



Language As Social Capital in Henrik Ibsen's and J.M. Synge's Drama

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Abstract

In the plays of Henrik Ibsen and J.M. Synge, Language is a money system used to control people. This article draws from Michel Foucault's theories of power and mechanisms of speech to show how language is used to regulate behavior and create identity in the works of Ibsen and Synge. In Ibsen's plays, like *A Doll's House*, *Pillars of Society* and *Hedda Gabler*, language is used to keep people in check, as it is commodified into a system of lies, secrets, and respectability. In this way, characters are constrained by a rigid order that polices and defines what can be said and who is permitted to speak. On the other hand, in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Riders to the Sea*, *The Shadow of the Glen*, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* language is used to give power to people who do not have much. The characters use storytelling and poetry to make themselves sound important and as such to get what they want. In these rural settings, where economic resources are scarce, the power of the spoken word becomes the primary means of survival and self-actualization. Through a comparative analysis of both playwrights, this article looks at how language is used to control people, create identity, and give and take power. The work concludes that language is not just neutral - it is always being used to exert power over someone. Whether it is spoken within the suffocating confines of the Norwegian bourgeoisie drawing room (Ibsen) or the wide landscape of the Irish peasantry (Synge), speech is never neutral; it is an economy of power that people must navigate to survive. To Ibsen and Synge therefore, language is not just something we use to communicate - it is a system of power that we have to overcome every day.

Keywords: Language, Social Capital, Money, Ibsen and Synge

Introduction

The movement from melodrama to modern drama is seen as a drive from spectacle to social criticism (from creaky Victorian drama of civilians to the landmark works of Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Michael Booth). This shift towards psychological realism in the representation of man's social environments, has been amplified not only in the

disregard of traditional theatrical conventions, but more importantly in the changes in dramatic language. This article will examine the language and speeches in the works of Henrik Ibsen and J.M. Synge with the intention of showing that both playwrights do not just use language to convey plot and interior emotions of characters. Rather, their language is an economic system of exchange that determines the social standing, power dynamics, and ultimate survival of the characters. To speak in the worlds constructed by Ibsen and Synge is to engage in an economic transaction, where words function as currency in an economy, and where the ability to manipulate them equals the ability to wield power. Understanding this linguistic economy is crucial for fully understanding the mechanics of power and subjugation in modern drama.

While scholars of Ibsen's and Synge's works have been involved in thematic and stylistic concerns, the specific function of language as a currency remains underexplored. Scholars, like Toril Moi and Joan Templeton, have focused on how Ibsen's plays critique societal norms and patriarchal values, often highlighting the suppression of truth. In contrast, critics like Declan Kiberd and Nicholas Grene have praised Synge's use of language as a way to reclaim Irish identity and celebrate the power of the peasant imagination. However, these two approaches rarely come together to explore how both playwrights use speech as a form of currency. Critics tend to see Ibsen's dramatic language as a way to comment on social issues, and Synge's as a beautiful expression of poetry, meant to reclaim Irish past, thereby overlooking a key similarity: in both cases, language is a tightly controlled system that shapes human behavior.

Therefore, this study asks some important questions: How does conversation work as a form of social power in the worlds of Ibsen and Synge? What rules govern speech in their societies, and how do people get rewarded or punished for what they say or do not say? Also, how do characters on the margins of society overcome these complex systems of language to gain independence or avoid being sidelined? By exploring these questions, one can gain a deeper understanding of how language operates in the plays of Ibsen and Synge, and how it reflects the social and cultural contexts in which they were written. This can help us see the works of these two playwrights in a new light, and appreciate the ways in which they use language to explore fundamental human concerns.

Ultimately, this study aims to shed light on the ways in which speech is used as a form of social capital in the dramatic worlds of Ibsen and Synge. By examining the mechanisms that encourage, regulate, distribute, and punish speech, we can gain a better understanding of how language shapes human environment and social relationships in these plays. This can help us develop a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics at work in the worlds of Ibsen and Synge, and appreciate the ways in which their use of language reflects and challenges the social and cultural norms of their time. This article posits that despite their starkly difference in culture, time, place and aesthetics, both Ibsen and Synge construct dramatic universes where language operates as a tangible

currency. However, while Ibsen's bourgeois characters are constrained by a restrictive economy of lies and respectability, Synge's rural characters are empowered by a generative vernacular economy of storytelling and poetic eloquence.

To investigate how the above stated economic structures of dialogue work, this study uses Michel Foucault's conceptualization of discourse, power, and disciplinary mechanisms. According to Foucault, discourse is not just a passive expression or a neutral reflection of the world; it is a system of representation that regulates and produces authority. In his work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault argues against the view of language as merely a neutral medium for communicating ideas. Instead, he proposes discourse as a social practice governed by implicit rules that determine who can speak, what they can speak about, and how they must speak. These rules reflect and reinforce power structures, guiding not just linguistic expression but thought itself. Foucault's analysis extends beyond mere linguistic structures, exploring how power relations are inscribed within language itself. As Foucault notes, "Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (*Archaeology*, 1969, p. 55). In *The Order of Discourse* (1970), Foucault explains how the mechanisms by which society controls and limits speech works, arguing that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures" (p. 52). He identifies several systems of exclusion, the most prominent being prohibition, which dictates that one cannot speak of everything at any given time, and that not everyone is authorized to speak. In Ibsen's plays, for example, some characters are not allowed to talk about scandals, divorce, debt, or women empowerment, and that creates a lot of tension within and around them, thereby showing how language is used to control people.

By synthesizing these Foucauldian concepts—discursive formations, systems of exclusion, disciplinary power, and the technology of confession—this article constructs a theoretical model of the "economy of language." In this economy, words are not cheap; they are the very currency of power. The ability to speak, to be heard, to keep a secret, or to compel a confession determines a character's wealth or poverty in the social hierarchy. Through a close reading of four plays by Ibsen (*A Doll's House*, *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Hedda Gabler*) and four by Synge (*The Playboy of the Western World*, *Riders to the Sea*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*), this article will explore the divergent yet intersecting ways in which language operates as social capital, revealing that for both playwrights, the struggle for autonomy is inextricably linked to the struggle for linguistic agency.

Verbal Exchanges and Social Capital in Ibsen's Market Place Drama

In the works of Henrik Ibsen, the bourgeois drawing room functions as a transaction ground where speech is used as currency to buy and sell socio-political positions and safeties. Ibsen's characters are aware that their survival depends on their ability to manage information, maintain appearances, and control their tongues and the narrative of their lives. This "economy" works on Foucault's instructions which impose that certain topics—financial debt, disease, female emancipation, and moral corruption—must remain unspoken or be heavily coded. Who has power in these works is determined by who possesses the language capital to enforce these rules and who is marginalized by them. The powerful ensures that the marginalized speech align expectations of respectability.

In *A Doll's House* (1879), the economy of speech is directly connected to the financial market of the nineteenth century Victorian society where the menfolk had the capital of the tongue, and as such controlled the system. Nora's husband's control over her guaranteed and maintained through a disciplinary vocabulary of pet names and financial admonitions. Throughout the play, Torvald repeatedly refers to her as "my little lark", "my little spendthrift", "my prodigal", "my sweet tooth", and "my squirrel". These derogatory names show Torvald's lack of basic respect for human dignity. Besides, his constant use of the personal pronouns "my" each time he refers to Nora shows how he considers her as a commodity. This linguistic diminishment is not merely affectionate; it is a mechanism of control that denies Nora access to adult conversations. What is even more interesting is Nora's response to these tags – she seems to be contented. This impression is justified by the fact that she takes up Torvald's words to refer to herself when Torvald accuses her of an offence. For example, towards the end of Act I, Torvald accuses her of being extravagant in a dying economy. She responds by saying "You haven't any idea of how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have" (Ibsen, 1879, p. 54). What Nora does here is in line with what Foucault (1969) calls "mechanistic encouragement of personality cult" (p. 297). Torvald dominates Nora's consciousness as he preaches to her about living without debts and waste.

His language is performative, establishing him as the maker of both financial and moral law. Nora, in turn, must survive this economy by eating macaroons in secret, giving tips to delivery boys behind her husband and forging the signature of her father in secrets and deception. These manoeuvre are desperate attempts to participate in the financial economy from which she is excluded. When asked whether she has been eating macaroons – something he forbids her to eat – Nora replies: "I will never think of going against you", and when cautioned never to borrow money, she replies "yes; what ever you say". Eric Bentley observes that the problem with Victorian England was not that the workers made so many claims but that the "servile class" made so few, it never occurred to them that they

will become ladies and gentlemen (p. 14). Nora's declarations are acknowledgments of her low social capital in a competitive linguistic economy.

The climax of *A Doll's House* where Nora bangs the door on her husband and leaves the marriage is a rapture on this economic system. Through the mail box, Torvald discovers Nora's secrets and immediately connects it to drastic drop in social capital:

Helmer (Striding about): Oh, what an awful awakening! In all these eight years she who was my pride and joy – a hypocrite, a liar – worse, worse – a criminal! How infinitely disgusting it all is! The shame (Nora says nothing and goes on looking straight at him. He stops in front of her). I should have suspected something of the kind. I should have known. Your entire father's flimsy values have come out in you. No religion, no morals, no sense of duty – Oh, ... You repay me like this?

Nora: Yes, like this.

Helmer: Now you've wrecked my happiness – ruined my whole future. Oh, it's awful to think of. (Ibsen, p. 187)

Torvald's discovery of the truth of the forgery pushes him to react in terms of social capital and public discourse. He does not express concern for Nora's moral and mental state or the motives that caused her to engage forgery; his panic is entirely focused on the optics of the scandal. Torvald's concern is how they need to keep this quiet, no matter what from the outside world. Nora might still live in his house, but he will not let her take care of the kids; as he cannot trust her with that responsibility. Torvald's primary concern is the threat the secret poses to his public image. Nora's subsequent awakening is fundamentally a linguistic rebellion, and through it she gains in language capital. She recognizes that she has been excluded from meaningful discourse throughout her life, passed from her father's control to her husband's. She states, "We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?" (Ibsen, p. 192). By declaring, "this is a settling of accounts," Nora reclaims the economic metaphor, rejecting the disciplinary language that has constructed her as a "doll-wife" and demanding the right to author her own truth. Her departure is the ultimate rejection of the bourgeois discursive economy.

In *Pillars of Society* (1977) Ibsen presents a similar pattern in the character Karsten Bernick. Bernick's entire social capital and economic empire are built upon a foundational lie, derived from his ability to control the discourse of the community, presenting himself as the model of moral rectitude while concealing his past sins—an affair and a financial embezzlement for which he allowed his brother-in-law, Johan, to take the blame. Bernick operates as the ultimate social capitalist, keeping the truth from the people so as to maintain his monopoly on respectability. The community's discourse is tightly controlled by Bernick and his sycophants, who constantly invoke the "moral foundation" of their society

while ignoring its rot.

When Lona Hessel unexpectedly returns from America, she threatens this monopoly on truth. Prior to the events of the drama, she had been betrayed by her lover, Council Karsten Bernick, who had married her rich half-sister Betty Toennesen in order to recover the fortunes of his crumbling family shipbuilding business. The heart-broken Lona had thus departed from Norway to America to begin a new life in the company of her half-brother Johan Toennesen, who had nobly taken the blame for Bernick's affair with a married actress, Mrs. Dorf. In the foreign country, Lona has led a self-sufficient life: she sings in cafés, gives lectures, and writes what people perceive as "a wicked book" while also looking after Johan (Ibsen, p. 34). "With her," Tore Rem (2016) remarks, "it is as if we are hearing a new voice, the voice of a woman speaking up for herself and rejecting the roles imposed upon her by society" (p. xxv). She represents an outside voice, unconstrained by the suffocating rules of the Norwegian provincial town. William Johnsen equates her return to the "bringing in the sunlight and fresh air of the American prairies that have nourished her naturalness, spontaneity, and vitality" (Ibsen, p.117), Lona outrightly challenges the social capitalism and ideals to which Bernick staunchly clings in his ambition of being perceived as the pillar of society. She confronts him with the reality of his capitalist economy, challenging "the lie you have persisted in for these fifteen years". Bernick's eventual public confession is a desperate act of discursive redistribution. By causing Bernick to confessing to the assembled townspeople, Lona succeeds to dismantles the false economy of respectability that has governed the town. Lona Hessel's final declaration, "the spirits of Truth and Freedom— these are the Pillars of Society," redefines the currency of the community, shifting it from hidden lies to open discourse .

In the play *An Enemy of the People* (1882), there's a big fight over who gets to talk and whose voice matters. The main character, Dr. Thomas Stockmann, finds out that the town's baths, which bring in a lot of money, are actually polluted. But when he tries to share this truth with everyone, his brother Peter Stockmann, who's the Mayor, stops him. The Mayor says that people can't just say whatever they want if it goes against what's already accepted or if it might hurt the town's economy. He's basically saying that some voices are more important than others. The local newspaper, *The People's Messenger*, plays a big role in controlling what information gets out to the public. They decide what's okay to print and what's not, which means they have a lot of power over what people get to know. This is a great example of how some people try to silence others and control the conversation.

Foucault's concept of prohibition comes into play when Dr. Stockmann is refused the right to speak at a public meeting. The townspeople, manipulated by the Mayor and the press, vote to forbid Stockmann from reading his report. Stockmann's realization that the discursive system is rigged leads to his explosive denunciation of the majority:

the majority never has right on his side ...That is one of the social lies

against which an independent man must wage war. Who is that which constitute the majority of the population in a country? I don't imagine you will dispute the fact that at present the stupid people are in an absolute overwhelming majority all the world over. But good Lord! – you can never pretend that it is right that the stupid folk should govern the clever ones. The majority has might on its side – unfortunately, but right it has not. (Ibsen, p.232)

Ibsen attacks both democracy and speech economic systems as he places these side-by-side truth. The town's economic survival is prioritized over the biological survival of its citizens, demonstrating the material violence of a corrupt speech economy. Stockmann is branded an “enemy of the people” not for his actions, but for his speech. His final resolution to stand alone is an acceptance of his exclusion from the dominant discourse, recognizing that true power lies in intellectual independence, free from the corrupting influence of the societal consensus.

In *Hedda Gabler* (1890), the economy of language takes the dimension of blackmail, where characters like Hedda Gabler are chained, entrapped, and manipulated through it. Hedda is suffocating as a result the bourgeois discourse of the Tesman household, where conversation is basically family annuity and academic trivialities. When Hedda makes her entrance on stage, She moves about the room with irresponsible touches, complains of the excess of light and looks on with relief while her husband draws the curtain. The irony, as Jeanette Lee explains, is that all these efforts and sacrifices aimed at pleasing her are met with anger. Her reaction to the flowers in the house, the décor of the house and even on Aunt Jullie's hat points to this direction. First, it is that Aunt Jullie has left her “old hat on the chair” (Ibsen, p. 274) and second, “these flowers make me suffocate” (Ibsen, p.276). The enthusiasm that Tesman and his aunt express before Hedda makes her entrance turns into frustration. Tesman, on his part is obsessed with medieval domestic crafts and domestic platitudes while Aunt Juliane endlessly talks about illness, hats and slippers. Hedda, possessing an aristocratic sensibility, finds this linguistic environment unbearable. She seeks to exert power elsewhere by manipulating the narratives of her former lover, Eilert Løvborg.

Hedda's destruction of Løvborg's manuscript—his life's work and his attempt to articulate a vision of the future—is a profound act of violence. She burns his words, whispering, “Now I am burning your child, Thea!—Burning it, curlylocks! Your child and Eilert Løvborg's. I am burning—I am burning your child” (Ibsen, p.156). The burning of the manuscript in itself is symbolic. It symbolizes the treatment intellectuals, who think they have all the words in the world to speak their lives up, receive in the hands of those who hold power and control situations. Lovberg has written a great work, a book though not yet published is already widely spoken of. Brack describes it (in the presence of Hedda)

as a “very wise” book (Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* 159), but Hedda still decides to burn it. Hedda’s burning of the manuscript is no more irritating and dehumanizing than many of her acts that precede it. She remains constant, cold, mysterious and deadly throughout the play. She fires into the air, at random, to kill time. By destroying his text, she destroys his future and his agency. However, it is Judge Brack who emerges as the social capitalist in the play. Brack’s language of operation is insinuation, double entendres, and coded threats. By discovering the truth about Løvborg’s death—that he was shot with Hedda’s pistol in Mademoiselle Diana’s boudoir—Brack acquires the linguistic authority to control Hedda. His threat of scandal—the ultimate currency in Ibsen’s world—places Hedda entirely in his power. Brack’s terms are clear and concise, and Hedda must obey:

BRACK: Well, fortunately, there is no danger, so long as I say nothing.

HEDDA: [Looks up at him.] So I am in your power, Judge Brack. You have me at your beck and call, from this time forward.

BRACK: [Whispers softly.] Dearest Hedda—believe me—I shall not abuse my advantage.

HEDDA: I am in your power none the less. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! [Rises impetuously.] No, I cannot endure the thought of that! Never! (Ibsen, p. 174)

Reviewing Brack’s terms, Hedda comes to realize that her speech, her reputation, and her body are no longer her own, and cannot function in the economy she finds herself. Hedda’s suicide, and absolute silence is her final refusal to participate in an economy where she mocked and despised. She chooses the absolute silence of death over the subjugation of Brack’s discursive control.

Language as Currency in Synge’s Drama

In the plays of J.M. Synge, the characters live in a very different world from the one created by Ibsen. Synge’s characters are from poor, rural areas in western Ireland, where lack and insecurity abound. The people do not trust the government, the church, or the British authorities that are in charge. Because they lack money or power, the way they speak and the stories they tell become very important. Language is what gives their lives value and meaning. This is a big change from the strict social rules and wealthy communities found in Ibsen’s works. In Synge’s world, words are a kind of currency that can be used to build relationships, share ideas, and even gain status. The characters use language in creative and powerful ways to make up for what they lack in material wealth. As a result, their conversations are rich and expressive, full of stories, legends, and poems that reflect their unique culture and way of life. By making language the central source of value, Synge’s plays show us a different way of thinking about wealth, power, and identity.

The way Synge's characters talk is like a special kind of trade. They share stories, use beautiful language, and even curses to get what they want. Speech in this context is currency and money that gives power to those who are good at it, and leaves behind those who are not. Synge himself wrote about this idea of linguistic economy in the introduction to his play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, contrasting the "joyless and pallid words" of Ibsen and Zola with the "fiery and magnificent, and tender" popular imagination of the Irish peasantry" (p.iv). For Synge, using the vernacular language was not just about making his writing sound nice - it was about showing how important language was in the daily lives of the people he was writing about. He believed that language was a living, breathing thing that could bring people together and give them power.

Where material wealth is lacking, words become a valuable commodity. This is seen in the well made play *The Playboy of the Western World*. When the opens, Christy Mahon comes to a small village in County Mayo, and at first, he's scared, dirty, and has nothing. As a frightened, dirty, and impoverished fugitive, he owns no material assets and is initially hesitant to speak. However, as he tentatively confesses to murdering his father with a loy (a spade), he discovers that his narrative has immense value in this community. The villagers transform his crime into a heroic myth. As Christy refines his story through repeated tellings, his language becomes increasingly poetic and expansive. He realizes that his speech is generating social capital, transforming him from a nobody into a hero:

As Christy tells his story more and more, he uses nicer words and makes it sound better. He realizes that talking is making him popular and important. His becomes a trade, and what he gets in return is attention and admiration. Philly and Jimmy who before Christy's arrival could not attend Kate Cassidy's wake for fear of Pegeen's safety, can now attend the wake without any worry. Pegeen can now sleep in peace since she has found an "appropriate" companion. To preserve the relationship between Pegeen and Christy, Michael, Pegeen's father offers Christy a job in his shebeen. Act II continues with the enthusiasm following Christy's story. His fame increases as the girls look for him in anxiety giving him gifts in shift. This shows how, in a society without many material things, stories and words can be like money or goods. People want to hear them, and they are willing to give something in return for a good story. Christy's experience teaches him that he can use his words to get what he wants, and this changes him from an outsider into someone the villagers look up to. It is interesting to see how Christy's language changes as he tells his story more. At first, he is hesitant and does not say much, but as he gets more confident, his words become more poetic and engaging. This shows how language can be used to create a certain image or impression, and how it can be used to gain power or status in a community. In this case, Christy uses his language to become a hero in the eyes of the villagers, and this transforms him from a poor, dirty fugitive into someone important and admired.

In the play, Pegeen Mike, who runs the local pub and decides what is valuable,

clearly connects Christy's ability to talk well with his worth as a person. She does not like her imposed fiancé Shawn Keogh, who is rich but talks in a timid way because of the Church's influence. Instead, she and the other village girls rally behind Christy's bold and confident way of speaking. Pegeen tells Christy that if he had not been traveling, he would be as good at talking as some of the famous poets. Christy's transformation from being seen as worthless to being known as the "champion Playboy of the Western World" happens because he learns how to use words to get what he wants. He figures out how to use language to win competitions, attract women, and secure his place in the community. This shows that in the play, being able to talk well is a kind of power that can help you achieve your goals and gain respect from others.

However, when his father, Old Mahon, arrives alive, the economy collapses. The community realizes that Christy's narrative was not backed by the "gold standard" of a literal deed. The illusion is shattered, and the villagers turn on him. Pegeen's devastating rebuke highlights the gap between linguistic representation and material reality:

I'll say, a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back-yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. (Synge, p.154)

The play does not actually end with Christy being defeated. Instead, he has now found his own voice and does not need the approval of the people in Mayo anymore. He stands up to his father and leaves the play feeling empowered. He says, "Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (Synge, p.165). This shows that he has taken control of his own life and language. On the other hand, Pegeen is left feeling sad and regretful, saying "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World." This is because she realizes she has lost the one person she helped create, and now she is left with nothing. She had a part in making Christy who he is, but now he has moved on and she has been left behind. It is like spending all her money on something that is no longer valuable to her.

In the play *In the Shadow of the Glen*, the way language is used is really important. It is principally about the fight between the silence that is suffocating Nora in her loveless marriage and the power of poetic language that is to set her free. Nora is stuck in a lonely house in the Wicklow mountains with her older husband Dan, who is wicked and stingy, and tries to control her by pretending to be dead to catch her with another man. Nora hardly talks, but is always drowned in deep thoughts about how poor and empty her. All she sees is the fog rolling in and out of the bog, and all she hears is the wind crying through the broken trees. The only man who might be interested in her, Micheal Dara, keeps talking about boring things like the price of sheep, which is not very exciting. Nora's cottage is a reflection of her sad life, where the only sounds are the harsh noises of nature. Her

husband's silence is a trap, and Micheal's practical talk is not enough to free her from her lonely existence. The play shows how language can be both powerful and limiting, depending on how it is used.

The arrival of the Tramp introduces a new linguistic currency. He offers Nora not material wealth, but the wealth of the natural world articulated through poetic discourse. When Dan Burke casts Nora out of the house, the Tramp invites her to join him on the roads, using language to paint a picture of freedom:

Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the herons crying out over the black lakes, and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm, and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a talk of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you, and the light of your eyes, but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up...(Synge, p. 23)

When Dan Burke tries to punish Nora by kicking her out, it backfires because she decides to leave with the Tramp instead. She likes the way he talks and thinks that a life without good conversations is boring and empty. Nora says to the Tramp, "you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go", which means she prefers his company and the way he speaks. She chooses to give up the comfort and security of the farm to be with someone who can have interesting and meaningful conversations with her, valuing the power of words over material things.

In *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a play that Synge never got to finish, language becomes a kind of legend. The story is about Deirdre, a woman from ancient Irish stories, who runs away from her arranged marriage to the powerful King Conchubor. She goes to live in hiding with a man named Naisi. But when they're tricked into coming back to the kingdom, they know they will probably die. What worries them most is not dying, though - it is how their story will be remembered. They know that the things they do will create a story that will live on after they're gone. In this case, language is what makes you immortal. When Deirdre gives her last speeches, she makes sure that her tragic story will be remembered by her culture. She even says her own epitaph, which is like a message from beyond the grave: "It's a sad thing, Conchubor, what you've done tonight in Emain; but it will be a happy and triumphant thing until the end of time." Being able to tell your own story, to decide how you will be remembered in history, is the ultimate way to defy the king's power. The king may have a sword, but Deirdre has the power of words. She gets to decide how her story is told, and that's what really matters. This play shows how language can be a powerful tool, even more powerful than a king's sword. It is about how the stories we tell can live on forever, and how we can use language to make sure we are remembered the way we want to be. Deirdre's story is a legend, and it's been passed down for generations -

and that's because of the power of language.

Ibsen's and Synge's Economies of Speech Compared

It has already been established that Henrik Ibsen and J.M. Synge operate in different cultural and geographical contexts. However, a comparative analysis reveals structural similarities in how they conceptualize the economy of language. In their works, the central dramatic conflict is motivated by the characters' attempt to overcome, disrupt, or escape the dominant discursive formation of their society.

The first distinction between Ibsen and Synge in relation to their economies of language lies in the nature of the linguistic currency and the direction of its flow. In Ibsen, the currency is almost always negative, used to keep secrets, avoid scandal, and suppress truth. As discussed above, in Ibsen's plays, power is exercised through deprivation, prohibition, denial and the enforcement of a hypocritical moral code. The bourgeois subject is reduced to a state of docile conformity, passive acceptance and any deviation from the accepted discourse is punished by severe social stigmatization. The linguistic economy in Ibsen's world is therefore a game where one character's gain is inevitably another's loss. Judge Brack's acquisition of knowledge regarding Hedda's pistol and the murder incident directly results in Hedda's loss of autonomy and consequent suicide; Torvald's maintenance of his public image requires the suppression of Nora's standards, and Nora's discovery of the manipulation leads to her abandonment of the economic system. The language of the bourgeoisie is a language of containment, designed to keep the chaotic forces of human desire, debt, and disease hidden behind a veneer of respectability.

On the other hand, in Synge's drama, the currency is generally positive and poetically generative. Social capital is created through the act of speaking itself, where the vernacular economy rewards invention, exaggeration, and poetic flair. While the community still exercises disciplinary power—as seen when the Mayo villagers violently turn on Christy Mahon once his story is exposed as a literal “lie” rather than a poetic truth—the boundaries of acceptable speech are far more elastic and forgiving than in Ibsen's drawing rooms. The language of Synge's peasants is a language of compensation; it fills the void left by material poverty with the riches of the imagination.

Furthermore, there is also the relationship between language and action that differs significantly between the two dramatic worlds under consideration. In Ibsen, language is often used to conceal truth and hide action or to stand for it. The characters talk non stop about their ambitions, ideals, their duties, and their pasts, but they are nonexistent when it comes to carrying out action in the present. Hedda Gabler desires to the world view of the Tesman family but can only do so by manipulating others from the confines of her parlor. In Synge, language is the action itself, and the telling of the story is the event that alters the social and political reality. Christy Mahon does not need to have actually killed his

father to become a hero; he only needs to tell the story with sufficient conviction and poetry. The speech act itself carries the weight of physical reality.

Despite these differences, both playwrights ultimately arrive at a similar conclusion regarding the relationship between language and individual freedom. For both Ibsen and Synge, true autonomy can only be achieved by stepping outside the established language economy and claiming the right to author one's own narrative. Nora Helmer must leave the doll's house to learn how to speak for herself, free from Torvald's disciplinary vocabulary. Dr. Stockmann must accept his position as an "enemy of the people", create his own economy of speech to maintain his intellectual integrity. Christy Mahon leaves the shebeen, realizing that his power resides not in the validation of the community, but in his own voice. Nora Burke walks out into the rain with the Tramp to escape the suffocating silence of her marriage. In every case, liberation requires a radical break with the prevailing rules of discourse.

Conclusion

From the analysis of Henrik Ibsen's and J.M. Synge's works, we have so far demonstrated that language is never merely a neutral vehicle for communication; it is a material practice deeply rooted in the networks of power. By applying Michel Foucault's theories of discourse, disciplinary power, and the technology of confession, this article has illuminated the underlying economic structures that govern speech in these modern plays. In Ibsen's bourgeoisie community, language functions as a currency used to purchase lies, secrets, and respectability. Through it the characters discipline themselves and push others into docile conformity. In Synge's Irish poetic drama, language operates differently, where poetic eloquence and storytelling create real social capital. Ultimately, both Ibsen and Synge reveal that the right to speak, the ability to be heard, and the power to define the truth are the most valuable commodities in any society. Their characters are engaged in a relentless, high-stakes negotiation within the economy of language, trading words for survival, status, and, occasionally, liberation. As modern drama evolved, it increasingly recognized what Foucault would later theorize: that discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle. To control the discourse is to control the world; to find one's own voice is the first, necessary step toward freedom.

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