

# Richard II

## 2.1

*Enter John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, sick,  
[carried in a chair,] with the Duke of York*

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

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

**YORK**

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

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

O, but they say the tongues of dying men 5  
Enforce attention, like deep harmony.

Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in  
vain,

For they breathe truth that breathe their words in  
pain.

He that no more must say is listened more  
Than they whom youth and ease have taught to  
glose. 10

More are men's ends marked than their lives before.

The setting sun, and music at the close,  
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,  
Writ in remembrance more than things long past.  
Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear, 15  
My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear.

**YORK**

No, it is stopped with other, flattering sounds,  
As praises of whose taste the wise are feared,  
Lascivious metres to whose venom sound  
The open ear of youth doth always listen, 20  
Report of fashions in proud Italy,  
Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation  
Limps after in base imitation.

Where doth the world thrust forth a vanity±±  
So it be new there's no respect how vile±± 25

That is not quickly buzzed into his ears?  
Then all too late comes counsel, to be heard

Where will doth mutiny with wit's regard.  
Direct not him whose way himself will choose:  
'Tis breath thou lack'st, and that breath wilt thou lose. 30

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

Methinks I am a prophet new-inspired,  
And thus, expiring, do foretell of him.  
His rash, fierce blaze of riot cannot last,  
For violent fires soon burn out themselves. 35  
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short.  
He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes.  
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder.  
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,  
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.  
This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, 40  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world, 45  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or as a moat defensive to a house  
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blesseÁd plot, this earth, this realm, this England, 50  
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,  
Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,  
RenowneÁd for their deeds as far from home  
For Christian service and true chivalry  
As is the sepulchre, in stubborn Jewry, 55  
Of the world's ransom, blesseÁd Mary's son;  
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,  
Dear for her reputation through the world,  
Is now leased out±±I die pronouncing it±±  
Like to a tenement or pelting farm. 60  
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,  
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,  
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.  
That England that was wont to conquer others 65  
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.

Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,  
How happy then were my ensuing death!  
*Enter King Richard and the Queen; [the Duke of  
Aumerle,] Bushy, [Green, Bagot,] Lord Ross, and  
Lord Willoughby*

**YORK**

The King is come. Deal mildly with his youth,  
For young hot colts, being reined, do rage the more. 70

**QUEEN**

How fares our noble uncle Lancaster?

**KING RICHARD**

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

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

O, how that name befits my composition!  
Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old.  
Within me grief hath kept a tedious fast, 75  
And who abstains from meat that is not gaunt?  
For sleeping England long time have I watched.  
Watching breeds leanness, leanness is all gaunt.  
The pleasure that some fathers feed upon  
Is my strict fast: I mean my children's looks. 80  
And therein fasting, hast thou made me gaunt.  
Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave,  
Whose hollow womb inherits naught but bones.

**KING RICHARD**

Can sick men play so nicely with their names?

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

No, misery makes sport to mock itself. 85  
Since thou dost seek to kill my name in me,  
I mock my name, great King, to flatter thee.

**KING RICHARD**

Should dying men flatter with those that live?

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

No, no, men living flatter those that die.

**KING RICHARD**

Thou now a-dying sayst thou flatt'rest me. 90

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

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

**KING RICHARD**

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

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

Now He that made me knows I see thee ill:  
 Ill in myself to see, and in thee seeing ill.  
 Thy deathbed is no lesser than thy land, 95  
 Wherein thou liest in reputation sick;  
 And thou, too careless patient as thou art,  
 Committ'st thy anointed body to the cure  
 Of those physicians that first wounded thee.  
 A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown, 100  
 Whose compass is no bigger than thy head,  
 And yet, encageÁd in so small a verge,  
 The waste is no whit lesser than thy land.  
 O, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye  
 Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons, 105  
 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. 110  
 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.  
 Thy state of law is bondslave to the law,  
 And±± 115

**KING RICHARD**

And thou, a lunatic lean-witted fool,  
 Presuming on an ague's privilege,  
 Dar'st with thy frozen admonition  
 Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood  
 With fury from his native residence. 120  
 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.

**JOHN OF GAUNT**

O, spare me not, my brother Edward's son, 125  
 For that I was his father Edward's son.  
 That blood already, like the pelican,  
 Hast thou tapped out and drunkenly caroused.  
 My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul±±  
 Whom fair befall in heaven 'mongst happy souls±± 130

May be a precedent and witness good  
That thou respect'st not spilling Edward's blood.  
Join with the present sickness that I have,  
And thy unkindness be like crooked age,  
To crop at once a too-long withered flower. 135  
Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee.  
These words hereafter thy tormentors be.  
(To attendants) Convey me to my bed, then to my  
grave.

Love they to live that love and honour have.

*Exit, [carried in the chair]*

**KING RICHARD**

And let them die that age and sullens have, 140  
For both hast thou, and both become the grave.

**YORK**

I do beseech your majesty impute his words  
To wayward sickliness and age in him.  
He loves you, on my life, and holds you dear  
As Harry Duke of Hereford, were he here. 145

**KING RICHARD**

Right, you say true: as Hereford's love, so his.  
As theirs, so mine; and all be as it is.

*Enter the Earl of Northumberland*

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

My liege, old Gaunt commends him to your majesty.

**KING RICHARD**

What says he?

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Nay, nothing: all is said.  
His tongue is now a stringless instrument. 150  
Words, life, and all, old Lancaster hath spent.

**YORK**

Be York the next that must be bankrupt so!  
Though death be poor, it ends a mortal woe.

**KING RICHARD**

The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he.  
His time is spent; our pilgrimage must be. 155  
So much for that. Now for our Irish wars.  
We must supplant those rough rug-headed kerns,  
Which live like venom where no venom else  
But only they have privilege to live.  
And for these great affairs do ask some charge, 160

Towards our assistance we do seize to us  
The plate, coin, revenues, and movables  
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possessed.

**YORK**

How long shall I be patient? Ah, how long  
Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong? 165  
Not Gloucester's death, nor Hereford's banishment,  
Nor Gaunt's rebukes, nor England's private wrongs,  
Nor the prevention of poor Bolingbroke  
About his marriage, nor my own disgrace,  
Have ever made me sour my patient cheek, 170  
Or bend one wrinkle on my sovereign's face.  
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, 175  
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 180  
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, 185  
Or else he never would compare between.

**KING RICHARD**

Why uncle, what's the matter?

**YORK**

O my liege,

Pardon me if you please; if not, I, pleased  
Not to be pardoned, am content withal.  
Seek you to seize and grip into your hands 190  
The royalties and rights of banished Hereford?  
Is not Gaunt dead? And doth not Hereford live?  
Was not Gaunt just? And is not Harry true?  
Did not the one deserve to have an heir?  
Is not his heir a well-deserving son? 195  
Take Hereford'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? 200  
Now afore God±±God forbid I say true!±±  
If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights,  
Call in the letters patents that he hath  
By his attorneys general to sue  
His livery, and deny his offered homage, 205  
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,  
You lose a thousand well-disposeÁd hearts,  
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts  
Which honour and allegiance cannot think.

**KING RICHARD**

Think what you will, we seize into our hands 210  
His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands.

**YORK**

I'll not be by the while. My liege, farewell.  
What will ensue hereof there's none can tell.  
But by bad courses may be understood  
That their events can never fall out good. 215

*Exit*

**KING RICHARD**

Go, Bushy, to the Earl of Wiltshire straight.  
Bid him repair to us to Ely House  
To see this business. Tomorrow next  
We will for Ireland, and 'tis time, I trow.  
And we create, in absence of ourself, 220  
Our uncle York Lord Governor of England;  
For he is just and always loved us well.±±  
Come on, our Queen; tomorrow must we part.  
Be merry, for our time of stay is short.

[Flourish.] Exeunt [Bushy at one door; King  
Richard, the Queen, Aumerle, Green, and  
Bagot at another door]. Northumberland,  
Willoughby, and Ross remain

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Well, lords, the Duke of Lancaster is dead. 225

**ROSS**

And living too, for now his son is Duke.

**WILLOUGHBY**

Barely in title, not in revenues.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Richly in both, if justice had her right.

**ROSS**

My heart is great, but it must break with silence  
Ere't be disburdened with a liberal tongue.

230

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Nay, speak thy mind, and let him ne'er speak more  
That speaks thy words again to do thee harm.

**WILLOUGHBY**

Tends that that thou wouldst speak to the Duke of  
Hereford?

If it be so, out with it boldly, man.

Quick is mine ear to hear of good towards him.

235

**ROSS**

No good at all that I can do for him,  
Unless you call it good to pity him,  
Bereft and gelded of his patrimony.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Now afore God, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne  
In him, a royal prince, and many more  
Of noble blood in this declining land.

240

The King is not himself, but basely led  
By flatterers; and what they will inform  
Merely in hate 'gainst any of us all,

That will the King severely prosecute

245

'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs.

**ROSS**

The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes,  
And quite lost their hearts. The nobles hath he fined  
For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts.

**WILLOUGHBY**

And daily new exactions are devised,  
As blanks, benevolences, and I wot not what.  
But what, a' God's name, doth become of this?

250

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Wars hath not wasted it; for warred he hath not,  
But basely yielded upon compromise  
That which his ancestors achieved with blows.  
More hath he spent in peace than they in wars.

255

**ROSS**

The Earl of Wiltshire hath the realm in farm.



**WILLOUGHBY**

The King's grown bankrupt like a broken man.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Reproach and dissolution hangeth over him.

**ROSS**

He hath not money for these Irish wars, 260  
His burdenous taxations notwithstanding,  
But by the robbing of the banished Duke.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

His noble kinsman. Most degenerate King!  
But, lords, we hear this fearful tempest sing, 265  
Yet seek no shelter to avoid the storm.  
We see the wind sit sore upon our sails,  
And yet we strike not, but securely perish.

**ROSS**

We see the very wreck that we must suffer,  
And unavowed is the danger now  
For suffering so the causes of our wreck. 270

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Not so: even through the hollow eyes of death  
I spy life peering; but I dare not say  
How near the tidings of our comfort is.

**WILLOUGHBY**

Nay, let us share thy thoughts, as thou dost ours.

**ROSS**

Be confident to speak, Northumberland. 275  
We three are but thyself, and, speaking so,  
Thy words are but as thoughts. Therefore be bold.

**NORTHUMBERLAND**

Then thus. I have from Port le Blanc,  
A bay in Brittain, received intelligence  
That Harry Duke of Hereford, Reinold Lord Cobham, 280  
Thomas son and heir to the Earl of Arundel  
That late broke from the Duke of Exeter,  
His brother, Archbishop late of Canterbury,  
Sir Thomas Erpingham, Sir Thomas Ramston,  
Sir John Norbery, 285  
Sir Robert Waterton, and Francis Coint,  
All these well furnished by the Duke of Brittain  
With eight tall ships, three thousand men of war,  
Are making hither with all due expedience,

And shortly mean to touch our northern shore. 290

Perhaps they had ere this, but that they stay

The first departing of the King for Ireland.

If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke,

Imp out our drooping country's broken wing,

Redeem from broking pawn the blemished crown, 295

Wipe off the dust that hides our sceptre's gilt,

And make high majesty look like itself,

Away with me in post to Ravenspurgh.

But if you faint, as fearing to do so,

Stay, and be secret, and myself will go. 300

**ROSS**

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

**WILLOUGHBY**

Hold out my horse, and I will first be there.

*Exeunt*