

Not a good king, according to historical accounts, Richard II and his failings were popularized by William Shakespeare in *The Tragedy of King Richard II*.

In this clip, we see John Gielgud, in the role of John of Gaunt (the Duke of Lancaster), bemoaning the weaknesses of the country (under Richard II) and berating the King (for his bad judgment).

It is Gaunt's last speech, before he dies.

Move the video forward, to 2:07, for the scene with these famous words:

*This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea
...
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.*

From Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Act 2, scene 1.

For a bit of historical background ... John Gaunt (so-called because he was born in Ghent which, in English, was then known as "Gaunt") was the younger brother of Edward, the Prince of Wales (also known as "The Black Prince").

Ancestor to many of Britain's Kings and Queens - including the present Queen - John Gaunt was one of the wealthiest men in Britain during his lifetime (1340-1399). Historians also believe he was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived.

The following brief summary of the entire work will provide some background for the meaning of Gaunt's words as he chastises his nephew, the young king.

At the beginning of the play, Richard II (the King) banishes his cousin (Henry Bolingbroke) from England. Bolingbroke later returns (with an army and the support of some of the nobility) to depose Richard. More successful than Richard, Bolingbroke (at the end of the play) is crowned King Henry IV - after Richard, separated from his Queen, is initially imprisoned, then murdered.

Those were interesting times!

Credits:

Video clip from *Richard II*, BBC Television Shakespeare cycle, first aired in the UK on October 12, 1978.

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Director: David Giles

Starring:

John Gielgud ... John of Gaunt

Charles Gray ... Duke of York

Derek Jacobi ... Richard II

Janet Maw ... Queen

David Swift ... Duke of Northumberland

Production Companies ... BBC Television, Time-Life Television

Producer ... Cedric Messina

Script Editor ... Alan Shallcross

Designer ... Tony Abbott

Music Adviser ... David Lloyd-Jone

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