

John McPhee erzählt über ein Interview mit Richard Burton

Burton returned to his story about 1953 at the Old Vic:

That his performance would be recorded far beyond St. John's Wood was largely due to a critical remark made more than midway in *Hamlet's* run. Burton's Hamlet was something like a corrida, good one night, disappointing the next. But when he had his color and gave it the full Welsh timbre, he thrilled audiences long accustomed to the tremulous Gielgud reading.

He had completed about sixty performances and the box office was beginning to slide when the house manager came to his dressing room one evening and said, "Be especially good tonight. The old man's out front."

"What old man?"

"He comes once a year," said the house manager. "He stays for one act and he leaves."

"For God's sake, what old man?"

"Churchill."

As Burton spoke his first line – "A little more than kin, and less than kind" – he was startled to hear deep identical mutterings from the front row. Churchill continued to follow him line for line, a dramaturgical beagle, his face a thunderhead when something had been cut.

"I tried to shake him off," Burton remembers. "I went fast and I went slow, but he was right there." Churchill was right there to the end, in fact, when Burton took eighteen curtain calls and Churchill told a reporter: "It was as exciting and virile a performance of *Hamlet* as I can remember."

Years later, when *Winston Churchill – The Valiant Years* was under preparation for television, its producers asked Sir Winston who he thought should do the voice of Churchill. "Get that boy from the Old Vic," said the old man.

They got that boy from the Old Vic.

Source: John McPhee, *Draft No.4. On the Writing Process*, New York, 2017 (2018 paperback edition), p 112 – 113

Old Vic: Theater in London; St-John's Woods – Bezirk in London. Gielgud: Sir John Gielgud, Schauspieler (Aufnahmen Youtube).

