

— The Characterization of  
Shakespeare's Richard II —

A k i k o K a m o

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Among Shakespeare's historical plays, Richard II is not so well-known, and therefore this play has been performed only once in Japan, and that was in 1979. Richard II is Shakespeare's early work and surely its degree of perfection is not high, compared to his mature works, for instance, Macbeth or Hamlet. This play, however, has something that attracts me.

Why was Richard II deposed? We can draw answers from two aspects of this question. One is a historical aspect and the other is a character problem created by Shakespeare.

Seen from the historical or political aspect, we know that Richard is a king usurped by Bolingbroke, who is both his cousin and subject. This fact is certainly caused by Richard's faults. It shows his incompetence as a king. On the other hand, seen from dramatic characterization, we know Richard is still immature and recognizes nothing. He never behaves as a king, nor is he fair. And therefore he is responsible for his own tragedy. But for all that we cannot reject him, because Richard II contains an interesting representation of Richard's mental development. As the drama develops, we see the change in Richard's mind. In this point it is more important to feel Richard's ordeal in his mind than to understand and appreciate his rhetoric.

I shall take up one of Richard's characteristics, childishness, and I would like to relate it to Richard's way of revealing his inner change and struggles.

## Chapter I

### Richard's Character

#### Section 1: Childishness

What does Richard think about his action and the environment around him? Richard's conception of the environment is that he is securely protected. It is natural for Richard to think in that way, and the security is the ground of his way of living; at the same time, it helps to form his character, which is unfit for kingship.

If the security is compared to a cradle, we can consider Richard a baby or a spoiled infant. It seems strange to compare Richard to a child, but when we think about the situations in which Richard is completely satisfied with and in which a child should usually be put in, we find something in common between them. But there is a decisive difference between them. Both of them are put in secure situations but it is a child who needs protection in the real world and not a king. Originally, anointing is an assurance that he is elected by God and the proof that he is a genuine king,

and therefore, a king, Richard, has to protect his people to the contrary. But it is not unnatural that Richard has childish consciousness in this case.

He acts ritually in the public scene, and acts the king. On the contrary, in the private scene, he reveals his frivolity and makes merry. Two aspects are not separate, though opposite, in his character. This gap is gradually bridged in the coming scenes. But Richard still has such dualism as a child has, proving that he is no more mature than experienced.

The childishness Richard possesses has another aspect. Richard keeps taking a passive attitude consistently toward various environments around him. I have already stated Richard plays a king in the public scenes, but , he is by no means active in playing such a role. Considering the matter, it can be said that his acting as a king is created by John of Gaunt and York who belong to an older generation than Richard's because we can see the large difference between Richard's attitude and the image of the ideal king which Gaunt and York hold in mind.

Oh, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye  
Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons,  
From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,  
Deposing thee before thou wert possessed,  
Which art possessed now to depose thyself.  
Why cousin, wert thou regent of the world  
It were a shame to let this land by lease.  
But for thy world enjoying but this land  
It is not more than shame to shame it so?  
Landlord of England art thou now, not king,  
Thy state of law is bondslave to the law  
(II.1.104-113)

I am the last of noble Edward's sons,  
Of whom thy father. Prince of Wales, was first.  
In war was never lion raged more fierce,  
In peace was never gentle lamb more mild  
Than was that young and princely gentleman.  
His face thou hast, for even so looked he,  
Accomplished with the number of thy hours.  
But when he frowned it was against the French  
And not against his friends. His noble hand  
Did win what he did spend and spent not that  
Which his triumphant father's hand had won.  
His hands were guilty of no kindred blood  
But bloody with the enemies of his kin.

(II.1.171-183)

Their ideal king is, to be concrete. Edward the Black Prince. Though Gaunt and York wish Richard to be a king like his father, it is needless to say that there is no similarity between the King and his father. To Richard, it is all right if all he has to do is to speak of stereotypes.

We were not born to sue, but to command

(I.1.196)

These words are very useful for him to avoid a trouble because king's power protects him, no matter how incompetent a king he is. Consequently, Richard does not relate himself to the inheritance of the succession to the throne.

Take Herford's rights away and take from time  
His charters and his customary rights.  
Let not tomorrow then ensue today  
Be not thyself. For how art thou a king  
But by fair sequence and succession? (II.1.195-199)

Richard is indifferent to York's appeal, lacking self-recognition to his position and the trends of the world. No one can develop himself without knowing what he is.

Richard, who is unexperienced and underdeveloped, has innocence, but cannot do anything.

In Act III, the story evolves prominently and Richard changes both externally and internally. Externally, the relation between Richard and Bolingbroke has changed and their positions have been reversed.

Richard's words come from his vanity and from the fact that he knows he is allowed to do so. He is both innocent and simple-minded. In the full conviction that he is going to win absolutely, Richard imagines that God is with him and angels help him, comparing himself and Bolingbroke to the sun and a thief. But his dreamy ideas are driven away by the news brought by Salisbury.

Richard's internal change occurs here. The news that all the soldiers have gone to Bolingbroke throws Richard into despair. Recovering his sense with Aumerle's words, he utters his next words appealing to the king's authority. Because it is obvious that Richard is a contrast to Bolingbroke in the way they deal with things, the readers of the audience realize that Richard's words, "Is not the king's name twenty thousand names? / Arm, arm, my name!" (III.2.85-86) will have no effect in fact. Richard's mind will never be relaxed from the moment when he has heard the news.

Superficially with assumed calmness, Richard shows preparation for the bad news but he cannot conceal his timidity. Besides, though Richard rebukes his favour-

ites as if he sent away his cowardice, timidity comes to the front instead of his aggressive attitude. While Aumerle and Scroope talk with each other, Richard becomes depressed and says, "Let's talk of graves, of wombs and epitaphs." (III.2.145) His mind is occupied by the conception of death and he falls into pessimism. In this scene, Richard cannot so much as appeal to the authority. Rather, he learns how empty it is to be an anointed king, though Richard himself has caused such situations.

Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits  
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,  
Allowing him a breath, a little scene  
To monarchise, be feared and kill with looks,  
Infusing him with self and vain conceit  
As if this flesh which walls about our life  
Were brass impregnable, and humoured thus  
Comes at the last and with a little pin  
Bores through his castle wall and farewell king!  
(III.2.162-170)

Richard, who has learned that a king is "mortal" (III.2.161), now shows his subjects the truth.

Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood  
With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,  
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,  
For you have but mistook me all this while.  
I live with bread like you, feel want  
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,  
How can you say to me I am a king?  
(III.2.171-177)

The worse news that York has run away to Bolingbroke follows. There is no way for Richard who has neglected

reality but to face the severe world. But he dares not see the reality positively. He only listens to the news which the subjects bring and is tossed about by the news. When he listens to the news brought by Scroope and Aumerle, he feels now joyous, now depressed, and he does not see situations calmly. As the result, his feeling fluctuates strikingly between joys and sorrows.

Richard despairs of the news about York and tries to enter his own world, making a wretched sufferer of himself,

Go to Flint Castle, there I'll pine away  
A king, woe's slave. Shall kingly woe obey.  
(III.2.209-210)

In Act III Scene 2, Richard does not try to struggle with Bolingbroke. Here, Richard meets Northumberland as his enemy for the first time. Richard receives Northumberland formally, but Richard's armor is consistently that he is an anointed king. Moreover, he asserts that the protection of God is taking sides with him as if he anticipated Northumberland's following words, "The King of Heaven forbid our lord the king / Should so with civil and uncivil arms / Be rushed upon!" (III.3.101-103), and at the same time, because Richard knows it cannot happen, he blames Northumberland for neglecting his duty to the King.



We are amazed, and thus long have we stood  
To watch the fearful bending of thy knee  
Because we thought ourself thy lawful king.  
And if we be, how dare thy joints forget  
To pay their awful duty to our presence?

(III.3.72-76)

Richard accepts Northumberland's words with good grace, but to the contrary his pride tortures himself. At this juncture, Richard begins to recognize the reality, and "emerges into full prominence as a dramatic character."

(1) Richard's suffering also begins when his own self and his office separate.

In his words, at first Richard calls himself "the king".

What must the king do now? Must he submit?  
The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?  
The king shall be contented. Must he lose  
The name of king? A God's name let it go.

(III.3.143-146)

Rejecting the name of king, Richard who has become a man is absorbed himself in his own woe.

We'll make foul weather with despised tears:  
Our sighs and they shall lodge the summer corn  
And make a dearth in this revolting land.  
Or shall we play the wantons with our woes  
And make some pretty match with shedding tears,  
As thus to drop them still upon one place  
Till they have fretted us a pair of graves  
Within the earth, and therein laid? There lies  
Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes.  
Would not this ill do well? (III.3.161-170)

When Richard comes to present a tragic hero, his excessive woe makes us feel his childishness as well as cowardice and timidity. But knowing others cannot follow his deep sorrow and his world ("Well, well, I see / I talk but idly and you laugh at me.") (III.3.170-171), Richard recovers the presence of his mind.

Richard, who has come to face reality, humbles himself and flatters Bolingbroke and Northumberland exaggeratedly.

Most mighty prince, my Lord Northumberland

(III.3.172)

Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee  
To make the base earth proud with kissing it.  
(III.3.189-190)

These words prove that Richard has learned the way of coping with difficult circumstances, and that with the power of speech. Richard adjusts himself to the fact that the world moving around him has changed to the contrary.

When Richard goes down to Bolingbroke in the base court, he makes a public statement to him, which expresses Richard's inner changes.

First of all from a political point of view Richard is not a king now. This also means that Richard does

not have the reason to be frightened any longer. Though Richard has performed the office of a king by acting its role, at present he does not have to keep acting a king because there exists no distinction between public scenes and private scenes in Richard. Here, he is separated from himself in the public scenes.

Secondly Richard indicates that he will not depend upon his subjects who have supported his private scenes. Rather, it may be more correct to say that Richard cannot think of others because now thinking himself is everything in his power. In any case Richard parts from his favourites in such mental conditions, and it shows not only Richard's isolation but also his independency. This means that Richard has departed from himself in the private scenes.

In Richard's case, he has been forced to be deprived of kingship. For instance, when a child is pulled apart from his parents or a parent, at first he does not know the situation, but his desire to depend upon someone is not gratified and gradually he comes to feel frustration. It is, however, the process of independency. The child comes to recognize what he is required to do, and he develops by fulfilling the requirements. Its process is the same as the scene (III,3) in which Richard parts from the world in which he has been dependent. And therefore Richard's childishness is quite lost after III.3.171.

Richard comes into contact with Bolingbroke and Northumberland very formally. Both of them are conquerors, but the importance of this formality for Richard is not because he recognizes his defeat, but because he can sever the communications with the past by doing it for the first time. Richard discriminates between the past and the present or the future.

Richard has realized that tradition and speech are quite powerless against the strong force Bolingbroke has employed. Added to that, Richard has understood his part in the reality. This process contributes to Richard's independency. Here at last, the gap between the public scenes and the private scenes of Richard has been bridged.

Originally Richard (who has had a talent for acting) chooses to play a role again. The scene in which Richard and Bolingbroke face each other is somewhat theatrical and even hypocritical. This reveals only perfunctory relations between a king and a subject. On one hand, Bolingbroke takes a moderate attitude to the end of the scene, and on the other hand Richard begins to play the role of a king to be deposed.

Richard, who has lost his childishness, says to Bolingbroke somewhat ironically.

Me rather had my heart might feel your love  
Than my displeas'd eye see your courtesy.  
Up, cousin, up. Your heart is up, I know,  
Thus high at least, although your knee be low.  
(III.3.191-194)

Richard's words are, at the same time, Bolingbroke's real intention. And Richard reads Bolingbroke's mind, and shows the foreknowledge of Bolingbroke's coming action.

Cousin, I am too young to be your father,  
Though you are old enough to be my heir.  
What you will have I'll give, and willing too,  
For do we must what force will have us do.  
(III.3.203-206)

Acuteness of Richard's great insight increases more and more, and it is made manifest in Act IV as his peculiar talent to see through the truth.

#### Section 2: Innocence

In Act IV Scene 1, Richard appears, absorbed in woe.

Alack, why am I sent for to a king  
Before I have shook off the regal thoughts  
Wherewith I reigned? I hardly yet have learned  
To insinuate, flatter, bow and bend my knee.  
Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me  
To this submission.  
(IV.1.162-167)

As Richard who has been forced to play a deposed king produces his role with woe, we think he seems to put a barrier to the external world when we look at it from a different angle. The external world to Richard is "this all-hating world" (V.5.66), and he has to abdicate the throne in it. Richard makes himself a hero in this

scene.

The greatest interest in the spectacle is centred not on a transition of the throne but on Richard's woe. He resigns the crown to Bolingbroke quickly, likens themselves to two buckets in the same deep well. Richard says, "The other down, unseen and full of water/  
That bucket, down and full of tears, am I / Drinking my  
griefs whilst you mount up on high." (IV.1.186-188) Employing the image of the buckets, Richard connects himself with personal sorrow. And besides he states to Bolingbroke, "My crown I am, but still my griefs are  
mine / You may my glories and my state depose / But not  
my griefs. Still am I king of those." (IV.1.190-192) Richard calls himself "king of griefs", and forms his own world, involving Bolingbroke in it. Richard stands in the centre of the world. Because he is the king of griefs, he appeals "The cares I give I have, though  
given away./ They 'tend the crown, yet still with me  
they stay." (IV.1.197-198), and pray "Make me that nothing have with nothing grieved." (IV.1.215) On his plea of sorrow, Richard rejects the suffering which may be newly brought. Consequently, when Nothumberland says to Richard, "...you read / These accusations and these  
grievous crimes / Committed by your person and your followers / Against the state and profit of this land" (IV. 1.222-224), Richard never intends to accept his demand. Once he turns down the demand, he gives himself up to his anguish as if anything but the woe is beyond

his notice.

However, on the other hand, Richard's recognition gradually comes to grow. At the beginning of this scene, the degree of his recognition is so low that the self-dramatization gets ahead of that. But as the recognition grows, Richard affirms that his crimes are shameful in the following manner:

Must I do so? And must I ravel out  
My weaved-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,  
If thy offences were upon record  
Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,  
To read a lecture of them?  
(IV.1.227-231)

Moreover, he reflects on his crimes and repents of them.

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon my self  
I find myself a traitor with the rest,  
For I have given here my soul's consent  
T'undeck the pompous body of a king,  
Made glory base, a sovereignty a slave,  
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant.  
(IV.1.246-251)

Like this, "the process of recognition begins." (2)

Richard's feelings are so emotional that it is almost impossible to know his real mind. But certainly it is not Richard but a "king of griefs" who keeps in touch with "this all-hating world" and accepts events there. Then how has Richard's internal world changed at this important turning point in his life? I have already stated that Richard has been childish and innocent till the deposition scene. But now he has no childishness

and therefore the question is what has become of his innocence.

Richard's recognition is certainly a kind of experience, but he does not lose his innocence with it. Innocence is lost gradually by gaining a lot of experience and, instead, mental development comes to be expected. For such development, it is necessary to accept experience positively. However, far from doing so, Richard does not accept various experiences which are assigned to him. The king of griefs, instead of Richard himself, has accepted them, and therefore, Richard's personal innocence has nothing to do with the events which have occurred in the external world, and it is kept in his mind.

As Richard plays a fool, or a king of griefs, he comes to state the truth. Originally, though a fool is a funny character, he has another role, to state the essence of things and show hidden aspects of the truth. Richard also plays such a role.

Richard has learned the truth by smashing a mirror in which his face has been reflected.

my grief lies all within  
And these external manners of laments  
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief  
That swells with silence in the tortured soul.  
There lies the substance; (IV.1.294-298)

Maybe Richard himself notices the nature of a king of griefs for the first time here, and moreover he notices the things of greater importance, for instance, the es-



sence and the truth of things, in other words, the relation between a shadow and substance. Richard's mind shut to the external world turns its destination to the soul, and at the same time innocence kept in Richard comes to increase the transparency more and more.

Richard is confined in the prison of Pomfret Castle and prevented from contact with the external world, but this matter keeps him in isolation from "this world" (V. 5.10) not only physically but also mentally, and gives him objectivity. As a result, Richard learns about life rather than is involved in finding the way to overcome his suffering.

How sour sweet music is  
When time is broke and no proportion kept.  
So is it in the music of men's lives.  
And here have I the daintiness of ear  
To check time broke in a disordered string,  
But for the concord of my taste and time  
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.  
I wasted time and now doth time waste me,  
For now hath time made me his numbering clock.  
(V.5.42-50)

These words are a lesson Richard has got individually, but this lesson holds good to everyone. His words have got generality now. And on the other hand, Richard is conscious of love by virtue of innocence, and accepts it without hesitation.

Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me,  
For 'tis sign of love, and love to Richard  
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world.  
(V.5.64-66)

Richard has recovered his soul and feels glad because he has known that his soul can sympathize with others.

Though Richard has awoken his own human nature, the situation never takes his awaking into consideration. Suddenly ruthless reality breaks into Richard's innocent world. Of course, he never hopes for death of his own free will. However, he himself is confined in the prison, his body is bound on earth and he has neither freedom nor tranquility of mind. When Richard says, "Mount, mount my soul. Thy seat is up on high / Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die," (V.5.111-112) at the last moment, it shows that death is the freedom from all sorts of restraint on earth. His body left in this world is just a cast-off shell. On the contrary, Richard's soul which has got out of his "gross flesh" has ascended to Heaven as the emblem of innocence, attaining peace of soul.

## Chapter II

### Childishness and Speech

Richard's speech reflects his character, and his speech is the only clue to know his character. L. C. Knights says, "...essential attitudes are embodied in a matter of speech which simultaneously 'place' them." (3) Then how is Richard's speech related with his character, especially childishness?

Richard's character is revealed manifestly and shows an important change in Act III. In his misfortune, Richard is forced to outgrow his former self, a spoilt child, and as a result his childishness is lost. Of course, that change influences his speech.

Roughly speaking, there is an image of a mother and a child in Richard's speech. And it is reflected in the word, "earth", but there is a difference in Richard's way of referring to the earth between in prosperous circumstances and in adverse circumstances. For instance, in Act III Scene 2 or the scene of Richard's returning to his kingdom, Richard describes himself as "a long-parted mother with her child" (III.2.8), and compares the relation between himself and England to the relation between a mother and a child. He calls the earth "Dear earth" (III.2.6), "my earth" (III.2.10), and "my gentle earth" (III.2.13) affectionately, and furthermore, he prays to the earth, adding a selfish and unreal demand as follows:

Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth  
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense  
But let thy spiders that suck up thy venom  
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,  
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet  
Which with usurping steps do trample thee.  
Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies,  
And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower  
Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder  
Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch  
Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies  
(III.2.13-22)

This unreal and childish conception entertains Richard, and stimulates his mood.

Mock not my senseless conjuration, lords.  
This earth shall have a feeling and these stones  
Prove armed soldiers ere her native king  
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.  
(III.2.23-26)

This speech is unsuitable for the scene of the actual fighting and is even ludicrous. As Richard probably conjectures that his subjects think so, he starts the speech with "Mock not...". Richard is quite indifferent to morality and does not have common sense, and therefore he has his sense of value different from others'. He appears to be satisfied with his own world no one but him can enter. Selfishness and unreality are prevailing in to Richard's childishness.

But when Richard has recognized his loss, his affection to the earth is lost. He calls it "the base earth". (III.3.190) As I have stated in Chapter 1, Richard loses his childishness here. There is connection between "the base earth" and the loss of childishness. Richard refers to the same earth. In spite of that, the difference between the earth in the former scene and in the latter is very great from sublimity to baseness. The change in Richard's mind has brought such a difference in the choice of adjectives given to the earth in his speech.

The positive image of the earth reflects Richard's joyful mood. His speech is, most of all, exaggerated and imaginative, though he knows it is impossible in actual fact, or "he is a self-deceiver, a man who imagines

that a habitable world can be constructed from words alone." (4) L. C. Knights also says, "...this bit of make-believe (that Richard is a 'mother' to his land) is almost as fantastic as the notion that Bolingbroke would be troubled by spiders." (5) But I do not think Richard's reference to a mother and a child is fantastic because the reference shows his childishness very clearly as I have already stated in Chapter 1. Certainly this Richard's speech is childish. In this case, the notion about Bolingbroke's trouble with spiders is not fantastic. Stated reversely, it proves Richard's childishness.

As the situation gets worse, the image of the earth changes. What is interesting is that gradually Richard himself comes to be linked to the negative image of the earth. At first he has compared himself to the sun but now this image is quite lost to his mind. Richard associates a grave with the earth. When Scroope says to Richard, "Those whom you curse / Have felt the worst of death's destroying wound / And lie full low, graved in the hollow ground" (III.2.138-140), Richard suggests as follows:

Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs,  
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes  
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.  
(III.2.145-147)

And the earth which has brought up Richard is now "the

barren earth." (III.2.153) Richard has considered the earth just as an object, but in his image, now, the physical distance between them is drawing near. Richard says he writes sorrow on the earth, sits upon the ground, and wishes his bones be covered by the barren earth.

At last when Richard is confronted with Bolingbroke, Richard is connected with the earth. Richard says to Bolingbroke, "Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee / To make the base earth proud with kissing it." (III.3.189-190) In these words, Richard means manifestly Bolingbroke does not have to show him every courtesy as a subject. Richard is the base earth and he is not childish any longer. The more the image of the earth becomes negative, the more Richard's childishness is lost. Now, Richard comes down to earth.

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Throughout the play, Richard has come to take recognition of the truth while he has lost kingship. In the flow of the story, the loss of his childishness may be a small element. Thinking about the process of Richard's mentality, however, childishness is an important element. There is a great difference in Richard's character between the first half and the latter half. Richard's selfishness, however, has brought himself to his abdication and his ideal is

betrayed by ruthless reality. Richard has considered himself as the sun which is the symbol of a king. He has got this idea firmly rooted in his mind. But in fact Richard is a flame which is easily put out by water, though, to Gaunt, Richard is "violent fire" (II.1.34)

Richard in Act IV has lost his childishness and has an image of a martyrish sufferer like Christ, instead of the Richard in Act III who is a child craving for a mother. When Gaunt dies, Richard says, "our pilgrimage must be (spent)." (II.1.154) The foretold pilgrimage happens here, and he finishes it by his own death. This play is not only "a history of human mind" (6) as S. T. Coleridge has stated but also a history of human soul.

#### notes

- (1) Stanley Wells, "Introduction" to Richard II (New Penguin Shakespeare) pp. 17.
- (2) L. C. Knights, Shakespeare: The Histories pp. 34.
- (3) L. C. Knights, op. cit., pp. 32.
- (4) L. C. Knights, op. cit., pp. 32.
- (5) L. C. Knights, Ibid. pp. 33.
- (6) S. T. Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism vol. II, pp. 232.