

SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD II



**A study morning
led by**

Dr Richard Moore

Friday 4 October 2019

from 10-12 noon

**William Elder Building,
56-58, Castlegate,
Berwick, TD15 1JT**

Richard II was a child-king, aged ten when he was crowned. Shakespeare, however, shows him in the last years of his brief life, making the play in part a generational study. The great embodiment of old patriotic and chivalric values is his uncle, John of Gaunt. Gaunt's death is a turning-point, after which Richard becomes ever-more rash and influenced by his favourites.

The play is a brilliant poetic study of a self-dramatising man in decline, trying to make sense and significance from his own tragedy.

In many ways Shakespeare's Richard seems superficially attractive - in real life, he was good-looking, intelligent and cultured, with exquisite artistic taste and keen judgement of literature. He was six feet tall, slim and fair-skinned with dark blond hair which he wore at shoulder length.

Unfortunately, the praise he earned at fourteen for his courageous behaviour during the Peasants' Revolt had convinced him that he was a born leader of men. Though striking to look at, he was no soldier and was actually politically inept. He could be unstable, headstrong, suspicious, temperamental, extravagant and cruel. Shakespeare gives him a sharp cutting edge, a doubtful sexuality and a noted political carelessness. However, he redeems it with the poetry and shows Richard gaining in a kind of emotional stature under the weight of suffering. Notably he develops a true tenderness to his Queen, and learns that he is his own Nemesis: "I wasted Time and now doth Time waste me."

In the study-session we shall example the characterisation – not just of Richard but of a range of other interesting figures, including Bolingbroke, York and the Earl of Northumberland. We shall also find out about 'symphonic imagery' where certain words (such as sour and sweet) resound like a musical refrain.

The study will also include a look at themes such as patriotism, identity and kingship. Richard's harshness to Gaunt – the symbol of the old order of piety, chivalry and patriotic devotion to duty – is in the play a sign of his moral carelessness and also perhaps of his delight in wounding. Yet he is hyper-sensitive himself and ultimately undergoes an almost Christ-like Passion. In his Shakespearian manifestation, he is partly based on Marlowe's Edward 11, but he is more intelligent, more self-dramatising, and more aware of the double mirror effect of his vision. All this and more will be covered in the study session, aided by dramatised excerpts.

Richard has prepared some background notes, which can be found on the BEA website (see 'downloads'). Please [click here](#).

Tickets £6, including refreshments. All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.

If you supply us with your personal data (name, address or email), we will hold this in accordance with our privacy policy, available [here](#) or by request to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX. If you have any queries, please email berwickea@gmail.com or phone Cian McHugh on 01289 303254

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(Richard II)

