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David Mamet's *Oleanna*: A Bourdieusian Reading

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Abstract

David Mamet's *Oleanna* addresses different notions such as power, hierarchy, education and language. According to Pierre Bourdieu, social agents compete for specific positions in a *field* and gain certain *habitus* (attitudes, dispositions, *bodily hexis*). In the process of socialization, agents struggle for different capitals (economical, cultural, social and symbolic) all of which lead to "power". *Oleanna* set in the *field* of academia concerns the struggle of the members for cultural capital which leads to symbolic capital. The shift of power in the play is the outcome of the shift of symbolic capital. Other Bourdieusian issues namely *bodily hexis*, misrecognition, feminine capital and IQ racism are also related to *Oleanna*. This article is an attempt at shedding light on how in Mamet's play linguistic, cultural, and symbolic capital lead to shift of power in different discourses. The aim is to argue for the relevance of Bourdieu, a great theorist of culture, in reading David Mamet, a playwright preoccupied with contemporary American culture and its roots.

Keywords: *Oleanna*, Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, Symbolic Capital, Power.

1. Introduction

Though on the face of it David Mamet's *Oleanna* seems to be about education, it has a deep interest in power, hierarchy and language. There exists a multiplicity of discourses through the mastery of which the characters are empowered and gain control over one another. In this article, the play's attempt to show how a certain discourse, institution or social position can be a source of power and how power is shaped within different *fields* is very much in line with Bourdieu's discussion of the reflection between social structures and everyday practices.

Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *field* and capital constitute what is arguably the most significant and successful attempt to make sense of the relationship between objective social structures (institutions, discourses, *fields*, ideologies) and everyday practices (what people do, and

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why they do it).¹ In *Distinctions*², Bourdieu offers a formula for the practices performed in the *fields*: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice. The notions of *habitus*, capital and *field* postulated to analyze how different individuals act within a society are defined as follows.

1.1. *Field*

“*Field*” as Bourdieu defines is:

a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined (in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the *field*, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).³

Field denotes a dynamic social space in which individuals struggle for a position or in other words for “capital”, like the *field* of education. A cultural *field* can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations and appointments which constitutes an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorize certain discourses and activities.⁴ “Intellectual *field*”, as Bourdieu maintains, designates that matrix of institutions, Organizations and markets in which symbolic producers, such as artists, writers and academics compete for symbolic capital.⁵

“*Field* of power” is called the principal *field* in Bourdieu’s corpus⁶ As Bourdieu discusses in *The Rules of Art*⁷, “is the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant position in different *fields* ... the site of struggles between holders of different power (or kinds of capital).” Thus, different *fields* such as academia, sports, politics, etc. are exposed to different relations of power. That is, Bourdieu like Foucault is concerned about different discourses and power relations among them.

1.2. Capital

“Capital is accumulated labor”.⁸ Bourdieu⁹ introduces four generic types of capital: economic capital (money and property), cultural capital (cultural goods and services including educational credentials), social capital (acquaintances and networks), and symbolic capital (legitimation, prestige, status and authority).

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital covers “a wide variety of resources, such as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, scientific knowledge, and educational credentials”.¹⁰ Then, culture becomes a source of power for an individual in society.

Symbolic capital, a reformulation of Max Weber’s idea of charismatic authority, is “denied capital”¹¹ it is a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others.¹² Prestige, fame, authority and alike are

¹ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002: 2)

² (Bourdieu, 1979: 101)

³ (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992: 97)

⁴ (Webb et al., 2002: x)

⁵ (as cited in Swartz, 1997: 117)

⁶ (Eastwood, 2007: 153)

⁷ (Bourdieu, 1996: 215)

⁸ (Bourdieu, 1986: 241)

⁹ (ibid., 243)

¹⁰ (Swartz, 1997: 75)

¹¹ (ibid., 43)

¹² (Swartz, 1996: 77)

not meaningful by themselves; they are recognized as the sources of power when public opinion receives them as legitimate. This is the public opinion that permits a teacher, an artist, a priest or a sports hero to manipulate the rules of the society.

The amount of power a person has within a *field* depends on that person's position within the *field*, and the amount of capital she or he possesses. For instance, within the *field* of education, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital and the one who possesses it (like a university professor), has a certain amount of power, a set of acquired tastes and patterns of behavior by which he or she is known to people.

1.3. *Habitus*

For Bourdieu this is *habitus* that is the key. The *habitus* is a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them".¹³ *Habitus* is the system through which social reproduction takes place¹⁴. It is not found just at the level of people's thoughts (their consciousness), nor just in the language they use, though these are important dimensions of it. The *habitus* also works at the level of the body, shaping what might seem its instinctive responses; and it is as much unconscious as conscious.¹⁵ This is through *habitus* that individuals access certain manners, values and assets and make up an image for themselves in society.

1.4. *Bodily hexis*

Bodily hexis is "political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking".¹⁶ Bourdieu declares:

When the properties and movements of the body are socially qualified, the most fundamental social choices are naturalized and the body, with its properties and its movements, is constituted as an analogical operator establishing all kinds of practical equivalences among the different divisions of the social world - divisions between the sexes, between the age groups and between the social classes - or, more precisely, among the meanings and values associated with the individuals occupying practically equivalent positions in the spaces defined by these divisions. In particular, there is every reason to think that the social determinations attached to a determinate position in the social space tend, through the relationship to one's own body, to shape the dispositions constituting social identity (ways of walking, speaking, etc.) and probably also the sexual dispositions themselves.¹⁷

Bourdieu believes that people's body language functions as a distinction for them; for instance, too much agitation and haste, grimaces and gesticulation in the Bourgeois are opposed to slowness and the slow gestures which signify elevation in the noble. He explains that body is not just subject to the self but it also is open to the world and "so capable of being conditioned by the world, shaped by the material and cultural conditions of existence in which it is placed from the beginning".¹⁸ For example, the members of academia are usually expected to be studying in their libraries or their ivory towers.

¹³ (Bourdieu, 1992: 53)

¹⁴ (Eastwood, 2007: 150)

¹⁵ (Webb et al, 2002:115)

¹⁶ (Bourdieu, 1992: 70)

¹⁷ (ibid., 71)

¹⁸ (as cited in Webb et al., 2002: 37)

1.5. Misrecognition

Misrecognition is another Bourdieusian term relevant to our discussion. It is “an alienated cognition that looks at the world through categories the world imposes, and apprehends the social world as a natural world”.¹⁹ Misrecognition is the function of symbolic violence, the imposition of dominant-class culture on subordinate groups.²⁰ Agents are prone to symbolic violence which is forced on them by an authority that possesses symbolic capital. But they (social agents) do not feel the symbolic violence and consider all the limitations and denied resources as natural.

In the *field* of academia which is the focus of this article, students might be treated as ignorant, inferior members. Gender discrimination might also exist in some male dominant *fields* but the female members may regard this state as natural since they have not had the experience of not being exposed to a male dominant culture.

1.6. Language

According to Bourdieu²¹ “linguistic exchanges are relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized”. The more linguistic capital the speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit *the system of differences* to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction.²² Language can be a means of power and power can also lead to a serious language in every *field*. For instance, a reputable specialist who speaks persuasively has a certain amount of symbolic power since he does not need to impose meaning on his language; or a good and powerful lawyer knows exactly how to present a case in court. “Discourse” as a form of language associated with the values of a certain cultural *field*, forms the *habitus*. Moreover, it can be a source of power for a person who masters it.

These key concepts of Bourdieu are applicable to *Oleanna* which deals with relationship between language and power and the process of socialization in the *field* of education.

2. Discussion

In Mamet’s Play, the dominant *field* is the *field* of education or academia. Education is an important *field* because of its capacity to confer capital, particularly cultural capital, upon its participants. John whose relation with Carol (his student) is the focus of the play, owns this cultural capital since he is a professor and has certain dispositions due to the job he is handling. He has written a book on education which he teaches to his students. After years of teaching he is getting a promotion which is very valuable to him. His teaching at college or better to say, the *field* of academia, along with his having written a book, make up his cultural capital. The point about such cultural capital is that it plays a crucial role in the reproduction of dominant social relations and structures. Therefore, for John, academia has not only brought about cultural but also social capital. Through these capitals he has possessed a certain form of discourse or language which is vividly emphasized throughout the play. Mamet’s dramatic power is much influenced by his language which like that of Pinter-- is spare, oblique, inferential and catching the everyday cadences and vocabulary of desperate people.²³ To make the point clear, it is necessary to compare his condition to Carol-- his student-- who has come to consult him about her educational problems: Carol is not a very intelligent student according to herself and John, for she does not fully comprehend his language, whether in his book or his lectures in the class. John’s language is the pedantic, pompous and verbose language of academia which is too heavy for Carol to understand for she does not

¹⁹ (Bourdieu, 1992: 140-141)

²⁰ (Swartz, 1997: 160)

²¹ (Bourdieu, 1991: 37)

²² (Thompson, 1991: 18)

²³ (Bryer and Hartig, 2010: 342)

share the same cultural capital with John, meaning that she has not gone through the same stages of education as John has. Bourdieu believes that Academic discourse is a specialized language that confers "distinction" and value (that is, cultural capital) upon those who employ it. Besides, universities are due to provide the students with the academic discourse; a learned professor is expected to deliver an elegant and erudite speech, full of "flowery metaphors and obscure allusions" and a good student is expected to master and apply this academic discourse.²⁴

Carol is unable to communicate her problems to John since she does not speak the same language as John does. Her "inarticulateness" contrasts with John's pedantry.²⁵ She is constantly misunderstood and interrupted by him:

CAROL: *(Pause)* What is a "term of art"?

JOHN: *(Pause)* I'm sorry...?

CAROL: *(Pause)* What is a "term of art"?

JOHN: Is that what you want to talk about?

CAROL: ...to talk about...

JOHN: Let's take the mysticism out of it, shall we? Carol? *(Pause)* Don't you think? I'll tell you: when you have some "thing." Which must be broached. *(Pause)* Don't you think...? *(Pause)*

CAROL: ...don't I think...?

JOHN: Mmm?

CAROL: ...did I...?

JOHN: ...what?

CAROL: Did ... did I ... did I say something wr...

JOHN: *(Pause)* No. I'm sorry. No. You're right. I'm very sorry. I'm somewhat rushed. As you see. I'm sorry. You're right. *(Pause)* What is a "term of art"? It seems to mean a *term*, which has come, through its use, to mean something *more specific* than the words would, to someone *not acquainted* with them ... indicate. That, I believe, is what a "term of art," would mean. *(Pause)*²⁶

The play starts with Carol's asking for the definition of a "term of art". What John explains as the answer to her question is related to the notion of jargon or specialized language²⁷ "which serves as the ticket of admission into restricted linguistic communities that confer power, money and privilege upon their members". John as a *homo academicus* which is a Bourdieusian term used for a person who is a member of academia,²⁸ is using the language of academia but Carol does not understand him, although she has also read his book and taken notes in the class; that is why she starts to believe that John is humiliating her for not understanding the lessons:

CAROL: I'm just: I sit in class I... *(She holds up her notebook.)* I take notes...

JOHN *(simultaneously with "notes")*: Yes, I understand. What I am trying to *tell* you is that some, some basic...

CAROL: ...I...

JOHN: ...one moment: some basic missed communi...

²⁴ (Webb et al., 2002: 130-131)

²⁵ (Shipton, 2007: 146)

²⁶ (Mamet 1993: 1-2)

²⁷ (Murphy, 2004: 126)

²⁸ (Bourdieu, 1988)

CAROL: I'm doing what I'm told. I bought your book, I read your...

JOHN: No, I'm sure you...

CAROL: No, no, no. I'm doing what I'm told. It's *difficult* for me. It's *difficult*...

JOHN: ...but...

CAROL: I don't ... lots of the *language*...

JOHN: ...please...

CAROL: The *language*, the "things" that you say...

JOHN: I'm sorry. No. I don't think that that's true.

CAROL: It *is* true. I...²⁹

Deprived of the cultural capital, Carol has problems communicating with the academic discourse and consequently, she lacks power in the *field*. When she talks to John, he tells her that he has suffered from the same problem before and even now that he has a good position in the *field* of education, he is tested by the committee before being given the full membership of the academia. He professes contempt for the exploitation in the education system and the rotten bureaucracy: "they had people voting on me I wouldn't employ to wax my car".³⁰ After going through all the steps for achieving the cultural capital (through studying for instance), John has entered the *field* of academia and has a certain power in this *field*. He even mocks the institution which is the same as mocking the students.³¹ John's language is filled with contradictions; there is the discourse of praising and blaming along with the discourse of accusing and defending or advising and dissuading;³² that is why Carol is mixed up about everything and later on pursues the same blaming and accusing language. In response to Carol's questions about her grade John suggests that they start the class over in his office and then she will be given an "A" if she attends the tutorials:

JOHN: I say we can. (*Pause*) I say we can.

CAROL: But I don't believe it.

JOHN: Yes, I know that. But it's true. What is The Class but you and me? (*Pause*)

CAROL: There are rules.

JOHN: Well. We'll break them.

CAROL: How can we?

JOHN: We won't tell anybody.

CAROL: Is that all right?

JOHN: I say that it's fine.

CAROL: Why would you do this for me?

JOHN: I like you. Is that so difficult for you to...

CAROL: Um...

JOHN: There's no one here but you and me. (*Pause*)³³

²⁹ (Mamet, 1993: 3)

³⁰ (ibid., 13)

³¹ (Bryer and Hartig, 2010: 411)

³² (Raymond, 2003: 62)

³³ (Mamet, 1993: 15-16)

John exercises his power over Carol through the language he uses; his words are not only suggestive but commanding. When Carol reminds him that there are rules for holding classes, he replies: "well, we'll break them".³⁴ Then, he starts simplifying the difficult words of his book to Carol which sounds more like pedantry rather than teaching. What happens here is much related to the notion of "symbolic capital". John seems to have gained a symbolic power over this teacher-student relationship since he is a teacher, with more capital (distinguished as knowledge here). This power has been conferred on him through the reputation and respect he has gained in the *field* of academia for his cultural background; in other words, students themselves have provided John with his symbolic capital by accepting him as a prestigious professor and an expert in his *field* of study. West and Zimmerman have mentioned³⁵ three types of participant identities that are relevant to Bourdieu's notion of *field* and capital: "master identities" as the more permanent identities, namely, age, sex and social class; "situated identities" which are shaped in certain social settings, like professorship and studentship; and finally "discourse identities" which shift between discourse participants according to their "verbal activity". Considering these three categorizations, we could say that John has power over Carol since firstly, he is male, older and of a higher social class (master identity or social capital), secondly because he is a professor and Carol is his student (situated identity or symbolic capital), thirdly, he has a conscious verbal activity in the *field* of academia (discourse identity or linguistic capital). Then, John's power is a product of social, institutional and discursive identities. Also, there can be a shift of social and symbolic power due to the maturation of discourse identities as we will see in Carol's case later.

In developing his approach to language and linguistic exchange, Bourdieu applies and elaborates the ideas that make up the theory of practice. Linguistic utterances and expressions are forms of practice and, as such, can be understood as the product of the relation between a linguistic *habitus* and a linguistic market. The linguistic *habitus* is a sub-set of the disposition which comprises the habitus: it is that sub-set of dispositions acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts.³⁶ Academia in *Oleanna*, is not only the source of cultural capital, John's prestige as a teacher has brought him symbolic capital as well. Moreover, through his cultural and symbolic capital he is attaining material capital too: his new position at college will result in a tenure, a new house and security for him. John is a person with a very ordinary familial background; he might not have been able to buy a house if he were not a member of the academia. This is to say that he did not possess much material capital; thus, in order to move up the ladder, he has tried to gain cultural capital. This cultural capital brings about a certain type of disposition for him which includes material (economic betterment) as well as symbolic capital.

JOHN:What might be some reasons for pursuit of higher education?

One: A love of learning.

Two: The wish for mastery of a skill.

Three: For economic betterment.

(Stops. Makes a note.)

CAROL: I'm keeping you.

JOHN: One moment. I have to make a note...

CAROL: It's something that I said?

JOHN: No, we're buying a house.

³⁴ (ibid., 15)

³⁵ (as cited in Weber, 1998: 114)

³⁶ (Thompson, 1991: 17)

CAROL: You're buying the new house.

JOHN: To go with the tenure. That's right. Nice *house*, close to the *private school*... (He continues making his note.) ... We were talking of economic *betterment* (CAROL writes in her notebook.) ... I was thinking of the School Tax. (He continues writing.) (To himself :) ... *where is it written* that I have to send my child to public school. ... Is it a law that I have to improve the City Schools at the expense of my own interest? And, is this not simply *The White Man's Burden*? Good. And (Looks up to CAROL) ... does this interest you? ³⁷

In the second act, there is a shift of power or symbolic capital due to the shift of discourse. Carol takes control of the conversations in act two and three. John, attempting to manipulate the academic discourse that is his source of power, submits to Carol who has become empowered by the language of her new linguistic community which might be a feminist group.³⁸ Thus, there is a clash of discourse and power between the two. It is possible for socially powerless participants to temporarily gain discursive power over socially powerful participants in particular discursive encounters.³⁹

Bourdieu believes that linguistic capital can be cashed in for educational qualifications or cultural capital, which in turn can be cashed in for lucrative jobs or economic capital.⁴⁰ In *Oleanna* the linguistic capital very directly changes into symbolic capital. Carol seeks refuge in a new linguistic community which protects her against the linguistic community of academia that had already imposed power on her. Applying a new language, she gains a new identity and the process of socialization in a new discourse takes place. In her new group, she learns how to take control of the dialogues she has with John.

John's attempts at convincing her to call her complaint off are ineffective. When he uses the same pedantic language as before, Carol demands that non-specialized terms be substituted, while previously she had confessed her ignorance of the meaning of the academic words. . As Lerner explains ⁴¹

Each of John's utterances will be decontextualized and reassembled, then hurled back at him as accusations. Harassment and assault appear as the perfect postmodern deconstruction: unpredictable, dangerous, in arbitrary context, and the result of conflicting social ideologies and forces.

Language is now an instrument or medium of power relations, rather than a means of communication. ⁴² Having shown him her new power, Carol starts naming John's actions using the language of "law" (a new linguistic community).

CAROL: What gives you the *right*. Yes. To speak to a *woman* in your private... Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You feel yourself empowered ... you say so yourself. To *strut*. To *posture*. To "perform." To "Call me in here..." Eh? You say that higher education is a joke. And treat it as such, you *treat* it as such. And *confess* to a taste to play the *Patriarch* in your class. To grant *this*. To deny *that*. To embrace your students.

CAROL: How can you *deny* it. You did it to me. *Here*. You *did*... You *confess*. You love the Power. To *deviate*. To *invent*, to transgress ... to *transgress* whatever norms have been established for us. ... ⁴³

³⁷ (Mamet, 1993: 19-20)

³⁸ (Murphy, 2004: 129).

³⁹ (Weber, 1998: 115)

⁴⁰ (Goldstein, 2008: 215)

⁴¹ (Lerner, 2007: 113)

⁴² (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 141)

⁴³ (Mamet, 1993: 29)

Apart from Carol's new linguistic community, John has problems communicating with the community of law and the real state. Since he does not fully understand the language of his lawyer and the realtor, he gets very anxious. That is because his security, comfort and social capital are at risk if the agreement for the house fails:

JOHN (*on phone*): And what about the land. (*Pause*) The land. And what about the land? (*Pause*) What about it? (*Pause*) No. I don't understand. Well, yes, I'm I'm ... no, I'm *sure* it's signif ... I'm sure it's significant. (*Pause*) Because it's significant to mmmmmm ... did you call Jerry? (*Pause*) Because ... no, no, no, no, no. What did they say...? Did you speak to the *real* estate ... where *is* she...? Well, well, all right. Where are her notes? Where are the notes we took with her. (*Pause*) I thought you were? No. No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that, I just thought that I saw you, when we were there ... what...? I thought I saw you with a *pencil*. WHY NOW? Is what I'm say ... ⁴⁴

The interruptions, repetitive questions and answers and pauses show his anxiety. In this state, he is exactly like Carol who cannot communicate with the language of academia.

In act three, Carol makes John so angry that he resorts to physical violence. His linguistic powers have failed him and he has not been able to conquer Carol's new language. Her last shot is to ban his book which is so insulting to John. "Removing his book from inclusion"⁴⁵ means the loss of his cultural capital and, consequently, the loss of his social, material and symbolic capitals:

JOHN: And, and, I owe you a debt, I see that now. (*Pause*) You're *dangerous*, you're *wrong* and it's my *job* ... to say no to you. That's my job. You are absolutely right. You want to ban my book? Go to *hell*, and they can do whatever they want to me. ⁴⁶

If his job as a professor is over at the college, he is expelled from the *field* of academia; hence, he has lost his prestige in society and also his source of income. But still he does not surrender to Carol's threats about the legal charges and when she finally orders him not to call his wife "baby" ⁴⁷, he gets furious and hits her for he wants to keep at least 'his dignity'('master identities').

So far, we have talked about different capitals and their functions in the process of socialization of the characters of *Oleanna*. Still, there is something missing in the justification of Carol's power in the third act. According to Bourdieu ⁴⁸, women are not "capital-accumulating subjects" but they are "capital-bearing objects." "Gender" is not much emphasized in Bourdieu's sociology. Bourdieu ⁴⁹ maintains that "certain women derive occupational profit from their charms and that beauty thus acquires a value on the labor market". Bourdieu has not mentioned a term such as "feminine capital" but Huppertz ⁵⁰ defines "feminine capital" as "the gender advantage derived from disposition or skill set learned via socialization, or simply when members of a particular *field* recognize one's body as feminine." Skeggs ⁵¹ also recognizes femininity as a kind of "cultural capital". Carol, as discussed before, applies a new language belonging to a feminist or women-rights-fan group. It is in that group that she learns about the law and how she could accuse John of rape and sexual harassment. In other words, she uses her feminine capital when accusing John of attempted rape. Carol can be called a "capital-accumulating- subject" since she has learned a new language which she has been able to apply very successfully.

⁴⁴ (*ibid.*, 1)

⁴⁵ (*ibid.*, 41)

⁴⁶ (*ibid.*, 42)

⁴⁷ (*ibid.*, 44)

⁴⁸ (as cited in Skeggs, 2004: 29),

⁴⁹ (as cited in Thorpe, 2009: 494)

⁵⁰ (*ibid.*, 495)

⁵¹ (*ibid.*, 494)

The next issue to discuss is the Bourdieusian term *bodily hexis* intriguingly exemplified in *Oleanna*. In the first act, Carol is anxious, stressful and constantly interrupted by John: her body language depicts her inferiority to John. Whereas in the second and third acts when there has been a shift of discourse and power, there is a shift of body language as well. This is John who is anxious and constantly interrupted by Carol. Carol refers to their difference in verbal and body language in act three:

CAROL: My charges are not trivial. You see that in the haste, I think, with which they were accepted. A *joke* you have told, with a sexist tinge. The language you use, a verbal or physical caress, yes, yes, I know, you say that it is meaningless. I understand. I differ from you. To lay a hand on someone's shoulder.⁵²

"Note taking" could be counted as a *bodily hexis* for a student whose job is to listen and take notes. In the first act, Carol takes notes whenever she had difficulty understanding the language of the professor. In the second act, her note taking turns into a weapon to threaten the professor; she writes down every word that he utters and labels it as bribing, sexual harassment, exploitation, etc. words and actions change connotation and meaning when there is a shift of context or discourse; John's telling Carol that he likes her, turns into an act of sexual harassment in feminist community:

CAROL: Whatever you have done to me – to the extent that you've done it to *me*, do you know, rather than to me as a *student*, and, so, to the student body, is contained in my report. To the tenure committee.

JOHN: Well, all right. (*Pause*) Let's see. (*He reads.*) I find that I am sexist. That I am *elitist*. I'm not sure I know what that means, other than it's a derogatory word, meaning "bad." That I ... That I insist on wasting time, in nonprescribed, in self-aggrandizing and theatrical *diversions* from the prescribed *text* ... that these have taken both sexist and pornographic forms ... here we find listed... (*Pause*) Here we find listed ... instances "...closeted with a student" ... "Told a rambling, sexually explicit story, in which the frequency and attitudes of fornication of the poor and rich are, it would seem, the central point ... moved to *embrace* said student and ... all part of a pattern..." (*Pause*)

(*He reads.*) That I used the phrase "The White Man's Burden" ...that I told you how I'd asked you to my room because I quote like you. (*Pause*)

(*He reads.*) "He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me.' He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office." (*Pause*) (To CAROL:) It's *ludicrous*. Don't you know that? It's not *necessary*. It's going to *humiliate* you, and it's going to cost me my *house*, and...⁵³

Misrecognition and symbolic violence as explained earlier feature in *Oleanna*. Carole has always been regarded as an inferior, unintelligent student and she herself has admitted being so. Not until she enters a new society (the feminist group) does she become keenly aware of the symbolic violence she has been subject to. Having become self-conscious, she learns to resist the reproaches of the male dominant academia by accusing John of various crimes.

The notion of "IQ Racism" proposed by Bourdieu is very much related to the events of this play. As he states⁵⁴, "IQ Racism is racism of the dominant class that differs in a host of ways from what is generally called racism, that is to say the petit bourgeois racism which is the general target of most classic critiques of racism. This racism is the characteristic of a dominant class whose reproduction depends to a large extent on the transmission of the cultural capital." The racism of intelligence is the means through which the members of the dominant class aim to produce a

⁵² (Mamet, 1993:38)

⁵³ (Mamet, 1993:27)

⁵⁴ (Bourdieu, 1993: 177)

“theodicy of their own privilege”, as Weber puts it; in other words, a justification of the social order that they dominate.⁵⁵ In *Oleanna* the mayhem starts when Carol feels that she is being humiliated by John for her low IQ. Intelligence is associated with the cultural capital since a person with low rate of intelligence cannot prosper in the *field* of academia. John and the other professors make up the dominant class and Carol and the rest of the students are the lower class. This social order is the outcome of the decisions of the dominant class in the *field*. Through IQ Racism, academia members like John gain a specific means of power to control the students. In John’s case, this power is more linguistic (cultural/symbolic capital). He imposes his book on his students which is a sign of his having learned the rules of the ‘game’, the way of gaining and sustaining authority. But this ‘authority’ is circumscribed; John confesses that as a student, he has had the same problems with modern education system and the exploitation behind that. Even now that he is a homo academicus, he is still under control. Carol suffers from lack of understanding since she has not had a proper education before entering the college (maybe for being a petit bourgeois). The fact that people do not possess the same cultural capital is partly due to this intelligence discrimination which begins in the very first stages of education. A petit bourgeois does not go to the same school as an upper- class does. Therefore, the transference of capital in these two cases takes place differently.

Conclusion

David Mamet’s *Oleanna* thematically hinges on the relationship between discourse and power. The symbolic power is attained through the domination over certain discourses; this domination could be explained in terms of the Bourdieusian notion of ‘capital’. In the *field* of academia that is more concerned with cultural and social capital, mastering the language confers a symbolic power on the characters. Hence, language changes role from a means of communication to a means of power and domination as can be seen in the case of *Oleanna*’s characters.

The *field* of academia requires a certain *habitus* (the determining issues in the theory of practice) that includes mental and physical aspects (such as *bodily hexis*). Agents in a certain *field* are known by their different dispositions or *habitus* producing distinctions. Bourdieu does not classify agents according to their social class; for him, these are the distinctions that make up the social classifications, and that is so in Mamet’s play. The symbolic power shifts from the professor to the student when she joins a new community.

IQ racism in the play concerns the power that the dominant agents in the *field* of academia (professors), impose on the lower agents (students). This act is a sort of transmission of cultural capital (as intelligence deals with cultural and linguistic capital).

In *Oleanna*, the intersection of gender, race and class is generally articulated through language. The agent (Carol) gains linguistic capital through her feminine capital and turns it into symbolic power and confers it on the other agents (John).

Oleanna is mostly about the power of linguistic capital or discourse that as a sort of cultural capital is not inherited but gained through the agents’ endeavor. Whoever has more capital has more distinctions and power, hence able to move up the social ladder. Carol, distinguished as an unintelligent, submissive and inarticulate student becomes a member of a new community in the *field* of academia and through the new *habitus* she gains new capitals (linguistic and cultural) which later on turn into symbolic capital. She becomes articulate and moves from a submissive position to a ruling one.

⁵⁵ (ibid., 177)

Pierre Bourdieu's broad sociology can help us have a better understanding of the works of a playwright who is broadly and profoundly concerned with issues of power and identity in (modern) American society.

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