

Citizens' intuition in shakespeare's "richard iii"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shakespeare's "Richard III" mainly concerns itself with the royal court under the rule of the Yorks; however, occasionally, Shakespeare takes a break from portraying the lives of noblemen. These window scenes provide the audience with insight as to what the common people think about the drama ensuing in court, resulting in a greater perspective of the play as a whole. One of these scenes occurs in Act Two, Scene Three, where three citizens discuss the death of Edward IV and its ensuing power struggle concerning who the next king should be. After close analysis of this scene's language, it becomes apparent that this scene contributes to the idea in the play that, through their general knowledge and intuition, the citizens know that danger is imminent with the death of Edward IV and the power struggle of which Richard III is part.

The first few lines of this scene consist of the relaying of the news that Edward IV is dead. After the First Citizen tells the Second Citizen that the king is dead, the Second Citizen immediately replies with "seldom comes the better" (2. 3. 4). The footnote explains that this means that times are bad and are probably going to get worse. Basically, this is a premonition of bad things to come. Since this is the first thing the Second Citizen says after hearing about the death of Edward IV, the audience knows that the citizens are fully aware of the danger that is to come with the struggle for who is next in line for the throne. The Second Citizen goes on to say "I fear, I fear 'twill prove a giddy world" (2. 3. 5). Not only is he elaborating on his intuition that there is peril to come, his repetition of the phrase "I fear" directly emphasizes how truly afraid he, and through representation, the other citizens, is of what is to come. Furthermore, the Third Citizen goes on to

repeat the word " world," when he states " look to see a troublous world," emphasizing the danger that this death has for the entirety of mankind. After relaying the news of the death of the king once more, the Second Citizen goes on to appeal to God, saying " God help the while" (2. 3. 8). He is using this form of an apostrophe not only to provide insight as to how bad the situation may be, but also to call for help upon the only being in the universe who is left to help him and his fellow citizens in this perilous situation. This entire section of this scene illustrates that immediately upon the death of Edward IV, the citizens intuitively know that danger is coming.

As the scene unfolds, the citizens realize that the next in line to be king is Edward IV's son, Richard, the Duke of York, referred to as York in this edition of the play. Upon this realization, the Third Citizen states, " Woe to that land that's governed by a child," lamenting his country because, as he sees it, York is too young to rule (2. 3. 11). Due to this statement, a debate about Henry VI ensues. The Second Citizen argues that the country may not be doomed, seeing as York's council can rule until he is old enough to take over (2. 3. 12-15). The First Citizen agrees because " So stood the state when Henry the Sixth/ Was crowned in Paris but at nine months old" (2. 3. 16-17). The Third Citizen goes on to argue that this is not the only contribution to the good rule of Henry VI, but that additionally " the king/ Had virtuous uncles to protect his grace" (2. 3. 20-21). This historical allusion to Henry VI provides the audience with an insight of the common people. First, it shows that the common people have a vast knowledge about the world of politics. In fact, they have enough of this knowledge to think of past rulers and what made them great and apply these tactics to current or future leaders. This allows

for them to formulate opinions and arguments on not only their leaders but also the state of affairs in their country. This proves that not only can the citizens know that danger is about to come to their country because of their intuition but also through their general knowledge. Additionally, this historical allusion shows how the common people view future success in court. If the ruler himself is unsuccessful, or unable to be successful yet in the case of York, the common people still have two outlets for hope that they will be ruled benevolently. The first of these hopes is the royal council, and the second of these hopes is the ruler's family.

Despite the citizens having a little bit of hope for the future, these feelings soon disappear when they think of the eminent power struggle between York's mother, Queen Elizabeth, and her family and Richard III and his allies. The Third Citizen emphasizes this when he states " Better it were they all came by his father,/ Or by his father there were none at all" (2. 3. 23-24). By this, the Third Citizen means that it would be better if all of York's uncles were on his father's side or if he had no uncles on his father's side because then there would not be this intense power struggle. His use of anastrophe, or sentence inversion, emphasizes the depth and wisdom of these words, seeing as if this were true, there would not be any issue with the future rulers or the future of the country. The use of anastrophe is used again when the Third Citizen states, " O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester [Richard]" (2. 3. 27). This again emphasizes the wisdom of the common people because the Third Citizen says this from sheer intuition; however, as the audience knows, he is correct in this idea that Richard is a villain and is ill fit for the throne. The weight of this line is also emphasized through the use

of an interjection, " O," which draws attention to what is being said and stressed the impending peril that comes alongside Richard III. Much like the first part of this scene, this section demonstrates the citizens' instinctive knowledge that peril is to come if this power struggle is to continue and if Richard III gains any power.

The citizens know there is danger to come with the death of Edward IV and the resulting power struggle not because they were told but because of their general sense of knowing and intuition. In order to prove to his fellow citizens that there is a problem at hand, the Third Citizen states: When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks; When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand; When the sun sets, who doth not look for night? Untimely storms makes men expect a dearth. All may be well, but if God sort it so, 'Tis more than we deserve or I expect. (2. 3. 32-37) Through this use of multiple metaphors, the Third Citizen is basically saying that when there are certain signs, men should not ignore them. This is an allusion to their intuition that their country is in danger with the eminent power struggle. If all will be well as the First Citizen states, then it is more than the people expect because, at this rate, the country will be in peril. An example of this intuition can be seen when the Second Citizen states, " Truly, the hearts of men are full of fear:/ You cannot reason almost with a man/ That looks not heavily and full of dread" (2. 3. 38-40). Every citizen knows that something bad is about to happen, so much so that there is not a man that one can speak to who does not look " full of dread." The Third Citizen goes on to elaborate on this intuition by saying, " By a divine instinct men's mind mistrust/ Ensuing danger; as by proof we see/ The water swell before a boist'rous storm" (2. 3.

42-44). By this he means that men have intuition that tells them when danger is approaching. Through the use of a simile, he compares this knowledge to the sea swelling when a storm is about to ensue. This last section summarizes the entire tone of this scene. It is entirely focused on the citizens' knowledge of what is happening and intuition that something dangerous is about to occur.

Through the use of language in Act Two, Scene Three of "Richard III," Shakespeare is able to illustrate that the common people of the country are able to sense danger approaching when Edward IV dies and Richard III begins his rise to power. They are able to sense this danger through their general knowledge and intuition. This can be seen when the citizens discuss the death of Edward IV, the possibility of York taking over the throne, and the power struggle ensuing between Queen Elizabeth and her family and Richard III and his allies. This knowledge and intuition finally culminates in an overall sense that the country will soon be in peril, which the audience knows to be true because of the impending reign of Richard III. This ability to see the impending danger much before it actually occurs proves that the common folk are underestimated and are much wiser than the court believes them to be.