

**A361 Shakespeare**  
**A361/01: Henry IV Parts 1 & 2: Workshop 1**

**Executive Producer: Nat Taylor**  
**Producer: David Hoyle**  
**Production Assistant: Anne Pearson**  
**Designer: Paul Bannister**

**Contributor(s) in clip: Cicely Palsler Havely**

**Clip transcript: A361 Play Interpretation**

**Cicely Palsler Havely:**

Shakespeare's texts don't tell you how they must be played. They're extraordinarily open to a huge range of different, and sometimes even contradictory interpretations, and no two productions are ever the same. And yet they all start from the same point, words on the page. But, who has best title to these words and what they mean? The actor, for whom they were undoubtedly written, or the scholar?

Actors accuse scholars of reading too much into the text and scholars accuse actors of reading too little. But it's a false quarrel, I maintain. We're all in the same business and I hope that what you're going to see in these programmes will prove this.

When we see a play on the stage or on film or on television, complete with music and lighting, props and scenery, with the actors made up and in costume, word perfect with every movement and gesture, confident and significant, it's easy to mistake the nature of the process that went before. Oh sure we know it had to be rehearsed, the cast had to learn their words and practise their gestures. But if we're not at the theatre ourselves, what we don't realise is how many choices and decisions have to be made in order to achieve each detail in the finished performance. Rehearsal isn't just getting the polish on, it's also exploration, interpretation and discovery, and it's sometimes deciding what to leave out. Actors have to make responsible choices and this is intellectually very taxing.

In any particular production three major variables combine, the director, the actor, and the text, which isn't quite as stable as you might think. It may be cut, it often has to be. Not even all the words are certain, and it doesn't always render up its meaning easily. Sometimes time itself and the changes in our language have made obscure for us what the play's first audiences would have found clear as glass.