
**INTERROGATING FOUCAULDIAN CONCEPT OF POWER/KNOWLEDGE IN
SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST***

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is an attempt to discuss the operation of power/knowledge and invisible disciplinary measures that are operational in Shakespeare's tragi-comedy The Tempest. Prospero's island in this play can be assumed as a metaphorical presentation of modern society where human behavior is determined by the implication of power/knowledge structure. The play validates Michel Foucault's claim for omnipotent nature of Power being operated through the manipulations of Knowledge. Power and knowledge are inseparable and in order to make an effective society, modern institutions ceaselessly produce knowledge leading to "biopower". These are the basic tenets of Michel Foucault's conception of power/knowledge. Besides the theme of power, this play can also be analyzed basing on power relations and production of knowledge in both the court and exiled life. We have tried to analyze Shakespeare's theme of power in The Tempest in the light of Foucault's concepts and explore human relations based on the integrity of power/knowledge. However, the paper also shows the reversal of power relations in the form of resistance from the apparently docile and controlled bodies.*

KEYWORDS: *Power/knowledge, Biopower, Panopticon, Disciplinary power, Resistance*

INTRODUCTION

Power is a recurrent theme in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The play demonstrates power being exercised through force or violence. It is also exercised along with knowledge by the ones who hold. The play is crucial in investigating the nature of power exercise, its accession and invisible operation that appropriate the stakeholders for existing ideology and governmentality of a human society. Almost all the characters in this play demonstrate this power irrespective of their position and situation. From Prospero to the mediocre class all aspire to dominate the Sycorax's island by demonstrating and consolidating their power. Relationship among the characters is also determined by power relations and most importantly, power mechanics determine the action of these characters in the play. However, we note that behind the facade of this power that produces strength, lies the knowledge of the concerned characters.

It is observed that the power these characters wishes to exercise seem to be an object of their possession rather than of any form of exercise. This possession of power is actually derived from the Knowledge they acquired by being subjected in the discourses and contemporariness of their

respective society. Power is thus found to be an inescapable associate of Knowledge. However, this very notion of relationship between Power and Knowledge is the basis of French Philosopher Michel Foucault's thesis of Power/knowledge in his *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.

This relationship of Power/knowledge identified by Foucault can best be illustrated in Shakespeare's last play *The Tempest*. Though Shakespeare was writing long before Foucault did, his play on colonial theme demonstrates the mechanisms of power that is prevalent even in modern society. The time when Shakespeare's *The Tempest* could have been written in between 1610 to 1611, England was going through a political crisis in the court. Conflict between the Church and Court was going on. Moreover, the Gunpowder plot in 1605 had triggered the religious dispute between the Catholics and the Protestants; in fact, it fueled total unrest in the country. The whole English society was divided by two conflicting classes- the upper and the lower. Furthermore, the time is also marked by the explorations to the different parts of the world which ultimately result in colonialism. It was the military power on one hand and more significantly, the scientific or civic knowledge on the other hand that had been exercised to maintain the undisturbed domination over the colonies.

Considering the context of the play's time of production, it is not unusual on the part of a playwright who excelled in analyzing human mind and society to deal with the theme of power/knowledge in his play. Moreover, we can assume that any production of literary work of a time would obviously reflect the conflict and fluid power relations operating in that particular society. However, obtaining and challenging power is a common phenomenon of every power relation. Just like the law of activity that argues every action has a reaction, power is always followed by resistance as a consequence of its operational mechanism.

Such mechanisms of Power/Knowledge and resistance is a recurrent issue in this play. The setting or place of action of the play is an isolated island focusing on the intrigues of Elizabethan as well as modern world. Being betrayed by his own sibling, Prospero took a refuge on this island. The island seems to have a magical power of relieving sins and restoring order after turmoil and anxiety. The corrupted royal party is brought to the island by Prospero's power of magic and they undergo a sort of change that brings their redemption. Nonetheless, Prospero himself has also changed and learned a lesson for his negligence of administrative responsibility. At the end of the play, he puts off his magic robe and dresses like the duke of Milan meaning that he will exercise the power that his title has endowed him. At the cost of his service to Prospero, Ariel gets free which is also integrated to power. Caliban becomes repentant and is allowed to stay on his island with full liberty. In fact, Prospero's island can be considered as a metaphorical society where knowledge and power operate regulating the wheels of human life. Power portrayed in this play is not one dimensional; it rather comes from everywhere discarding the idea of its sovereign nature. However, the play records a society that is marching towards modernity and thereby new forms of power relations can be traced here.

Shakespeare had always been a good creator of representative characters. Moreover, his characters transcend the boundary of time and place in terms of universal human traits he designed them with. Considering the universality of Shakespeare's theme and characters, his play *The Tempest* can be interrogated to identify the contemporariness of modern societies where the intricacies of power/knowledge is a well contested subject. It is observed that, interestingly, almost all the

characters in the play, try to exercise power over one another from their limited positions. Knowledge, whether it is political, or technical or magical, produces power and therefore plays an important role for determining the characters. Power, demonstrated in the plot of *The Tempest*, has been handled so skillfully that it manifests the complicated mechanics of power relations in our modern life.

Power being an inseparable entity of Knowledge, comes from no definite point; rather it plays its significant role from every point and by every person who possesses it. The power found in the play is of various nature: creative, biopower, disciplinary, governmental or resisting power. The present paper aims at analyzing Power/Knowledge in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with a view to finding the validation of Michel Foucault's notion of 'creative power'. However, before discussing the power/knowledge intricacies in the play it is important to focus on some basic tenets of Foucault's concept in this regard.

Foucault's Concept of Power/Knowledge

In his seminal piece *History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction* (1979), Foucault analyses as to what he means by 'power'. In this context he makes two epoch making sentences: a) Power is exercised rather than possessed and b) Power is not repressive but positive. From this statement we can sum up that for Foucault, power does not belong to anyone nor does it come from one specific location. Foucault holds that "Power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93). He contests the idea that power is exerted by the act of domination or coercion; instead, it is disseminated and pervasive. It is also a metapower operating through social institutions. He thus uses the term power/knowledge to denote its indistinguishable association with knowledge. Conventionally power operates through accepted forms of knowledge and "truth". It is diffused through social institutions and is exercised by innumerable, replaceable functionaries. However, he also warns that this truth is produced by those who dominate in a particular social relation. Again, he tends to be concerned with the operation of power rather than looking into its origin. He contends that it is embedded with knowledge- a perception that Motlagh (2015) reads in Foucault's conception of power/knowledge. He identifies a "reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge" (213).

On the other hand, in his genealogical works, Foucault accentuates that power is not only negative and repressive but can also be positive, productive and enabling (Foucault 2000e, 341; 1980, 78-109). He argues that unlike the traditional power that represses behavior and perceived to be something unproductive, intimidating or otherwise undesirable, modern power is creative, and it produces the very categories, desires and actions that it aspires. In this sense Foucault's "work marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them" (Gaventa 1). To put it in his own words:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1991: 194)

Furthermore, he contends that in modern societal institutions like schools, hospitals or prisons, they produce some sort of truths or discipline about the inhabitants that make them (inhabitants) law abiding citizens and this disciplinary power ultimately circumscribes them within social disciplines.

This concept of disciplinary power came to his mind through his analysis of modern social structures characterized by an increasing number of population and multi diversification. This scenario ushers in new mechanisms of power administering and managing 'life' of subjects. It involves the regulation of phenomena such as birth, death, sickness, disease, health, sexual relations and so on. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), he studies the practices of discipline and training associated with disciplinary power. The key feature of disciplinary power is that it is exercised directly on body. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile bodies'. It also takes hold of the mind. According to Foucault, the transition to modernity entails the replacement of law by norm as the primary instrument of social control. It involves power that control over human body. From this deduction, Foucault develops his notion of bio-power. Biopower, as we know, is produced and exercised through the practices associated with the body and the mechanism of biopolitics that control biological dimension. In Foucault's words:

By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. (Foucault, 2007:1)

Foucault explains this governmentality relating it to architect Bentham's design of panoptic prison. This type of prison has a tower at the center of the cells from where the prisoners are observed. They are given the idea that their activities are constantly surveyed. So, they control their behavior fearing the terror and violence from the guards. Foucault uses this metaphor of Panopticon to explain modern forms of disciplinary power exerted from invisible state apparatus targeting the body of populace. Today CCTV is an illustrated example of such surveillance conducted by the government to establish discipline.

However, in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (1979), he describes how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sex and sexuality became crucial political issues in a society concerned with managing and directing the life of individuals and of populations. Therefore, there emerged discourses on sex categorizing the normal and deviant sexuality to determine the social behavior of the individual. This new type of power Foucault calls "Bio-Power" - a type of power that focuses on the regulation of populations and the control of bodies. Foucault claims that modern regime of power operates to produce us as subjects who are both the objects and vehicles of power.

Such concepts of the French philosopher Michel Foucault in regard to Power and Knowledge is crucial to understand the mechanism of power/knowledge and discipline manifested in Prospero's island. The magical charm of Prospero's island is a metaphor of modern society where power/knowledge is operational to correct the behavior of populace as well as maintaining the existing social structure depending on dominant power relations. Nonetheless, the resistance of

dominating power from the bottom/docile bodies also conforms Foucault's conception of reversal power as well as of positive and creative nature of power that may come anywhere.

Power in *the Tempest*

The play opens with a confrontation of power between the royal party and the boatswain. A fierce storm is blowing on and King Alonso asks the Boatswain for the Captain. But the Boatswain is reluctant to answer as he is busy exercising his knowledge to control the ship against the power of the fierce storm. He shows his irritation for being disturbed and threatens them to go back to their respective cabins. He, in fact, advises his superior people with the authority and power disregarding their loftier titles. Despite being a professional advisor, Gonzalo, the old lord, is neglected at this hour due to the fact that their lives are at risk and they cannot help depending on the technical personnel of the royal ship. For a moment, both the lord and the boatswain engage in a tug of conflict with each other on the basis of their respective powers in possession. The king and his son Ferdinand go back to their cabin as their titles are useless to the boatswain's knowledge. All the characters involved in this scene tend to use their respective micro power. With regard to comment on power relations, we can note that power does not necessarily come from the higher position to the lower one. Foucault (1980) also points out that, modern operations of power do not work on vertically, but they are operating from everywhere. In the chapter on Method in Part 4 of *History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1), he asserts, "Power is everywhere, not because it is well-embracing but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1979:93).

Barker (1998) notes, "Every specific individual occupies various positions in networks of power: mother, brother, father, sister, lover, friend, teacher, employee, student, employer and so on, and so stands in multiple positions in the power/knowledge grid" (Page) The arrogant Boatswain displays his power that is embedded in his knowledge. Interestingly, he need not threaten them with any hint of punishment; rather they have to abide by the unwritten discipline to maintain order and peace at this dangerous period. They know that it is beneficial for them and thereby are motivated by self-control. It is disciplinary and acceptable for maintaining the system that can save them. Foucault holds that the nexus of Power/knowledge engenders such programming in us. Moreover, power cannot be separated from knowledge. He believes that any attempt of separating power from knowledge will lead to an inadequate analysis of its operation. And he says in *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings (1972- 1977)*, "Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point of dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power" (1980:52).

Disintegration of this relationship results in anomaly. In Prospero's case we note that his usurpation and consequent suffering result from his lack of knowledge despite his being in a powerful position. He wants to acquire knowledge by indulging himself in his books while entrusting his dukedom with his brother Antonio. Prospero lacks in insightful knowledge of judgment and fails to differentiate between a good and an evil. Antonio consolidates his power and ultimately takes over his brother's position— Duke of Milan. It is clear from Prospero's story that he had been an unskilled ruler, more interested in his books than in his responsibilities. We see that power and knowledge are separated which leads to usurpation of Prospero.

Later in the play, we further note this subsequent disorder of power possession in the relationship between Caliban and Prospero. Caliban represents the savage world the European explorers had been believed to encounter. Despite being the legal inheritor of the island, he stands for one having no knowledge of appropriating power. He is the son of the witch Sycorax and is represented as an unwilling slave in the play. Prospero controls and makes his provisions supplied by Caliban through the use of his Power/Knowledge. The master Prospero is noted to have educated him and in return Caliban serves him. Any sign of disobedience is addressed with strong hand: “Shrug’st thou, malice?/ If thou neglect’st or dost unwillingly/ What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps/ Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar/That beasts shall tremble at thy din” (I.ii. 367-71). The nature of Prospero’s control is illustrated through Caliban’s statement: “No, pray thee/ [aside] I must obey; his art is of such power/It would control my dam’s god, Setebos/And make a vassal of him” (I.ii. 372-75). He knows the secret places of the Island’s treasures; but due to ignorant cannot use or explore them. Contrarily, it is Prospero who enjoys the superiority using the provisions that the island offers. Having the slightest possession of power Caliban tends to exercise it over his superiors on his own way: “You taught me language and my profit on’t/ Is I know how to curse” (I.ii. 363-64). Actually, Prospero’s knowledge gives him power with which he can control both Ariel and Caliban. At times, he seems to be a sympathetic master to them; again, on other occasions he needs to threaten them. Ariel says: “Pardon, master/I will be correspondent to command/ And do my spiriting gently.” (I.ii. 396-98)

However, Ariel is made to work for Prospero in exchange of promise for the former’s freedom. He serves as an invisible power of governmentality. The royal party on the island tend to be careful about maintaining the discipline Prospero proposes. Ferdinand is seen cautious about his advancement towards Miranda. Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio are afraid of invisible spirits commanding them. Being scared of punishment from unknown sources, these characters remain docile act according to a pattern of passivity. On the other hand, Caliban is forced to obey Prospero as he believes to be always under his master’s surveillance, a form of modern exercise of power as Foucault argues. Caliban grudges that Prospero’s spirits are always following him. “But they’ll nor pinch/ Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i’ th’ mire/ Nor lead me like a firebrand in the dark/ Out of my way, unless he bid’em. But / For every trifle are they set upon me” (II.ii. 4-8). Therefore, he is captivated in Prospero’s panoptic structure of power mechanism that aims at governing the deviant. He also captivates all the characters in the island and observes their behavior. Ariel is used as Prospero’s surveillance tool, “Go make thyself like a nymph o’the sea/ Be subject to no sight but mine, invisible/ To every eyeball else” (I.ii. 359-61).

Mistaking Stephano and Trinculo for Prospero’s spirits, Caliban surrenders to them fearing that “Prosper[o] works upon thee” (II.ii. 34) soon. Moreover, considering Stephano as God dropped from haven and more powerful than Prospero, he immediately promises them to serve and show him “the best springs . I’ll pluck thee berries/ I’ll fish for thee and get thee wood enough. /A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!/ I’ll bear him no more sticks, but follow thee, Thou wondrous man” (II.ii. 72-75). Caliban immediately hatches a plan to revenge on Prospero’s tyranny on him. He seeks help from them in this regard and suggests them to strip Prospero, first, of his magic books that represent his knowledge of power, “Remember/ First to possess his books, for without them/He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not/One spirit to command” (III.ii. 88-91). Stephano immediately decides to execute the plan of acquiring power and declares that this island “will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I shall

have my music for nothing” (III.ii. 139). It is noted that in his attempt of getting rid of one power, Caliban is going to involve himself with another; validating Foucault’s concept of power that it is ‘omniscient’, “No more dams I’ll make for fish/ Nor fetch in firing/ At requiring,/Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish/ 'Ban, 'Ban, Ca-caliban/ Has a new master. Get a new man./ Freedom, high-day, high-day/ freedom, freedom, high-day/ freedom!” (II.ii.90-98)

This disciplinary structure is noticed in our modern society as an effective tool to prevent anti-social activities. Jay (1986) remarks, “[c]omplementing the role of gaze- or rather the sensation of always being in target – in the control and rehabilitation of criminals is the prophylactic power of surveillance, which is designed to prevent potential transgressions of the law” (192). Thus we note that the political power that Prospero maintains in his island is something that depends on disciplining, surveillance and punishment. To make a disciplined and ordered society, the body is targeted and made to be docile for productivity. It also replicates the modern state power aiming “to discipline the body, optimize its capabilities, extort its forces, increase its usefulness and docility, integrate it into systems of efficient and economic controls” (Foucault 1980: 139).

It is noted that almost all the characters in the play aspire to control the island. Prospero has now become skilled ruler of this island, exercises his power of ‘art’ that brings order. Stephen Orgel, the Stanford University Professor of English, observes it meticulously in his essay “Prospero’s Wife”, “Power, as Prospero presents in this play, is not inherited but self-created. It is magic or ‘art’, an extension of mental power and self- knowledge, and the authority legitimizing it drives from heaven- ‘Fortune’ and ‘Destiny’ are the terms used in the play” (339). This will to power does not come only from superiors who enjoy privileged social position. Rather, everybody seem to be a part of power here. It operates from micro levels in a strategic way patterned like a game of chess. Everybody’s will to control make them individual vehicle for exercise and transfer of power. Stephano seems to do favor to his new servant Caliban more than he does to Trinculo. Again, to satisfy and get more services from Caliban, he threatens Trinculo. Antonio and Sebastian make a plot of killing the king to exercise power. Alonso helps Antonio with a view to receiving more taxes from Milan. Even the old good lord Gonzalo aspires to rule the island in his own fashion, “I’th’commonwealth I would by contraries/Execute all things. For no kind of traffic/Would I admit; no name of magistrate/Letters should not be known; riches, poverty/And use of service, none; contract, succession/Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard -none./No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil/No occupation, all men idle, all/And women, too, but innocent and pure/No sovereignty” (II.i.123-32). Gonzalo plans that if he ‘were the king’ on the island he would make it an equal utopian world with no sovereignty. But rightly is he mocked by Sebastian who reminds him that he would still be king and would therefore still have power – even if he did not exercise it.

However, failing to possess knowledge along with power, the treacherous party fails and are punished by Ariel on the instructions of his master Prospero. Their plan of killing Prospero also does not work because of the timely intervention of Ariel. Interestingly, Caliban is programmed by Prospero’s power structures. He seems to be more careful than his fellow conspirators. He makes them aware several times that Prospero has agents to control everything and if they are caught, severe punishment is going to be inflicted. “If he awake/From toe to crown he’ll fill our skins with pinches/Make us strange stuff” (IV.i. 22-24).

In modern society, knowledge is produced to enhance skill and strengthen power through discourses on discipline. Consequently, sexuality is also to be controlled strictly with a view to maintaining social order. Ferdinand and Caliban must be checked to protect Miranda's virginity. Otherwise, the island will be full of 'Calibans'- an emblem of abnormality. Sex is seen not as a matter of pleasure; but a manner which is to be instilled to have control over the society. Foucault observes that the dichotomy between 'lawful' and 'deviant' is determined through sexual discourses. In the play, Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda and Ferdinand's premarital sex are seen as deviation to the law. However, female chastity in Elizabethan England was given much priority as they were the mothers of future kings. Moreover, the contemporary Christian preoccupation that Eve is the cause of Man's fall from heaven was the dominating belief of Elizabethan patriarchy. Therefore, she should be controlled so as not to be the breeders of sin and sinners. In *The Tempest* both Miranda and her mother are the objects of male domination. Miranda is given little information about her mother except for her chastity. Prospero seems to be proud of saying about his wife's chastity to his daughter, "Thy mother was a piece of virtue/and She said thou wast my daughter."(I.ii.56-59)

This implication for Miranda that a virtuous woman should be chaste is clear. Again, Ferdinand has to be assured of Miranda's virginity before he expresses his love for her. "If you be maid or no?" (I.ii.422), asks Ferdinand, the future king of Naples. On the other hand, Prospero's plan to get Miranda married off to Ferdinand is a politically motivated issue. She has been commodified in the power dynamics that will restore Prospero to power. Therefore, female sexuality is utilized for obtaining political power here. Marriage spreads out power, and so if characters wish to retain power, they must make a proper match. Improper passion is an impediment to authority and dominance. Prospero tricks to entangle Ferdinand in Miranda's love so that she might become a legal heir to the Kingdom of Naples.

Though Foucault focused on the omnipresence of power, he couldn't devalue the possibility of resistance. In fact, he believes on the possibilities of action and resistance. Foucault speaks on the intellectual property and discourse which "can be both an instrument and an effect of power , but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart" (Foucault 1998: 100-1). Caliban, while resisting Prospero, always try to prevent Prospero's attempt to establish his dominance over him again and again and takes the benefit of learning Prospero's language to exercise a tthe power of curse. Wherever the power is, resistance should show its counter power. That happened in the island, and that is happening even in today's modern society.

In many ways, the island is the microcosm of today's modern society where the world runs by the dynamics of power. In the modern society, knowledge is produced to enhance skill and strengthen power through discourses on discipline. Political marriages were also the normal parts of Elizabethan life. Moreover, daughters had nothing to say but to marry the person of their father's choice. In *The Tempest*, Miranda has no voice but to yield to the patriarchal power. Prospero, therefore, reinforces male power that constructs Women identity. However, Miranda has little space to negotiate her position. The power dynamics establishes her relationship with her father:

Miranda dare not object to her enforced proximity to a hostile slave, for within the play's universe of discourse any attempt at pressing her own needs would constitute both personal insubordination and a disruption of the hierarchical order of the universe of which 'foot/head' familial organization is but one reflection. (Leininger, 227).

Though more advanced than the Elizabethan society, the present world produces more intricate weapons of exercising the power over the less powerful subjects and the weak. The intellectual power is dominating across the world and Prospero is the modern embodiment of the present superpower while Caliban and the other subjects in the island express themselves to be the ones with less power or no power at all. The production of discourse is treated to be one of the finest weapons to exercise power today and that is literally happening when we see the superior western civilization, with all their seminal discourses, is dominating the whole world. Prospero becomes the modern western society to reign the other parts of the world.

CONCLUSION

Power has always been a concern for the people of all times as it determines the creation and destruction of civilization. Power works through all the strata of life leaving minimal space for those who are powerless. We see the most powerful people is the well-survived ones. In fact, all the conflicts and problems originate from the distance between the powerful and the powerless. And it is a universal struggle that the most powerful would always try to exercise their power over the powerless and the latter tries to resist and re-evaluate their position to become powerful. *The Tempest* is re-evaluated and re-read to understand this dynamics of power which is prevalent everywhere. And the master of objective presentation of human beings and their surroundings, Shakespeare has wonderfully depicted this intricate relationship between power and its producers in his play.

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