

Light and Darkness in *King Richard III*

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I. A Study of *Richard III*

Act I, Scene i. The Wars of Roses between the House of Lancaster and the House of York for the throne ended in the victory of the York family. The tragedy of *Richard III* begins with Richard's soliloquy.

Now is the *winter* of our discontent
Made *glorious summer* by this sun of York.

(I. i. 1-2)

To the York it is the glorious day of victory. The past discontent and dark shadows are represented by the image of winter. The dark, sombre winter is gone, and the sun of summer shines on everything. The image of the sun is that of splendid glory to which Shakespeare gave force and dignity. The ideal kingship, filled with life and ecstasy like the shining summer sun, ought to bring peace. On this day of glorious victory, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, stares at his ugly figure. Richard, cursing his own shadow in the sun, burns with ambition and hatred. He betrays himself, "I am determined to prove a villain." (I. i. 30)

The images of winter and summer, the sun and the shadow reveal themselves in contrast. The images of light and darkness in contrast may be said to be the key to Shakespeare's imagery. Here the floating image developing in pairs are comparatively simple. The sombre winter and the bright summer sun, but this image of the sun soon flows to the images of the shadow and the cloud, and by and by ends in the

image of blood.

Act I, Scene ii. The dead body of Henry VI is carried in. The Lady Anne, the wife of the late Prince Edward is bewailing. Her mourning over the late King changes into the words of hatred and curse on Richard, who took the lives of her husband and her father-in-law. The images of adders, spiders, toads, and the like continue to appear. Presently Richard shows up.

What *black magician* conjures up the *fiend*?

(I. ii. 34)

The image of the black magician turns into that of the fiend. The black magic or necromancy, having been believed in by the people since the Middle Ages, fills the atmosphere. This image, in Richard's dialogue, moves to that of the unmannered dog, and again, in Anne's dialogue flows to the dreadful minister of hell from the devil, and continues to move to the butcher, the blood, the murderer and the hell-governed arm.

The images of the devil and the hell represent a magic world, a world of shadows in contrast to the sun, a world of darkness. This world of darkness, in addition to the image of the weird magic, casts the dark shadow to the bright sun. This dark shadow is none other than the figure of Richard, filled with malice and hatred. From devil to hell, murderer, blood, the image continues to change, intertwine, flow, until the image develops into that of the night in contrast with the sun. In this continuous flowing of the image we find the characteristic of Shakespeare's image.

Act I, Scene iii. Elizabeth, worrying about the health of her husband, King Edward IV, is conversing with others close to the king. Soon Richard appears. He begins to cavil at them. There the wife of the late King Henry VI, Queen Margaret comes. Richard and Margaret begin to bicker. Margaret curses Richard. Here also the image begins with the devil. The image of the devil in Margaret's dialogue flows from the hell to the cacodemon, the wrangling pirate, and then the bloody

deed. In contrast with the hell, the image of the heaven appears, then flows to the dull cloud, and turns into the image of murder. In Margaret's dialogue, the image of the bloody daggers changes into that of the dog, the hell of ugly devils, the elvish-mark'd, the rooting hog, and the son of the hell. When Hastings, Rivers, and Dorset try to intervene between Queen Margaret and Richard, she says thus, turning to Dorset:

They that stood high have many blasts to shake them,
And if they fall, they dash themselves to pieces.

(I. iii. 259-60)

This cluster of imagery is not originated by Shakespeare. Such imagery can be found in the works of other contemporary writers in the Elizabethan age. They seem to have been influenced by 'the fall of the great', one of the theme of Seneca's tragedy popular in those days.

The images of the high tree and the wind in Margaret's dialogue flow into Richard's dialogue.

I was born so *high*
Our aery buildeth in the *cedar's* top
And dallies with the *wind*, and scorns the *sun*.

(I. iii. 263-65)

This image of the aery is also used in Act I, Scene i and ii. The images of the high tree and the wind turn into that of the sun, which soon flows into that of the shade, and is associated with that of the shade of death. The shade of death begins Shakespearian change from outshining beams to the cloudy wrath, and then to the eternal darkness, and develops into the image of blood, turning into that of the dog, fawning, and venom tooth in succession, ends with that of death and hell.

Hitherto, Shakespeare often used the image of the dog as the symbol of abomination. As Caroline Spurgeon points out, it was customary for the Elizabethan writers to use the dog as the symbol of aversion.¹⁾ Spencer often used it as such also.²⁾ The image of the association of the dog with flattery can be found in Chaucer, too.

1) C. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 195-9.

2) Edmund Spencer, *The Faerie Queene*, Bk IV. 8, 26, and others.

A whelp that *fawned* me as I stood.

(The Book of the Duchesse, 389)

The association of the dog with flattery, which the Elizabethan age inherited from the preceding age along with the custom, must have been very familiar to the common people.

Act I, Scene iv. A room in the Tower of London. George, Duke of Clarence enters with the prison warden Brackenbury. The Duke remembers the nightmare of last night. The Duke, who escaped from the Tower, got aboard the ship to cross to Burgundy. The Duke was with Richard, Duke of Gloucester. On the deck, seeing Richard staggering, the Duke tries to support Richard, who throws the Duke overboard. The Duke's nightmare begins with the images of billows, main, water, ugly death, and moves with a cluster of new images. The bottom of the sea is strewn with the anchor of gold, pearls and numerous jewels. Some of the jewels, set in dead men's skulls, are shining, as if laughing at dead bones lying on the bottom. The image, beginning with the images of the deep, the blood, the sea, the tempest and the melancholy flood, ends with the image of the grim ferry man, who carries the soul of the Duke to the kingdom of perpetual night. It is the dark monarchy. There appearing is a shadow like an angel. However, her bright hair is dabbled in blood. The shadow calls on the god of vengeance for the Duke's fall into the pit of darkness. Her scream makes a legion of foul fiends surround the Duke completely. Here the Duke's story of his dream full of suggestions and symbols, ends. But the image moves from devils to night, morning, day, and night. Two assassins enter.

The Duke, believing in Richard, does not know that it was Richard who sent the assassins. The Duke says, vindicating Richard, that he is kind. One of the assassins replies that Richard's kindness is like the snow at the harvest, and that it was Richard who sent them. The image of snow also appears in Chaucer,³⁾ which is used to be compared to things fleeting and unreliable, soon disappearing by the heat

3) Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Bk I. 75, Bk IV. 53, and Bk V. 168.

of the sun and fire.

Act II, Scene i. Images deserving special attention are not found.

Act II, Scene ii. The dowager Duchess of York, Richard's mother enters accompanied by the son and the daughter of the Duke, who was killed. The children do not know Richard sent the assassins, which makes Lady York the more sorry. And there Queen Elizabeth enters, telling them of the death of the King in tears. Here the images of branches, root, leaves, and the like represent the Queen's helplessness and sorrow deprived of her husband and King. Lady York, comparing the deaths of the King and the Duke to two mirrors broken to pieces, bewails that she lost two clutches to support her weak legs. The image of tears drowns the world and transfers to that of the watery moon controlling tides, with our shining stars dimming.

Act II, Scene iii. Two Londoners, hearing of the death of the King, talk on the street. Here the scene begins with the image of cloud. On a cloudy day wise men prepare the raincoat. The fall of a large leaf means the coming of winter. With the setting of the sun comes night. Images with a suggestive force continue to transfer in the midst of proverbial expressions, for instance, that a sudden storm brings a bad harvest. The images of cloud and night ends with the image of storm.

Act II, Scene iv. Queen Elizabeth, the old Lady York, the young Duke York enter accompanied by the archbishop. They are waiting for the arrival of the Prince. Duke York, the brother of the Prince tells them that Uncle Richard said that the small herb was pleasant, but that the great weed was troublesome. The images of herb and weed, sweet flower and weed are repeatedly used. A messenger comes and says that Rivers, Grey and Sir Thomas Vaughan, sent to Wales to escort the Prince to London, have been arrested by Richard and Buckingham. The Queen cries bitterly when she knows that her relatives fall one by one through Richard's malice. The image of contrast is used that the innocent hinds are attacked by the tiger, and the idea of cruelty and sacrifice is emphasized, together with the image of flower

and weed.

Act III, Scene i. Again on the street of London. The scene of the arrival of Prince Edward. He thinks it strange that more relatives did not turn up to welcome him. Richard, using the image of sugar and poison, tells the Prince that there is unfaithfulness in seemingly faithful appearance. Again the image of idle weed repeats itself, foreshadowing the fate of the young Prince.

Act III, Scene ii. In front of the mansion of Lord Hastings. A messenger comes from Lord Stanley, and advises Hastings to escape from the imminent danger. In Stanley's dream of last night a boar struck at his helmet. The image of the boar is repeated several times thence. Aside from the hog image used in Act I, it is the image of Richard in relation to the heraldry of Richard. This image of the boar has nothing direct to do with the main flow of the image of this play. But it is repeated through the whole play, and along with the images of the dog and the toad it represents Richard's character, and gives this play a kind of characteristic.

Act III, Scene iii. Pomfret Castle. Rivers, Grey and Sir Thomas Vaughan taken prisoner by Richard are being sent. In this short scene, the images of the damned blood sucker, the bloody prison, and guiltless blood appear, but do not flow to other images.

Act III, Scene iv. The conference for the coronation is held. Richard enters. Hastings does not know the intrigue of Richard against him at all. Using the images of damned witchcraft and hellish charm, Richard says that there are plotters against him, and that they are planning to cripple him. Richard goes on saying that the arm of the intrigue was like a blasted sapling, and that it was planned by the widow of his elder brother Edward. He calls her a monstrous witch. When Hastings speaks out in spite of himself, Richard turns his anger to him, as if waiting for the opportunity, and orders Hastings be put to death immediately, and withdraws. Hastings remembers anew Stanley's dream of last night. The image of the boar flows to that of the butcher. He who lives on a temporary favour is like a drunken sailor on a mast.

The images of fatal bowels, the deep, the butcher are mixed with the images of a sailor and the sea, and end with the image of blood. The weakness of human mind depending for a moment upon the unreliable thing is represented as the mast image by Chaucer.⁴⁾ The weakness that a drowning man will catch at a straw is symbolized by the mast image.

Act III, Scene v, and vi. There is no image to be worthy of particular observation.

Act III, Scene vii. Richard and Buckingham enter. They talk about the success of their plan so far. Buckingham informs Richard that he told citizens that the children of the late King Edward were not legitimate children, that Richard should be honoured as the King, and that citizens were just staring at one another like dumb statues or breathing stones. Buckingham advises Richard to be out of sight, as the Mayor soon arrives. Presently Buckingham tells the Mayor that Richard is at his prayers. By and by Richard appears with two bishops on a high place. Buckingham and the Mayor offer him the crown, but Richard refuses peremptorily, yielding only after repeated entreaties.

The images of a stock and a royal stock grafted with an ignoble plant flow to the swallowing gulf, dark forgetfulness, deep oblivion, and the fall of the country appears in conjunction with the image of the sea. Richard compares himself to the bark which can tide over the mighty sea. The bark images not unfrequently appear in Chaucer also.

Act IV, Scene i. In front of the Tower of London. Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York appear from one direction, and from the other direction Anne, now the wife of Richard. They came to meet the Prince. They are surprised to hear that they cannot in the name of the 'King'. They hear of the coronation of Richard. Anne is told to attend the coronation. Queen Elizabeth mourns over the unexpected, and advises Dorset to flee from the hell, away from the slaughter house by ship. The image of wind of misery runs to that of bed of

4) Jeffrey Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcite*, 314-14. As in a tempest is a rotten mast,

death and then that of basilisk or cockatrice, flowing to the images of red hot steel, deadly venom, and blood. The image of 'scarce the blood was well washed from their hand' reminds us of *Macbeth*. This image of blood transfers to the images of angel, dead saint, honey, sleep, golden dew of sleep and dream. Here the similar progress seen in *Macbeth* can be detected, though relatively coarse and simple. The people heavy at heart depart on their own way. Elizabeth, facing the stone of the Tower of London, appeals to the wall for her sorrow leaving her two children there. The images of stone, walls, rough cradle, rude, ragged nurse, old, sullen playfellow show her sighs and spleen in sequence.

Act IV, Scene ii. A room in the palace. Richard wishes to remove the children of the late King Edward by any means. Buckingham promises to consider the matter and withdraws. Richard tells Catesby to circulate the rumour that Anne is gravely ill. Richard soliloquizes that he will kill Anne, and marry his niece, thus securing his throne. His present throne is of brittle glass. The image again changes to blood. There a servant comes with a man named Tyrell, an impoverished gentleman. Richard orders Tyrell to dispose of the lads, the sweet sleep's disturbers. The running images around here have something common with *Macbeth*.

Act IV, Scene iii. The same place as in Scene ii. Tyrell, who slew the two lads, enters. The images of blood, butchery, and bloody dog flow. During the flowing of these images, the images of alabaster innocent arms, describing the innocent children, four red roses on a stalk, and summer beauty intertwine. These smack of the tradition of the Middle Ages, and have the effect of contrast in the midst of the images of blood, butchery and dog.

Richard, after slaying two princes, his wife Anne, plans to marry the elder sister of the princes. His courtier Catesby enters, and informs Richard that many people are gathering around Earl Richmond to destroy Richard.

Act IV, Scene iv. In front of the palace. Again the Queen Margaret

enters. She whispers that she will go to France, having seen the ripe glory falling into the rotten mouth of death. There Elizabeth comes accompanied by Duchess of York. Elizabeth, thinking of the two children slain, weeps over the unblown flowers. Margaret whispers that it is causality that infant morn vanished behind aged night. Elizabeth mourns over the deaths of her children, using the images of contrast like gentle lambs and entrails of the wolf. In the dialogue of Duchess York, there are many oxymorons increasing the effect of contrast, such as dead life, blind sight, and living ghost. Margaret, using the images of hell hound, dog, teeth, lambs, and carnal cur, attributes everything to Richard. Beloved ones are in the dusky graves, while the hell's black intelligencer, Richard is still alive. The earth gapes, the hell burns, the devils shout, the saints pray, waiting for the death of Richard. Margaret swears that she will live to see the dog, Richard, die. The images of hell and devils are followed by the image of dog, and then the images of bottled spider and foul bunch-backed toad.

Margaret calls Queen Elizabeth the poor shadow, or the painted queen, and goes on to say that everything is a flattering index, like a direful pageant attracting the attention of the audience, and that life is fugacity like bubbles.

Richard appears and appeals to Elizabeth for her daughter's hand. Elizabeth blames Richard for the deaths of her sons. Richard uses the traditional image of the medieval astrology, saying they simply were not born under good stars. In Elizabeth's dialogus the images of murderous knife, stone-hard heart, and lambs appear, and flow to the images of anchor, desperate bay of death, poor bark, sails, tackling, rocky bosom, stormy sea and bark. And these images turn to the images of hell, butcher, murder, and devils. Before long a messenger comes to report that Richmond made an attack. The long Scene IV ends with the images of sea and ship.

Act IV, Scene v. No images are to be seen.

Act V, Scene i. Buckingham, taken prisoner, is led to his execution. No images of particular interest can be found.

Act V, Scene ii. The camp of Richmond. The images of blood—usurping boar, field, fruitful vines, foul swine, and harvest of peace—the image of the field of harvest on the just side of the Richmond force stands in contrast with the images of boar and swine on the evil side of the Richard force.

Act V, Scene iii. The camp of Richard. The images of weary sun, golden set, golden track and fiery car foreshadow the victory of Richmond and the doom of Richard. The image of edgeless sword are joined with that of boar, and from shadow, substance and sweeter sleep, the image of dream comes. The end of the scene closes with the images of bloody tyrant and black day.

Act V, Scene iv. Finally, Richard is defeated by Richmond. A long cruelty is ended and a new peace comes. The images of bloody dog, bloody wretch flow to slaughter and butcher, but soon peace comes with the images of white and red roses.

When the play is seen through the imagery, it has a few things in common with *Macbeth*. But generally both the contents and the usage of imagery are simple. The blood image is characteristic of this play. In *Macbeth*, a dark world manipulates everything, but the central image of this play is blood and butcher. In *Richard III*, what is momentous in the movement of imagery is the image of contrast. This is, as Wilson Knight and L.C. Knights emphasize, the essential characteristic of Shakespeare's play. The contrast of images representing music and tempest, order and confusion, always turning up in the movement of Shakespeare's imagery, and making the appearance complicated, builds up Shakespeare's play. In *Richard III*, an image is frequently accompanied by another in contrast. However, this contrast, as with many earlier plays, compared with the later plays, is simple and mechanic.

II. Conclusion

As stated already, it was in 1930 that Caroline Spurgeon's *Leading*

Motives in the Imagery of Shakespeare's Tragedies, Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* appeared. Since then, imagery study has been regarded as a new direction of Shakespearian criticism, a basis of aesthetic criticism, and a new clue to the interest in Shakespeare's style and rhetorical technique. The imagery study has maintained the position of its own importance. Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Wolfgang Clemen's *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, and Wilson Knight's consecutive publications of his works made many people recognize a significant role in the interpretation of Shakespeare played by imagery.

As mentioned before, in contrast with Spurgeon's assembling-classifying study method, Clemen's study method emphasizes the function and the dramatic role of imagery, and the interpretation of imagery joined with the progress of Shakespeare as a dramatist. This method insists that it is meaningless to treat of imagery as isolated, because images should be grasped in a system of the complex structure of the play. We should also think of the relations of image to the essence and the technique of the play. It stands to reason to say that images are elements that cannot be sequestered from the whole system of the play, and they are inextricably involved with the structure of the play.

This attitude to imagery has great influence on the latest study of imagery. At the present time few seem to adopt Spurgeon's method, but there is no study of Shakespeare but shows the interest in imagery now. Imagery study, led by Spurgeon and criticized and developed by Wilson Knight and Wolfgang Clemen, is an indispensable element of a new Shakespearian criticism and interpretation. The followers of Spurgeon—L. C. Knights, Robert B. Heilman, William Empson, Frank Kermode, M. M. Mahood, J. E. Hankins, Rosemond Tuve, T. W. Baldwin, and Adrien Bonjour—have made great efforts to improve what Spurgeon crudely formed. Two-dimensional study of imagery by the pioneer Spurgeon has now become three-dimensional. The separated, mechanical study of Shakespeare's imagery has become

the basis on which is founded the latest attitude to imagery study that is more and more complicated, complex and pluralistic. Imagery study is not everything of Shakespearian criticism; however, no matter what direction and what method is adopted in the interpretation of Shakespeare, it is utterly impossible to fling Shakespeare's imagery to the four winds.