

THE
**DONALD
RICHIE**
READER

50 Years of Writing on Japan



Compiled, edited, and
with an introduction by
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The Great Mirror: An Introduction to Donald Richie

ONE

Donald Richie is an amateur and a dilettante (in the best sense of these words), a humanist and a romantic (as he calls himself, so contrary to the contemporary tide), and an aesthete (as I also think of him). He is also the best writer we have on Japan. This statement requires two comments. First, while Richie's worldwide reputation rests specifically on Japanese film, he has also written voluminously and variously on a wide array of Japanese subjects—from gardens and Godzilla to temples and tattoos—seemingly destined to be of interest only to so-called Japanophiles (except perhaps when tattooists or garden historians wish to pursue their research further). But even within (and especially beyond) the fairly specialized field of film studies, Richie has much to tell us about Japanese culture, society, and character. Second, in a very real—and aesthetic—way, it can also be said that Richie has always had only a single subject: himself. Even as he observes Japan, he also, as in a mirror, observes himself.

How romantic! Few have looked as “deeply” into the Japanese mirror as Richie and seen not only Japan, but himself, reflected back. And we, as we read him, are further thrust into a vertigo of recognition: discovering Japan, Richie, and ourselves.

What we have before us then is Donald Richie's Japan, a

by Arturo Silva

description and an interpretation that is recognizable certainly, and possible, but one that is also, in the best artistic sense, impossible, imagined. His is a Japan as interpreted and invented as was Lafcadio Hearn's. One may recall Oscar Wilde here: "The whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people."* I am certainly not the first to be struck by the notion that Richie's view of Japan will serve for the twenty-first century as Hearn's did for the previous one. Nor is it coincidence that one of Richie's later works is a commentary on Hearn's Japan writings, the contemporary observer commenting on his most important predecessor.

But for all the work and decades spent on it, Richie's view of Japan seems still to belong only to the "happy few." One difficulty in "placing" him is that Richie is neither an academic nor a popular writer (that is, one who writes books meant to be popular). He lacks clout then in two areas that unfailingly gain respect (one for its "intelligence," the other for its profitability). Concerning his lack of academic affiliation, he comments, "I've never approved of the academic style, which seems to be obscurity. Nonetheless, I do do learned papers, but everybody complains that they're far too readable, and that they are far too lucid to be any good." As for the popularity end of writing, he cites a story about a piece on film director Akira Kurosawa that was commissioned by the *New York Times Magazine*, which turned it down no less than five times: "Richie, you just haven't got the drama inherent in the man," they complained. His response: "I said that I didn't know that drama was inherent in people. I thought people like you made it up."

Richie's interpretation of Japan is compellingly attractive, eminently full of common sense, almost too easy to subscribe to. But why do so few? The problem is its ironically perfect fit: it fits no one's Orientalist agendas, all of which require an *other* Japan. Indeed, Richie is doubly other: caught between two facing mirrors that no one bothers to look into. His view is that of the *gai-jin*, the foreigner who will never fit in, a position necessarily to be accepted by all outsiders in Japan, though not all do, of course.¹ (And in his case, he is one who wouldn't want to: "I think if I didn't feel like a foreigner, I wouldn't be here. If I were Japanese, I wouldn't stay here ten minutes.") More importantly, Richie's views are "unofficial"; he is no academic nor affiliated with any major newspaper or governmental agency. The complete free-lancer, Richie only observes; he has neither an agenda, paradigm, nor system to push, no "Us versus Them" policy to assert. As he

* See pages xxxvii–xxxviii for the sources of quotations cited in the main text of this section.

I Richie speaks of "the tone of a lot of writers in Japan now" as being one of "violated innocence. 'Here I was, open like a flower, and look what you did to me,' they say about Japan. Of course, this is based upon the idea that Japan would ever return whatever affection they were lavishing upon it." The subject of the foreigner in Japan receives some of Richie's most scathing comments. For example, he also recounts this incident: "Can you imagine, I heard a man, who'd been here before [i.e., during the Occupation] and then came back, say, 'these people are getting uppity.' If you say a person's getting uppity . . . you're saying that their position was such that they should never have attempted equality. That's not a very democratic thought" (Interview, May 11, 1996).



EUGENE LANGSTON

At Engakuji, Kamakura, 1947.

says, “There are so many more resemblances between the Japanese and everybody else than there are differences—all this harping on difference really becomes irritating.”

Refreshingly, there are no tired and offensive clichés about Japan to be found in his work, few statistics, and no financial forecasts.² While he is undoubtedly *the* expert on Japan, he has no pretense of being a “Japan expert.” He takes no position: “I am not to be put on one side or the other. You can’t get that bipolar grip on me.” Richie has always happily acknowledged his status as outsider—he has never been a joiner—a position that allows him to observe dispassionately. “I didn’t have to make the country coherent. All I had to do was describe things. I didn’t have to have this superstructure that so many later writers about Japan thought they had to carry around. Particularly, I didn’t have to construct models of the country. I could look at it and attempt to describe it.”³ For many an establishment or institution, he is neglected because no use can be made of him. (“Richie? Writes about films, doesn’t he? Oh, and tattoos and gardens, eh? Good for him,” one imagines editors and bureaucrats remarking.)

That, precisely, is the value and beauty of his work. What

2 And there is a good deal of (gratuitous?) debunking of many received notions. For example, Richie does not think that the Japanese are particularly hard-working nor especially devoted to cleanliness, arguable points, of course. For all of his descriptive abilities, Richie himself can also be faulted with the creation of a no-less-subjective set of peculiar views of the Japanese. While I largely agree with him, I also have to acknowledge that he does tend sometimes to wear the proverbial rose-tinted lenses. This is especially so, for example, regarding his notion of Japanese “innocence.”

3 “I am at home in Japan precisely because I am an alien body. It is that I am no longer a member over there and cannot become a member over here—this defines my perfectly satisfactory position. One does not have to be a member of something” (*Journals*, March 21, 1992).

With a Gagaku dancer, 1947.



NEREDITH WEATHERBY

4 His view might also be said to be self-defeating by being so varied: never having made the gesture of a single, all-encompassing history or, again, “interpretation” of Japan (which would be antithetical to his nature), Richie is thus (by this mode of thinking) not to be taken seriously. But taken together, his variety does possess an exceedingly impressive fullness—one that also resists “unity,” systematicity. One of the obvious aims of this anthology is to display some of that variety; the reader, filling in the rest, will come halfway and perceive the fullness of Richie’s view.

good is film criticism or a discussion of pachinko when it comes to international trade talks? None, certainly, to the academic’s or the bureaucrat’s mind-set. But a serious reading, of say, the opening chapter of Richie’s book on the film director Yasujiro Ozu (included here), would provide any reader with a wealth of understanding of traditional Japanese family life. And a look at the essay on pachinko might provide some insight into the sense of loss, insularity, and insecurity of postwar Japanese (not irrelevant to trade talks). The use-value of Richie’s eminently practical view of Japan is then immediately and ironically defeated by its beauty and charm—and yes, its real usefulness.⁴

Why then would one want to “subscribe” to Richie’s view of Japan? Not because the establishment does not but simply because, it seems to me, his is a view one can live with. This is obvious, not in the views of big business or government but in terms of daily life, of mutual appreciation and comprehension, and of getting rid of that “Japan-equals-the-Other” mind-set. Generalizations about “the Japanese,” or even “the Americans,” “the Europeans” (or Italians, English, etc.) are in the end offensive. While Richie does make some generalizations—we all do—about “the Japanese,” they are never held as unchanging truths. The truths lie in individuals, and of these, Japan has about 128 million.

* * *



RICHARD LARSH

*In the ruins of the Imperial
Hotel, Tokyo, 1947.*

For fifty years, Richie has observed, described, and commented upon the Japanese. One hesitates to say that he has also “interpreted” them as the term is usually understood; doing so would contradict the very core of his position, which is, that there is nothing to interpret, nothing to see through (no deeps to plumb, no essences to reach), no correlation to be made between some inner and outer worlds. At the most, one can say that, true to a rhetorical and aesthetic strategy holding, for example, that description itself is the strongest possible criticism (or even interpretation), so Richie’s beautifully crafted descriptions of the Japanese must stand as his sole interpretation. One of the most important (and oft-repeated) themes of his view, his gaze, is that the ostensible is the real. What he observes is what he describes; what he describes is what we interpret.

* * *

Since he first arrived in Japan on the last day of 1946, in more than thirty books, scores of essays, and hundreds of book and film reviews, as well as dozens of lectures and presentations, not to mention a great miscellany of uncollected notes and articles, Richie has expostulated a view of Japan and the Japanese that is

as “deep” or “true” as it is varied. He has not only written about Japanese film (perhaps a quarter of his work) but also the city of Tokyo (two books, many essays) as well as Japanese life in regard to nature and spirit (Zen, Shinto, gardens, etc.); such seeming abstracts as time and space as perceived by the Japanese; a host of Japanese arts, including traditional and contemporary theater; aspects of popular culture (Japanese comics, television, fashion); Japanese food, design, pornography, Japanese ghosts, and tattooing; not to mention scores of specific Japanese individuals. No one, to my knowledge, has ever written such a compendium on Japan in so thorough a form and with such style and erudition. The only comparable effort must be Basil Hall Chamberlain’s perennial *Things Japanese* (1927), which, while somewhat outdated but nonetheless still enjoyable, is more of a collection of encyclopedic entries. Richie has even challenged that volume (see the bibliographical note). Also, one must consider the many genres and styles Richie has worked in. These include not only film history and criticism but also the historical as well as contemporary and experimental novel; short stories and drama; the biographical portrait (as well as autobiography in both memoirs and journals); the fable and satire; travel and garden and culinary writing; amateur or quasi-sociology, history, and anthropology (including religious anthropology), and semiology; art, theater, and music criticism; not to mention the journalistic grind of a book or film review written every week for almost five decades. His other roles include editor and lecturer, as well as composer and painter.

* * *

While this great variety is astounding, even more so is the consistency with which he approaches his subjects.⁵ Somehow, early on, the subject and its writer formed a natural symbiosis, an immediate connection, and, as one might say, the texts simply came forth. What is astonishing about his first stay in Japan (1947–49) is the immediacy of connection Richie felt for this strange, new land. There is no easy explanation. Perhaps we can attribute the feeling to that most natural of occurrences, coincidence. Richie says he was simply ready. “I knew nothing about Japan. The reasons I liked it here were emotional. I was ready to fall in love with whatever fell in my lap. I’d come from an industrial town in the northwest corner of Ohio—I never liked it very much—and my earliest ambition was to leave. If you grow up having those feelings, and then when you finally get

5 A keen reader will also, happily, find some inconsistencies and contradictions.



HOLLOWAY BROWN

In Nakano, Tokyo, 1948.

to a place which is complicated and interesting and filled with promise, you're bound to have an emotional feeling. You've got all these feelings you haven't used. My roots descended, here, in this friendly loam."

Perhaps these lines from William Carlos Williams's "Spring and All" describe it best:

*They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter.*

.....

*One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf.*

*But now the stark dignity of
entrance—Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken.*

*With Yasunari Kawabata,
Kamakura, 1948.*



TWO

Donald Richie was born in April 1924 in the town of Lima, Ohio, of Scottish and Swiss ancestry. There was nothing extraordinary about life in Lima (pronounced as the bean is), and that was the problem: “50,000 people, in the corner of the beet-growing fields of northwest Ohio.” Precociously, at about the age of eight or nine years old, he became aware of language and its power to describe and order the world and his emotions. He was also sensitive to music—always classical—and listened to radio broadcasts. At the same time, during his weekly visits to the Sigma Theater, the local cinema, he discovered the magical world of film (at first merely an alternative to the reality of Lima). These three worlds of language, music, and film provided imaginative means of escape from Lima (as did a visit to the Chicago World’s Fair in 1933), but he keenly felt the need for a real one. Around 1939 he read Frederick Prokosch’s *The Asiatics*, which prophetically whetted his appetite for the Orient. At age seventeen, the revelation of film as another means of ordering and describing the world came when he saw Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane*. In the same year (1941), he read another book by Prokosch, *Night of the Poor*, in which a young man decides to leave home by hitchhiking. Richie did the same; he hitchhiked to New Orleans and stayed there for four months. Meanwhile, America had entered the World War, and Richie enlisted in the U.S. Maritime Service (the Merchant



*At a rooftop shrine, Ginza,
Tokyo, 1948.*

Marines). He spent the next four years as an ensign and purser, positions allowing him a great deal of time to read deeply into modern and classic, European and American literature. It also gave him an opportunity to see much of the world: northern Africa, southern Europe, Shanghai, and other places.

On New Year's Eve, 1946, his ship was docked in Okinawa Bay. On the next day Donald Richie would enter Japan, and his *annus mirabilis* would begin.

After discharge from the Maritime Services, Richie joined the civil service as a typist for the U.S. Occupation forces in Japan. During that first year alone in Japan, he underwent a number of astonishing experiences. Not only did Richie see the air-raid-devastated Tokyo (and watch it come back to life), he could also see Mount Fuji everyday from the main Ginza crossing. Richie visited the shrine of Ise and the stone garden of Ryoanji; awoke on a beach to discover boys sleeping in the sand for the O-Bon (Festival of the Dead) holiday; took part in the all-male nude Festival of Darkness; and on Sundays visited Daisetsu Suzuki in Kamakura, where he attempted to "understand" Zen Buddhism. By the next year, he had moved over to a position as staff writer and film critic on the Army newspaper, the *Pacific Stars and*

6 In fact, Richie has continued to be very much the working writer. Despite the number of books in print and their steady sales, as well as the international film festival invitations, he continues to perform “regular jobs”—editing a newsletter, taking part on various film committees, subtitling films, etc. His “normal” day remains simple: early to rise, he takes care of his correspondence, then writes—always careful to have a variety of subjects at hand so as to keep inspiration fresh—then lunch, jobs, and in the evening, dinner with friends or social or cultural occasions. He is also, needless to say, the complete Tokyo *flâneur*.

7 “To see if I can find out how to do it. The process is everything, the result’s nothing—and once I’ve decided that I know how to do it, then I don’t have any reason for doing it anymore. I long ago made the decision that writing is the only thing that counts for me” (Interview, November 4, 1996). And: “The avocations are there because I am curious. And since I make my living as a critic, I think I should not criticize until I know how to do it myself. Once I learn how to do it, I lose interest” (from a letter, February 25, 1996).

Stripes. He also made a number of important and lifelong personal and professional friendships. By spring 1949, Richie knew that he had found his home. He had also decided that he needed a “proper” education and so returned to America, with no doubt that he would be returning to Japan. Richie enrolled at Columbia University in New York, majoring in English Literature and also taking part in the first academically sanctioned course in Film Studies, offered by Roger Tilton. It was during these Columbia years, too, that Richie made his first experimental films.

Graduated, he returned to Japan in 1954 and worked at a few jobs—teaching, editing, and writing film reviews for the *Japan Times*, an association that still continues to this day.⁶ Richie took evening classes in spoken Japanese; continued earlier friendships and made new ones; and, in 1956, published his first book. Begun in 1949, the novel *This Scorching Earth* (later reissued under its original title, *Where Are the Victors?*) expressed his view of the Occupation and its varied personnel, “indigenous” and otherwise. Over the next few years, much of his energies would be devoted to educating himself about Japanese film. While doing so, he also wrote articles for international film magazines, thus making something of a reputation for himself abroad, which resulted in his meeting a number of distinguished visitors to Japan (Alberto Moravia, Igor Stravinsky, Stephen Spender). He also met another Japanese film researcher, Joseph L. Anderson, and together they would write *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (1959). This book secured his reputation and would shortly lead to his either assisting in or organizing director retrospectives at major European film festivals in the early 1960s.

Richie’s activities increased significantly during that time. Living in a friend’s traditional Japanese farmhouse (it had been moved to Tokyo’s Roppongi district; this was before the area’s neon pick-up days occurring a decade later), he set about writing about film (his book on Kurosawa appeared in 1965); making his own films; participating in the thriving theater scene (and becoming friends with such artists as Butoh founder Tatsumi Hijikata, playwright Shuji Terayama, composer Toru Takemitsu, and novelist Yukio Mishima); and writing some of his more important early essays (he had already become an aficionado on the Noh). Besides writing, Richie also composed music, painted, and made prints.⁷ He also married the writer Mary Evans (they divorced in 1965). Intellectually and personally, Richie had also come to appreciate Existentialism (he calls the Kurosawa book a “hymn to Existentialism”), underwent analysis, and came again, not coinci-



HOLLOWAY BROWN

In Asakusa, Tokyo, 1948.

dentially, to be intrigued by Zen Buddhism (“Zen teaches one to be in harmony with one’s own nature”).

All of this came to a temporary halt in 1968 when he was invited to become curator of film at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Richie stayed four years, returning to Tokyo every summer for three months. (“The U.S.A. was just one big Ohio so far as I was concerned. OK for a visit but no place you’d want to live.”) While there, he organized a hundred-film retrospective of Japanese cinema, as well as the first U.S. retrospectives of the films of Robert Bresson and Stan Brakhage.

Since the 1950s, and throughout the 1960s, Richie had taken extensive trips throughout Japan, especially to an area known as Seto Naikai, the Inland Sea, a body of water located between three of Japan’s four major islands and itself containing hundreds of smaller ones. From the many notes taken on these journeys his masterpiece, *The Inland Sea* (1971), was formed.⁸ In 1975, he would finish another masterpiece, *Ozu*, a study of the great Japanese film director.

The later 1970s, and the 1980s and 1990s, the second quarter-century of his life in Japan, saw Richie in the position of being a “Japan expert” (though not in the academic sense I referred to above) and now more free to write about whatever his attention and enthusiasm turned to.⁹ In 1980 he moved to Shitamachi, the older quarter of Tokyo, parts of which had not been devastated by the war’s air raids, and lived in what he called his “Ozu

8 Curiously, for all his extensive travels worldwide, apart from *The Inland Sea*, almost the only other travel pieces he has written are the few compiled in *Partial Views*. Interestingly, these all date from the early 1980s and are redolent of Richie’s recurring nostalgia for a “lost Japan.”

9 Or was distracted by. The early 1980s see him succumbing somewhat to a “French” semiological influence. But he says, “I have little respect for the French school. I want to put an imprimatur on sanity. I do believe strongly in the humanist approach—man is the measure of all things—no ideas, no systems” (Interview, September 1996). But it is also interesting to note that Roland Barthes, for whom Richie does have great respect, had hoped to meet him; alas, such an auspicious meeting never took place.

At Nikkatsu Film Studio, in front of a miniature set, 1956.



NIKKATSU

10 As a practical way to live, not out of some earnest nostalgia. After all, Shitamachi is still part of the greater capital. “I don’t think I’d have stayed here if it hadn’t been for Tokyo. Tokyo is, as you know, a world in itself. One of the things about Tokyo is that you can escape from Japan” (Interview, May 11, 1996). Though not much emphasized here, the city holds a position of absolute centrality to Richie’s life in Japan. For a description of his final “Ozu apartment,” see the last entry in this book, “New Year’s 1999.”

11 *Different People* was reissued in 1996 under the title *Public People, Private People*.

apartment.”¹⁰ During these years, he wrote prolifically on a variety of subjects (food, tattoos, temples, Tokyo, pop culture, etc.), despite all his public-work commitments (lectures, film festivals), publishing fifteen books in the 1980s and 1990s, and about a hundred essays. Among other notable prizes, Richie was awarded the prestigious Japan Prize in 1995. Especially important books include *Zen Inklings* (1982), a delightful retelling of Zen tales; *Different People: Pictures of Some Japanese* (1987), portraits of individual Japanese;¹¹ *Tokyo Nights* (1988), an experimental comic novel; *The Honorable Visitors* (1994), accounts of twelve illustrious post-Meiji Western visitors to Japan; *Tokyo* (1999), his *zuihitsu* (“follow the brush”) meditation on the great city; and *Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai* (1999), a historical novel-cum-intellectual autobiography. During these years too, he regularly served as a judge at major world film festivals; still tirelessly introduced Japanese film to the West; wrote a weekly newspaper book review column; took extensive travels to many countries around the world; and, needless to say, led a full, active, social life.

* * *

Donald Richie is now in his late seventies. He represents not only a generation of young men who came of age in postwar Japan—including well-known scholars such as Donald Keene and Edward G. Seidensticker and numerous business- and family men and women—“old hands,” as the phrase once had it. But



*In a bookstore, Kanda, Tokyo,
1958.*

Richie represents more too. When he casts off this mortal coil, a whole world of irrecoverable experience and knowledge will pass with him. One need only take a look at a few of the hundreds of book reviews he has written over the past forty years for the *Japan Times*; one cannot help but be struck not only by the great learning he possesses in regard to “things Japanese” but also the intelligence and care with which he delivers it, the ease with which he does it. His references to events, people, books, and films are encyclopedic (and more often than not based on experience), and as such, we feel, to our great loss but academia’s gain, will never be so smartly worn again.

Richie has had the good fortune to have (in Frank O’Hara’s words) the “grace / to be born and live as variously as possible.”

THREE

Within the great variety of Richie’s work, we also see everything that is human.¹² And within the human we see the artistic: the style is the man. For all the quasi history, sociology, and anthropology he has written, Richie is first of all a writer, an artist.¹³ His Japan is, of course, his version, his own take on the place and the people, his “imaginative interpretation.”¹⁴ But it is also very real (or, being art, realistic). Indeed, his interpretation would seek to “redeem reality”—revealing it by describing it faithfully¹⁵—in the way that Ozu’s films do or the way that the Japanese gardener does.¹⁶

12 Or almost everything: I cannot recall any births occurring in the oeuvre.

13 Ozu is great film criticism partly because it recreates the director’s working method.

14 As it should go without saying, this essay is my “interpretation” of Richie; I am very aware that so many more are possible.

15 The faith being in that describing, that removal to language. (Richie also calls himself, rather modestly to my mind, a “descriptive journalist.”)

16 The idea of a “redemption of reality” comes first from Sigfried Kracauer’s and Andre Bazin’s film writings, and later, Paul Schrader’s study, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

17 Nor did he ever “go native,” or equally as bad, become uncritical. Japan, or Tokyo, may be “home” but only to a limit: “I find anyone who is ‘at home’ in this universe a person seriously deluded. . . . Being at home means taking for granted, going blind and deaf, eventually not even thinking. It means only comfort. I would hate to be at home” (*Journals*, February 3, 1992). That said, one can also say that Richie can also wax nostalgic and even sentimental at times. “Cold comfort” (see the next note) can become cozy.

18 “The liberty of realizing that I am responsible for everything that I am and have been and will be. . . . That has remained, with its hard mindedness, its lack of sentimentality, its cold comfort” (*Journals*, January 20, 1960).

19 The only extensive use of musical reference that Richie has made of music in his Japan writings is in his “Notes on the Noh” in *A Lateral View*.

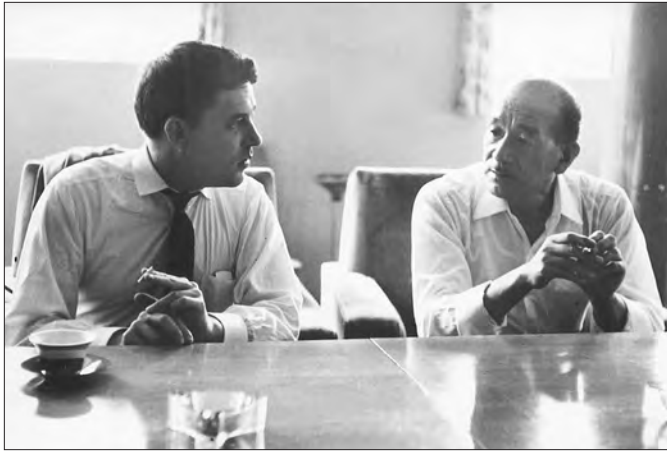
20 “The story is there entirely for its formal qualities. To read Henry Green is like listening to well done music” (Interview, November 4, 1996).

21 “Rereading Colette’s *The Pure and the Impure*, her best book, or the one I like best. It is pure description, very pure. And she sits there alone with her subject and we see her describing. It is a tone that I admire. Much in *Different People* has been learned from her. But what she can always do and what I can only occasionally do is to forget self in pure description. She can keep the description pure and yet go deep, so deep” (*Journals*, February 8, 1992).

In terms of the specifically real and present Japan, his perception can be found in the spiritual/anti-spiritual notion that “yes, there might be a Paradise, but life here on Earth is a Paradise too.” In other words, the transcendent is the here and now. Richie’s film criticism exemplifies the idea that Japanese film reflected Japanese daily life, that “the people on the screen and the people in the theater were so much the same.” But Japan never became any sort of art object for Richie;¹⁷ instead, the country became the “friendly loam” in which he could discover and be true to his own nature (redeeming, again, that reality too). Japan is also the Great Mirror in which he sees himself reflected. Art and Nature, Self and Other are the terms behind Richie’s work. On New Year’s Day, 1947, one of the great recognition scenes took place.

Again, Richie is an artist first; he approaches his material through the literary lens (and not as, say, a sociologist in the field, gathering data). Among the ideas that form his thinking, I have already mentioned the influence of Existentialism,¹⁸ and Zen, but these came later in his makeup. The earliest artistic influences—or at least sources of wonder—were, as also previously mentioned, music, film, and language (though not yet as literature). Though he has written some music and music criticism, music has remained for Richie something that has “enriched me, made me alert, made me more open.”¹⁹ Music, of course, offers a writer lessons in rhythm, weight, tone, and so on. From film he learned especially about narrative structure. “It taught us what to leave out. Films have a terseness about them that is very good for art.” The most obvious evidence of such is in the fiction, but it can also be found in the portraits, in that specificity of gesture or word, which are so cinematically precise.

Richie is a widely read person, and at some undefined point, his taste in writing was formed (perhaps during youth when he was taught to be wary of display for its own sake, and to appreciate craftsmanship). The “Richie pantheon” is very select. Among writers, there are (supremely) Jane Austen, Henry Green,²⁰ Colette,²¹ and Marguerite Yourcenar, with Proust, Gide, and Borges in the anteroom. In film, Ozu and Robert Bresson. In music, Haydn, late Beethoven, late Brahms, Hindemith. In the visual arts, Vermeer, Chardin, and Giorgio Morandi.²² In one conversation alone, Richie drew on three different arts in describing what he has wanted to achieve in his own: “I would like to be as good a describer as Ingres is a pencil-drawer. [Later:] One of my goals was to become as good a classical novelist as Colette. [And later again:] If I could be somebody as assured and as much a



KAWAKITA MEMORIAL FILM INSTITUTE

craftsman as Mendelssohn, then I would be very pleased.” Briefly, while I hope that the meaning of this list is apparent, I think we can recognize a few points about these writers: in all of them, the style is classical, restrained, and always charming. Too, character description is supreme and refined. And third—perhaps the most important point in the Richie aesthetic—structure is impeccable. That is, stories unfold with an inevitability that appears utterly natural. All art is concealed, but it is an art whose subject determines its form (see his introductory remarks in *Tokyo*), where things are only shown and never explained.²³

* * *

Richie’s art and character are one of continuity and change (terms he also uses to describe his fifty years in Japan). One cannot say “when” he decided (humanistically) that “man is the measure of all things” or (existentially) that “ideas are only emotions whose time has come” or that “it doesn’t matter what was done to you, but what you do with what was done to you.” Richie’s earliest Japan writings (apart from the 1947 journal entries included here) come from the mid-1950s, by the time he was in his early thirties and by which time his ideas had had nearly a decade in which to develop. These are remarkably lucid. One can detect later developments. The writing of *The Inland Sea* (1971) represents a watershed in clarifying his idea of Japan (and, naturally, himself). The publication of *Ozu* (1975) is a further instance

With Yasujiro Ozu during the filming of Akibiyori, Ofuna Shochiku Studios, 1960.

22 Two further points might be made here. One, Richie’s taste in art is not as overweening as it seems; indeed, he also sees a lot of “trash” films. In other words, his tastes run high and low, but never rest in the middle. As he says, “I like generals or privates; Bresson or King Kong” (Interview, November 4, 1996). Two, given this sort of taste, it should be no wonder then—as it long was to me—that Richie would never, apart from a few short essays, write a book-length study of Japan’s other great filmmaker, Kenji Mizoguchi, simply because his films call such attention to their style. Likewise, Max Ophüls and Hitchcock are not to his liking.

23 “I gave an introduction to *Tokyo Story*, recounting how Ozu hated just this kind of introduction. The explanation is always unnecessary. If you use your eyes and ears properly you will understand; if you do not, no amount of explanation will inform you. The reason is that Ozu is interested in showing, not explaining. He implies; you infer. He builds his half of the bridge; you build yours. Each having made some effort, a real communication becomes possible. No effort, no communication. This is the only kind of art I admire” (*Journals*, May 23, 1978).

*At an inn on the Inland Sea,
1962.*



(especially as it takes him so outside of himself) and led inevitably to *Zen Inklings* (1982), a book he has called “a gift.” Behind the first two books lies, to speculate for a moment, the early 1960s period of psychoanalysis as well as Richie’s marriage and divorce. Behind the latter book lies the late 1940s weekends at Engakuji in Kamakura with Daisetsu Suzuki, and again the analysis.²⁴ *Different People* (1987) and the work of the decade to come represent on one hand a “unity of being” (the earlier lessons had been fully learned, and incorporated) and on the other a more intensely passionate period of freedom to write about whatever he wanted—*Tokyo Nights* (1988) and *Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai* (1999) especially—while also having his “final say” on certain matters (some individuals, Japanese film). But these remarks are mere broad brushstrokes that deeper study could clarify.

* * *

The style is the man. The man is charming, open, witty, a cosmopolitan *flâneur*. The style, the prose, is as well. He is comfortable to read, smooth, steady, melodious. The art is disguised, remarks flow naturally. (And thereby he achieves his ideal of art.) Insight rests on common sense. Description is epiphanic, aphorism abounds. There are few extremes, few judgments. (These occasional latter come in when he derides Japan for having sold out to big money.) A kind person, his satire is never cruel (see his article here on the “sex industry”). The prose, given its seductive charms,

24 Richie sees a certain relationship between Existentialism, Zen, and Psychoanalysis in that all three are concerned with liberating the “self” from the idea of “itself” (while admitting the great differences too, of course).



MARY RICHE

can be rather erotic (though never specific; the reader must read into his desires). A circumspect man, presentation being all, best face forward, Richie's deeper emotions are rarely laid bare, except in the *Journals*. (For erotic and emotional specifics, readers will have to wait for the *Journals*' posthumous publication.)

FOUR

Awash in this soup—of boredom in Lima, ideas, aesthetics, artistic influences, worldwide travels—we come back to Okinawa Bay, New Year's Eve, 1946.

Open-eyed, observing, accepting, and ready for transformation by an equally accepting and welcoming society, Richie landed in Japan, and, in a colorfully dramatic phrase he said to me once, "I felt my testicles descend to the earth."²⁵ What he saw was a nation in ruins and a people who were dealing with it most practically. He saw smiles on the defeated, facing and welcoming their just recent enemy. He saw what he would come to call a natural and innocent people who had accepted their lot. Though screened from full view by being a representative of the Occupation forces, he would soon meet individuals who would accept him as the person he was.²⁶

He would come to see that these individuals (he didn't yet speak the language) were simply who they openly presented themselves to be. They in turn accepted him for whom he presented

At Dogashima, 1964.

25 The word choice is more than appropriate. As Richie has written, for most travelers, travel also entails sexual freedom and opportunity (see the excerpt from *The Inland Sea* in the "Foreigners" miscellany, page 155). The nature he would be true to in Japan would also entail his sexuality, as he did find a sexual paradise there.

26 "I'd grown up with a lot of the facades that one grew up with in the 30s and 40s in America. And then I suddenly came here. I'd never been to a poor country before, and Japan was what we'd now call a Third World country, it didn't have any money. And people were living somewhat naked lives, and so I didn't have to put up with the kind of hypocrisy that I was used to. I was able to see people, and I was able to approach people. They wanted to be approached because everybody needed help. And so I was able to achieve terms of intimacy with people that I had singularly failed to back where I came from" (Interview, May 11, 1996).

himself to be. The ostensible was the real; there were no “depths of character” to be trudged through, no “essence” to be reached after struggle. Life was lived on the surface (a much better term for this discussion than the loaded “superficial”); character was what was presented, what was done by a person. Japan had lost the war; America had won. OK, accept it, *shoganai*, nothing to be done.

The description above is mostly mine but encapsulates, I think, the essence (if I may) of what Richie perceived during his first two-year stay in Japan. The essence also contains what were to remain most of the central themes of his writings on Japan, which, intertwined, are not easily separated, the one leading to the other and back again.

* * *

Richie’s ideas about Japan form a continuum; any attempted unraveling would be like taking a painting apart, separating its colors side by side, and saying, “There is your painting in its constituent parts” (or a poem and lining up the words, or a film and reediting it according to long, medium, and close-up shots). One can name them all as a single continuum or better, divide them into closely related groups. They can even be abstracted into a single and not unexpected familiar opposition: Nature versus Art. In what follows, I hope to do as Richie, not explain things away but rather only suggest or indicate salient points and ways to read him (and this volume).

The ostensible is the real is a phrase often found in Richie’s work (or the variant, “appearances are the only reality”; compare Wilde’s “Only shallow people do not judge by appearances”). Richie’s phrase is perhaps so often repeated because it is the hardest lesson for most Westerners to learn. Existentialism might have told him that people were simply what they did and that “intentions are ashes,” but his encounters with the Japanese demonstrated the truth to him. Here, the self was in fact its surface. Richie’s Japanese are a sublunary people, facing facts, facing appearances.

Facing what is in front of one’s self entails two further notions central to Richie’s view of Japan: the ideas of presentation and acceptance. Whether it be a tattooed sushi chef or a family at a funeral, *people present themselves in the most appropriate manner* (even “privileged, emotional moments are no less staged”). None of this presentation is done in bad faith; on the contrary, and too, it bespeaks fine character. Time and again in



DAIJI

Richie's writings, characters are seen who put their best selves forward (telling phrase), who keep on in the midst of hardship for no other reason than that it is the best—indeed, the only—thing to do. None of this is to say that the Japanese do not possess “character” or “individuality”—a lingering Orientalist notion Richie detests, and, for example, *Different People* certainly demonstrates to be untrue—or that they do not have dreams and ideals. Look only at the Tanabata scene from *Companions of the Holiday* (included here): Sumiko has her somewhat silly dreams of marriage to an older, mustachioed man, but when she is kissed by Saburo, the local meat-shop delivery boy, she is very much in the present moment and those dreams vanish. She accepts the hitherto unrecognized real being presented to her and now finally revealed.²⁷ Daily life in Japan is such that people necessarily have to get along (for any number of reasons, e.g., because they are so crowded together or the government for centuries has so inculcated the idea into them). Richie's Japanese are not plagued by any sentimental depth psychology. Life is to be lived; work is its own reward, and nothing more.²⁸ The view may be a hard truth to many, but it becomes for Richie a real one.²⁹

Acceptance—existential, Buddhist—*is all*. The idea may be attributed to the practical lot of Japanese life, that poverty from which they created so much, the oppression they have long had to endure. But it does not bespeak any sort of passivity.³⁰

With Kon Ichikawa, 1965.

27 The scene is doubly poignant for being one whose possibility has fast faded in post-Bubble Japan.

28 Consider this also from *Companions of the Holiday*. The old housekeeper Setsu is doing the accounts and thinking to herself: “Laying down her pencil, she decided that she had learned one thing, and that this was all the philosophy that she contained: the meaning of work lay in the working, so the meaning of life lay only in the living; one added one day upon the next, and this was sufficient; whether one served oneself or served a master, it was the same; to fill the day was important; what filled it was of small importance.”

29 But too, emotional expression and spiritual striving are equally real to him, and they occur in art, in that “redemption of reality.” The crux is simply that there is no “essence” of character or “transcendent beyond”—because it is all here and now.

30 Nor, once more, does it imply any passivity on Richie's part. Yes, he has embraced life in Japan, but not uncritically, as many of his works testify. If I may be allowed a lengthy footnote, consider this entry from the *Journals* (September 16, 1990):

Thinking about Japan this rainy Sunday—about the increasing amount of social control. Though the Japanologists talk about “innate” Japanese need for consensus, for the search for the great *wa* [harmony], without which no one is happy,

With Hidetoshi Hirano and Clifton Harrington during the filming of Futari, 1967.

the “work ethic” which is said to be inborn, all of these things dividing Japan from the rest of humanity and making it unique—though this is talked about, few observe that: consensus is forced and the dissenter is punished, the *wa* is applied, not discovered, the ethic is enforced and not chosen. Japan exhausts its citizens with forced work and it deadens them with the forced play of the tube, pachinko, drink, drugs such as tobacco, encouraging a pathological dependence upon what one would in other countries call the state. That we do not in Japan is because it is not visible as such. Indeed, little is visible. There seems to be no control—certainly not the government that holds up clean hands and denies repression.

What it is, is the rule of a bureaucratic elite, which determines how Japan is governed—this is an oligopoly which forces the citizens of Japan into their characteristic mold. This would be impossible without a pliable populace, hence the necessity of creating (through the hierarchy of schools, through popular prejudice, through fear—the fear of being left out, left behind) a pliable populace. This control is seen as “self-regulatory”—the limits are imprinted. One is expected to submit to *gyosei shido* (administrative guidance) and practice *jishaku* (self-restraint)—these are held



Again, quite the contrary: pragmatic acceptance has yielded great spiritual nourishment (or at least once did). To it also must be attributed that acceptance of Nothingness itself (the *mu* on Ozu’s gravestone), the “Nourishing Void” as Richie calls it (and the title of another piece included here).

This acceptance, of what is presented, of one’s lot, is active, trusting, curious. It reaches out. Without conscience, self-consciousness, cynicism, and irony, it is childlike. And thus *the Japanese are innocent*. At least they *once were* childlike (and too the source of many worse presuppositions).

In 1947, Richie landed in a Japan that he regarded as a Paradise. People were friendly, open, and naked. Mount Fuji could be viewed from the main Ginza crossing. Time had been conquered at Ise Shrine and space rendered mystic at the stone garden of Ryoanji. From the horrors of war, a whole nation had re-arisen, smiling and hard at work. There were no agonies of conscience to endure, only work to be done.

From about the early 1970s on, one begins to recognize a certain wariness in Richie’s writing. He begins to remark that Japan is rapidly changing, and not for the good. The country is losing its “innocence” as the economic machine with its rapid develop-



SAZORIZA

*With the cast of "Three Kyogen,"
Tokyo, 1969.*

ment takes control. The earlier Japan had been predicated on an aesthetic of poverty, as Richie says in an interview session:

What has gone missing? One, and of course it's irretrievable, is the beauty of the country. It was the most beautiful country I'd ever seen in my life, and now it's just about the ugliest. That and an attitude toward nature which was based upon penury. If you don't have furniture, then you pay a lot of attention to empty space. And if you have only mud, then you pay a lot of attention to pottery. This attitude based on want leads to all sorts of interesting things like *wabi* and so forth, has given way to a new sort of cultural carpetbaggery and nouveaux riches beyond anybody's wildest dreams of bad taste.³¹

And,

One of the things that I prized most was a kind of creative innocence on the part of the Japanese. We think of innocence as being an empty vehicle, a thing that has to be filled. But that's not it. It's got its own proportions, and it is a thing in itself, and so it's a positive and not a negative thing. Innocence is a force, and this innocence leads to things like an open mind, an inquiring disposition, certainly trust.

No longer. From that period on—it is also the time of *The Inland Sea* and its search for the "real Japan"—Richie derides

up as virtues. And none of this is new. Japan was governed in just this fashion in the Tokugawa period where a completely controlled society was under a totalitarian state and the rebels, the humanists, the dissenters were punished. Now they are merely ostracized, and have to go into the *mizu shobai* ["water trade," or hostessing and other red-light-district entertainments]. However, the press is still relatively uncontrolled, things are still made public, and so *jishaku* is not yet complete.

31 Also:

The virtues I have been describing have now vanished from the Japanese film as they are vanishing from Japanese life. Where there is no more *shomin* (the lower-middle class) there can be no more *shomin-geki* (films about the lower-middle class). In an affluent society, there is no more *mono no aware* [the transience of all earthly things]. In a land where little is forbidden, there can be none of the energy or power of restriction. Less still means more, but the Japanese no longer believe it. There are doubtless strong economic reasons for all of this, but the economic explanation, whatever its strength, is never sufficient. ("A Definition of the Japanese Film," in *A Lateral View*)

32 A moment later in the same conversation, Richie says, “I know Roppongi gives me the creeps. If that’s the future, I don’t even want to look at it.” And later in the *Journals*, he again derides Roppongi: “All of Roppongi growing like a poisonous fungi” (August 23, 1989). Richie had lived in the district in the 1960s, and the life-style enjoyed there then is lovingly recalled in the 1968 novel *Companions of the Holiday*.

33 This nostalgia becomes a regular refrain as the years go by. (Fifty years and Eden gone is certainly acceptable, but some might argue that Richie goes a bit far: tatami are still common, as are good manners.) On October 4, 1973, he meets a friend who hasn’t been in Japan for thirty years and says,

She still, however, speaks the pure pre-war Tokyo accent, now almost disappeared, a language free from Osaka vulgarisms.

Five years later (July 30, 1978), he takes a trip to Tachikawa, on the western side of Tokyo, observing:

There was the Tokyo I remembered from a quarter century ago. . . . I had forgotten the trees of Tokyo—and empty lots graciously doing nothing at all. . . . Everything looking smaller and yes, more gracious.

And only a few days later (August 4) at an outdoor fair, he reflects:

Japan in the summer is always more Japanese, and never more so than at this fair. . . . This is what Japan once looked like. And old attitudes as well. A sudden interest in nature. . . . And a much slower tempo. And with it the old politeness.

Yet Richie has also stated:

what is happening to his lost paradise.³² In fact, at one point, he even calls it such. On June 30, 1989, he sees Heinosuke Gosho’s 1933 *Izu Dancer*:

How astonishingly beautiful the Izu peninsula was half a century ago. It certainly isn’t now. And so I gazed at this scratched, faded, black and white image and saw Eden.³³

Can nature be reclaimed, can the Japanese original, innocent nature be found again? From the looks of it, no. But one can keep on looking, as Richie does. One can also at times make it reappear, and that is called art. Richie was never so naive (or Orientalist) as to believe in an unadulterated “natural Japanese.” The aesthetic sensibility was just too strong, daily social life just too polite. And, nature just too right. Against the Western sentimentalism of a Japan somehow in perfect accord with nature, Richie was able to perceive that, yes, the Japanese did have a special relationship with nature, and the base of it was aesthetic (or animist). In Japan, nature is redeemed by being remade:³⁴ the flower is placed just so, the rock turned to reveal a certain outline, even the movie set furnished just right.³⁵

* * *

This exposition can only offer an indication of Richie’s thoughts about Japan. I do think that in the end one can discover an interesting opposition in them, between Art and Nature. Essentially, and paradoxically, on the side of Nature are the first four notions: the ostensible real, presentation, acceptance, and innocence. Paradoxical because one’s first impulse is to consider them on the side of Art. But, to take only the most obvious example, presentation, while being a matter of making one’s self up, has no sense of contrivance to it and comes from that lack of self-consciousness Richie also sees as characteristically Japanese. On the other hand then, and on the side of Art, is—what, but—Nature, or better, the Japanese attitude to Nature: that it must be remade. In a word then, *our nature is art*: to perceive what is made and to remake it, and so achieve that “clarity” and “outline” that Williams speaks of.

* * *

At the end of Ozu’s *Tokyo Story*, Setsuko Hara presents the most compassionate and affirmative smile when her sister-in-law complains that “life is disappointing.” It is the smile of Kannon, the same smile Richie speaks of Hearn speaking of, and the same



IAN BURUMA

smile that Richie refers to somewhat frequently in his work, but never with more inquisitiveness and lucidity than in his portrait of Hanako Watanabe, an elderly lady³⁶ who rushes for but misses her train—and smiles. It is presentation, acceptance, surprised innocence all at once. And by surprising us, this ostensible real transforms our natures and redeems.

* * *

Japan is the Great Mirror in which Richie found himself reflected back.³⁷ Identification with his subject varies. In his early writing, one can read a strong desire to be liked by the people he encounters. In later works he simply wants to be liked (or laid). More importantly, in almost anything he describes, one catches glimpses of him. The most obvious example is *Different People*, where we are given portraits of a multitude of “Richie-selves” through the multitude of “Others,” his friends and colleagues. Put the forty-eight characters together, and one has a forty-eight-part Richie as well. (Similarly, put the chapters of *Temples of Kyoto* together, and one has a twenty-one-part history of Japan.) Of course, “self” is a very slippery concept for Richie, but three extreme examples can be noted. The power of observation of *The*

With a model for The Japanese Tattoo, 1979.

But I don't want to think that I have turned into one of those old parties who are forever extolling the good old days—which, as a matter of fact, never were. I feel a sense of nostalgia if I go back to a place I've not seen for forty years—it strikes me like a blow. But on the other hand, where I usually go is where I've watched the change, which is so gradual that one can understand it if not approve it. (Interview, May 11, 1996)

34 Certainly, never “conquered” as in the West.

35 Wilde knew the same. From *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895):

Cecily: You dear romantic boy. I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

Algernon: Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

36 There are in fact a telling number of elderly women in the oeuvre, including the final characters of *The Inland Sea* and *The Honorable Visitors*. Richie speculates that they seem to represent potentially “threatening, yet caring and harmonious” figures (Interview, September 1996). The Ms. Watanabe character can also be criticized as having been written while wearing the rose-tinted lenses. After all, there are any number of Japanese who miss their train—and curse.

37 “I'm not very much like Hearn, but I do share this with almost

everybody who's written at length on the country: one of the things you're doing is making it your own, you make it your subject, and you make it in a way a paradigm of yourself' (Interview, May 11, 1996).

38 Though he has never said so, to my reading, I believe *Ozu* to have been of monumental importance to Richie. To offer only a few reasons: In the director's work, he found not only the "redemption of reality" he believed to be film's especial art and mission but also a body of work that reflected his own ideas about art—inevitable, natural—and about Japan—natural, innocent, and so on. He also discovered significantly and unsentimentally truths about the life of the individual within life's chaos and disappointments (again, refer to the end of *Tokyo Story*), especially that life as it is reflected within the family structure. In *Ozu's* work too, he could observe emotion held back for the sake of social harmony; objective correlates that could stand in for emotion (see the remarks on the vase at the end of *Late Spring*); and conversation itself as both real and art, and which he would so wonderfully capture in *Companions of the Holiday*, itself a "slice of *Ozu*" (whose screenplays are, incidentally, considered works of literature among the Japanese).

39 One must make mention too of what might be called "previous selves"—Richie's predecessors. For this, see the bibliographical note and its comments on *The Honorable Visitors*.

Inland Sea lies in the observer, Richie himself. The reader comes to know (and be fascinated by) the ostensible subject—Japan—as much as the real one—Richie. Identification is even. At the other end of the oeuvre is *Ozu*, a book in which it is almost impossible to discover the author. One is even tempted to wax Oedipal here. (Richie obviously "admired" Kurosawa, but he was "so devoted to the films of *Ozu*, and so cherished the man who made them.")³⁸ Finally, *Zen Inklings* can be read as a book about the "Non-self." Obviously, these are stories Richie wants to write (or wishes to have originally written); they are reflections of his desires but written dispassionately. He can be found inside them, while he is also outside: here, the self is not the subject. It simply does not matter.³⁹

The Selections

This selection of Donald Richie's writings aims simply to present an idea of their fullness and many forms. (The exigencies of book publication—I've long felt that a CD-ROM would make the ideal Richie text—have determined that this book will be a sort of hybrid anthology.) Cinephiles know his work certainly. Most Japanophiles probably own one or two of his books, while also being aware that his name studs the various sections of any good Japan section of a bookstore or library. Few have delved into the variety: the fiction, essay collections, autobiography, specific commentaries (gardens, temples, Tokyo, etc.).⁴⁰ If they had, they would have noted not only the great range of his enthusiasms but the wholeness of the view and its deep attraction.

Any anthology is necessarily selective, and most anthologists somewhat defensively note why he or she has chosen to include certain articles and exclude others. I offer none such, and will only say that this book is (to use Borges's famous phrase) "a personal anthology." My position on Richie is stated throughout this introduction.

The Donald Richie Reader is divided into a number of thematic sections, drawing on a broad range of sources (including some rare or unpublished works).⁴¹ These more formal set-pieces are themselves "punctuated" or remarked upon by other groups of writings placed as sidebars throughout. These are the Miscellanea, less than full-length essays or fictions. As my work on the book progressed, I kept placing into a separate envelope pieces



Portrait with Mount Fuji in the distance, 1985.

of text—from a few paragraphs to perhaps a few pages—that I thought worthy of inclusion, though I was not entirely sure how or where they might fit. When I later looked at these pieces all together, I saw that they did seem to fit into four separate categories of, well, miscellanea. These I called “The Body,” “The Gods,” “The Japanese,” and “The Foreigners.” An earlier assemblage had them grouped as individual, transitional chapters (“Miscellany I: The Gods,” for example), but further discussion with my publisher persuaded me that they might be put to better use were they spread about the “main texts” (in a somewhat loose order), “commenting” on or “taking off” from them, thereby adding increased perspective.

“The Body” covers the sublime (a veritable prose poem on Japanese skin), the somewhat unexpected (a paragraph on Kurosawa’s nose), some reflections on Japanese apparel (the kimono and men’s traditional underwear), and a few other oddities. “The Gods” concerns Nature itself, shrines, gardens, and phallicism. (The latter is in reference to Richie’s *The Erotic Gods*, a rare book now, and so I have chosen to include five passages from it.) “The Japanese” is a collection of short pieces that make further comments on those notions discussed above: presentation, innocence,

40 Why haven’t they? Is it a cynical reluctance to seriously entertain the idea that one can write intelligently on such a variety of subjects? To take one example, Richie’s fiction is some of his best work (artistically, and for the pictures it describes of Japan) but the most neglected. Is this because Orientalist policy would have it that Japanese fiction itself is “Other” enough, that “Western Japanese fiction”—artful, accurate—could only be dilettantism (in its worst sense) taken to an intolerable extreme?

41 Some minor housekeeping notes: The selections came from diverse sources, and I have not tried to make them all stylistically consistent, particularly in their treatment of Japanese words. However, most diacritical marks have been dropped and some obvious typographical errors in the originals have been discreetly corrected. In almost all cases throughout the selections, Japanese names appear in Western order, that is, family name last.

and so on. The final grouping is “The Foreigners”: how they are regarded by the Japanese, the troubles they have in regarding the Japanese, and a couple of more beatific moments. I should add here that while it might seem an inordinate number of the Miscellanea come from *The Inland Sea*, they by no means exhaust the riches of that book. In fact, I believe that this book’s selections, taken as a whole, offer a fair coverage of Richie’s entire career and interests.

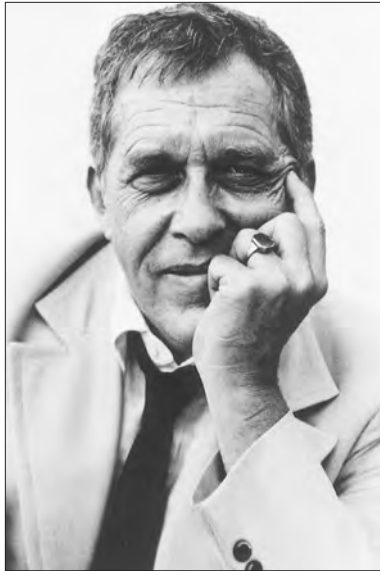
The groupings of the main texts reflect the main preoccupations of Richie’s Japan writings.

The “Prologue” opens with a piece describing Richie’s position in Japan, that is, “Intimacy and Distance,” and is followed by one concerning his position before his arrival in Japan, that is, childhood and his longing to leave (his then) home. This latter piece, “Prose of Departure” is taken from a longer memoir wittily called “Watching Myself.”

“Japan: Early” features two of his private journal accounts of events he experienced during his very first year in Japan (1947), appearing at the beginning and end, respectively, as well as another entry originally written in the *Journals* too but refashioned for his book of portraits, *Different People*. As well, there is one of his earliest (1962) and remarkably illuminating essays on some fundamentals about Japan, “Japanese Shapes.”

Then we move on to “Japan: Film.” The first piece is also taken from the *Japan Journals* and is a memoir of Richie’s career as a film critic. Then comes a short piece (again from the journals) that acts as an amusing follow up. Then come several of Richie’s tours de force, his preface and introduction to *Ozu*, and the conclusion to the first chapter, “Script.” For all of Richie’s vast writings on Japanese film—seven books, scores of articles, reviews, and lectures—I have chosen these brilliant pieces for two reasons: the light they shed on Ozu’s (and Richie’s) view of the Japanese family—hence, almost all of its society—and because they are certainly some of his most heartfelt pieces of writing. This section concludes with the notes of a 1993 lecture delivered at the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, California, “Buddhism and the Film.” Richie lectures regularly in Japan, Europe, and America on Japanese film; notes such as these form the skeleton of his talks. They are particularly interesting for their quick, insightful wit and additional demonstration of Richie’s interest in Buddhism.

“Japan: People” features five of Richie’s portraits from *Different People*. Three are “commoners”—a senile man, a crazy



KAZUAKI KIYOTA

Portrait, 1995.

neighbor, the smiling woman who misses her train—and two are (relatively) famous. I could have chosen more famous people, e.g. Daisetsu Suzuki, Mishima, Kawabata, Kurosawa, etc., but these two portraits and people are for me more compelling. As for the semifamous, we have Ozu's selfless alter ego Chishu Ryu (forever clipping his toenails in the films and muttering an accepting “mmm”), and Toshiro Mifune, best known in the West certainly for his great samurai portrayals but here shown in an entirely new (and almost Borgesian) light. I have also included in this section one chapter from *The Honorable Visitors*, the one on Pierre Loti. (See also an extensive comment on this book and chapter in the bibliographical note.)

“Japan: Fiction” is the longest section, comprising as it does nine (actually fifteen) selections. (And even at that I have not included two of Richie's novels, his first, *Where Are the Victors?*, and his last, *Kumagai*, nor material from two important unpublished fictions.) Richie's fiction is probably the most neglected area of his work. And yet he displays as much (if not sometimes more) art in it as he does in any of his other work. Invention, humor—Richie is a very funny writer—wit, tenderness, and insight are all on display. The section opens with three stories

from the series *A View from the Chuo Line* (previously published in small magazines but not yet as a collection). They are magical miniatures and completely believable (and the title piece is again Borgesian as it seems to describe an *aleph* in Japan). These are followed by a wonderfully tender scene from the novel *Companions of the Holiday*, which one could imagine appearing not so much in an Ozu film (though the dialogue could certainly fit), as in an MGM/Minnelli *Meet Me in Roppongi*. Then come five selections from *Zen Inkings*, retellings of Zen stories; in the last one, the sage is a wholly believable picture of life today in Japan. Next are the middle chapters of Richie's delightful novel *Tokyo Nights*. Finally, while *The Inland Sea* is known as a travel book, Richie considers it a novel. Certainly it has many of the trappings of being one, what with the hero's quest, the complication of a wife, his adventures (especially amatory), recurring characters, and "fantastic speculations" concerning the people he is traveling among. In any event, respecting Richie's view of the book, I include three amusing scenes.

"Japan: Later" includes a variety of pieces concerning contemporary (decidedly nontraditional) Japan. There are three pieces on Tokyo; one refreshingly un-solemn on Hiroshima; and two superb essays on what passes as Japanese culture today: the sex industry (a gentle satire), and television.

The "Epilogue" opens with "The Nourishing Void," an essay on a central (or pervading) Japanese concept (if that is the appropriate word). It closes with the reflective "Japan: A Half Century of Change," followed by two elegiac journal entries from New Year's 1999 echoing as far back as 1947 and earlier, and thus bringing the selections full circle.

A bibliographical note appears at the end of the book, written not so much conventionally but as a commentary on Richie's varied writings, including a list of what I consider to be his essential works.

"The Great Mirror"

In its early stages, *The Donald Richie Reader* was once known as *The Great Mirror*, a title I maintain a certain fondness for. After tossing forth and back a number of possible titles—bad puns and industrial and furniture references—I chanced upon a reference to a "great mirror" in the very last paragraph of *The Inland Sea*:



DAE-YUNG CHOI

“We must all remember that, as Helen Mears knew so well, for the Westerner Japan is a great mirror.” I immediately took to it (as did Donald, initially). After all, the reference had ancient Japanese sanction: there was a tradition of writing “great mirrors” (of learning, of manly love, etc.), and within my furniture hunting it seemed not inappropriate. When I asked Donald who Helen Mears was, he sent me a short article that he’d written about her. Mears had been an American journalist in Japan and in 1948 written a book, *Mirror for America: Japan*, that was in fact critical of U.S. Occupation policy, not unlike his own later novel *Where Are the Victors?* What a perfect fit, I thought. The title was set—for a while, at least.

Amusingly, in an interview a few months later, Donald mentioned that this book was being compiled and said, “The mirror’s not me, it’s Japan. The idea is that you look at yourself in Japan as if in a mirror.” “No, Donald,” I had to remind him, “in this case, *you* are the mirror.”

Donald also passed on this quotation from Percival Lowell: “It is because the Far East holds up the mirror to our civilization—a mirror that like all mirrors give us back left for right—because of her very oddities, as they strike us at first, we truly learn to criticize, examine, and realize our own way of doing things, that she is so interesting. It is in this that her great attraction lies. It is for this that men have gone to Japan intending to stay weeks, and have tarried years.”

At Tofukuji, Kyoto, 1997.

QUOTATION SOURCES

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p. x. “I’ve never approved . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. x. “Richie, you just haven’t . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. x. “I think if I didn’t feel . . .” *Kyoto Journal*, no. 41, 1999.

p. xi. “There are so many . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. xi. “I am not to be put . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. xi. “I didn’t have to . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. xiv. “I knew nothing . . .” Interview, May 11, 1996.

p. xv. “They enter the new world . . .” “Spring and All,” *Collected Poems: 1909–1939, Volume 1*.

p. xvi. “50,000 people . . .” Interview, November 4, 1996.

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p. xix. “The U.S.A. was just . . .” *Journals*, 1960.

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Portrait, 2001.

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- p. xxvi. "intentions are ashes, . . ." Interview, February 26, 1997.
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- p. xxxvii. "It is because the . . ." *Kyoto Journal*, no. 40, 1999. Original source unknown.



EVERETT K. BROWN

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role in introducing Japanese film to the West and for his travel memoir *The Inland Sea*, which has been adapted into a popular PBS documentary. Donald Richie still lives and writes in Tokyo.

ARTURO SILVA is an American writer who lived in Japan for eighteen years. He currently resides in Vienna, where he is finishing an experimental novel, *Tokio Whip*.

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