

Richard.

A Re-imagining of Shakespeare's Great King

by Zoe Settle

“RICHARD, the second of that name, a child of the age of eleven yeares, began to reign over the realme of England in the yeare of our Lord 1377.

You shall understand, that by reason of his young yeares, as yet he was not able to governe himselfe, and therefore John duke of Lancaster, with other péeres of the realme, were appointed to have the administration.

He was of good disposition and towardnesse, but his age being readie to incline which way soever a man should bend it... in the end they brought him to tract the steps of lewd demeanour, and so were causers both of his and their owne destruction.

Thus was king Richard deprived of all kinglie honour and princelie dignitie, by reason he was so given to follow evill counsell, and used such inconvenient waies and meanes, through insolent misgovernance, and youthfull outrage, though otherwise a right noble and worthie prince.

He reigned two and twentie yeares, three moneths and eight daies. He was séemelie of shape and favor, & of nature good enough, if the wickednesse & naughtie demeanor of such as were about him had not altered it.”

– Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland; by Raphael Holinshed and others; 1807 edition; Volume II of VI, Part 12 of 12; RICHARD II

The Characters

RICHARD, the king
GAUNT, his uncle
HENRY, his cousin
YORK, his uncle
ISABELLA, his wife
NORTHUMBERLAND, his deposer
BUSHY, BAGOT, and GREEN, his friends
BOY, his groom
NORFOLK, his subject

On Casting:

Richard encounters a great many people in his memories, but as we know, memory is unreliable. As such, the performers embodying this story are seen in many ways. Below I will suggest some possibilities for doubling, though this is at the discretion of whomever may take up this piece.

Actor 1 as Richard

Actor 2 as Gaunt, Guard, and others

Actor 3 as Henry, Bushy, and others

Actor 4 as York and others

Actor 5 as Isabella, Mother, and others

Actor 6 as Northumberland, Butler, and others

Actor 7 as Boy, Young Richard, Green, and others

Actor 8 as Norfolk, Ross, Bagot, and others

Lights up on a stage that shows walls of stone surrounding the playing space. This could be a palace or a prison all the same. A young boy is center stage, almost aware of the instruments that now light him. MOTHER enters and crosses to his side. She gives him a quick but warm embrace: the last he will have for many years, if ever.

Mother turns upstage as BUTLER sets out an ornate chair.

MOTHER

Richard, deare.

The boy turns dutifully and sits upon the chair. A parade of admirers enters to pay their respects, the stage seeming to fill with a bustling crowd. GAUNT makes his way in, giving a dramatic bow.

GAUNT

My liege.

Richard bobs his head, and Gaunt takes his place just upstage of the chair. YORK enters and bows, then takes the other flank.

Butler approaches with a crown in hand. The Dukes stand the boy up, as if manipulating a puppet. With pomp, Butler lifts it and places it atop the head of the youth. Whispers begin as the youth, now crowned, faces forward. The crowner leans as though to whisper in his ear. Another appears on his other side and pulls him. Another joins, then another. The tug-of-war becomes more intense as the whispers grow louder and louder. A large knife is brandished as grandly as the crown was. It is placed in the youth's hand, and he turns profile again. He slowly processes to the other side of the stage.

THEN the lights shut off suddenly, the whispers reduced to a sound resembling wind. We hear the sound of a cell door creaking open. Still in darkness, a MAN screams.

A VOICE

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

A sudden lights up on what we now can see is an empty cell. A gust of wind sounds. There is a stone wall across the upstage with a door carved in. On either side the cell is caged in by a grid of iron bars. Light streams in from stage right, presumably a window from the next cell over. There are several shapes laying on the floor around the cell. Thudding footsteps can be heard coming down the hall, then two large men throw a

man into the middle of the cell, and abruptly slam the door behind them. We hear the cell's lock engage.

PRISONER 1

God save your majesty!

PRISONER 2

Your presence makes us rich, most noble lord.

PRISONER 3

The king's grown bankrupt, like a broken man.

PRISONER 4

'Tis nothing but conceit

PRISONER 5

- most degenerate king!

ALL

My lord!

PRISONER 3

Why should you welcome such a guest as grief?

PRISONER 2

Comfort, my liege; why looks your grace so pale?

RICHARD

Have I not reason to look pale and dead?

PRISONER 4

Comfort, my liege;

ALL-

- remember who you are!

RICHARD

Ha! I had forgot myself; am I not king?

Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.

PRISONERS 1, 2, 3

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear!

PRISONERS 4, 5

Yet looks he like a king: behold, his eye,
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth.

Footsteps are heard again. Richard looks up hopefully. The gate creaks again, and Isabella rushes in. Richard scrambles to his feet to catch her in his arms. They embrace as they know it's their last chance.

ISABELLA

Richard!

RICHARD

My love.

There might be tears. After a moment has passed, Richard puts on his bravest air.

RICHARD

Join not with grief, fair woman, do not so,
To make my end too sudden.

ISABELLA

But dear -

RICHARD

Learn,

To think our former state a happy dream,
From which awaked, the truth of what we are
Shows us but this: I am sworn brother, sweet,
To grim necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death.

Voices and noise are heard from the hall; the exchange grows desperate.

RICHARD

Hie thee to France
And cloister thee in some religious house.
Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,
Which our profane hours here have thrown down.

ISABELLA

What, is my Richard both in shape and mind
Transformed and weakened? Hath Bolingbroke
Deposed thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?

RICHARD

No, my deare. Tis only you, Isabel.
Good sometime queen, prepare thee hence for
France.

ISABELLA

Must I?

RICHARD

Think I am dead and that even here thou takest,
As from my deathbed, thy last living leave.

ISABELLA

Please, no -

*They share another heavy embrace. The door creaks open once more, the footsteps
unnoticed by the couple.*

NORTHUMBERLAND

My lord, the mind of Bolingbroke is changed.
You must to Pomfret, not unto the Tower.—
Take leave and part, for you must part forthwith.

ISABELLA

But must we be divided? Must we part?

RICHARD

Ay, hand from hand, my love, and heart from heart.

ISABELLA

Banish us both, and send the King with me.

NORTHUMBERLAND

That were some love, but little policy.

ISABELLA

Then whither he goes, thither let me go.

RICHARD

So two together weeping make one woe.

A knock sounds at the door. Northumberland clears his throat to disrupt the embrace. He reaches to open the door.

NORTHUMBERLAND (*gesturing to the exit*)

Ma'am

ISABELLA

Please, a little more time -

A pair of soldiers enter to escort her out, followed by a guard. As the soldiers begin to guide Isabella away, she and Richard try to keep in contact until the distance is too great. He leaves a gentle kiss on her hand as her fingers slip from his grasp. Richard takes a small step as if to follow, and the guard hits his club square between Richard's shoulders. Isabella's cries echo as the gate swings shut. Whispers sound. Richard is alone again.

RICHARD

Poor queen, so that thy state might be no worse,
I would my skill were subject to thy curse.
Here did she fall a tear. Here in this place
I would a bank of rue, sour herb of grace.
Rue even for ruth here shortly should be seen
In the remembrance of a weeping queen.

The hallway quiets. Richard is curled up still from where he fell. Murmurs begin in the corners of the cell as the shapes regain life. One set of hands aides Richard to sitting. Another procures a box for him to sit upon. A third shares a cloak and a final places a small hunk of bread in Richard's hands, then they fade away as though never there at all.

RICHARD

I am studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world,

And for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself,
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.
My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
My soul the father, and these two beget
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humors like the people of this world,
For no thought is contented. They do plot
Unlikely wonders: how these vain weak nails
May tear a passage through the flinty ribs
Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls,
And, for they cannot, die in their own pride.
Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's knaves,
Nor shall not be the last—like silly beggars
Who, sitting in the stocks, refuge their shame
That many have and others must sit there,
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
Of such as have before endured the like.
Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented. Sometimes am I king.
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am; then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king.
Then am I kinged again, and by and by
Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing. But whate'er I be,
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
With being nothing. *(Faint horns are heard.)*

Music do I hear?

The horns and fanfare grows louder. Richard stands, the lights grow brighter and warmer. As if a memory exploding into the mind, the prison walls peel apart to reveal the revelry of Act I of Richard II. Richard's rags are pulled off, revealing his kingly garb. Mowbray and Bolingbroke storm into the scene, gages in hand.

RICHARD

Old John of Gaunt!

GAUNT is summoned, maybe with a clap

Hast thou brought hither Henry, thy bold son,
Here to make good the boist'rous late appeal,
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

GAUNT

I have, my liege.

RICHARD

Then call them to our presence.

*Enter HENRY and NORFOLK. They flank Richard, bowing separately to greet him.
Henry should be Richard's equal but not his match.*

HENRY

Many years of happy days befall
My gracious sovereign, my most loving liege.

NORFOLK

Each day still better other's happiness
Until the heavens, envying earth's good hap,
Add an immortal title to your crown.

HENRY, throwing down a gage

Pale trembling coward, there I throw my gage.
If guilty dread have left thee so much strength
As to take up mine honor's pawn, then stoop.
By that and all the rites of knighthood else
Will I make good against thee, arm to arm,
What I have spoke or thou canst worse devise.

NORFOLK, picking up the gage

I take it up, and by that sword I swear
Which gently laid my knighthood on my shoulder,
I'll answer thee in any fair degree.

RICHARD

What doth our cousin lay to Norfolk's charge?

HENRY

Look what I speak, my life shall prove it true:
Upon his bad life to make all this good,
That he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death,
And consequently, like a traitor coward,
Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of
Blood.

RICHARD

Norfolk, what sayst thou to this?

NORFOLK

Thou liest!

I slew him not, but to my own disgrace
Neglected my sworn duty in that case.

RICHARD

Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be ruled by me.
Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed.
Good uncle, let this end where it begun;
I'll calm the Duke of Norfolk, you your son.

GAUNT

To be a make-peace shall become my age.—
Throw down, my son, the Duke of Norfolk's gage.

RICHARD

And, Norfolk, throw down his.

GAUNT

When, Henry, when?
Obedience bids I should not bid again.

RICHARD

Norfolk, throw down, we bid; there is no boot.

NORFOLK

Myself I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot.

Mowbray kneels.

RICHARD

Rage must be withstood.

Give me his gage. Lions make leopards tame.

NORFOLK, *standing*

Yea, but not change his spots. Take but my shame

And I resign my gage. (*he draws*)

Cousin, throw up your gage. Do you begin.

HENRY

O, God defend my soul from such deep sin (*he draws and lunges*)

GAUNT

Henry!

The two square off and begin to spar. Richard is eventually overcome. He throws his crown to the ground and brings a halt to the battle.

Richard

STOP

The command reverberates, coupled with the following voices overlapping in echoes, creating a cacophony of sound:

VOICES

Banished

Henry banished

Ten winters

We banish you

Twice five summers

Pain of life

At once the scene is gone, and a sharp, single light beats down over Richard. He is panting, as though he had just relived the scene before. Wind sounds.

RICHARD

What...where...where am I?

A VOICE

My lord?
ANOTHER
My liege, what troubles you?

RICHARD
Who's there?

The prison has returned, though Richard still feels out of place. He looks around trying to account for his surroundings. A man enters, well dressed, and makes his way to Richard. Richard cannot believe his eyes. A man has returned from the dead.

RICHARD
Bushy? *(he crosses to the man in disbelief, reaches to almost grasp his collar)*
Bushy, what news?

BUSHY
(he speaks as though still stuck in the memory of the story)
Old John of Gaunt is grievous sick, my lord,
Suddenly taken, and hath sent posthaste
To entreat your Majesty to visit him.

RICHARD
Where lies he?

BUSHY
At Ely House.

RICHARD
Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!

A door slams. A switch is flipped. The lights shift again, flinging us into another scene in Richard's memory. This time, Richard is fully engrossed in replaying his role.

RICHARD
The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.
Pray God we may make haste and come too late.

Gaunt, ailing, and York have entered upstage. While Richard is fully present in the past, he is not yet in this scene, and lingers to the side, listening.

GAUNT

Will the King come, that I may breathe my last
In wholesome counsel to his unstaid youth?

YORK

Vex not yourself nor strive not with your breath,
For all in vain comes counsel to his ear.

GAUNT

O, but they say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony.
Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear,
My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear.
His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
For violent fires soon burn out themselves.

Richard makes himself known.

YORK

The King is come. Deal mildly with his youth,
For young hot colts being reined do rage the more.

RICHARD

What comfort, man? How is 't with aged Gaunt?

GAUNT

O, how that name befits my composition!
Old Gaunt indeed and gaunt in being old.
The pleasure that some fathers feed upon
Is my strict fast—I mean my children's looks—
And, therein fasting, hast thou made me gaunt.

RICHARD

Can sick men play so nicely with their names?

GAUNT

No, misery makes sport to mock itself.
Since thou dost seek to kill my name in me,
I mock my name, great king, to flatter thee.

RICHARD

Should dying men flatter with those that live?

GAUNT

No, no, men living flatter those that die.

RICHARD

Thou, now a-dying, sayest thou flatterest me.

GAUNT

O, no, thou diest, though I the sicker be.

RICHARD

I am in health, I breathe, and see thee ill.

GAUNT

O, 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,
Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
Landlord of England art thou now, not king.

RICHARD

A lunatic lean-witted fool,
Presuming on an ague's privilege,
Darest with thy frozen admonition
Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood
With fury from his native residence.
Now, by my seat's right royal majesty,
Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son,
This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.

GAUNT

O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son,
For that I was his father Edward's son!

That blood already, like the pelican,
Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused.
Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee.
These words hereafter thy tormentors be.

He exits as the wind sounds once again. The harsh downlight returns to highlight Richard, leaving the stage dark. As Richard speaks, YORK enters behind him.

RICHARD

All is said.
His tongue is now a stringless instrument;
Words, life, and all, old Lancaster hath spent.

Richard turns and exits directly upstage, effectively changing places with York, who takes over the small circle of light.

YORK

How long shall I be patient? How long
Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?
Not Gloucester's death, nor Henry's banishment,
Nor Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs,
Have ever made me sour my patient cheek
Or bend one wrinkle on my sovereign's face.

I am the last of noble Edward's sons,
The king, his 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 Richard hast, for ev'n so looked he;
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.

O, Richard! York is too far gone with grief,
Now afore God—God forbid I say true!—
If you do wrongfully seize Henry's rights,

You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts.
What will ensue hereof there's none can tell;
But by bad courses may be understood
That their events can never fall out good.

He exits. Richard appears once again, in his rags. He hums tunelessly and ambles through the space. The door opens just a bit, and a stable boy enters, removing his hat in respect. Richard does not notice him.

RICHARD

Ha, ha, keep time! How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept.
So is it in the music of men's lives.

BOY

(hesitant at first)

M'lord?

RICHARD

And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disordered string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.

BOY

My lord!

RICHARD

What art thou, and how comest thou hither,
Where no man never comes but that sad dog
That brings me food to make misfortune live?

BOY

I was a poor groom of thy stable, king,
When thou wert king; who, traveling towards York,
With much ado at length have gotten leave
To look upon my sometime royal master's face.

RICHARD

Ay, methinks I do remember thee, Master- ?

BOY

Hugo, m'lord.

RICHARD

Master Hugo.

Say, is my kingdom lost? Why, 'twas my care,
And what loss is it to be rid of care?
Strives now Henry to be as great as we?
Greater he shall not be.

BOY

O, how it earned my heart when I beheld
In London streets, that "coronation" day,
When King Henry rode on roan Barbary,
That horse that thou so often hast bestrid,
That horse that I so carefully have dressed.

RICHARD

Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend,
How went he under him?

BOY

So proudly as if he disdained the ground.

RICHARD

So proud that this new "king" was on his back!
That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand;
This hand hath made him proud with clapping him.
Would he not stumble? Would he not fall down
(Since pride must have a fall) and break the neck
Of that proud man that did usurp his back?

(Realizing he has slipped into his old ways, he pulls back:)

Forgiveness, horse! Why do I rail on thee,
Since thou, created to be awed by man,
Wast born to bear? I was not made a horse,
And yet I bear a burden like an ass,

Spurred, galled, and tired by my jauncing cousin.

BOY

Comfort, my liege. Remember who you are.

RICHARD

Of comfort no man speak. Come.

He motions for Hugo to come further in, to sit on the box. As he begins his speech, he retrieves his piece of bread from earlier and splits it with the boy.

RICHARD

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.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives, and all are Henry's now,
And nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings—
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
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 monarchize, 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 humored thus,
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king!
Cover your head, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,

He plops down.

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?

Hugo searches for words but finds none. Richard's question needs no answer. Richard smiles weakly and pats the boy's knee. They hear footsteps and murmurs in the hallway. He stands.

RICHARD

If thou love me, 'tis time thou wert away.

BOY

What my tongue dares not, that my heart shall say.

Hugo dutifully puts his hat back on his head, and just as he decides to go, he pays respects to his king one final time. Hugo crosses to Richard and gives a deep bow.

BOY

Farewell, my liege.

Richard accepts with a faint nod. Hugo turns and exits without another look as York and Henry enter from opposite sides of the stage to flank Richard.

HENRY

Be he the fire, I'll be the yielding water;
The rage be his, whilst on the earth I rain
My waters—on the earth and not on him.

RICHARD

As the seas swell with a wild, stormy wind,
I am left in a ship torn by the waters.

YORK

Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his eye,
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty. Alack, alack for woe
That any harm should stain so fair a show!

RICHARD

From Richard's night to Henry's fair day.

Another door slams, then Richard looks on as the memory of Northumberland and his man quickly cross the playing space as the war is on the brink. Once they cross Richard, he vanishes.

ROSS

Be confident to speak, Northumberland.

NORTHUMBERLAND

Then thus: I have from Le Port Blanc,
A bay in Brittany, received intelligence
That Henry Duke of Hereford, accomp'nied
By eight ships and three thousand men of war,
Are making hither with all due expedience
And shortly means to touch our northern shore.
If then we shall redeem our blemished crown,
Wipe off the dust that hides our scepter's gilt,
And make high majesty look like itself,
Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh.

ROSS

To horse, to horse! Urge doubts to them that fear.

They complete their swift cross of the stage and exit, as Bushy and Isabella enter together from upstage, already seeming mid-conversation.

BUSHY

Madam, your Majesty is too much sad.
You promised, when you parted with the King,
To lay aside life-harming heaviness
And entertain a cheerful disposition.

ISABELLA

To please the King I did; to please myself
I cannot do it. Yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard.

Green enters

GREEN

God save your Majesty!—And well met, gentle man.
I hope the King is not yet shipped for Ireland.

ISABELLA

Why hopest thou so?

GREEN

The banished Bolingbroke repeals himself
And with uplifted arms is safe arrived
At Ravenspurgh.

ISABELLA

Now God in heaven forbid!

GREEN

Ah, madam, 'tis too true. And that is worse,
The Lord Northumberland and his young son
With all their powerful friends, are fled to him.

ISABELLA

Why have you not proclaimed Northumberland
And all the rest revolted faction traitors?

GREEN

We have

BUSHY

Despair not, madam.

ISABELLA

Who shall hinder me?

York's footsteps are heard. He enters, along with Bagot

GREEN

Here comes the Duke of York.

ISABELLA

With signs of war about his aged neck.
O, full of careful business are his looks!—
Uncle, for God's sake, speak comfortable words.

YORK

Should I do so, I should belie my thoughts.
Comfort's in heaven, and we are on the Earth,
Where nothing lives but crosses, cares, and grief.
Your husband, he is gone to save far off
Whilst others come to make him lose at home.
The nobles they are fled; the commons they are cold
And will, I fear, revolt on Hereford's side.
Come, cousin, I'll dispose of you.
Gentlemen, go muster up your men
And meet me presently at Berkeley.

York and Isabella exit

BUSHY

For us to levy power proportionable
To the enemy is all unpossible.

GREEN

Besides, our nearness to the King in love
Is near the hate of those love not the King.

BAGOT

And that is the wavering commons, for their love
Lies in their purses, and whoso empties them
By so much fills their hearts with deadly hate.

BUSHY

Wherein the King stands generally condemned.

BAGOT

If judgment lie in them, then so do we,
Because we ever have been near the King.

GREEN

Well, I will for refuge straight to Bristow Castle.

BUSHY

Thither will I with you, for little office
Will the hateful commons perform for us,
Except like curs to tear us all to pieces.—
Will you go along with us?

BAGOT

No, I will to Ireland to his Majesty.
Farewell. If heart's presages be not vain,
We three here part that ne'er shall meet again.

BUSHY

More welcome is the stroke of death to me
Than Bolingbroke to England. Lords, farewell.

GREEN

Farewell at once, for once, for all, and ever.

BAGOT

Well, we may meet again.

BUSHY

I fear me, never.

They exit. The wind and whispers begin again, the echoing voices return:

VOICES

Our countrymen are gone and fled,
As well assured their king is dead.

Henry enters the empty stage with the single downlight.

HENRY

Ah, Richard! With the eyes of heavy mind
I see thy glory like a shooting star
Fall to the base earth from the firmament.
Thy sun sets weeping in the lowly west,
Witnessing storms to come, woe, and unrest.

Thy friends are fled to wait upon thy foes,
And crossly to thy good all fortune goes.

A door slam is heard, followed quickly by the door to the cell swinging open. The lights onstage remain out, save Henry's light, but the prison hallway now has an eerie glow behind him.

HENRY

Bushy and Green, I will not vex your souls,
Since presently your souls must part your bodies,
For 'twere no charity; yet to wash your blood
From off my hands, here in the view of men
I will unfold some causes of your deaths:

Myself, a prince by fortune of my birth,
Near to the King in blood, and near in love
Till you did make him misinterpret me,
Have stooped my neck under your injuries
And sighed my English breath in foreign clouds,
Eating the bitter bread of banishment.

This and much more, much more than twice all this,
Condemns you to the death.—See them delivered over
To execution and the hand of death.

Similar to earlier with York, Richard has entered behind Henry, and the two exchange places. Richard listens as Henry's steps echo off. He shows some signs of battle, some signs of wear. The lights slowly come up on the rest of the cell, and Richard's shadow subjects have returned.

RICHARD

I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again.
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs.
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,
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.

PRISONER 1

Fear not, my lord.

PRISONER 5

That power that made you king
Hath power to keep you king in spite of all.

RICHARD

But Henry grows strong and great in power.

The prison door opens softly. The prison guard stands reluctantly with a bowl of something akin to a meal.

GUARD

My lord, will 't please you to fall to?

RICHARD

Taste of it first as thou art wont to do.

GUARD

My lord, I dare not.

Richard lashes out, taking him by surprise

RICHARD

The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee!

GUARD

Help, help, help!

At this even more commotion begins, with two guards bursting forth, grabbing each of Richard's arms and hauling him to sit at a makeshift witness stand that has appeared. The courtroom scene begins as things are already in motion. York, Northumberland, and Henry face him.

HENRY

Hither comes Richard, that in common view
He may surrender. So we shall proceed
Without suspicion.

RICHARD

God save the King! Will no man say "amen"?
Am I both priest and clerk? Well, then, amen.
God save the King, although I be not he,

And yet amen, if heaven do think him me.
To do what service am I sent for hither?

YORK

To do that office of thine own goodwill
Which tired majesty did make thee offer:
The resignation of thy state and crown
To Henry Bolingbroke.

RICHARD

Give me the crown.—Here, cousin, seize the crown.
Here, cousin.

HENRY

I thought you had been willing to resign.

RICHARD

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.

HENRY

Part of your cares you give me with your crown.

RICHARD

Your cares set up do not pluck my cares down.
My care is loss of care, by old care done;
Your care is gain of care, by new care won.

HENRY

Are you contented to resign the crown?

RICHARD

Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be.
Therefore no “no,” for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me how I will undo myself.
I give this heavy weight from off my head
And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.

HENRY

Richard -

RICHARD

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.

YORK

(to Henry)

Good cousin –

RICHARD

Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit,
And soon lie Richard in an earthy pit.
God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says,
And send him many years of sunshine days.
What more remains?

NORTHUMBERLAND

No more, but that you read

These accusations and these grievous crimes
Committed by your person and your followers
Against the state and profit of this land;
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily deposed.

RICHARD

Must I do so? And must I ravel out
My weaved-up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offenses were upon record,
Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop
To read a lecture of them? If thou wouldst,
There shouldst thou find one heinous article
Containing the deposing of a king
And cracking the strong warrant of an oath,
Marked with a blot, damned in the book of heaven.

NORTHUMBERLAND

My lord, dispatch. Read o'er these articles.

RICHARD

Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see.
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here.

NORTHUMBERLAND

My lord—

RICHARD

No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man,
Nor no man's lord. I have no name, no title,
No, not that name was given me at the font,
But 'tis usurped. Alack the heavy day,
That I have worn so many winters out
And know not now what name to call myself.
O, that I were a mockery king of snow
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water drops.—
Good king, great king, and yet not greatly good,
An if my word be sterling yet in England,
Let it command a mirror hither straight,
That it may show me what a face I have
Since it is bankrupt of his majesty.

HENRY

Go, some of you, and fetch a looking-glass.

One appears

RICHARD

No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine
And made no deeper wounds? O flatt'ring glass,
Like to my followers in prosperity,
Thou dost beguile me.
A brittle glory shineth in this face.
As brittle as the glory is the face,

He breaks the mirror.

For there it is, cracked in an hundred shivers.—
Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport:

How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face.

HENRY

The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed
The shadow of your face.

RICHARD

Say that again.

The shadow of my sorrow? Ha, let's see.
'Tis very true. My grief lies all within.
I'll beg one boon then trouble you no more.
Shall I obtain it?

HENRY

Name it, fair cousin.

RICHARD

"Fair cousin"? I am greater than a king,
For when I was a king, my flatterers
Were then but subjects. Being now a subject,
I have a king here to my flatterer.
Being so great, I have no need to beg.

HENRY

Yet ask.

RICHARD

And shall I have?

HENRY

You shall.

RICHARD

Then give me leave to go.

HENRY

Whither?

RICHARD

Whither you will, so I were from your sights.

HENRY

Go, some of you, convey him to the Tower.
On Wednesday next, we solemnly set down
Our coronation. Lords, prepare yourselves.

YORK

Long live Henry, the fourth of that name!

At once, the court disappears as quickly as it assembled, and Richard is left alone. The voices return again in the aftermath of the deposition. At first, they are in the nether space, but then we find Richard caught once more in the midst of battle in his mind.

VOICES

My lord
Richard
My liege
Despair not

RICHARD

All souls that will be safe, fly from my side,
For time hath set a blot upon my pride.

PRISONER 1

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.

PRISONER 2

The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.

PRISONER 3

For every man that Henry hath pressed
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel.

PRISONER 4

Then, if angels fight,

Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

RICHARD

No more, gentle friends.

PRISONER 5

Good my lord, let's fight with gentle words,
Till time lend friends, and friends their helpful swords.

Henry slowly reappears from the shadows. He speaks before fully seen, his voice having a reverberant quality.

HENRY

Tell him that Henry Bolingbroke
On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand
And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
To his most royal person,
Provided that my banishment repealed
And lands restored again be freely granted.

RICHARD

O God, O God, that e'er this tongue of mine
That laid the sentence of dread banishment
On yon proud man should take it off again
With words of sooth! O, that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been,
Or not remember what I must be now.
Swell'st thou, proud heart? I'll give thee scope to beat,
Since foes have scope to beat both thee and me.

HENRY

Or I'll lay the summer's dust with show'rs of blood
Rained from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen

RICHARD

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? I' God's name, let it go.

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave, an obscure grave;
Or I'll be buried in the King's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;
For on my heart they tread now whilst I live
And, buried once, why not upon my head?
What say you King Henry? Will his Majesty
Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?

During this speech, York enters and comes to Richard's other side. Richard listens to his speech as Henry slowly turns upstage, satisfied his work is done.

YORK

The Duke, great Bolingbroke,
Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed,
Which his aspiring rider seemed to know,
With slow but stately pace kept on his course.
Men's eyes did scowl on gentle Richard.
No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home,
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head,
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
His face still combating with tears and smiles.
Had not God for some strong purpose steeled
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted.
To Bolingbroke are we sworn subjects now,
Whose state and honor I for aye allow.

York takes his leave as Isabella runs to join Richard once more. It's as if in a dream. This is his last happy moment, remembering a time before the troubles. It is just the two of them, some afternoon when they managed to steal a moment away from court. He spins her around. He may be a brute everywhere else, but he is always gentle with her.

ISABELLA

Richard!

RICHARD

My love. I've only a moment.

ISABELLA

We shall make it count!

(playfully)

What sport shall we devise here in this garden
To drive away the heavy thought of care?

RICHARD *(playing along)*

Madam, we'll play at bowls!

ISABELLA

No!

RICHARD

No! Why no?

ISABELLA

'Twill make me think the world is full of rubs
And that my fortune runs against the bias.

RICHARD

Then madam, we'll tell tales.

ISABELLA

Of sorrow or of joy?

RICHARD

Of either, madam.

ISABELLA

Of neither, then,

For if of joy, being altogether wanting,
It doth remember me the more of sorrow;
Or if of grief, being altogether had,
It adds more sorrow to my want of joy.

RICHARD

Madam, I'll sing.

ISABELLA

'Tis well that thou hast cause!

RICHARD

Still no? Why then madam, we'll dance.

QUEEN

My legs can keep no measure in delight –!

He whisks her into his arms and her pretended protests turn to laughter. They spin and dance until Richard is at last alone again, for the final time.

He lets out a sigh as heavy as the weight of the world. Perhaps he knows the end is near, and makes to share his final speech. A bell sounds.

RICHARD

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me;
For now hath time made me his numb'ring clock.
My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
Is pointing still in cleansing them from tears.

Another bell

Now, sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
Are clamorous groans which strike upon my heart.

Another bell sounds. The lights go out as a door slams. The wind again returns.

RICHARD

How now?

Footsteps sound. The cell door creaks open. The lights return to reveal a small army of Richard's executors.

RICHARD

Villain!

A fight ensues. Richard knows this is the end, but takes many along with him in earnest.

RICHARD

Go thou and fill another room in hell!

While initially overpowering them, the tide begins to turn, and Richard is losing. As he moves to surrender his fight, he delivers his final speech, which is cut short by the fatal blow.

RICHARD

Mount, mount, my soul. Thy seat is up on high,
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to –

Black out.