

Bourdieuian Reading of Caryl Churchill's *Serious Money*

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Abstract

Caryl Churchill is one of the most widely performed female dramatists in contemporary British theatre. She is arguably the most successful and best-known socialist-feminist playwright to have merged from Second Wave feminism. Her plays have been performed all over the world. In her materialist plays, she shows the matters of culture, education, power, politics, and myth. Her oeuvre hovers over the material conditions which testify to the power relations within society at a given time in history. Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, and theorist in cultural studies points out the dynamics of power relations in social life throughout ideas such as capital, field, habitus, symbolic violence, theories concerned with class and culture. The overarching concern for the purpose of this essay is to analyse Churchill's *Serious Money* (1987) in the light of Bourdieu's sociological concepts. In accordance with Bourdieu, there exist various kinds of capital (cultural, economic, social, and symbolic) which distinguish every individual's status both in society and in relation to other individuals. The present study attempts to show that in *Serious Money*, the capital especially economic capital forms the foundation of social life and dictates one's position within the social order and respectively, determining the power discourse in the matrix of social life.

Keywords: capital, Caryl Churchill, field, habitus, Pierre Bourdieu, play, *Serious Money*

1. Introduction

Caryl Churchill is one of the mainstream political playwrights in contemporary British theatre. As a socialist—Marxist writer, her works are marked with the socio-political events of her time. She is in fact in line with what Patterson called “a new way of thinking” among the twentieth century writers:

In the twentieth century, theatre with an intention to convert to a new way of thinking, or at least to challenge old modes of thought, became more overtly political, questioning not so much social morality as the fundamental organization of society, with the emphasis on economics rather than on ethics (2003).

Churchill as a socialist activist as much as a playwright, too, by blending feminism and socialism, proved Patterson right when he called all theatre as “political” (2003). According to Pattie (2006), “Churchill's 1970s work blended a strong commitment to both socialism and feminism with an interest in experimentation. Her formally innovative plays combined an analysis of gender and economic oppression, both in contemporary Britain and in other historical ages”. Among her political tendencies, one could mention her stance against globalisation, and capitalism. The latter an issue most manifest in *Serious Money*—a play written in the wake of the Big Bang, the Thatcher-era deregulation of British markets. It is money which is merchandised in LIFFE (the London International Financial Futures Exchange). Money, in this overly political play of Churchill is presented as fading away the humanitarian aspect of the characters as they see life just in terms of capital and the rise in economic status. With the competence of money, the relation between individuals is based on their interest—ipso facto, the most determining factor in their social status as human being. What Churchill, then, presents here, is in close affinity with Pierre Bourdieu's sociological studies on individual relations in terms of capital, field, and habitus. Pertinent to the subject matter of *Serious Money*, the present article attempts to read the relationships between what Bourdieu calls social agents, in the light of the three above mentioned key terms in his sociological theories.

2. Methodology and Literature Review

In modern era, literature is understood through interdisciplinary studies and different perspectives such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, art, cinema, and so forth. The central research question, assigned here is the relation between sociology and literature. On the basis of sociology where studying behaviours play fundamental role in determining social patterns and theories, one could also trace such roles in maybe the most social production of literature, i.e drama. Drama is the most socially-oriented production among creative writings because not only the very script of the text is a mirror held up to true relations of human being, but also because it is a place where gathering together and experiencing a similar event is practiced. For the same reason, the present paper, strive to study the different aspects of social behaviour in *Serious Money* through the looking glass of a sociological theory.

Searching the journals from 80s showed that no work has been done on the similar topic as that of the present study. Searching through journals, resulted in the conclusion that all journals either talked around Bourdieu's sociological concepts or Churchill's plays, style, and form. "The Dramas of Caryl Churchill: The Politics of Possibility" (1983) by Helene Keyssar delineated the role of men and women in Churchill's plays and discussed that there remained a complexity in order to call her a feminist writer or not. "Theatricality and Empowerment in the Plays of Caryl Churchill" (1989) by Amelia Howe Kritzer described the materialistic issues which led to power. By the use of theatre elements, she tried to show her audiences the concept of change. In the mentioned paper the relationship between the play and the audiences was shown. "Review" By Laura Doan (1993) also, pictured Amelia Howe Kritzer's "The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment" and how Kritzer had a close reading of Churchill's pieces of works. "Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography" (1995) by Helmut K. Anheier, Jurgen Gerhards and Frank P. Romo depicted Bourdieu's different definitions of capitals and social status. "Performing Capital in Caryl Churchill's '*Serious Money*'" (1999) by Linda Kintz showed the relationship between Churchill's and Brecht's notion over drama. "Bourdieu's Uneasy Psychoanalysis" (2000) by Jean-François Fourny and Meaghan Emery demonstrated the influence of psychology in Bourdieu's works. Thus, the present contribution seems innovative for as said above no contribution regarding Bourdieu's sociological application on Churchill's *Serious Money* has been done so far. Intermingling sociology with literature as in the present case in which the main purpose is to illustrate Bourdieu's notions of sociological terms, i.e. capitals, field, habitus, bodily hexis, and misrecognition in Churchill's *Serious Money* makes the elements more palpable to comprehend. In the case of intertwining these two fields of study, it is observable that though literature can be independent of other branches, it can also be related to them. Literature is an art which is progressed throughout centuries quite independent of sociology, but sociology pursues its societal life elements in literature. But at the end they can be interrelated. With this research, other future researches may be done on the basis of two different allied fields.

3. Theoretical Background

Bourdieu believed that each agent is differentiated from the other in relation to different capitals (cultural, social, symbolic, economic, and linguistic). For him, cultural capital is the desire for something which is culturally valued and is worth gaining, in order to reach a higher social status. As Danahay (2005) mentions "much of Bourdieu's work was concerned with articulating the ways in which a person's social position (and the "cultural capital," or values and resources connected to this) affects the choices he or she makes in life—from that of choosing a suitable marriage partner, to educational and career decisions, to deciding how much time should elapse before repaying a gift". Components such as skill, taste, clothing, mannerism, material belonging, credential, and so forth include in cultural capital. Every agent gains these elements according to his/her social status. Bourdieu points out that one's social status raises up when one has more wealth and power. Social capital, as the second capital discussed by Bourdieu, is a network of relationships among the members of a group which provides the members with some values and credit. In linguistic capital, the third in the list, language as a means of creating power can function as a factor shaping the identity of the characters and is regarded as a value by Bourdieu. Language for Bourdieu is a mechanism of power. He believes that "the language one uses is designated by one's relational position in a field or social space" (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Symbolic capital is prestige, social status, fame, and qualities which are not meaningful by themselves, but people believe some others to have. Finally, economic capital refers to the money and properties one has.

Next comes another key term of Bourdieu, that is to say, field, which is meant by him to refer to be "a network of relations among objective positions" (Bourdieu in Ritzer, 2011). Individuals, according to Boudieu, struggle for a higher position or capital like field of power or cultural field. Still, habitus "are the 'mental, or cognitive structures' through which people deal with the social world" (Bourdieu in Ritzer, 2011) and via which images, values, and manner are achieved. Moving to "bodily hexis," Bourdieu defines it as "the physical attitudes and

dispositions which emerge in individuals as a result of the relationships between particular fields and individuals' habits" (Bourdieu, 1979). He believes that figurative disposition, way of speaking, walking, standing, and thinking, that is, their body language, functions as the bodily hexis for social agents. And finally, misrecognition, the last term discussed here is "the imposition of the dominant-class culture on subordinate groups. It is forced on agents by authority and the agents; it is a form of 'symbolic violence'" (Bourdieu, 1992) which the agents do not feel. They consider all the limitations natural.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Moving to the play, as Diamond mentions, "begins with a scene in full Restoration dress from Thomas Shadwell's *The Stockjobbers* (1692), a play that satirizes the sharp practices of members of the Stock Exchange who 'turn {ed} a penny' by dealing in stocks on behalf of themselves or their clients" (2006). It "is a play that captures the 1980s ethos of capitalist greed enshrined in the policies and values of the Conservative government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher" (Howard in Aston & Diamond, 2009). It chronicles the moment in Britain in 1987 known as Big Bang when Margaret Thatcher de-regulated the British financial systems. Big Bang also represents the real beginning of globalisation as International Financiers from Banks to individuals come in to take advantage of the rapid growth the de-regulation creates. This play uses the characters found on the floor of the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE) to examine what happens to people and by extension society, when the ability to accumulate wealth becomes the only gauge that success is measured by. The main intention of the story is upon the stock market corruption in Britain. The plot circulates around Jake and Scilla Todd, brother and sister, who are adoring both the ease and bliss of the upper class. But the story apexes when Jake is murdered throughout the first few scenes as a consequence of his underground trading. Scilla becomes eager to seek his brother's murderer. Though she does not find the case, she realises that her brother was dealing loads of money and was under the surveillance of Trade and Industry Department. During these events Scilla notices Marlylou Banes, the American business trader, with whom his brother was working. Marylou provokes Scilla to join this party. Other members of this party are Billy Corman and Zac Zackerman who are struggling to annex the Albion corporation from Duckett. During this capture, Corman advertises in order to attract others to come and buy the shares in the company. At the end, Greville Todd is in jail, Corman is attributed as a Lord, and Scilla is working for Marylou.

Firstly, there exist stockbrokers, bankers, traders, and other people involved in international finance dealings. Their job requires them to swear a lot which illustrates their lack of cultural capital as well as their habitus and bodily hexis—to be discussed later. Their attitude should be led as such in order to let them stay in the field of market. Their manner of swearing indicates the "embodied cultural capital" for they do not use formal diction. The language they restore to, is rude and cheap: "Grimes: Get off the fucking line, will you please?" (p. 4), or in "Mate (to Grimes): There's a fucking seller trying to make us pay up" (p. 5), or "Dealer: What the fuck?" (p. 8), or "Grimes to Scilla: Won't survive without one, poor old wanker" (p. 11). Also, they speak informal, colloquial, and slang diction—an appropriate language for their level. Zac lacks embodied cultural capital as he states, "I don't mind bending over and greasing my ass but I sure ain't using my own vaseline" (p. 16). Or for Durkfeld "I don't give a rat's ass" (p. 14). This lack is also observable even in the wealthy Corman, who does not possess the embodied cultural capital as he says "Zac, have you seen the fucking *Times* this morning?" (p. 22). Instead, the objectified cultural capital, i.e. luxury cars or collections, is replaced as a source of capital: "Schilla: If we've a Porsche in the garage and champagne in the glass" (p. 10). Institutionalised cultural capital referred to as credential and qualities as illustrated in "Grimes: Jake's the only public schoolboy what can really deal. Jake: That's because I didn't go to university and learn to think twice" (p. 10).

Secondly, the relationship between these brokers and the others to gain money embodies examples of social capital. The starting scene of play, from *The Volunteers* or *The Stockjobbers* by Thomas Shadwell, illustrates the exchange of information between colleagues. When Schilla prefers to work "on the floor instead of back door" (p. 11), she shows to be interested in working with many people and having communication with them—a relationship which extends to after work. This is shown in the Liffe Champagne Bar (p. 9), or when agents go hunting (p. 16).

Linguistic capital as mentioned before is the third type of capital they adhere to. They do not use formal vocabulary and diction. For instance pages 15 and 16, illustrate how Zackerman who is a banker has social and economic capitals, but no linguistic, cultural, and symbolic capitals.

Fourthly, symbolic capital refers to the social status these people have in their life. Because of money, they have symbolic capital. Duckett the chairman of Albion, is the wealthiest and so famously bear a good social status. "Duckett: I run a highly efficient company" (p. 40). Another example is STARR, a PR consultant who wants to

create a mask (propaganda) for Corman in order to present him reasonable, so people would buy his share and hence make famous (pp. 90-91).

Next is economic capital, a prominent capital all the characters are obsessed with. They all want to gain higher status and credit. Churchill shows how economic system functions as power in order to let them gain higher status. Money and power (and the latter emerging from the former,) are situated in extremes and represented in greed, materialism, and corruption. In the case of Jake for instance, as soon as Scilla finds out that her brother was making enormous money, she stops finding his murderer and instead seeks for the money. "Scilla to Marylou: I had been wondering if you killed Jake, but now I hardly care. It's not going to bring him alive again, and the main thing's to get my share" (p. 109). "What she really wants to uncover is not the cause of his death but the whereabouts of his money, or at least 'her share'" (Naismith, 2002). Even these people will betray each other in order to gain their share. As we read in the case of Scilla: "Scilla: If you don't help me I'll go to the authorities and tell them—Marylou: Is this blackmail? Scilla: Yes, of course. I put you in jail" (p. 110). Driven by greed, all can justify their actions: Marylou and Jake can do insider trading because, after all, everyone acts on whatever information happens to come his way; Jacinta can double-cross even would-be lover Zac because a businesswoman is supposed to make as much money as possible; Jacinta and Marylou can deal in cocaine because the Central Intelligence Agency also benefits (pp. 66-67). In the play, Churchill's commentary on oppression relates more generally to all the victims of the capitalist system, to society at large. Also, "*Serious Money* took on the new financial arrangements of late capitalism whereby deregulated financial markets encourage speculation, risky investments and high-speed international deals" (Howard, 2009). This is observable in pages 32-33 where Corman, Zac, and Etherington are discussing to join other companies and institutions in order to reach higher economic and hence social capital. Also, "Corman's attempt to take over the Albion Company by getting a "war party" of business colleagues to buy up shares secretly" (Naismith, 2002). He wants to buy Albion even if he goes to prison when he says "Corman: I don't care if I go to jail, I'll win whatever the cost" (p. 99).

Jack identifies rich people in order to make contracts with them in order to get his own part. He also acts as a spy. For instance in one case, he is asking Zac to join Senora Condor in a contract because Jack says he is a wealthy business man (p. 61). The greed as such could also be traced in Durkfield and Merrison's case where Merrison gives place to Durkfield for more economic space, but at the end Durkfield asks Merrison to resign in order to announce himself the chairman of the company (p. 14). Everything hovers over economic capital and examples are plenty: "Jake: What did you think of the family? Zac: quite a mansion" (p. 35). "In *Serious Money*, Churchill turns from consideration of labour to an examination of capital. Called a 'city comedy of High-Tech greed'" (Cousin, 1989). "A City Comedy, the city of the play's title is the City of London's financial district" (Kintz, 1999).

To move to the second step, field is another Bourdieusian term. In *Serious Money*, the field is mainly business, and based on fight for money which could consequently lead to higher social status. This is seen in all parts of the play. This is shown from the very first stage of the play where it starts with the matter of money. The play by Shadwell is mentioned regarding the stockjobbers and their duty for money making.

The third argument is related to habitus and bodily hexis, which both fall in one category. The first habitus of these business people are the swearing, discussed earlier. Their work situation requires them to swear and use street talk, hence their code of behaviour is not formal. The second habitus they have is trading. Everything is seen through the looking glass of wealth and business. "Grimes: For the market. Jake's the only public schoolboy what can really deal. Jake: That's because I didn't go to university and learn to think twice" (p. 10). Clearly, this is a habit of them for if they want to trade in the market they should not suspect, they should buy and sell in seconds. Or in page 39 when Duckett is analysing his options for his company to Ms Biddulph, pictures his habitus. Greed is attributed to their habitus and bodily hexis (p. 67). They also have a bossy body language which can be read in terms of their habit as seen in, "Corman: Ok, let's skip the introductions. How do you do. Let's get on with the ructions" (p. 71). He wants to imply his own attitude. Also, businessmen are good actors, putting masks on and pretending to be good people. This is shown when Duckett and Biddulph talk about Duckett's symbolic capital and fame he has among people (pp. 78-79). They make profit out of people's trust.

Finally, "*Serious Money* gives us a compelling, speedy, exciting world in the modern marketplace (where the women are as powerful and ruthless as the men)" (Naismith, 2002). The women characters in the play do not serve merely as objects for male sexual gratification, but have the same privileged access to money. But beside the matter of money, men equate women with money. This can be felt both as the habit and misrecognition. Regarding the former, their habitus as discussed above is just the matter of money, so in this case gender is not counted, and concerning the latter, women are under the suppression of the dominant male. This is seen in the

play when, for example, Scilla, Joanne, a runner, and Kathy, a trader are sitting in the LIFFE canteen and discussing the place of work. Joanne does not want to work among men as she says “I’m not going to work down there. It’s like animals in a zoo/ so then I thought I’ll have a bash. Kathy: When you start they really stare. Scilla: Don’t let them care” (p. 49). Or in the middle of work, men invite women to go out with them and keep flirting as in, “Vince: Coming out with me tonight? Scilla: Leave it out, Vince.Vince (to Joanne): Coming out with me tonight?” (p. 51). The dialogue shows the habitus (money and sex) of male traders. Another example is when Annie comes up to Brian and asks “I’m looking for Mike Hunt. Brian: She’s looking for her cunt” (p. 56)—a verbal sexual abuse towards a woman which makes her cry.

5. Conclusion

Serious Money as its title depicts is just talking around business and economic phase. Bourdieu’s sociological theories, especially his notion of different capitals is applicable to this play. Economic capital is the best to fit. Agents fight for earnings to profit a higher social status. This is seen all through the play: dealing with money, fighting for a higher position, and making connections with others to gain more money profit. The present article tries to show that literature can be read in terms of sociological theories and the reader can easily recognise these sociological notions within the characters of the play. Churchill has presented herself as an opponent of capitalism and globalisation. She has, long ago, described her utopian society: “what kind of society I would like: decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, non-sexist—a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives” (Churchill in Patterson, 2003)—a dream, which though never realised, is always present in all her critical plays including *Serious Money*.

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