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# “I will not peace”: Language, power, and the Duchess of York in *Richard II*

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## Abstract

The action of Shakespeare's *Richard II* centres on the overthrow of a king and the installation of a usurper in his place. Male characters dominate the play in terms of numbers and stage time. It is an indication, paradoxically, of both the subordination of women in this political and military world as well as their refusal to be completely passive that all three major female characters are seen in roles of supplication before men.

This paper considers the relation of power and language when one of these women, the Duchess of York, tries to persuade men to do her bidding. It examines the linguistic strategies she employs to gain ascendancy over them as well as those they use to assert their superiority. In addition to looking at how power is exerted through language, it also considers how power is reflected in language.

The relevant parts of Act 5 Scene 2 and Act 5 Scene 3 of *Richard II* are analysed using adaptations of concepts from conversation analysis, Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, and Culpeper's (1996) model of impoliteness.

## Introduction

It is critical commonplace that women are marginalised in the history plays. There are, for instance, just three women in *Richard II*. They take no part in the political struggles that form the main action. Having no public roles, they are defined by the domestic roles they play. All three derive their identities from their husbands. They are “the Queen”, “the Duchess of Gloucester”, and “the Duchess of York” because they are the wives (or widow) of the King, the Duke of Gloucester, and the Duke of York. Their first names are never used. We only know they are Isabel, Eleanor, and

Joan, rather than Rosalind, Goneril, or Volumnia because editors of modern scholarly editions tell us so. The women make only brief appearances. As if to underline their subordination, all of them are seen appealing to men on behalf of male relatives. Yet, these women are not without power. They do not passively accept all the decisions made by men.

When we first see the Duchess of York, she appears to be the patriarchy's model woman. She is at home, where she belongs, attentively listening to "my lord" hold forth at length. But the image is soon shattered. Her passivity vanishes as soon as she senses a threat to her son. She does not hesitate to act in whatever way she can. She defies her husband both verbally and physically, gives her son orders, and rides to Windsor to plead with the King himself.

This paper considers how language is both a reflection of and a means to power in the conversational exchanges involving the Duchess in Act 5 Scene 2 (5.2) and Act 5 Scene 3 (5.3) of *Richard II*. Three approaches are employed: conversation analysis, politeness, and impoliteness. The Duchess's utterances as well as those of her interlocutors—York, the King, and Aumerle—are analysed in terms of conversational features such as turn length, *speaker selection*, *adjacency pairs*, *repair*, and *preference*. The utterances are also examined for politeness and impoliteness strategies. I consider how these features and strategies are related to power; how they reflect the balance of power between the interlocutors or are manipulated in their struggle for power. The text used is that of the Arden 3 edition edited by Charles Forker (2002) as it is the most widely available and the most recently published scholarly edition of the play.

### **Theoretical approaches**

The three approaches used in this paper to examine the relation of power and language in the Duchess of York's conversations are conversation analysis, politeness, and impoliteness.

#### ***Conversation analysis***

Conversation is an orderly and organised behaviour. There are several concepts in conversation analysis to account for this, including *turn-taking*, *adjacency pairs*, and *preference*.

Sacks et al (1974) constructed a model called "a simplest systematics for the turn-taking organization of conversation" to explain how informal conversations are organised locally by the participants themselves to keep talk flowing smoothly with minimal silences and overlaps. Their model

consists of two components: the *turn constructional component* and the *turn allocational component*. The former deals with the features of turns such as length and linguistic texture while the latter explains how turns are distributed among participants. Speakers come to take turns at speaking either through being selected by the prior speaker, i.e. the previous turn was addressed to them, or through *self-selecting*, i.e. they choose to speak despite not being addressed in the previous turn.

The *adjacency pair* (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) is another concept that explains how conversation is organised. It is formed by two paired utterances from different speakers, the first of which sets up expectations of the second. For instance, we expect a question to be followed by an answer, and a greeting by another greeting. Should the *second pair part* fail to follow the first, its omission is noticeable and interpretable. If a question, for example, is not answered, we note the fact and try to account for it.

The concept of *preference* is closely linked to *adjacency pairs*. Some *first pair parts* have alternative seconds. For instance, addressees may respond to offers in one of two ways: acceptance or refusal. Likewise, requests may be granted or refused. These options do not have equal status. One is *preferred* to or ranked above the other. Generally, acceptances and grantings are the *preferred* seconds to offers and requests respectively while refusals are *dispreferred*. *Dispreferreds* are commonly avoided. If performed, they are structurally more complex than *preferreds* and delayed by pauses, prefaces, or even explanations (Levinson 1983: 332-4, Liddicoat 2007: 113-7).

*Preference* is also applicable to *repair* or "practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation" (Schegloff 2000: 207). *Self-repairs* are *preferred*; *other-repairs*, *dispreferred* (Schegloff et al 1977). The former are performed by the speaker in whose turn the *trouble source* occurs, the latter, by another participant. *Repairs* can also be initiated, i.e. the problem can be pointed out, by the speaker or another. Thus, there are four kinds of *repairs*.

1. Self-initiated self-repairs
2. Self-initiated other-repairs
3. Other-initiated self-repairs
4. Other-initiated other-repairs

How co-conversationalists manage and construct their turns may reflect the power relations at work in their relationships with one another. As all participants generally have equal rights to the floor, dominance of a

conversation through the taking of considerably longer turns or a greater number of them could point to dominance over the others present. On the other hand, when individuals are excluded from conversations by other participants not orienting turns to them, we might conclude that they are less powerful than those who ignore them. But if they then *self-select*, this may indicate assertiveness. Assertive or powerful individuals may also routinely complete *adjacency pairs* with *dispreferreds* or not provide any *second pair parts* at all. Similarly, repeated interruptions or *repairs* could indicate a speaker's bid for or possession of power over his/her interlocutors.

### ***Politeness theory***

Brown and Levinson theorise that speakers use linguistic strategies to avoid offending their hearers. Their theory is based on the notion of *face*, "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1987: 61). The notion of face has two aspects

- 1 *positive face* or the desire to be appreciated and approved of by others
- 2 *negative face* or the desire to be free to do as one wishes and not to be imposed upon by others.

During interaction, there is often a clash between what speakers wish to say or do and the *face* desires of addressees. For instance, a simple request to borrow a pen is an imposition upon the owner of the pen, who feels compelled to agree. Brown and Levinson call actions that come into conflict with addressees' *face* desires, *face threatening acts* or *FTAs*. In such situations, speakers have four superstrategies to choose from.

- 1 to perform the FTA on record baldly without redress, i.e. to speak as directly and unambiguously as possible so that hearers have no doubt of their intentions
2. to perform the FTA on record with redress, i.e. to mitigate the threat inherent in the act by adopting strategies that give *face* to hearers
- 3 to perform the FTA off record, i.e. to speak indirectly so that they do not commit themselves to a particular intention, and thus, addressees have a variety of meanings to choose from
4. not to perform the FTA at all

There are a number of *face* saving strategies that a speaker may employ to redress FTAs. The strategies of *positive politeness* appeal to the addressee's *positive face*, and those of *negative politeness* to his *negative face*. Brown and Levinson (1987) have identified 15 substrategies of *positive politeness*

- P1 Notice, attend to addressee's interests, wants, needs, goods
  - P2 Exaggerate interest, approval, sympathy with addressee
  - P3 Intensify interest to addressee
  - P4 Use in group identity markers
  - P5 Seek agreement
  - P6 Avoid disagreement
  - P7 Presuppose/raise/assert common ground
  - P8 Joke
  - P9 Assert or presuppose speaker's knowledge of and concern for addressee's wants
  - P10 Offer, promise
  - P11 Be optimistic
  - P12 Include both speaker and addressee in activity
  - P13 Give (or ask for) reasons
  - P14 Assume or assert reciprocity
  - P15 Give gifts to addressee (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)
- and 10 of *negative politeness*:
- N1 Be conventionally indirect
  - N2 Question, hedge
  - N3 Be pessimistic
  - N4 Minimise the imposition
  - N5 Give deference
  - N6 Apologise
  - N7 Impersonalise speaker and addressee
  - N8 State the FTA as a general rule
  - N9 Nominalise
  - N10 Go on record as incurring a debt or as not indebted to addressee

A speaker's approach to the performance of an FTA may reveal much about his relationship with his addressee. Which superstrategy of politeness he picks depends not just on the size of the imposition involved, but also on the power relations and the social distance between him and his addressee. The larger the FTA or the greater the social distance and the addressee's

power over him, the greater the effort he will expend in maintaining the addressee's *face*. In addition, *positive politeness* strategies are used to emphasise solidarity with social equals and *negative politeness* ones to indicate inferiority to social superiors.

### ***Impoliteness***

Culpeper (1996: 350) defines impoliteness as "the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect [from politeness] – that of social disruption". The immediate goal is to attack the addressee's *face*, but very often, there is a long term goal as well. For instance, when a 10-year-old boy tells his 7-year-old sister, who wants to tag along with him and his friends, that "You're just a silly *girl!*", his intent is not just to attack her *face*, but to stop her from coming along. There are five superstrategies of impoliteness corresponding to the five original politeness superstrategies of Brown & Levinson (1987):

1. Bald on record impoliteness, i.e. to perform the FTA directly, clearly, unambiguously and concisely with intent to attack the addressee's *face*
2. Positive impoliteness, i.e. to damage the addressee's *positive face*
3. Negative impoliteness, i.e. to damage the addressee's *negative face*
4. Sarcasm or mock politeness, i.e. to use politeness strategies in an obviously insincere manner
5. Withhold politeness, i.e. to remain silent or not to redress with politeness where it is expected.

Several possible output strategies for *positive* and *negative impoliteness* have been suggested by Culpeper (1996: 357-8), Culpeper et al (2003: 1555) and Bousfield (2008).

The positive ones include

- Ignore, snub the other, fail to acknowledge the other's presence.
- Exclude the other from an activity
- Disassociate from the other
- Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic
- Use inappropriate identity markers
- Use obscure or secretive language
- Seek disagreement or avoid agreement
- Make the other feel uncomfortable
- Use taboo words

- Call the other names
- Fail to attend to the other's needs
- Criticise

Among the negative impoliteness output strategies are

- Frighten or threaten
- Condescend, scorn, or ridicule
- Do not treat the other seriously
- Invade the other's space literally or metaphorically
- Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect
- Put the other's indebtedness on record
- Hinder or block the other physically or linguistically
- Enforce role shift
- Challenge the other through rhetorical questions

The recipient of an impoliteness attack may choose either to respond or not. A recipient who decides to respond, may either accept responsibility for the impoliteness act or counter it using offensive or defensive strategies. The former are designed to attack the impoliteness user and the latter, to defend the recipient's own *face*. However, as Bousfield (2008: 193) observes, offensive and defensive counter strategies are not mutually exclusive, for offensive strategies do have the ultimate goal of protecting one's *face* while the defensive may attack the other's *face* while defending one's own.

Culpeper (1996: 356) emphasises that there can only be impoliteness when there is a threat to *face* and when the speaker does not have considerably more power than the addressee. A speaker generally has no need to resort to impoliteness to get what he wants from an addressee who is very much his inferior while the fear of retribution would in most cases stop a speaker from employing it when speaking to a significantly more powerful addressee. Impoliteness, then, is most often used to gain power over an addressee in a roughly symmetrical power relationship.

### **The Duchess of York in Act 5 Scene 2**

Act 5 Scene 2 is one of the few occasions in *Richard II* when men are seen in a domestic setting. It dramatises York's discovery of the Oxford plot against Henry IV and the Duchess's attempts to persuade him not to endanger Aumerle, their son. York's belief that "lasting fealty" (5.2.45) to the monarch supersedes all else colours his views and guides his actions in

Act 5 To the Duchess, however, duty to one's family is paramount and she makes her opinion known.

### *Conversation analysis*

The scene opens with York recounting to the Duchess, Bolingbroke and Richard's entry into London. The separation of the genders is clear even in this brief episode, which is largely a narrative by York. The Duchess, a woman, remained at home while York, the man and the royal duke, was in London to play his part in state affairs. The entrance of Aumerle provides more evidence of the superior status of men. The Duchess looks to him for more news. With the arrival of his son, York begins to turn his attention away from his wife. Indeed, he dismisses her entirely from his thoughts when he notices the suspicious document in his son's possession. A possible threat to the kingdom is far more important than she and moreover, no concern of hers. She is shut out of the conversation completely between turns 11 and 19 as he tries to force Aumerle to give him the document. However, her protective maternal instincts on the alert, the Duchess refuses to stay on the sidelines, where York would have her. She *self-selects*—and interrupts:

York	Which for some reasons, sir, I mean to see. I fear, I fear—
Duchess	What should you fear? Tis nothing but some bond that he is entered into For gay apparel 'gainst the triumph-day

(5.2.63-6)

She is quick to ward off the danger she senses to her son with her own—safer—interpretation. Her efforts, however, earn her only an impatient, insulting reply from York, who swiftly turns his attention back to Aumerle:

	Bound to himself? What doth he with a bond That he is bound to? Wife, thou art a fool. Boy, let me see the writing.
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(5.2.67-9)

He shuts his wife out of the conversation once more. But the Duchess does not give up. If York will not select her as next speaker, she will simply continue to grab turns. She *self-selects* in her next three turns as well. He





physical tussle between his parents is at its height, he has merely two lines—a single turn out of 20. His mother shouts at him to “strike” the servant bearing his father’s boots, but he stands by, “amazed” (5.2.85). It is left to her to drive the man away. Again, it is she who has to prompt him to take his father’s horse and ride to the King before the old man does. His silence and inaction throw her volubility and action into relief. Despite his youth and gender, he is ineffectual. *She* has to fight his cause for him.

### *Politeness*

The Duchess does not use many politeness strategies. That she only redresses her FTAs of request to York minimally suggests that she is not quite the submissive woman she appears to be at the start of 5.2. Her two major politeness strategies are positive ones, which serve to emphasise the solidarity between them. Firstly, she employs P13, give reasons. She urges York to protect Aumerle, for he is “thine own” (5.2.89) and they have and will have no other sons: “Have we more sons? Or are we like to have?/ Is not my teeming date drunk up with time?” (5.2.90-91). She includes him in her reasoning to show him not only the reasonableness of her request but also that he, too, has something to gain by granting it—or rather, something to lose by rejecting it.

Her other major politeness strategy is P4, use in group identity markers, which is realised mainly through address terms. What is particularly noteworthy about the Duchess’s use of address terms is the shift in her choice towards the end of the scene. As observed earlier, she appears initially to be the archetypal submissive wife. This is due in part to her initial, rather formal mode of address to York:

*My Lord, you* told me *you* would tell the rest,  
When weeping made *you* break the story off  
(5.2.1-2)

She continues using honorifics and the formal second person pronoun even when she begins questioning him.

What is the matter, *my lord*? (5.2.73)  
Why, what is’t, *my lord*? (5.2.76)

But she drops all formality when he not only ignores her, but also verbally abuses her. First, she omits all honorifics:

What is the matter? (5.2.80)

Then, he becomes simply “York” and “thou”  
 Why, *York*, what wilt *thou* do?  
 Wilt *thou* not hide the trespass of *thine* own?  
 Have we more sons? Or are we like to have?  
 Is not my teeming date drunk up with time?  
 And wilt *thou* pluck my fair son from mine age  
 And rob me of a happy mother’s name?  
 Is he not like *thee*? Is he not *thine* own?  
 (5.2.88-94)

Anxiety for their son and anger at York’s refusal to protect him prompt the Duchess to shift from formal to informal address terms. However, contempt getting her nowhere, she turns to solidarity instead. “*Sweet York, sweet husband*, be not of that mind./ He is as like *thee* as a man may be” (5.2.107-8). The endearments and familiar ‘thou’s’ in her last turn to him are meant to mollify and remind him of their relationship. But whether expressive of contempt or solidarity, the Duchess’s use of informal address terms argue that the power differential in the Yorks’ relationship is not as great as might be imagined.

### *Impoliteness*

Impoliteness features quite prominently in the Duchess’s utterances to York. She conducts “intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts” (Bousfield 2008: 72) with the express purpose of getting him to yield to her. For instance, the shift in address terms discussed earlier is a *positive impoliteness* strategy, which implicates a reduction in respect, while her interruption of York’s turn (5.2.63-65) is a *negative impoliteness* strategy, which hinders his words.

The Duchess moves from hindering York conversationally to hindering him physically. To prevent him from leaving to expose the plot, she tries to stop a servant from giving him his boots and when that fails, to bar his way herself, an action which prompts his angry final turn, “Make way, unruly woman!” (5.2.111). Perhaps the strongest of her impoliteness strategies is her implication of impolite beliefs through the rhetorical questions, “Wilt

thou not hide the trespass of thine own?" (5.2.89) and "wilt thou pluck my fair son from mine age/ And rob me of a happy mother's name?" (5.2.92-3). She implicates that York does not love his son or wife. There is an element of emotional blackmail in this, for she is suggesting that refusal to protect Aumerle would make him an unnatural father and husband, who would deny his son, life, and his wife, happiness. The Duchess' use of impoliteness suggests power in her relationship with York. That she employs the strategy at all indicates enough intimacy in their relationship for her not to fear his wrath.

York also resorts to impoliteness to exert power. His goal is to silence his wife. To that end, he employs impoliteness strategies calculated to put her in her rightful, subordinate place. He begins by snubbing her, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge her repeated questions. Then, he attacks her intellect and gender. She is "a fool" (5.2.68), a "foolish woman" (5.2.80), an "unruly woman" (5.2.111), and a "fond woman" (5.2.101). In a particularly virulent attack, he flings her inferiority as a woman at her, then implicates the impolite belief in her willingness to be complicit in treason. "Thou fond mad woman./ Wilt thou conceal this dark conspiracy?" (5.2.95-6). He even physically pushes her aside. There is a striking contrast between the ferocity of his attacks on the Duchess and his earlier patience in describing to her Bolingbroke and Richard's entrance into London. A lesser person might be cowed into submission, unfortunately for York, not his wife. She remains undaunted, continuing her questions and pleas till he leaves. Even failure to persuade him does not discourage her. She simply takes her appeal to a higher authority, the King himself.

### **The Duchess of York in Act 5 Scene 3**

Act 5 Scene 3 sees the Yorks, father, son—and mother—at Windsor pleading their opposing causes. The Duchess's request remains the same: the sparing of Aumerle, but she now addresses it to a different interlocutor: Henry IV, her sovereign and the target of the plot. The *face threat* of her act is much greater now

#### ***Conversation analysis***

The Duchess is the last of the Yorks to reach the court, age and gender working against her. For the first time in the play, she enters the public world. It is not her natural sphere, at least not in the view of the patriarchy, which York represents. "Thou frantic woman, what dost thou make here?" (5.3.88). But she does not allow their disapproval or the closed door to stop

her. She asserts herself from the start, hailing the King from outside the chamber and *self-selecting* upon entering. Indeed, five of her 12 turns involve *self-selection*. Despite being the only woman present and the King himself being a participant in the conversation, she goes on to dominate it. She has the lion's share of the turns following her entry: 12 of the 25 are hers. The King has eight; York, four; and Aumerle, just one. Her turns are also much longer. The longest of York's turns has merely 30 words while the King, to whom husband and wife address their suits, is reduced to turns of between just 4 and 8 words, with the statistical mode at 4. The Duchess, however, has turns of 95, 68, and 71 words. She simply outtalks all three men, Aumerle, whose life is at stake; York, who is competing with her for the King's attention, and Henry IV himself, in whose gift lies what she seeks. Once again, she hogs the conversational floor.

She successfully counters every attempt York makes to wrest control of the conversation from her, grabbing turns after every one he addresses to the King. Twice, he warns Henry about the danger of pardoning traitors. Twice, she rejects his construction of meaning. On the first occasion, she warns the King that "Love loving not it self, none other can" (5.3.87). On the second, she questions York's sincerity and urges her own. It is worth noting that her turn is considerably longer than his: 11 lines to just two. In a final attempt, the Duke tries to use *repair* to direct the conversation.

Duchess	Say 'Pardon', King; .. No word like 'Pardon' for kings' mouths so meet.
York	Speak it in French, King; say ' <i>Pardonne-moi</i> ' (5.3.115, 117-8)

This too fails. The Duchess chides him, then conducts her own *other-initiated other-repair* on his turn to give "pardon" its English meaning once more:

Dost thou teach Pardon pardon to destroy?  
Ah, my sour husband, my hard-hearted lord,  
That sets the word it self against the word!  
Speak 'Pardon' as 't is current in our land,  
The chopping French we do not understand.  
(5.3.119-123)

Again, her turn is much longer than his, nine lines to a single one. York capitulates and is silent for the rest of the scene.



But the King does try to reassert some control over both the conversation as well as the Duchess. He regains a measure of it by initiating closure. His final turn contains instructions for York, a warning for Aumerle, and farewells to both men, but curiously, none to the Duchess, who has had his attention for so long: "*Uncle*, farewell, and so *cousin*, adieu, / Your mother well hath prayed, and prove you true." (5.3 143-4, emphasis mine). In performance, he might acknowledge her non-verbally with an inclination of the head perhaps. Yet that he addresses both his male interlocutors individually underlines his omission of a farewell to her. It would appear that his mind now firmly focused on the rebellion—a matter that does not concern her, a woman—he dismisses her from his thoughts. York can help him deal with the rebels. Aumerle could prove false and help the rebels. The Duchess, however, is a mere woman, neither help nor threat, and so, not worth his attention. Having capitulated to her wishes, he now orients his closing turn only to the men and thus puts her back in her place. While his snub is not an instance of impoliteness, his social status being far higher than hers, it is nevertheless an attempt to put her back in her place.

The Duchess foils the attempt. The King's final turn ends with two rhymed couplets. The first (5.3 141-2) concludes his instructions to York about dealing with the Oxford conspiracy and signals closure. The second (5.3 143-4), containing his farewells to York and Aumerle, is meant to actually close the conversation. But the Duchess *self-selects* to add a rhyming third line to his final couplet, "Come, my old son, I pray God make thee new" (5.3 145). That additional third line diminishes the King. Firstly, it is the Duchess, not he, who has the last, triumphant word in the scene. Secondly, her reference to the Biblical idea of rebirth through repentance (2 Corinthians 5 17) points to "another kind of closure, the possibility of redeeming grace, a grace beyond the earthly god's competence to bestow on another, much less on himself" (Berger 1987 148). The King's power is limited. He may have the power to pardon Aumerle for plotting treason, but he has none to grant any soul salvation, particularly not that of the usurping Henry Bolingbroke.

### *Politeness*

Holderness (1992: 82) observes that "the Duchess of York offers what is in effect a contrasting success story, precisely because she accepts and embraces the subjected and marginal role of women" This is particularly true in 5.3. From the outset, she positions herself as Henry's subordinate. To his question, "What shrill-voiced suppliant makes this eager cry?", she

answers "a woman" (5.3.75) and "a beggar ... that never begged before" (5.3.77). Paradoxically, she derives power from her subordinate role as woman, subject, and suppliant.

The kinship terms so abundant in her 5.2 utterances are conspicuous by their near absence in 5.3. She uses just one, "aunt", to identify herself in her second turn and uses no more for the rest of the scene. It is her sovereign, not her husband, to whom she now appeals. She adjusts her politeness strategies accordingly, stressing deference through negative politeness, rather than solidarity.

Her main politeness strategy in 5.3 is N5, show deference. Henry is "my liege" (5.3.73), "Great King" (5.3.75), and "gentle liege" (5.3.90). While the use of such honorifics to the monarch is to be expected, it should be noted that she last refers to him simply as "Bolingbroke" (5.2.117). She 'thou's' him throughout the scene, but with "the formal T of supplication" (Lock 2008: 125), not that of contempt or solidarity, which she uses for York. It points at *her* lowly status, not his. She takes pains to humble herself. Besides identifying herself as "a woman" (5.3.75) and "a beggar" (5.3.77), she uses verbs that underline her inferiority. She "begs" (5.3.77), "beseech[es]" (5.3.91) and "pray[s] with heart and soul and all beside" (5.3.102) for his "pity" (5.3.76). There are other, more subtle, acknowledgements of his royal authority. Unlike in 5.2, she makes no excuses for her son's behaviour here. He is simply "my transgressing boy" (5.3.95). He is also "Rutland" (5.3.95), rather than "Aumerle". Her use of the lower title acknowledges Henry's right to strip him of the title of Duke of Aumerle. It contrasts with her previous defiant refusal to use "Rutland". In 5.2, she insists on calling her son "Aumerle" (5.2.81, 85, 111) even after York corrects her (5.2.41-43).

Her humility is expressed not just verbally. She kneels before the King in physical expression of her position as a suppliant, insisting that "Forever will I walk upon my knees/ Till thou give joy" (5.3.92, 94). In her hands—or should one say, on her knees—kneeling, the archetypal expression of submissiveness, becomes a weapon of power. The King is unable to ignore the sight of his aged aunt on her knees pleading with him. Thrice, he urges her to rise, and finally, he grants her what she wants: a pardon for Aumerle.

The King's own use of politeness strategies is indicative of the Duchess's power. Despite the power differential, he redresses each of his three requests to her with a respectful "good aunt". The acknowledgement of his familial ties with her is a realisation of both P4, use in group markers, and N5, show deference. He is expressing solidarity as well as deference.

This concern for her *face* needs when taken together with the patience he shows in listening to her appears to be more than mere magnanimity. He is according her the respect due to her status within the family and this surely has implications for her influence with him.

### ***Impoliteness***

Cognisant as she is of the difference in their status, the Duchess naturally avoids impoliteness with Henry IV. She is, however, once again the target of impoliteness from York. Anxious that the King not pardon Aumerle as the Duchess wishes, York attempts to silence her upon her entrance:

Thou frantic woman, what dost thou make here?  
Shall thy old dugs once more a traitor rear?

(5.3.88-9)

He attacks her sanity (“frantic”), her gender (“woman”), and her age (“old dugs”) as well as implicates impolite beliefs in her having no place in the important, masculine world of the royal court (“what dost thou make here?”) and in her recurrent complicity in treason (“Shall thy old dugs *once more* a traitor rear?”). The Duchess is not cowed by this virulent attack on her in the presence of the King. Indeed, her response to his impoliteness demonstrates her control of the situation. She says simply, “Sweet York, be patient” (5.3.90). Her use of the endearment positions her as a loving wife while the appeal to him implicates that the Duke is being impatient and far from sweet. She defends her own *face* and subtly attacks his. Any observer—including Henry IV—of this exchange would find York out of control and her, calm and rational.

### **The dramatist’s containment of female power in Act 5 Scenes 2 & 3**

That the Duchess exercises some power is undeniable. We have seen that both York and the King make attempts to control her. But it can be argued that the ultimate source of male power—the dramatist himself—also tries to limit her power. Firstly, he has her exert her power in comic scenes, which diminishes her. Secondly, he makes the pardon she wins from the King the third that Henry gives Aumerle, which arguably makes her efforts superfluous. Yet, a closer consideration shows that the comedy and the earlier pardons do not reduce the Duchess’s power as much as might be imagined.

### *Comedy in Act 5 Scenes 2 & 3*

Before he lets the Duchess into his audience chamber, Henry wryly observes that "Our scene is altered from a serious thing,/ And now changed to 'The Beggar and the King'" (5.3 78-79). His words and the accompanying change from high blank verse to low rhymed couplets signal a change in the tone of the scene. Indeed, both 'York' scenes are highly comic ones. In 5.2, the slapstick comedy of York's struggle with his wife over first his boots and then his departure from the room undercut the seriousness of the discovery of the Oxford conspiracy and the danger to Aumerle's life. The repeated knocking and kneeling of the Yorks do the same in 5.3. As we laugh at the histrionic antics of the Yorks, the execution of Aumerle might not even seem a remote possibility.

It could be argued, therefore, that the Duchess is a comic figure, whose power cannot be taken seriously. But if that is so, then the same is true of the men who enact the comedy alongside her. York is diminished by his verbal and physical frenzy, Aumerle by his catatonic stupor, and most significantly, Henry IV by his presiding—if it may be called that—in near silence over the farcical wrangling not just of his relatives in 5.3 but also of his equally ridiculous, accusation-and-gage-flinging nobles in 4.1. It is impossible not to compare this picture of Henry's court with that of Richard's in 1.1 and 1.3. Richard, whatever his shortcomings as king, is seen presiding over a serious conflict between two powerful nobles. The comic 5.3 and first half of 4.1 are, as Howard & Rackin (1997: 156) put it, "calculated to exhibit the new king's lack of inherent authority." The Duchess of York, comic though she may be, is hardly out of place in the court of Henry IV. Her power may be taken quite as seriously as the King's own.

Moreover, there is a striking contrast between the confident and dominant Henry before her arrival and the one standing almost passively on the sidelines after it, periodically imploring his aunt to rise. The patriarchy, with its fear and abhorrence of female power in any form, might well see this change in the King as Henry's emasculation by the force of an unruly and, therefore, dangerous female tongue.

### *Aumerle's (at least) triple pardon*

It might be argued that the Duchess's power is more apparent than real because, as some commentators maintain, the King pardons Aumerle twice before her arrival, once at Aumerle's own suit and again when York tries to have him condemned (Barkan 1978; Berger 1987; Hartwig 1983; McNeir 1972). However, the King's earlier words do not diminish the Duchess's

achievement. While the first pardon (5.2.33-4) is expressed clearly—Henry actually uses the word “pardon” itself—it is granted without knowledge of the nature of Aumerle’s transgression. The second does not abide by Grice’s (1999) Maxims of Quantity and Manner. “Thy abundant goodness shall excuse/ This deadly blot in thy disgressing son” (5.2.64-5) may not quite add up to a pardon especially not in view of Henry’s violent response to York’s initial warning:

York	( <i>Within</i> ) My liege, beware! Look to thyself! Thou hast a traitor in thy presence there.
King Henry	[ <i>to Aumerle</i> ] Villain, I’ll make thee safe. [ <i>Draws his sword</i> ]

(5.2.38-9)

and his anger when he finally learns what exactly Aumerle has done: “O heinous, strong and bold conspiracy! O loyal father of a treacherous son!” (5.2.58-9). Add to this, the prerogative of monarchs to change their minds and the matter is far from settled. The two York men certainly believe so. Both join the Duchess on their knees.

The pardon Henry gives Aumerle at the Duchess’s behest is granted with full knowledge of his treason and expressed unequivocally: “I pardon him, as God shall pardon me” (5.3.130). Having mentioned God and his own salvation, he is unlikely to go back on his word. Indeed, in his final turn, he confirms the pardon and attributes it to the Duchess’s efforts. “so, cousin, adieu./ Your mother well hath prayed, and prove you true” (5.3.143-4).

### Conclusion

As the discussion above shows, the Duchess of York is neither submissive nor passive. She employs various strategies to exert power over her male interlocutors. The most obvious are *self-selecting* and hogging the conversational floor. Considering her subordinate social position, she does not use politeness strategies as often as might be expected and in fact, employs impoliteness on occasion. This suggests a measure of power over her male addressees, York and the King. She is an intelligent woman who suits her strategies to her interlocutors. N5, show deference is her main strategy with the King, while P4, use in group markers, and impoliteness dominate the turns she addresses to York. With her husband, she tries to exploit the affection and the intimacy of their relationship to her advantage. With the king, she does the opposite, using deference rather than solidarity

as a means to power. To get what she wants, she humbles herself and stresses his superiority. Language is, therefore, a means to power for the Duchess, but it also reflects the long term power relations between her and her interlocutors. She uses her impoliteness to York and her *dispreferred* responses to the King with impunity only because they countenance her use of those strategies.

The patriarchy does not entirely welcome the Duchess's exercise of power. Her male interlocutors make attempts to assert their superiority over her. They use language as a weapon against her too. York employs a whole arsenal of impoliteness strategies. He repeatedly calls her names, ridicules her, implicates impolite beliefs about her, and snubs her. Even the King, who otherwise treats his "good aunt" with indulgence, snubs her in his last turn in an apparent attempt to put her back in her place. Feeling threatened by the Duchess's volubility, the men hope that by ignoring her presence, they can silence and thus, control her. Their attempts, however, are not entirely successful. She insists on acting and being heard. Like many a medieval knight, she defends an accused person. However, she enters the lists as Aumerle's champion armed not with sword and lance, but her tongue. The Duchess simply "will not peace"

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