

A STUDY OF THE FOUCAULDIAN CONCEPT OF POWER IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT PART I*

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ABSTRACT

The present article applies Foucault's concept of Power to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (c.1587-88). Power is productive and not restrictive; there are power relations and power is not controlled by anyone, rather it is simultaneously everywhere and also the exercise of power is strategic and war-like. These are what Michel Foucault defines as Power which is totally different with the repressive notion of power everybody had in mind before Foucault. First and foremost, it tries to explain power in Foucauldian perspective and what does he meant by the concepts of or the relation between power and knowledge in generality. Furthermore, the scope of the article changes to trace the concept of power throughout the play. The remainder of the paper focuses on explaining the layers of the power dispersed throughout the society, the power of language and discourse, the downfall of societies' rulers and the coming together of several realms under Tamburlaine's banner. On the other hand, the power of individual kings, queens especially the Tamburlaine himself as the main embodiment of autocracy and also their ministers and followers in power will be discussed in due order, by having Foucault's ideas in mind. Moreover, other terms related to Foucauldian 'Power' like 'Sovereign power', 'Disciplinary power' and 'Pastoral power' will be explained and traced in the play. To put it in a nutshell, the aim of the present article is simply to explore the capability of reading one of Marlowe's plays in Foucauldian terms giving Marlowe's play a new layer of meaning, to make it applicable for the contemporary reader and audience and to work on them anew.

KEYWORDS: Michel Foucault, Power, *Tamburlaine The Great*, Language, Pastoral Power, Ambition, Sovereignty

INTRODUCTION

In Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, the importance of power in individuals and power relations in the society of the time is undeniable. This was also the sole reason that this work by Marlowe has been chosen between all other dramatic works produced in Renaissance England as the main concern of this paper. It is notorious that Foucault's ideas are not written to be used for literary purposes. After all, he was a philosopher and social critic not a literary individual. By having all these in mind this paper aims to exemplify the concept of power in its new Foucauldian definition by applying his theories and techniques on to text in spite of its difficulties and resistance that Foucault's theories show toward literature and literary texts. The main points to be said about Foucault's concept of power are as follows. Simons claims in his article that, Foucault understands power as something which makes resistance possible and also gives freedom to its individual subjects. To be more specific, it is strategic and network like (Cf. Simons 2013:301).

Moreover, Foucault defines power as not being repressive but productive. He also describes it as something which can be performed rather than possessed by a special group or class in society (Cf. Mills 2003:35).

In addition, the article introduces three minor notions under the major branch of power namely, 'Sovereign power', 'Disciplinary power' and 'Pastoral power' and traces them on the play. Sovereign power is mostly related to the rulers and governors of several realms in the play; Disciplinary power is about the small tactics and strategies that the kings and queens employ to control their subjects and to compete with their counterparts and finally the Pastoral power which turns toward Tamburlaine himself in specific. The latter notion is mainly about his social mobility by practicing individual witticism, cunning and bravery, rising in status from a shepherd to a renowned warlord. Moreover, the power relations in the theory of Foucault will be traced throughout the text or at least in those parts where they are evident, and finally the article concludes that this theory of Foucault is applicable to the following text.

Having stated the main premises of this paper, in the following chapters, different subcategories of 'Power' will be defined and applied to the text.

Sovereign Power

Sovereign power involves obedience to the law of the king or central authority figure. In other words, that is a system of government based on the power of the king (Cf. O'Farrell 2005:150).

It must be mentioned that this form of power is sometimes, intangible, that it is given once and for all but, at the same time, is fragile and always liable to disuse or breakdown. For the relationship of sovereignty to really hold, there is always the need for a certain supplement or threat of violence, which is there behind the relationship of sovereignty, and which sustains it and ensures that it holds. The other side of sovereignty is violence, it is war (Cf. Foucault 2006:43).

Disciplinary Power

Discipline is a mechanism of power which regulates the behavior of individuals in the social body. This is done by regulating the organization of space (architecture etc.), of time (timetables) and people's activity and behavior (drills, posture, movement). Foucault emphasizes that power is not discipline, rather discipline is simply one way in which power can be exercised (Cf. O'Farrell 2005:133).

Pastoral Power

This idea of politically organizing the day to day conduct of the population is borrowed from the metaphor of the care of a shepherd for his flock and originated in Egyptian, Assyrian, Mesopotamian and Hebrew cultures (ibid.:150).

DISCUSSIONS

The most evident form of power in the play is power of language and words that Tamburlaine uses to introduce himself and his followers. His courageous and brave rhetoric that is his characteristic makes him the center of the play to the extent that everything becomes a complementary or secondary matter to what happens to the protagonist of our story. Other subplots throughout the play just reinforce this character's power of language, his talents as a warlord and also his dexterous plans to fulfill his ambitious nature.

Tamburlaine and his army, threaten the greatest powers of the time like the Persians and the Ottoman Empire, bringing the kings to their knees and treat them as slaves. The lack of discipline and precautions from the Persian king Mycetes and betrayal of his brother Cosroe paves the way for Tamburlaine to conquer Persia and later by defeating the Turks and their janissaries capturing their emperor Bajazeth and his empress Zabina. Later on, he attacks Egypt and successfully annexes their empire to his own, while showing merci to their Soldan because of the love he had for his daughter Zenocrate. The play ends with their marriage and Tamburlaine's coronation of Zenocrate as his queen.

After this brief summary, the following chapters try to trace and apply the concept of individual and societal Power Throughout the Play

Power of Language and Discourse

Act I begins with Mycetes the king of Persia saying:

Brother Cosroe, I find myself aggrieved,

Yet insufficient to express the same;

For it requires a great and thundering speech:

Good brother, tell the cause unto my Lords;

I know you have a better wit than I. (Marlowe. 1885:48)¹

By saying this, Mycetes confesses his inability to deliver a speech powerfully and effectively from the beginning of the play and gives over this responsibility to his brother Cosroe. Garrido in his article explains the power of language in *Tamburlaine* and claims that:

Tamburlaine the Great is a good instance of Marlowe's mastery of scholarly rhetoric. In this play, the author's portrait of his hero as great warrior is achieved through the emphasis on his rhetorical skills. Metaphor, hyperbole, and *amplificatio* throughout his speeches. The '...Scythian Shepherd' is a successful leader insofar as he is a skillful rhetorician. By contrast, the failures of Mycetes, the Persian King, are presented through his rhetorical inability and inaccuracies. These render his speeches nonsensical, and therefore he comes to be represented as a ridiculous figure. [...] His linguistic isolation is taken here as the key feature that explains his political failure. (Garrido 2002:91)

Moreover, it can be said that this 'Wit' that Mycetes refers to is the evidence of Cosroe's having the sufficient knowledge of strategy, warfare, reign and other characteristics that a mighty ruler must have, showing a Foucauldian formula of knowledge at the service of power reinforcement. As Foucault himself said that "[...] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Simons 2013: 304).

Game of Thrones (Power of the Sovereign)

Under This Title, The Following Events Can Be Categorized Respectively:

Theridamas and his cavalry join the army of Tamburlaine while betraying Mycetes, king of Persia, who sent him as an envoy to the camp of Tamburlaine the Thief; this, on the other hand demonstrates how the power can be substituted by anyone who dares to challenge its masters.

¹All references in the text shall be to this edition and will be indicated with act, scene and line numbers only

Moreover, Cosroe and Tamburlaine join their armies to usurp the Persian thrones.

Tamburlaine betrays Cosroe by killing him and crowning himself the king of Persia, these two shows how the challenge for gaining power is so bloody and negative and also in Foucauldian terms exposes at what high costs these power relations, or better to say, these sovereignty powers are being substituted. It is all evident in what Tamburlaine himself expresses:

TAMB.

[...]Nature that framed us of four elements,

Warring within our breasts for regiment,

Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:

Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend

The wondrous architecture of the world,

And measure every wandering planet's course,

Still climbing after knowledge infinite,

And always moving as the restless spheres,

Wills us to wear ourselves, and never rest,

Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,

That perfect bliss and sole felicity,

The sweet fruition of an earthly crown. (1. 3. 17–28)

Furthermore, Tamburlaine by conquering Africa and expanding his territory as far as Spain and becoming allies with the King of Arabia, king of Fez, King of Morocco and King of Argier, made himself the most powerful ruler of the time.

On the other hand, by annexing Egypt to his territory and showing mercy to their king, the Soldan of Egypt, he made Egypt a powerful ally exerting his influence on that territory and the neighboring ones.

Finally, the last and most notorious of these battles of sovereigns, is the war with the Ottoman Empire under the command of Bajazeth. On the other hand, it must be said that, Christopher Marlowe as an Englishman, might have written this chapter of the play intentionally which concludes with the death of Bajazeth in the meanest way possible, humiliating and imprisoning him in a cage like an animal, because they were enemies of England, West and Christendom and this play might have been a kind of retaliation.

The degradation of Bajazeth and Zabina ends with them doing a voluntary suicide. On this particular issue, Foucault asserts that:

Pastoral and Disciplinary Power in Tamburlaine

In this chapter, different characteristics of pastoral power will be explained according to the following model:

- It is “not exercised over a territory” [“a flock rather than a land”].
- It is “fundamentally a beneficent power” or “a power of care” towards salvation
- [“the shepherd gathers together, guides and leads his flock” and saves it from Danger].
- It is a “dutiful” and “devotional” power [the shepherd “keeps watch” over the flock].
- It is “an individualizing power” [“individual attention is paid to each member of the flock”].
(Carrette 2013:375)

By having this notion of Foucault's pastoral power in mind, it can be applied to Tamburlaine and his comrade and the way Tamburlaine as a shepherd, guides, feeds and cares about his followers. Ortygius, Ceneus, Meander, Menaphon, Usumcasane, Agydas and Maonetes, at the end, all of them became the king of several realms that Tamburlaine as the shepherd captures. He equally shares the lands between his flocks to prosper. On the other hand, it is an individualizing power; a power solely attributed to the Tamburlaine himself as a gifted individual. Everything that he dedicated to his companions, the love he had for his mistress and the merci he shows to the Soldan of Egypt, all of them reinforces his individuality and at the end it was all for his own sake.

It has also a more serious and intense form which is the sacrifice of the shepherd for his flock, the sacrifice of himself for the whole of his flock, and the sacrifice of the whole of his flock for each of the sheep. What Foucault mean is that, in the Hebrew theme of the flock, the shepherd owes everything to his flock to the extent of agreeing to sacrifice himself for its salvation (Cf. Foucault: 2009:128).

Before Christianity there was no specific pastoral institution. The key aspect of pastoral power is the way it is institutionalized in the Christian church. In Christianity, pastoral power “envelops all” and the “laws, rules, techniques, and procedures” become institutionalized. (Cf. Carrette 2013:375).

But it can be said that Tamburlaine by showing a thirst for power, blood and massacre is a foil to the figure of the lamb or Jesus Christ. Moreover, having in mind the probable atheism of Christopher Marlowe, and when later on in the second part of the play, Tamburlaine tear the holy Quran to pieces, this can be a heavy and blatant blow to religion in general that Tamburlaine reinforces.

CONCLUSIONS

Tamburlaine won the challenge, and despite his low background became one of the most famous warlords of all time. He resisted the repressive power relations in the society of his time and found a way out of these limitation surrounding him. By using his talents such as, power of language and rhetoric, fearlessness, brutality, cunning, temptation and bravery he successfully guided his flock to salvation. By trusting his own self he crossed the barriers set for him by the great powers of the time. The lack of strategy, insight and foreboding of these rulers made them subordinate to an upstart villain. This article applied the concepts of ‘sovereign power’ to Tamburlaine as the protagonist of the play, ‘disciplinary power’ to the strategies he undertook and ‘pastoral power’, referring to his goal in social mobility. In addition, the religious

aspects of pastoral power and the importance of knowledge and language in power relations, have been discussed. Furthermore, Michel Foucault's new definition of power in generality was explained. On the other hand, different major character's roles in the play was discussed and their relation to power in the society, debated. As a suggestion for further reading, Marlowe's play called *Edward II* (1593), can be worked on in Foucauldian manner specially Foucault's concept of power relations in the court and society. It is mainly about the dethronement of Edward II, the king of England, by his courtiers and his French wife. Moreover, the controversial homosexuality of the king can be debated in terms of Foucault's ideas in his books namely, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

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