

Richard II: Responding Unspoken Intent, or Hopeless Dramatic Coward?

What confuses me most in Richard II is trying to determine Bolingbroke's motives and understanding the king's reaction. As Mcevoy points out, it is clear from the beginning that King Richard's power is slipping- as Bolingbroke and Mowbray refuse to obey the king and put their own honors above obedience. Thus they show the weakness of the king's power without intentionally moving against him. It is also clear that King Richard is a bad king. He cannot manage money, changes his mind and his decrees on whim (you may not fight, you may fight, no you may not fight AND you're banished, then you're banished only for 6 years instead of ten) and neither understands or respects any of his subjects, including his wise uncles.

When Bolingbroke executes Bushy and Green in 3.1, he accuses them of misleading and corrupting the king, and of mismanaging the land. Northumberland sets forth this idea that Bushy, Green, Bagot, and Wiltshire are the real problem/villains in 2.1 lines 242-246 "The King is not himself, but basely led/ By Flatterers; and what they will inform/ Merely in hate 'gainst any of us all,/ That will the King severely prosecute/ 'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs." Yet though Richard follows these men he clearly has no true affection for them, as he instantly believes them traitors in 3.2 125 and scathingly insults and curses them, and then shows no remorse or chagrin when informed that they did not join Bolingbroke, but were executed by him. Bolingbroke's meaning in the execution is ambiguous. It could be that he is merely ridding the land of what he is convinced is destroying both it and it's king. Yet by so ordering execution of the king's favorites, he is establishing his authority above Richard's. Doing what is 'best' for the king, and taking care of one who cannot take care of himself.

What I found most astonishing was the way Richard basically threw his crown at Bolingbroke when Bolingbroke didn't even ask for it. Perhaps he was reacting to some unspoken threat, or perhaps he is just the dramatic cowardly weakling I esteem him to be. Bolingbroke clearly demonstrated his

willingness and ability to rebel and conquer, but it seems that if Richard had merely apologized and given Bolingbroke back his rights, he would have subsided into reasonable loyalty. At no point does he ask for the crown or indicate that Richard is anything less than a king, even if he is a bad one, until after Richard throws down the kingdom at his feet. At the same time, all the other lords seem to be switching allegiances and begin to act as if Bolingbroke is king, from everything from flattery and having one's son pledge loyalty to him.

I am still confused as to when Bolingbroke actually decides he wants to be king, but I am convinced of these things. 1. Rebellion of some sort was inevitable under such bad leadership 2. Richard's advisers were looked on as a greater problem than Richard. 3. Bolingbroke won the allegiance of most of the country and demonstrated the power to overthrow and 4. Richard was delusional, cowardly, and weak.

Another thing that astounds me is Richard's deep assurance that God is on his side and he can do no wrong, when he only calls God his master once and shows absolutely no sign of allegiance to God or His laws or anything other than himself, simultaneously disregarding the "natural law" of succession when it applies to Bolingbroke and upholding it when applied to himself.

In conclusion, whether Richard could have kept his throne by granting Bolingbroke's demands or not, I despise the former and am sincerely glad he was deposed.

Richard, the Second...Or Was He the Third to Die during 5.5?

Shakespeare was quite skillful when comparing Richard II to Jesus Christ. During an era in which the ideology of absolutism was rife amongst rulers, to the point of justifying many royally corrupt activities, Richard II rules England after receiving God-given right to do so. He is "not born to sue, but to command." He is a representative of God on Earth, and as such the comparison to Jesus Christ fits, surely after being a bit greased up with the oil of his vanity.

After his deposition, Richard's vanity acquires new shape. In his lamentations, he views himself as a sorrowful martyr who's been sacrificed by the Judases who once kneeled before him. The comparison is thus retained. Even better, it is inversed, since it depicts a man of undesirable qualities, who believes himself Christ-like to shelter his pride from any more blows.

A second interesting aspect was Henry's pardon of Aumerle as a favor to the Duchess of York. As McEvoy states, it's ridiculous that all the Duchess must do is refuse to stand up before the King to obtain Aumerle's pardon. Why did Henry grant this pardon though? Is it the sign of chivalry's decline? Of the decadent values of impartiality, justice, and royal fidelity?

Women participate in this play by offering alternative perspectives on the protagonist's affairs. One example is how York and the Duchess differ in their thinking of why York denounces Aumerle. For York, who has exhibited more refined chivalry than his royal cohorts, he is acting upon his duty to the King. For the Duchess, however, York is being driven by jealousy and insecurity. He fears she's been unfaithful and takes revenge as a result. As readers, we see a glint of psychological depth, as the Duchess implies that more private and primal emotions, instead of chivalry, may be motivating characters to act as they do. Moreover, the scene resonates with the theme of feudalism's decay by ridiculing chivalry as a lofty motive.

And what does the conclusion leave us? Perhaps a presage of what's to come under the reign of Henry IV. We already see a sentence of hypocrisy: "I hate the murderer. Love him murdered." In addition, Exton's dialogue in 5.4, contrasted with Henry's punishment of Exton, sends the message that he will maintain the public's trust by erecting a façade of chivalry and justice. One could debate whether Henry actually ordered the death of his cousin, yet one can't help but to ask if Exton acted upon a selfish want for status or royal recognition.

McEvoy provided valuable information about historical context and theme which allowed me to read the play with clarity and depth. There were scenes meant to be comedic, for example, which I would've interpreted as commonplace in the 1400's, or simply strange and unimportant. The ritual combat in which five gages are thrown, and Richard's foolish (but lovely) dialogue with the Earth come to mind. These parodies obviously matter because they show the decline of feudalism and absolutism respectively, and therefore, develop theme.

good

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A Call to Take Action: The Tragedy of King Richard the Second

The Tragedy of King Richard the Second is focused largely on war, conspiracies and treachery. The men in the play are shown in a constant battle for power through duels and conspiracies, but when the time for worthy action is called upon, the men fail to measure up. Amidst the struggle for power between the men, some women seek justice and call out the men's lack of courage in specific situations.

The first act of the play introduces the Duchess of Gloucester, who is the widow of Thomas of Gloucester and King Richard's uncle. The Duchess pays a visit to John of Gaunt who is Bolingbroke's father, as well as King Richard's uncle, to speak with him about avenging the death of her husband and his brother, Thomas of Gloucester. The Duchess of Gloucester urges John of Gaunt to take action against the murderer of Thomas of Gloucester for the sake of his own preservation, as well as avenging his brother's death. Gaunt refuses stating that "God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute, his deputy anointed in his sight, hath caused his death; which if wrongfully, let heaven revenge, for I may never lift an angry arm against his minister." (37-41). Apart from his religious convictions, Gaunt also refuses to take action against Thomas of Gloucester's death because he also knows that King Richard II had a hand in the conspiracy.

While John of Gaunt refuses to take action against his brother's death at the Duchess of Gloucester's request and leaves the matter up to God, Queen Isabel looks to King Richard to defend himself. In the last act of the play the fallen King Richard is being escorted to Caesar's ill-erected Tower and meets with Queen Isabel. The Queen asks, "What, is my Richard both in

shape and mind transformed and weakened? Hath Bolingbroke deposed thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?" (26-29). King Richard responds telling her that his fate has been decided and that she should flee the country. Here we see the definite weakness of King Richard II as Queen Isabel questions why he is so willing and doesn't fight back. *yes, I see*

The Duchess of Gloucester and Queen Isabel call out the courage and seek justice from John of Gaunt and King Richard. However, the two men have given up hope on the matter; John of Gaunt has looked past the death of his brother, and King Richard gives up hope all together telling the Queen to escape and turn her life over to a religious covenant. These two prominent political figures abuse their power, but once someone calls them to take action on a worthy matter they refuse and submit to the powers that be.

ROYALTY STRIPPED OF TITLE COMPARED TO STATUS OF WOMEN

The similarities between King Richard stripped of his royal title and women's general societal positions are provocative. Mcevoy writes that when Richard ceases to become king, "he cannot imagine he has an identity, for his name and him were part of the same unity: consequently he keeps referring to himself as 'nothing'" (pg. 204). He thinks that his title of king has the power of twenty thousand men until he becomes nothing to society, entirely useless. Similarly, women were treated as nothing. It was thought very commonly that a woman was an 'incomplete' man, without the faculties of reason or self-control. To lose these qualities was a fear that most men carried. Controlling a woman's sexuality was a priority, as that was one thing that women could use to gain power. Richard holds that he is divine and chosen by God, that he could summon a world into existence by talking about it, but without a title all power is lost. Richard II then essentially become like a woman once his crown is taken away.