the City and the Crown. Thus Shore/London is variously depicted in these writings as the victim of royal predation and the corrupting effects of court culture; a dutiful, selfless and benevolent intermediary concerned to temper monarchical and aristocratic

excess; or as trading whorishly on appetites and desires. Richard Helgerson contends that 'Shakespeare's "Mistress Shore" ... is a figure of fun' and the object not only of Richard's and Clarence's mockery but also of 'Shakespeare's laughing scorn' (2000, 33, 37; added emphasis). Certainly Richard seeks to trivialize Mistress Shore's suasive power by disarticulating her into a selection of sexualized anatomical parts – 'a pretty foot, / A cherry lip, a bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue' (where 'tongue' carries the primary sense of 'speech' and is also sexual slang for 'cunt') – before further reducing her to a promiscuous sexual cipher or 'naught' (1.1.93-94, 98). The insinuation is that it was not her eloquence but her sexual appeal which moved the king. But while Richard and Clarence do indeed make the king's mistress the object of 'naught'-y jokes when first they talk of her, in the midst of their ribald exchange Richard also describes the queen and Shore as 'mighty gossips in this monarchy' (1.1.83), exaggeratedly attributing the power to imprison whom she chooses to the former and to liberate to the latter. Bernard Capp has shown that gossip was an important method by which women exercised informal authority in early modern England, and that the characterisation of gossip as female reflected male unease about its subversive potential to undermine their respect and authority (2003, see esp. 272-281). Richard voices such disquiet when he complains that, by socially elevating his mistress to the rank of gentry and marrying Lady Grey (a 'jealous, o'er-worn widow' of comparatively modest means and pedigree for a royal spouse), the king has permitted mere 'gossips' to exercise a destabilizing, oxymoronic power at court that threatens social and gender hierarchy (1.1.81-83).

Richard's mockery and subsequent demonization of Mistress Shore and disparagement of the king and Hastings for forming an amorous alliance with her betray his unease at the influence this city-wife (or City/wife) exerts within the precincts of the royal court. He ridicules those who have '[n]aught to do with Mistress Shore' (1.1.98), yet rather than nullifying Shore's wife Richard's repeated iteration of her surname and shifting socio-sexual identity as wife/mistress/whore ensures that she retains a place in the conventionally masculine and aristocratic narrative of 'great affairs' from which he would have her expunged. Insofar as Mistress Shore is to be remembered, Richard would have her caricatured as a 'harlot strumpet' (3.4.73); however King Edward's belated castigation of himself and his court for failing to plead for Clarence's life (2.1.104-132) sets Shore's intervention on Hastings' behalf in stark relief as a rare act of benevolence in an otherwise corrupt and corrupting courtly milieu. The more stridently Richard derides Mistress Shore the more power he ascribes her, the spurious allegation of practicing witchcraft attributing her with the demonic power to deform his body. As a female, commoner and adulteress, the transgressive influence Mistress Shore held with the former king makes her vulnerable to Richard's bogus accusation that she conspired with the queen to cause his 'death with devilish plots / Of damned witchcraft',

leaving him with a 'withered' arm (3.4.62-74) as evidence of their maleficia (see More 1963, 2.48). The notion that the queen would join in league with her husband's lover strains credulity, but Shore has abruptly ceased to be 'a figure of fun', least of all to Hastings whose hesitancy to condemn her is seized on by Richard as evidence of the lord chamberlain's complicity in plotting treason (3.4.75-77). Behind Richard's sneering contempt for Shore's adulterous wife lies the greater threat of topsy-turvydom posed by the City of London which Mistress Shore's sexual and discursive intimacy with Edward IV and Hastings presages. Typically characterized as female and, by the end of the sixteenth century, often as a fickle mistress (Gowing 2000, 131-132), London's perceived potential to destabilize social and gender hierarchy was a focus of the developing genre of city (or citizen) comedy. And it is this transgressive potentiality which is distilled in the person of Mistress Shore, a city-wife (*cf.* F, 3.7.8) who swayed a king and to whom a lord chamberlain was a suppliant for his liberty – social witchcraft indeed.

#### 4. *Citizen Culture*

Helgerson argues that 'Shakespeare suppressed Shore's wife' to prevent her 'profoundly transgressive' story from detracting from 'the monarch-centered history he was making his own' (2000, 44, 35, 51). However, he overstates the exclusion from the drama of 'the urban community for which Jane Shore stands' (55), first, because she is not the only representative of the urban middling sort in the play, and, second, because the playwright has fashioned a would-be monarch who judges it necessary to play the citizen and adopt citizen discourses to secure the throne. While the notorious Mistress Shore is an absent presence in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, freemen of the city play a tangible part in the unfolding political drama. Citizens are first seen and heard on stage in act two, scene three as news of Edward IV's death reaches London. Identified as citizens in the stage directions and speech prefixes, 3 Citizen addresses his two companions as 'masters' (10), indicating that they are freemen and heads of households.<sup>21</sup>

Much can be gleaned from the manner in which these three citizens converse with one another. For Phil Withington, discussion, debate and civility are not just 'modes of discourse and activity associated with corporate governance and citizenship' but 'defining attributes of ... corporate citizenship' that fostered the creation of a civic public sphere in later-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England by inculcating in citizens the habit of public discourse (2007, 1017-1018; quotations on 1020 and 1024). Shakespeare's trio of citizens exhibit all three discursive traits: they greet one another familiarly and courteously as neighbours and friends (1, 7, 19), share news of the king's demise, debate what the succession of a child to the throne bodes, and appraise the quality of counsel at court before accompanying one another 'to



the Justice' (47-48; 'Justices' in F). The informality with which they discuss affairs of state suggests that, while the death of their king is momentous, their engagement in public discourse is unexceptional, even mundane. 3 Citizen shows both insight and, as events prove, sound judgement in his derogatory estimation of the crown prince's counsellors and the danger posed by the duke of Gloucester, in particular. He also touches on an issue central to contemporary debates about tyrannicide: what to do if a country is governed by those that ought 'to be ruled, and not to rule' (2.3.30)? The question underpins the play and is addressed explicitly by Richmond in his battle oration when he justifies armed rebellion on the ground that Richard is '[a] bloody tyrant and a homicide' and as such is 'God's enemy': 'If you do sweat to put a tyrant down, / You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain' (5.3.252-253). 3 Citizen directs his observation at royal counsellors, not a royal sovereign, and obediently resolves to 'leave it all to God' (2.3.46). Yet his judgment that Gloucester and the queen's kindred are unfit to rule is arrestingly frank and couched in language very similar to that used by Sir Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum* (printed in 1583) to justify the exclusion of lowlier subjects from government. Having first divided the commonwealth hierarchically into four groups or 'sortes', 'gentlemen, citizens [and burgesses], yeomen artificers, and laborers' (1906, 1.16), Smith then distinguishes citizens and burgesses 'of some substance' (1.22) from 'marchantes or retailers which have no free lande', grouping the latter with various handicraftsmen as among 'the fourth sort of men' who were 'onelie to be ruled, not to rule other' (1.24).<sup>22</sup> That a speaker whom Smith may have grouped with 'the fourthe sort' (depending on his wealth and occupation) is so bold as to characterise members of the social and political elite as unfit to rule is suggestive of a more robust civic culture than commentators who remark only on 3 Citizen's politically quiescent resolution to 'leave it all to God' have allowed.

Further markers of civic culture can be detected in the amiable verbal exchanges which characterise this scene. Beyond indicating residential proximity, citizenship and guild status, the citizens' genial salutations, candid interchange of views and companionable departure exhibit the traditional virtue of 'good neighbourliness' which remained highly prized in Elizabethan London due to the widespread reliance on credit in the capital (Wrightson 2000, 79; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 74).<sup>23</sup> The need for credit arose because the supply of cash in circulation was inadequate to meet the demand generated, from the 1550s onwards, by the City's rapidly expanding population and its inflationary economy.<sup>24</sup> The dependence of London's market economy on the availability of credit placed a social premium on 'trust and the maintenance of human obligation' (Muldrew 1998, 125; see esp. 124-129), as credit was negotiated between individuals rather than institutionally with only a token sum, known as pledge money, used to seal the bargain (Muldrew 2001, 83). We see evidence of such trust in the citizens' frank exchange of views on the

implications of the succession and the blunt criticism of the duke of Gloucester and the queen's kindred (2.3.28-29) by 3 Citizen in an open discussion conducted on a London street. At a time when social exchange underwrote commercial exchange, social capital was a vital form of wealth. It was by fostering and maintaining personal bonds on which reputation, trust and thereby the provision of credit depended that neighbourliness supported the system of market exchange.<sup>25</sup> With cash scarce, London's burgeoning market economy was reliant on credit, its credit economy was in turn reliant on a moral economy in which a reputation for honesty earned trust, trust accrued credit, and credit enabled market exchanges to be transacted. The 'good neighbourliness' displayed by the citizens in this scene is thus not simply a residual social virtue; it sustained the circulation of material goods in 1590s London.

The dependency of commercial exchange on social exchange in London's credit economy slowed the erosion of neighbourliness caused by unprecedented demographic growth (see Finlay and Shearer 1986; Wrightson 2007, 21) and hostility towards the mounting influx of 'foreigners' and 'strangers' to the city (see Selwood 2010, esp. 19-50; Rappaport 1989, 42-47; I.W. Archer 1991, 4-5). That all three citizens have been called to attend a judicial proceeding may nevertheless suggest a wider breakdown in communal bonds. The multiple summonses 'to Justice' may be a symptom of the sharp rise in litigation and greater preparedness to resort to the law to settle disputes rather than to resolve them informally which characterised the period from about 1580 to 1640 (Muldrew 1998, 3).<sup>26</sup> However, no guard is present, no constable is needed to coerce their attendance, and their prompt response to being summoned – the haste of 2 Citizen eliciting the query 'Whither away *so fast?*' (1; added emphasis) – indicates a ready willingness to comply with the legal process. The citizens may themselves be high ranking civic officials serving as justices of the peace who have been called to attend a daily or quarter session where they were empowered to mete out summary justice and oversee poor relief.<sup>27</sup> If so their summons is an opportune reminder of London's powers of self-government and the participation of citizens in every aspect of municipal administration. Alternatively, if they are attending an assize court, the fact that freemen of London had the privilege of attending their own assizes also underscores the City's autonomy (Withington 2005, 8).

### 5. *Playing the Citizen*

The contrast between this neighbourly encounter of freemen on a London street with aristocratic conduct at the royal court in Westminster could hardly be more striking. At court, proximity and familiarity have bred mutual distrust, duplicity and inveterate hostility, as Margaret wryly observes (1.3.184-185). Richard Gloucester's chilling assertion at the end of *3 Henry VI*, 'I am myself alone' (5.6.84), and his present delight in pronouncing himself 'subtle,

false, and treacherous' (1.1.37) could not be more antithetical to the moral economy on which London's credit economy was contingent. Yet Richard's language is uniquely strewn with idioms of the marketplace (see Siegel 1978 and 1986; Berry 1985, 22-23): he intends that 'George be packed with post-horse up to heaven' (1.1.145) as if he were a bundle of goods; smugly rebukes himself for plotting so far in advance that 'I run before my horse to market' (1.1.159); equates service to his brother Edward with being 'a packhorse in his great affairs' (1.3.121); and remarks that the imprisoned Clarence is 'well repaid' (1.3.309). Contriving the execution of one brother and fervently wishing the death of another are equated by Richard to securing a pecuniary advantage by eliminating market competitors: 'When they are gone, then must I count my gains' (1.1.161). On successfully seducing Anne over the bleeding corpse of Henry VI, he mockingly suggests that Anne's willingness to find him 'a marvellous proper man' warrants a shopping spree: 'I'll be at charges for a looking glass, / And entertain some score or two of tailors / To study fashions to adorn my body' (1.2.242-245). In the Folio version of the so called 'wooing-by-proxy' scene (4.4) Richard endeavours to lure Elizabeth into supporting his proposal to marry her daughter by vowing to recompense the dowager queen for her suffering. Appealing to her greed and ambition, he invites her to conceive of her grief as a loan which he pledges to repay with compound interest, repairing 'all the ruins of distressful times ... with double riches of content' (323), 'Advantaging ... love with interest / Of ten times double gain of happiness' (327-328). Confident that he has succeeded in tempting her, Richard dismisses Elizabeth as a 'shallow, changing woman' (436), but soon after we learn that she did not credit his oaths and instead has 'heartily consented' that Richmond 'shall espouse ... her daughter' (4.5.17-18). 'Credit ... was based on mutable trust' in early modern England (Muldrew 2001, 86), and Elizabeth's trust in Richard is spent. She has rightly discerned that Richard 'intend[s] to prosper' but has no intention to 'prosper *and* repent', despite his protestations to the contrary (402; added emphasis). Earlier Gloucester had parodied Elizabeth's strained claim that she 'had rather be a country servant maid / Than a great queen' to escape his 'gross taunts' (1.3.106-109), professing that he 'had rather be a pedlar' than a king (1.3.148). His preferred occupation is apposite, as the itinerant profession of pedlar or 'petty chapman' was viewed as socially 'masterless' and physically rootless and so classed as a profession of vagrancy and declared illegal under the vagrancy acts of 1572 and 1598.<sup>28</sup> The perceived social deviancy of the Elizabethan pedlar as an 'unbound' and unsettled subject neatly matches Richard's deviant and boundless aspiration for the crown.

Describing the crown on one occasion as his 'ripe revenue' (3.7.138), Richard repeatedly monetizes worth; however, monetizing worth was an increasingly vexed process from the 1550s until the great recoinage in 1696 as not only was the supply of coins deficient, but their value was also often

suspect and, like trust, mutable. The value of gold and silver coins in early modern England was based on the scarcity of those precious metals. Although a coin's exchange value was related to the intrinsic value of its gold, silver or copper content, with the practice of clipping coins rampant and an extraordinary mix of old, foreign and counterfeit coins in circulation, determining a coin's intrinsic worth was often difficult. 'Thus, what was supposed to be *the* standard measure of the value of all things in exchange remained itself an extremely variable commodity, whose market worth had to be judged based on its quality, just like any other commodity' (Muldrew 2001, 89, 90).<sup>29</sup> Several of Richard's expressions tap into late Elizabethan concerns about the quantity and quality of contemporary coinage. In *3 Henry VI* Richard Gloucester confesses that sovereignty is 'the golden time' (3.2.127) he dreams on despite knowing full well that his gaining possession of the crown is 'more unlikely / Than to accomplish twenty golden crowns' (3.2.151-152), a reference to the scarcity of gold coins in circulation in the crisis years of the 1590s.<sup>30</sup> At the outset of *Richard III* he describes himself as 'rudely stamped' (1.1.16), comparing himself to an unskilfully made or counterfeit coin (OED *v.* III.4.a). Before asking Buckingham whether he consents to the princes' murder, Richard warns his accomplice 'now I do play the touch / To try if thou be current gold indeed' (4.2.7-8), likening this trial of Buckingham's loyalty to testing whether a coin is genuine gold by rubbing it against a touchstone (OED *v.* I.8.a). Richard uses a variant of the pedlar/king trope when, having seduced Anne in the most unpropitious of circumstances, he compares his improbable love-suit to an 'all or nothing' wager staking his dukedom against a 'beggary denier' (1.2.239), a minuscule French copper coin, worth a fraction of a penny, which the poor were compelled to accept as among the few inferior coins available (Muldrew 2001, 100). He uses wordplay on the gold coin known as a 'noble' to express his contempt for Edward's elevation of members of the Woodville faction to the peerage, complaining that 'promotions / Are daily given to ennoble those / That scarce some two days since were worth a noble' (1.3.80-83). After Dorset impertinently dismisses Margaret as 'lunatic' (1.3.250) she similarly reminds him that his 'fire-new stamp of honour is scarce current' (1.3.252), comparing Dorset to a newly minted coin whose novelty provokes doubts as to its worth. Richard calculates gains, refers to court rivals as counterfeit coins which 'yet go current from suspicion' (2.1.92), and is confident that 'corrupting gold' (4.2.33) can purchase immoral service.

Together with his practice of sharing a joke with the audience through wordplays and sardonic asides, Richard Gloucester's use of everyday commercial expressions is part of a broader rhetorical strategy to ingratiate himself with a popular urban audience. As Ralph Berry remarks, such verbal devices make it seem 'as though Richard were saying "I am really one of you, you know"' (1985, 22-23). Though he derides the Woodville faction as upstarts and never tires of asserting his social pre-eminence at court, Richard's self-styled plainness

(1.3.51) and mockery of members of the titled elite (which extends to 'blunt upbraidings' of no less a person than the queen) (1.3.104) erode the social distinction between the commons and the nobility. With his bustling energy, plain-speaking and frequent adoption of everyday monetary and mercantile idioms, the duke of Gloucester can sometimes seem more like a late Elizabethan citizen than a leading peer. But while his colloquialisms are disarming and his humour engaging, alarmingly for citizens Richard gives 'business' a bad name. The word takes on sinister connotation after he encourages Clarence's executioners to be 'about ... [their] business' (1.3.350), an instruction which Buckingham echoes when he directs Sir William Catesby to 'effect this business soundly' (3.1.184) on sending him to gauge whether Hastings would support Richard's installation as king. Even Richard's solicitation of the opinions of Elizabeth and the Duchess of York on the proposal that Prince Edward be accompanied to London by a small retinue is a ploy to lull suspicion and make them complicit in a 'weighty business' (2.2.113) which proves fatal to the two young princes, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey. Margaret characterises Richard as a demonic 'factor' or business agent employed 'to buy souls' for hell (4.4.67). Not content to be a 'lowly factor for another's gain' (3.7.124), Richard schemes with Buckingham to usurp the throne in a joint enterprise which he refers to as 'our business' (3.4.39). Their compact dissolves when each believes the other has failed to demonstrate the reciprocity expected of a business partner and 'near' neighbour. Having formerly treated Buckingham as his 'other self' (2.2.120), Richard resolves that 'Buckingham / No more shall be the neighbour to my counsel' (4.2.42-43) after Buckingham requests 'some breath, some little pause' before declaring whether he will 'consent that [the princes] ... shall die' (4.2.22-23). For his part, Richard breaks his promise to award Buckingham the earldom of Hereford and some of Edward IV's moveable possessions on becoming king (3.1.193, 4.2.88-91), replying dismissively that he is 'not in the giving vein today' (4.2.117) when Buckingham presses him to keep his word. Buckingham falls at the hands of the person whom he 'trusted most' (5.1.17); needless to say, as his business with Richard was 'underhand, corrupted, foul injustice' (5.1.6), litigation is not an option.

Richard appeals to citizen morality by remarking disapprovingly on Edward's 'evil diet' (1.1.139) and sexual incontinence and affirming a preference for plainness, piety and simplicity (1.2.198-203; 1.3.47-53, 302-304; 2.1.51-70; 3.7 and *passim*); however, his blunt admission that he contrives to 'seem a saint when most I play the devil' (1.3.334) together with his inveterate untrustworthiness and self-serving violation of neighbourly reciprocity set him increasingly at odds with the ideals of the late Elizabethan culture of citizenship. The Marxist critic Paul N. Siegel argues that Shakespeare incarnates 'in the monstrous form of Richard III the spirit of the bourgeoisie at the time of its menacing approach to power' (1978, 106 and 1986, 85). But if Richard's single-minded pursuit of the crown is meant to be construed as a damning

embodiment of the individualist, capitalist and acquisitive ethos which Siegel dubiously attributes to 'the most aggressive section of the bourgeoisie' in 1590s England (1978, 101; 1986, 80), why is the language of the citizens in *Richard III* devoid of commercial terms or grasping, materialist sentiment? As noted at the outset of this essay, the identity of 'citizen' was a duplex one in 1590s London; in *Richard III*, however, the identity of the politically enfranchised citizen is strictly isolated verbally from that of the commercially enfranchised company member. Contemporary fears that the self-interested pursuit of material gain was undermining morality and weakening social bonds are transposed in *Richard III* from the corporate citizen to the corrupt prince. 2 Executioner suggests that anyone who seeks to thrive in a town or a city must abandon his conscience: 'It beggars any man that keeps it. It is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well, endeavours to trust to himself and to live without it' (1.4.120-123). However, it is not commercial dealings in the marketplace but underhand dealings at court which have tempted him to banish his conscience, and it is an ambitious prince, not a greedy citizen, who has importuned him to murder for money. His accomplice proves a willing journeyman in murder and kills Clarence for the promised fee,<sup>31</sup> but despite claiming that his conscience is 'In the Duke of Gloucester's purse' (1.4.109) the moral qualms of 2 Executioner ultimately trump the enticement of pecuniary reward (1.4.106-107, 110). An inveterate schemer, Richard ruthlessly exploits the immoral economy of power at a court where even grief is tallied (4.4.28-109). The success of Richard's murderous enterprise is critically reliant on its speedy dispatch. We glimpse in 2 Citizen a figure momentarily bewildered by the hectic pace of city life, but as previously noted it is Richard whose relentless, bustling tempo (see 1.1.151 and 5.3.285) consistently wrong-foots those around him. Craig Muldrew argues that, 'For the middling sort, especially, who depended on the market for their livelihood, wealth was not so much a state of ownership or inclusion in a privileged group, as a continual *process* of ethical judgement about credit' (2001, 98). The rise to the throne of a self-confessed counterfeit who prides himself on his falsity exposes the wholesale failure of the ruling elite to exercise ethical judgment in time. For as Richard observes with disarming frankness, 'none are for me / That look into me with considerate eyes' (4.2.28-29).

### 6. *Popular Election*

One of the signal features of Shakespeare's play, as of Sir Thomas More's *The History of King Richard III*, is that Richard's progress to the crown is dependent on successive acts of consent and complicity. Who pronounces 'Amen' when Buckingham salutes Richard as 'England's royal king' (3.7.18, 220) is therefore critical to determining whether London's citizens too are culpable. The person whose utterances most implicate London's citizens in the enthronement of a

tyrant is the city's lord mayor. It is in the immediate aftermath of Hastings' execution that Richard turns his full attention to the City and seeks to lure its mayor and citizenry into sanctioning his usurpation of the crown. In act three, scene five Richard and Buckingham are anxious to persuade the mayor that Hastings was a traitor whom they were forced to execute 'against the form of law' due to 'the extreme peril of the case' (3.5.40-42).

Shakespeare's departures from his principal source in this scene are illuminating. Although Shakespeare did not consult the original Latin version of More's *History* directly in writing *Richard III*, the English version (translated by More's nephew William Rastell in 1557) had been incorporated wholesale into the two chronicles on which the playwright mainly relied, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548) and *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (1587) of Raphael Holinshed. Holinshed's *Chronicles* makes its indebtedness to More explicit, stating that More's unfinished *History* has been followed 'word for word'.<sup>32</sup> More reports in his *History* that news of Hastings' death 'flew ... swiftly through the citie, & ... farder about like a winde in euery mans ere', and that the protector, 'entending to set some colour vpon y<sup>e</sup> matter, sent in al y<sup>e</sup> hast for many substauncial men out of the city into the Tower' (2.52), 'substauncial men' being men of wealth and hence of social standing (OED *A.adj.1.7*). More names the then lord mayor as Edmund Shaw (or Shaa) but makes no mention of him being in attendance on that occasion; however he states that the mayor was 'made of Counsaill' by Richard to advise him how best his intention to possess the crown 'might be first broken to the people' (2.58). According to More the mayor was enticed by the prospect of advancement 'whereof he was of a proud hart highly desirouse' (2.58). By contrast the mayor in *Richard III* is not identified by name, only by his political office, making the role more presentist. London's mayor is also the lone citizen called to the Tower, which he enters not knowing what has occasioned his urgent summons, the news of Hastings' abrupt beheading not having had time to fly 'like a winde in euery mans ere'. Thrust on his arrival into a scene of bewildering commotion with Richard and Buckingham both dressed in armour (3.5.sd) and behaving as if they feared an assault on the royal stronghold was imminent, he is wholly unprepared for the grisly spectacle which confronts him when Catesby appears bearing Hastings' severed head. That the mayor is unaccompanied and caught off guard by the apparent tumult he encounters on entering the Tower helps to account for his timid response to the lord chamberlain's extrajudicial execution. He requires no evidence of Hastings' alleged treason or of a wider coup plot before pronouncing himself satisfied that the lord chamberlain 'deserved his death' and that the Lord Protector and Buckingham were right to execute Hastings without a trial as a warning to other 'false traitors' (3.5.45, 40, 46-47). Although Shakespeare's mayor appears to be daunted by circumstance and overawed by the two dukes' high rank rather than driven by personal

ambition, the mayor's willingness to condone the execution of a high-ranking court official 'against the form of law' (3.5.40) is a disturbing development and contrasts both with the dutiful observance of the judicial process shown by the three citizens summoned 'to the Justice' earlier in the play and with the ensuing silence of the citizens at the Guildhall (3.7.3, 17-22).

Because the personal motives of the mayor of London remain opaque in *Richard III*, Richard's fleeting reference to Mistress Shore plays a greater part in framing the mayor's meek response. In the *History* Richard's claim that Shore's wife 'went about to bewitch him, & ... was of counsel w<sup>t</sup> the lord chamberlein to destroy him' (2.54) fails to convince Londoners, and 'euery man laughed' when the protector resorted to denouncing her for being 'nought of her body' since this had long been known by 'al y<sup>e</sup> world' (2.54). In *Richard III* Gloucester condemns Mistress Shore as a witch during a council session as a ploy to entrap Hastings; when he addresses the mayor Gloucester merely refers obliquely to Hastings' 'conversation with Shore's wife' (3.5.30). The comment is typically glossed as a coy euphemism for sexual intercourse; however, Richard's carefully chosen words leave open the insinuation that Mistress Shore may have been acting as an intermediary for others in the city who supported Hastings' alleged coup attempt. By responding that he 'never looked for better at his [Hastings'] hands / After he once fell in with Mistress Shore' (3.5.48-49), the mayor hastily distances himself and the City from their actions, sexual and political. Interestingly, as a consequence of Shakespeare's reworking of the episode, the sexual morality of the urban middling sort becomes the ostensible standard against which a lord chamberlain is judged and found wanting by a lord mayor.

While the mayor's extreme obsequiousness in undertaking to acquaint their 'duteous citizens' with Richard's and Buckingham's 'just proceedings' (3.5.63-64) appears craven, it is equally striking that two such high-ranking nobles are so anxious to assuage the popular alarm which they anticipate their unlawful execution of Hastings may provoke in the capital. Buckingham is fearful that 'the citizens ... may / Misconster us ... and wail his death' (3.5.58-59) and Gloucester is concerned 'To avoid the carping censures of the world' (3.5.66). Despite the mayor's abject display of loyalty, Richard urges Buckingham to hurry after the mayor to the Guildhall with instructions to deliver a speech 'Infer[ring] the bastardy' of the former king and his children (3.5.72, 83-91). Not content with challenging Prince Edward's lineal right, Richard seeks to turn popular sentiment against the former king by having Buckingham tell the assembly that King Edward executed a citizen 'Only for saying he would make his son / Heir to the Crown – meaning (indeed) his own house', and that Edward's 'bestial appetite ... stretched to their servants, daughters, wives' whom he made 'his prey' (3.5.72-81). In the Folio version Buckingham makes specific reference to Edward IV's 'enforcement of the city wives' (3.7.8). This brash attempt to appeal to citizen morality and self-interest



ends in abject failure. According to fable Amphion built the walls of ancient Thebes by charming the stones into place with his moving eloquence and music; Buckingham's attempt to 'play the orator' (3.5.92) has precisely the opposite effect and turns the citizens into 'dumb statues or breathing stones' who look 'deadly pale' with fear (3.7.21-22). Rather than crying out 'God save Richard, England's royal King!' on cue, '[t]he citizens are mum and speak not a word' (3.7.3). If they are to be addressed in the seat of civic government, the citizens require that it is a civic official, the Recorder, who addresses them (3.7.25-26). Civic culture limits, albeit temporarily, the reach of aristocratic authority and ambition. Buckingham's inability to persuade the citizens in the Guildhall to proclaim Richard their king is an example of a failed election.<sup>33</sup> In a play in which a tyrant rises to power by finding willing accomplices and exploiting the power of persuasion to secure acquiescence, the silence of the citizens is politically and morally highly charged.

The Scrivener gives eloquent expression to the ethical quandary of remaining silent in the face of wrongdoing and deceit on the part of the powerful. In his *History* More records the scepticism with which London's citizens responded to Richard's repeated attempts to win their support. The 'many substauncial men' summoned to the Tower were not taken in by the allegations levelled against Hastings but dissembled their disbelief, 'as though no man mistrusted y<sup>e</sup> mater which of trouth no man beleued' (2.53). The proclamation, which Richard issued 'w[ith]in .iii. houres' of Hastings' beheading, was so lengthy and 'so fair written ... y<sup>e</sup> eueri child might wel perceiue, that it was prepared before' (2.54). And so it proved when, after hearing it read out at Paul's Cross, a schoolmaster reportedly remarked aloud on the incongruity between the 'shortnes of y<sup>e</sup> time' which the protector had supposedly had to prepare the document and 'the length of y<sup>e</sup> matter', prompting a nearby merchant to remark drolly that 'it was written by profecy' (2.54). In *Richard III* disbelief of the official version of events is similarly voiced by a common citizen. Unlike the discerning schoolmaster and the sardonic merchant, however, the Scrivener does not feature in More's *History* (though one would have had a hand, literally, in documenting Hastings' fall). Much as the lord mayor in *Richard III* is identified solely by his political office, so the Scrivener is identified solely by his occupation (3.6.1-7), and it is his occupation as a skilled craftsman which has afforded him a chilling insight into the disparity between the official and actual sequence of events surrounding Hastings' execution. He not only holds '*in his hand*' the indictment of the good Lord Hastings' (3.6.0 sd), but the 'set hand' in which the official document has been composed is also his handiwork – 'Eleven hours I spent to write it over' (3.6.5). While his involvement in making a fair copy of the charges against Hastings potentially implicates him in the attempt to legitimise the lord chamberlain's execution, to the contrary the Scrivener uses his expert knowledge of penmanship to establish that the indictment is fraudulent. He realises that the draft version

must have been composed several hours *before* the alleged treason plot was supposedly discovered and Hastings was condemned because Catesby delivered the draft to him 'yesternight'. And he knows from experience that it would have taken 'full as long' to write as the formal copy, yet the indictment purports *and ought lawfully to be* the 'sequel' to those developments (3.6.4-7).<sup>34</sup> The Scrivener's knowledge of his craft exposes Richard's Machiavellian craft, yet the Scrivener is troubled by his own silence, which he regards as symptomatic of a society grown so corrupt that 'such bad dealing must be seen in thought' (3.6.14). But of course, in performance, the Scrivener does speak out publicly about the 'palpable device' which he has detected and shares his misgivings via print with an audience of readers, so he is neither 'so gross' as not to see nor 'so blind' morally as to say 'he sees it not' (3.6.10-12).

The Scrivener's fourteen-line 'quasi-sonnet' (Lull, ed., 2009, 3.6. n. 1-14) is one of the most arresting speeches in the play. However it is the silence of his fellow citizens at the Guildhall which reverberates most loudly. Until Buckingham reports on how his speech to the citizens at London's Guildhall fared, he and Richard have consistently won the compliance they needed to advance toward their goals. When Richard, anxious for news of whether he has won popular support for his bid to possess the crown, asks Buckingham 'what say the citizens?' Buckingham's stunned response, 'The citizens are mum and speak not a word' marks a turning point in the play (3.7.1-3). At first glance it may appear that Buckingham's failure is only a temporary setback which Richard swiftly reverses when he re-stages his 'election' within the precincts of Baynard's Castle. But the composition of the electorate at Baynard's Castle is very different to that at the Guildhall. In the first quarto Buckingham states that 'the Mayor and citizens' (3.7.61) have come to Baynard's Castle to confer with Richard on 'matters of great moment' (3.7.61-62); in the Folio version Buckingham specifies that the group of citizens comprises 'the Mayor, and aldermen' (3.7.65). The distinction is significant and bears directly on a second crucial variation between the two texts. The central question is whether the 'citizens entreat' Richard to become their king, as the lord mayor claims in both versions (3.7.181; *F*, 3.7.200). In the quarto an ensuing speech prefix indicates that 'A CITIZEN' urges Richard to recall the citizens as they make their exit; however, the mayor alone responds 'Amen' to Buckingham's cry: 'Long live, Richard, England's royal king!' (3.7.202, 220-221). In the Folio it is Catesby who urges Richard to recall the citizens but, according to a variant speech prefix, 'ALL' (not just the mayor) pronounce amen in response to Buckingham's exclamation proclaiming Richard their king (3.7.219, 239). But to whom does this 'ALL' refer? To the mayor and a clutch of the city's aldermen, as Buckingham's earlier comment (noted above) makes clear. The distinction is critical as it differentiates the silence of the multitude of citizens gathered at the Guildhall from the assent voiced at Baynard's Castle by a select number of London's civic elite.

Key elements of London's civic government were formally oligarchic. Executive authority resided with the twenty-six member court of alderman, each of whom held office for life. All aldermen customarily belonged to one of London's twelve most prosperous and powerful livery companies, known as the 'The Great Guilds', as did all mayors. And it was the aldermen who chose which of the two nominees, drawn from their ranks and selected by the liverymen, would serve as the next mayor.<sup>35</sup> The expectation that the City's governors would maintain the custom of communal feasting was another factor which further restricted access to the most senior and powerful civic offices, since the office-holder was expected to subsidise the growing cost of the annual cycle of civic commensality. As a result, in the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign the rising cost of office-holding meant that many were dissuaded from standing for the highest civic offices, and the positions of alderman, sheriff and mayor had become 'the preserve of the wealthy'.<sup>36</sup> Thus while London's administrative substructure (the subdivision of its 26 wards into 242 precincts and 111 parishes) meant that civic participation in local administration was fairly widespread and extended far beyond the mayoralty and the court of aldermen (I.W. Archer 1991, 64-69; I.A. Archer 2000; Withington 2005, 52-53), executive power was highly concentrated and stratified by wealth and guild membership. More describes the episode at Baynard's Castle as a 'mockishe eleccion' (2.82), and this is what both versions of Shakespeare's *Richard III* stage. In neither the quarto nor the Folio do Buckingham and Richard succeed in persuading the corporate body of enfranchised freemen to acclaim Richard king. In the quarto the 'many' prove resistant to persuasion and twice over 'say not a word'; in the Folio version the only citizens who voice assent are drawn from the ranks of the City's oligarchic 'few'.

### 7. *Theatre of a City*

If 'citizenship provided an identity which accelerated politicization' in early modern England (I.W. Archer 2000, 27), it was because citizenship in Elizabethan England consisted in much more than membership of a guild and possession of 'the freedom'; it was participatory and discursive. As self-governing communities the guild and the incorporated city or borough both 'provided a framework, or structure, for continuous and systematic public activity' by freemen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Withington 2007, 1017). Phil Withington argues that, in the course of the sixteenth century, the participatory and discursive nature of both guild and municipal administration 'intersected with the ideals of civic humanism to create a new kind of urban political culture' and 'what might be termed a "civic public sphere"' (2007, 1018). The emerging outlines of such a civic public sphere are perceptible in *Richard III*, not least when the body of corporate citizens gathered together at the Guildhall resist tyranny by stonily refusing to assent to the nomination of Richard as their king. Their silence does not prevent Richard from seizing

the crown, it merely withholds from the usurper the popular legitimation he seeks. However, the very fact that he makes two concerted attempts to be elected king by the citizens of London and feels obliged to play the citizen to win their support speaks volumes. Richard boasts of being 'born so high' that he 'scorns the sun' (1.3.259-261) and mocks Edward IV and Hastings for suing to Mistress Shore, yet it is Richard who whorishly prostitutes his tongue and speaks like a citizen to court popular favour.

The incursion of the City and of citizens into the drama of state and the play of history is a little regarded yet recurrent feature of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. When Buckingham welcomes Prince Edward to London he calls the City Edward's 'chamber' (3.1.1), a reference to the traditional conception of the capital as *camera regis*, 'the king's chamber' (see Munro 2005, 12, 77, 83). Conventionally, the trope affirms the subordination of the City to the Crown, yet on this occasion the audience's foreknowledge of Buckingham's malign intentions and the prince's fate taint it with menace. However, it is not Buckingham's treachery which alone unsettles the conventional application of the trope in *Richard III*. For in this highly meta-theatrical drama, we are especially mindful that when Prince Edward enters London he also enters onto the stage of a commercial playhouse which was itself a product of London's expanding market economy (see Agnew 1986; Bruster 1992; Howard 2007). The London setting, the incorporation of citizens, Richard's adoption of citizen idioms and direct involvement of citizens in pivotal affairs of state through his failed attempts at popular election transform the playhouse into a *camera civica* or 'city chamber' and, momentarily, into a *camera civium* or 'citizen's chamber'. It is into this civic and commercial chamber that successive Shakespearean rulers and would-be rulers, English and Roman, are obliged to step, and it is within the walls of this 'theatre of a city'<sup>27</sup> that several judge it necessary, advantageous or both to try their hand at playing the citizen to secure power.

<sup>1</sup> Arguably commercial expansion is a feature of 'structural urbanisation', a term used by urban historians to describe the concentration of 'large-scale, coordinated activities', such as 'a centralized state, the production and exchange of goods via large-scale markets, the organization and delivery of resources, especially water and services such as trash collection', and coordinated transportation. Karen Newman argues that the confluence of demographic and structural urbanisation led to 'an unprecedented concentration of both financial and cultural capital and ... distinctive urban behaviours, social geographies, and new forms of sociability in the early modern city' (2007, 2-3).

<sup>2</sup> Boulton's estimate of 70,000 in 1550 is relatively conservative and indicates a near trebling of London's population by 1600 (1987, 3). Finlay and Shearer estimate 'around 120,000 in 1550' (1986, 48); Harding considers this to be inflated and offers a tentative estimate of 61,000-75,000 for the period 1548-50 (1990, 123, and table 1 on 112). Keene puts the number closer to 80,000 (2001, 7; see also Finlay 1981; Newman 2007, 2). Rappaport excludes the suburbs and outparishes of the City to arrive at an estimated population of about 150,000 in 1600 (1989, 61, n.1).

<sup>3</sup> Boulton remarks that, as its death rate exceeded its birth rate, 'most of London's growth was sustained by immigration – particularly the immigration of young adults'. He calculates that, 'for the period 1550 to 1650 ... one in eight of the survivors of the nation's births would have been destined to have direct experience of life in the capital' (1987, 3; see also Bucholz and Ward 2012, 64–70).

<sup>4</sup> After being 'called to the freedom' by swearing an oath before the masters and wardens of their guild at the company hall and paying a fee, new companymen usually went to London's Guildhall later that same day or soon after to be sworn a citizen of London, completing what was in effect a duplex ceremony for conferring municipal privileges (see Rappaport 1989, 23–24; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 80).

<sup>5</sup> I borrow the terms 'corporate citizen' and 'corporate citizenship' from Phil Withington (2007). Theodore B. Leinwand proposes 'merchant-citizen' but acknowledges that this hyphenated term blurs important distinctions in status and economic activity among merchants involved in overseas trade, shopkeepers (householders) who had no such trade links, and journeymen (1986, 21).

<sup>6</sup> The lawyer John Manningham reported that 'almost any man for some 40£. may buy his freedom, and these are called freed by redemption'; nonetheless, over eighty per cent of company admissions were through apprenticeships (Porter 2009, 41; see also Rappaport 1989, 24), and even those entitled to claim the freedom by inheritance often undertook apprenticeships (Ramsay 1975, 34). On the methods of gaining the freedom see also Barry 2000, 191–192.

<sup>7</sup> See also J.M. Archer 2005, 1, 9. Though Shakespeare was a foreigner in London, his father's artisanal identity as a glove maker and involvement in town politics in Stratford-upon-Avon would have afforded the playwright some insight into the status, culture and administrative roles of burgesses.

<sup>8</sup> Wrightson 2000, 80. Although no law barred them from citizenship, in practice few women became citizens. Some women apprenticed, 'usually as seamstresses or textile workers' (Bucholz and Ward 2012, 79). On women and guild status see Rappaport 1989, 36–42. On how city women pursued advancement despite being prevented from participating fully in most formal institutions see Hubbard 2012.

<sup>9</sup> 'Within the City therefore freemen were not a privileged minority élite but were ubiquitous in the social order' (Boulton 1987, 151; see also Pearl 1979, 13–14; Rappaport 1989, 53, 112; I.W. Archer 2000, 27). The percentage of residents who were freemen was likely to have been lower in the suburbs, where population growth was most concentrated (Finlay and Shearer 1986; Merritt 2001, 1).

<sup>10</sup> It is notable, for example, that Thomas More, a company member, citizen and former undersheriff of London, regularly refers to London's aldermen as the *senate*, the Guildhall as the *forum*, and never refers to the English as *subjects* in the Latin version of his *History of King Richard III*, doing so only once in the English version (More 1963, 2.62); (Wegemer 2007, 40–41).

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Arnold's *The Third Citizen: Shakespeare's Theatre and the Early Modern House of Commons* (2007) is typical in including chapters on the *Henry VI* plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* but not on *Richard III*. John Michael Archer devotes approximately six of the 211 pages of his *Citizen Shakespeare: Freemen and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (2005) to *Richard III*, but the play sits uneasily within the framework of 'Civil Butchery' devised for the chapter on Shakespeare's English Histories.

<sup>12</sup> On popular participation in civic politics in *Coriolanus* see Kaegi 2008.

<sup>13</sup> In the first quarto the mayor alone pronounces 'Amen' (3.7.221) whereas in the Folio version the speech prefix 'ALL' indicates that the accompanying citizens do so as well (3.7.239), a point to which I will be returning. All citations from the first quarto printed in 1597 refer to *The First Quarto of King Richard III*, ed. by Peter Davison (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996). All citations from the First Folio version (1623) refer to the Folio-based edition of *King Richard III*, ed. by Janis Lull (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, updated edition 2009).

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the expression from J.M. Archer 2005, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Shakespeareans are not alone in devoting insufficient attention to urban culture; Phil Withington argues that 'historians of both English politics and the English state have vastly underestimated the urban dimension of their subjects' (2005, 7).

<sup>16</sup> Also known as the Peasants' Revolt or Wat Tyler's Rebellion, the uprising was reportedly quelled after London's lord mayor mortally wounded Wat Tyler during a parley with the king.

<sup>17</sup> Rowland 2010, 24; on Shakespeare see 27-34. On the influence of Stow's *Survey* on citizen history see Bonahue 1998; see also I.W. Archer 1995; Manley 1995; Merritt 2001.

<sup>18</sup> A 'night-walker' is a term for a prostitute *OED* *n.* 1b.

<sup>19</sup> On versions of the Shore legend and its cultural importance see Pratt 1970; Brown 1998; Wall 1998; Helgerson 2000; Steible 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Directors sometimes have Mistress Shore appear briefly alongside Hastings after Lord Stanley's messenger rouses him from his sleep in 3.2. In the recent Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Roxana Silbert in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2012, Mistress Shore also appeared in the first court scene (1.3), where she stood to the left of Edward IV's high throne while Queen Elizabeth occupied a much lower throne to his right.

<sup>21</sup> Menenius addresses the citizens similarly as 'masters, my good friends, mine honest neighbours' in *Coriolanus* (1.1.61). The rank of 'householder' entitled guildsmen to open a shop and employ apprentices, and is a level above the rank of 'journeyman' (wage-labourer) at which most former apprentices entered a guild. In stricter usage a master of a guild was someone who had attained the senior rank of 'liveryman' and been selected to manage the guild, together with the wardens and court of assistants. The latter sense would be consistent with the citizens serving as justices of the peace, but is not typically Shakespearean usage.

<sup>22</sup> Although supportive of the view that such men should 'have no voice nor authoritie in our common wealth', Smith grudgingly admits that even '[t]he fourth sort . . . be not altogether neglected' due to the absence of requisite numbers of yeomen 'in cities and corporate townes' and the need to fill lesser offices in villages that previously had not employed 'such lowe and base persons' (1906, 1.24).

<sup>23</sup> For a wide-ranging reappraisal of the supposed decline in neighbourliness see Wrightson 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Muldrew 2001, 88-89; on inflation in sixteenth-century England and the crisis of the 1590s see also Rappaport 1989, 14-15; Wrightson 2000, 116-120, 145-149, 193-194, 197.

<sup>25</sup> 'Due to the preponderance of credit transactions, and the increasing problems of maintaining trust as chains of credit grew longer, a reputation for honesty, trustworthiness and good neighbourliness became an attribute of wealth, enabling someone to do more business. This meant that reputation was no less a part of someone's "value" than any monetary calculation of their alienable property' (Muldrew 2001, 98; see also 105). See also Boulton 1987, 138-154; Muldrew 1998, 124-127; Wrightson 2007, 24, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Keith Wrightson describes the broader period from 1560 to 1640 as being 'perhaps the most litigious period in English history' and finds evidence of 'a greater willingness to suppress the traditional assumption that litigation was to be avoided as a breach of charity, and to involve public authority in the handling and settlement of disputes' (2007, 37). As most suits concerned unpaid debts or breaches of commercial agreements, the steep rise in civil litigation may simply reflect the increased volume of commercial transactions (Withington 2005, 31).

<sup>27</sup> From the Middle Ages through to the early seventeenth century, the office of justice of the peace was restricted 'to the recorder, the current lord mayor and those aldermen who had already held that position' (Dabhoiwala 2006, 798-799).

<sup>28</sup> Pedlars were omitted along with tinkers from the new vagrancy act issued by James I and VI in 1604 (Fumerton 2006, 3-4).

<sup>29</sup> 'Clipping' refers to the practice of trimming slivers from the edges of gold or silver coins and then flattening their rim.

<sup>30</sup> Muldrew calculates that 'by the end of the sixteenth century the demand for money had probably increased by something like 500 to 600 per cent, while the supply of coins hardly

expanded at all'. Moreover, the best coins tended to be hoarded by wealthy tradesmen and merchants 'for long-distance trade or for moneylending', making gold coins especially scarce (2001, 88, 90, 95).

<sup>31</sup> I borrow the expression 'journeyman in murder' from Wiggins 1991.

<sup>32</sup> 1587, 3.711. As Shakespeare drew on the chronicles of both Hall and Holinshed in *Richard III*, I have opted to quote directly from More's *History* for consistency. All quotations from *The History of King Richard III* by Sir Thomas More are from the Yale edition of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 2*, edited by Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1963). All references to this work are to this edition and are provided in parenthesis after the quotation.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Kishlansky argues that, prior to 1640, '[c]ontested elections were failures ... They represented a breakdown in ... the safeguards designed to prevent them'. 'Communities', he explains 'were not used to contested choices' (1986, 73, 55).

<sup>34</sup> As Paola Pugliatti argues, 'although he is responsible for the spatial *sequel* (the chain of words which compose the official text), he is not for the temporal *sequence*, the chain of events which led to Hastings' execution: the trick he has detected (the fact that the *sequel* was composed before the *sequence* of the accusation and condemnation began) is precisely what excludes his responsibility in the formal validation of the events' (1996, 210).

<sup>35</sup> I.W. Archer 1991, 18-19, 29; Bucholz and Ward 2012, 8, 77-78, 82-83. Archer calculates that 'There were probably 2,500 liverymen in late Elizabethan London, constituting about 10 per cent of householders in the capital' (19).

<sup>36</sup> I.W. Archer 1991, 18. Archer calculates that from 1579 until the end of Elizabeth's reign there were at least fifty-six refusals to take on the burdens and mounting expense of the office of sheriff of London (1991, 21). In *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the mayor predicts that Simon Eyre 'shall spend some of his thousands' (sc. 9.71) if elected sheriff. Firk subsequently greets the news of Eyre's election as a mixed blessing, exclaiming 'My master is chosen, my master is called, nay, *condemned* ... to be sheriff of the city ...' (sc.10.3-5; added emphasis).

<sup>37</sup> I borrow the phrase from J.E. Howard's book, *Theatre of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (2007).

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