

A205: Culture and Belief in Europe 1450-1600

A205/20: Richard II: Character of a King

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David Giles

Jeremy Irons

Narrator: Andrew Sachs

Clip transcript: A205 Richard II and Performance

Extract from Richard II: Act 1, Scene 1. BBC Production 1978

Contributors:

Derek Jacobi

Jon Finch

John Gielgud

Richard Owens

Richard

Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster
Hast thou according to thy oath and band
Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son
Here to make good the boisterous late appeal,
Which then our leisure would not let us hear,
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Gaunt

I have, my liege.

Richard

Tell me moreover, hast thou sounded him
If he appeal the Duke on ancient malice,
Or worthily as a good subject should,
On some known ground of treachery in him?

Gaunt

As near as I could sift him on that argument.
On some apparent danger seen in him
Aimed at your highness, no inveterate malice.

Richard

Then call them to our presence. Face to face
And frowning brow to brow ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak.
High stomached are they both and full of ire.
In rage as deaf as the sea, hasty as fire.

David Giles

What you do in rehearsal is try and look all the time for ways of making the text live. It is to put the emotion in with the intellect that is, that is the most dangerous difficult and private part of the rehearsal process.

Jeremy Irons

I always worry about simplify, over simplifying what a play is about, as much as I would worry about simplifying what, by saying what a picture was about. I think anything like this plays on different people in different ways.

Andrew Sachs

Shakespeare's plays, though handed down to us as text, were written to be performed. The text really only comes to life when it's in production. Actors and directors are crucial in bringing their own imagination and skill to a play. In this programme, we're going to look at three very different productions of Richard II and talk to the actors and directors involved. They reveal a wide range in the way they interpret the character of the King, and the different elements of the play.