
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

A tower of strength



Narrator

It was a dark and stormy night. Thomas Swann is in his favourite pub, the Duck and Whistle. He's rehearsing the role of King Richard in Shakespeare's Richard III.

Thomas

The King's name is a tower of strength ... Hmm. I could play it quietly: The King's name is a tower of strength ... or angrily: The King's name is a tower of strength ...

Barmaid

Here you go Mr Will, Mr Thomas, two more ales.

Thomas

Will, how should I play this line? What is Richard's motivation here?

Will

Thomas, Thomas, don't you understand? King Richard is about to go into battle. The opposing army has six or seven thousand men.

Thomas

That's a lot of men!

Will

Richard is not afraid. He has three times that number of soldiers.

Thomas

Twenty thousand men - that's a big army!

Will

Yes, but Richard has something more powerful than even the greatest army. He has his name: King Richard. That name makes him strong; powerful. It makes ordinary people fear and respect him.

Thomas

So the name King Richard is as strong as a tower...

Will

Exactly. Richard's enemies don't have that.

Thomas

So this line needs strength and confidence.

Will

Yes. This play is about power - and what people will do to get it. Let us rehearse. I am Norfolk, your general. Six or seven thousand is their utmost power.

Thomas Swann as Richard III

Why, our battalion trebles that account. Besides, the King's name is a tower of strength Which they upon the adverse party want.

Will

You have it! Well done! I'll drink to that. Another jug of ale!

Barmaid

Here you are sir.

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. In Richard III, or as I like to call it, the Mafia play, King Richard murdered everyone that stood between him and the absolute power that he wanted, including the Prince of Wales, his brother Clarence, Misters Rivers, Vaughn and Grey, Lord Hastings, King Edward IV's two young sons - and his own wife! Of course, these days, you don't have to kill your family to be described as **a tower of strength** - you just have to be strong, reliable, trustworthy, dependable and good in a crisis. Like footballer David Beckham, who said:

Clip 1

Alex Ferguson was like a father to me. He was a tower of strength.

Clip 2

My husband was a tower of strength when I had that operation - he really looked after me well.

Barmaid

Mr Will, a message from your wife. She says if you're not home in five minutes, don't bother coming home ever again.

Thomas

The old ball and chain at it again, eh? Come on Will, have another beer!

Will

Hmmm... To beer, or not to beer: that is the question.