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King Richard II

Analyzing the Political Discourse of Power

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Introduction

An analysis of the speeches made by the titular hero, Richard II of William Shakespeare by making use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) does seem to be worth a study. That shall unravel the nature of power in language as spoken by the protagonist of the play. *Richard II* (1595) is considered the initial play in a sequence planned as three or four plays about the Lancastrian phase of English history. Shakespeare launched a sequence from the rivalry between Bullingbrook (Duke of Hereford) and Mowbray (Duke of Norfolk) in 1398 to the aftermath of Agincourt in 1415, which covered seventeen years of English political history. *Richard II* was controversial mainly because of the deposition scene.

Fact and Fiction

Not all facts from history are taken into consideration for building the plot of the play. Richard's days of being a minor are not given any reference. The means by which he met the London rebels, during the times of Peasant's Revolt are not referred to. His attack on the group of people known as Lords Appellant is not given complete coverage. The chief appellant was Richard's uncle Thomas, duke of Gloucester, and the others the earls of Arundel, Warwick, Nottingham and Derby, the last of whom was Richard's cousin Henry, the son of John of Gaunt. The first three were condemned as traitors. Arundel was beheaded, Gloucester murdered in prison, Warwick pardoned after submission. Nottingham and Derby escaped this revenge because they had already come over to the king's side, and were rewarded by being made dukes of Hereford and Norfolk. In 1398, Richard took advantage of a quarrel between the two, stopped them from settling it by the knightly method of trial by battle and exiled both.

The play begins with this particular event. In 1399, when John of Gaunt died, Richard did not allow his cousin Duke of Hereford to return or inherit his father's lands. The play makes ample references to this event directly. Later, as it is given in the play, Hereford landed on the east coast, declaring his right of inheritance. Richard, who was away in Ireland, returned hastily, landed in Wales, only to realize his own sinking status and Henry's growth. Richard surrendered to his cousin at Flint, near Chester, and was forced, like Edward II, to give up the throne, nominally of his own free will.

Like Edward II, too, he died, probably by murder after a short time of imprisonment. In the play it is clearly shown that he was murdered. Thus the direct line of the Plantagenets, who ruled for nearly two hundred and fifty years, came to a miserable end paving way for the Lancastrian dynasty.

Scope and Limit

The present study limits itself to a specific area i.e., the language used by King Richard on various contexts - the opening scene where he addresses the warring nobles; the second act where he admonishes John of Gaunt; the third act where he speaks when he listens from Salisbury and Scroope that many of his close allies have either joined ranks with Bullingbrook or they have been murdered and his speech at the time of meeting Bullingbrook; the fourth act where he speaks at the time of deposition; and his soliloquy in the final act.

Method of Analysis

This Shakespearean text is analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA seeks not merely to describe language but also to offer critical linguistic resources to those wishing to resist various forms of power. The objective of CDA is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden within the text. Much has been written in recent years about CDA in its broadest sense and it encompasses a number of general tenets and uses a large range of techniques.

Fairclough (1989), Fairclough and Wodak (1997), van Dijk (1998; 2000; 2001; 2004) explain the sources of dominance and inequality observed in the society by analyzing texts. It is to find the discursive strategies utilized to construct or maintain such inequality or bias in different context.

A text according to van Dijk is merely "a tip of the iceberg" and it is the responsibility of the discourse analyst to uncover the hidden meaning of the text. The need is to "examine how the ways in which we communicate are constrained by the structures and forces of those social institutions within which we live and function" (Fairclough: 1989).

It may worth recalling the proposal of Foucault that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. Language is seen as creating and being created by social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and beliefs.

A Range of Techniques

The relevance of this analysis is primarily because of the fact that the political identity and social privileges of the King meet with a drastic dilution and that is explicit in the discourse of the protagonist. Out of the range of techniques used in CDA, the present study would choose the following to conduct the analysis.

- a) *Setting and interactional control*: i.e., where the event occurs, who controls the

agenda, who initiates and terminates the interaction, ways of turn-taking, who selects the topic, who asserts authority, etc.

- b) *Ideological assumptions*: i.e., how dominance is institutionalized, how is power enacted, sustained and legitimated. The dimensions, levels, structures, strategies, or moves in which ideologically based beliefs exhibit themselves in discourse.
- c) *Discourse organization*: i.e., sentence coherence, rhetorical features and metaphors used etc.
- d) *Positive self-representation and negative other-representation*
- e) *Discursive moves* such as *comparison, euphemism, implication, self-glorification derogation, polarization, Us-Them, presupposition, vagueness, victimization*.

The Elizabethan audience was given a dramatic unfolding of political events, which happened a century ago, and the dramatist knew that the people had to witness the fall of a historic figure from the high pedestal of 'God-given' authority. The society was still under despotic regime and the medium of drama being a popular one should not propagate the idea of revolt against the highest authority. Shakespeare, as one can realize, had to 'balance' the two. In this context, we have to look into the means by which Shakespeare developed the discourse of politics which carried highly 'sensitive' content.

Richard II and CDA

The analysis given below proposes to follow the sequence of events as given in the text.

The structure of play has been designed to show the protagonist reaching his crescendo in terms of his authority in Act 2 scene 1 and then slowly his downfall begins.

In the opening scene, Richard II asserts his power by asking John of Gaunt, whether he has brought his son Henry (Bullingbrook) in front of him, the supreme authority, to deliberate on the accusation Henry has made against Duke of Norfolk (Mowbray).

It may be noted that Richard II, son of the Black Prince, was just eleven when he became the king. He being a minor was controlled by councilors, and the chief among them was John of Gaunt, fourth son of Edward III. The events given in the play do start after 1389, when Richard's personal rule began.

The play begins with Richard's words:

*Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,
Had thou according to thy oath and band
Brought hither Henry Herford, 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? (1.1.1-6)*

Power Revealed in Expression

Looking at the language, one can read a few points in this discourse. The expressions "oath and band", "hither" tell about the powerful status of the speaker. This is a question asked to John in terms of speaker's authority. The pronouns "our", "us" emphasize that point. To this question John of Gaunt answers "*I have my liege*", which also shows Richard's power by making John use the feudal term "liege". Richard invites both parties, acting totally in control.

*Then call them to our presence. Face to face
And frowning brow to brow ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak. (1.1.15-17)*

One can find an interesting observation by Richard after the customary words of praise

We thank you both. Yet one but flatters us... (1.1.25)

It may be noted that ideologies and the social representations control the social practices of actors as group members. Richard being the monarch displays a high degree of control in the interaction and often legitimately asserts his dominance.

*Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears... (1.1.115)
Now by my scepter's awe I make a vow
Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him nor partialise
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul.
He is our subject, Mowbray; so art thou.
Free speech and fearless I to thee allow. (1.1.118-123)*

Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be ruled by me. (1.1.153)

*Rage must be withstood.
Give me his gage. Lions make leopards tame. (1.1.173-174)*

We were not born to sue, but to command... (1.1.196)

Discourse Controls Operate at All Levels

The control of discourse operates at all levels. The participants are told which propositions to select in event models, which speech act to realize, what the conditions of the speech act are, what politeness forms to choose, what style characteristics to select and so on.

In the third scene just before the combat, he interferes:

Stay, the king hath thrown his warder down (1.3, 118)

His pronouncement of banishment shows a language of supreme authority

And for our eyes do hat the dire aspect... (1.3.127)

And for we think the eagle-winged pride... (1.3.129)

Therefore we banish you our territories... (1.3.139)

*Shall not regret our fair dominions,
But tread the stranger paths of banishment.* (1.3.141-142)

He also makes them take a vow that they should not:

*.. .plot, contrive or complot any ill
'Gainst us, our state, our subjects or our land...* (1.3.189-190)

Advice to Maintain Reputation – Rebuke and Its Manifestation in Descriptive Terms from the Ordinary Language

Richard is later admonished by the old and ailing Gaunt. He criticizes the king for getting influenced by the flatterers and tells him that his reputation has become too low. He angers Richard by these words:

*Oh, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye
Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons,
From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possessed,
Which art possessed now to depose thyself.* (2.1.104-108)

Richard scoffs at Gaunt while he gets his turn:

*A lunatic lean-witted fool,
Presuming on an ague's privilege,
Dar 'st with thy frozen admonition
Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood
With fury from his native residence.
Now, by my seat's right royal majesty,
Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son
This tongue that runs so soundly in thy head
Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.* (2.1.123)

The words chosen for rebuke includes 'lunatic lean-witted fool', 'frozen admonition' which puts Gaunt in negative other representation and words like 'royal blood', 'royal majesty' in positive self representation.

King Richard leaves the stage in Act 2 Scene 1, only to return in Act 3 Scene 2. He expresses his delight to be back in his country,

*I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again...
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands (3.2.4-11)*

King as the Representative of God the Almighty

He believes that since he is the representative of God the Almighty, nobody can challenge his authority, his power.

*Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord... if angels fight
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right. (3.2.54-62)*

This act brings out the weak nature of Richard II, when he gets unpropitious news one after the other. His reaction to each shows a gradual decline of resolve.

Have I not reason to look pale and dead? (3.2.79)

*I had forgot myself Am I not king?
Awake, thou coward! Majesty, thou sleepest. (3.2.83-84)*

*My ear is open and my heart prepared.
The worst is worldly loss thou canst unfold.
Say, is my kingdom lost... (3.2.93-95)*

*Strives Bullingbrook to be as great as we,
Greater he shall not be. If he serve God
We 'll serve Him too, and be his fellow so.
Revolt our subjects? That we cannot mend.
They break their faith to God as well as us. (3.2.97-101)*

He wistfully clings to the old hierarchical norms of the king being the representative of God on earth. The ideological assumption that people need to have unquestionable faith on their king just as they believe God had given some kind of support to Richard II but

the new turn of events shook him.

This is indicated by the confusion in the pronoun *I, me, we* and *us*. Ideologies are not always very explicit. They may come in the form of opinions about specific events, or in the way such an event is described, more or less prominently.

When Scroope informs him about the death of his close allies Bushy, Green and the Earl of Wiltshire, Richard senses imminent death. The speech that follows (3.2.145-170) refers to graves, worms, epitaphs, execution, wills, deposition, bones, murder, and poison. He urges his fellow men to treat him as an ordinary subject.

*Throw away respect,
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king? (2.3.172-177)*

Poetic in Utterance When Tragedy Is Imminent

Once he starts slipping down, Richard becomes poetic in utterance, which reminds the reader of the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare. He starts identifying himself with others around. From here on there is definite change in the style of utterance, i.e. speech sans power.

*A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey.
That power I have, discharge, and let them go
To ear the land that hath some hope to grow,
For I have none. Let no man speak again
To alter this, for counsel is but vain. (3.2.210-213)*

*Discharge my followers, let them hence away
From Richard's night to Bullingbrook's fair day. (3.2.217-218)*

Imagery to Attract the Audience

The interest of the audience on King Richard is sustained by the use of imagery of the sun and eagle.

*See see King Richard doth himself appear
As doth the blushing discontented sun... (3.3.62-63)
Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his eye,
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty. (3.3.67-69)*

Growing Loss of Stature

In the ensuing sequence, one can see Richard reprimanding Northumberland for not showing the customary respect given to a king, he emphasizes the authority and privileges that he ought to enjoy.

*We are amazed, and thus long have we stood
To watch the fearful bending of thy knee
Because we thought ourselfthy lawful king.
And if we be, how dare thy joints forget
To pay their awful duty to our presence?
If we be not, sow us the hand of God
That hath dismissed us from our stewardship,
For well we know no hand of blood and bone
Can gripe the sacred handle of our scepter,
Unless he do profane, steal or usurp. (3.3.72-81)*

His loss of stature is evident just before the meeting with Bullingbrook.

*What must the king do now? Must he submit?
The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The king shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? A God's name let it go.
I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My scepter for a palmer's walking staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave, an obscure grave.
Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects 'feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head;
For on my heart they tread now whilst I live,
And buried once, why not upon my head? (3.3.143-159)*

Estranged Self Begging for Help

Then he adds at the end of the lengthy dialogue significantly a new expression

*What says King Bullingbrook? Will his majesty
Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?
You make a leg and Bullingbrook say ay. (3.3.173-175)*

He uses his own name to refer to himself whereas he calls Bullingbrook 'King'. His language meets his mind set which readies itself to be conquered by a new emerging power whereas he sees himself going 'down and down'.

*Down, down I come, like glistening Phaeton,
Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
In the base court? Base court where kings grow base
To come at traitors calls and do them grace!* (3.3.178-181)

Moreover in the same scene Shakespeare poignantly refers to the emotions of the fellow characters through King Richard. This is done to create a mood of understanding with the audience on Richard's fall.

*Aumerle, thou weep'st, my tender cousin... (3.3.160)
Uncle, give me your hands. Nay, dry your eyes... (3.3.201)*

Deprived of Leadership, Now a Commoner After All?

The deposition scene is crucial when considering the language used by the characters. Bullingbrook makes use of the name 'Richard' while issuing orders of summons.

*Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender. So we shall proceed
Without suspicion.* (4.1.155-157)

Richard begins his speech in the scene in a dramatic way:

*I hardly yet have learned
To insinuate, flatter, bow and bend my knee.
Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
To this submission. Yet I well remember
The favours of these men. Were they not mine?
Did they not sometime cry 'All hail' to me?
So Judas did to Christ, but he in twelve
Found truth in all but one, I in twelve thousand none.
God save the king!* (4.1.164-172)

The scene also makes it clear the desperation, agony and powerlessness of the king

*You may my glories and my state depose,
But not my griefs. Still am I king of those.* (4.1.191-192)

*With mine own tears I wash away my balm;
With mine own hands I give away my crown;
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state;*

With mine own breath release all duteous oaths. (4.1,206-209)

*Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see.
And yet salt water blinds them not so much
But they can see a sort of traitors here. (4.1.243-245)*

Absence of Power and the Use of Language

The final soliloquy in 5.5 is significant for its thoughts related to absence of power, authority and control. It has been noted for the brilliant and insightful use of negative markers *no*, *nothing*, *none*, *nor* and negative prefixes *un-*, *dis-*, and *mis-*. That sets the mood of the dethroned speaker who is completely desperate regarding the options in front of him to survive in future.

*Sometimes am I king
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king
Then am I kinged again, and by and by
Think that I am unkinged by Bullingbrook
And straight am nothing. (5.5.32-38)*

The second part of the soliloquy keeps constant references to time and the scene reaches a state of climax, when Richard, perceivably impatient, gets angry with the keeper who brings food.

Patience is stale and I am weary of it. (5.5.103)

He is in turn struck down by Exton and renders the following parting words:

*That hand shall burn in never-quickening fire
That staggers thus my person. Exton, thy fierce hand
Hath with the king's blood stained the king's own land.
Mount, mount my soul. Thy seat is up on high
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die. (5.5.108-112)*

Quite notably the protagonist is unwilling to see himself as an “unkinged” individual and still maintains to assert his superiority.

Conclusion

The analysis of the discursive strategies of the dialogues presented opens up the declining social and political relevance of the king. Richard finds it difficult to control the agenda of discussion, fails to moderate the interaction of others, and miserably loses to perpetuate the legitimate ownership of his domain towards the culmination of the play. His language

looses its connectivity with others and metaphors rely on solitude, emptiness and death. The capacity to victimize others changes to self-victimization. An exploration *in extenso* will reveal further possibilities of unearthing the inherent dominance and inequality through critical discourse analysis.

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