

The Intellectual in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*: A Bourdieusian Perspective

Zahra Baraani Dastjerdi

M.A Student of English Literature,
Allameh Tabatabaeei University, Iran

Hossein Pirnajmuddin

Assistant Professor of English Literature,
University of Isfahan, Iran

Abstract: *Lucky Jim* (1954), Kingsley Amis's debut novel, is a comic, campus fiction, in which Jim Dixon, a member of the new alienated educated generation, is striving for a position at a university which is still run by the upper-class professors. This masterpiece of Amis has generally been approached from two perspectives: either as an epitome of a new voice in literature (Amis as a member of the Angry Young Men's group, for instance) or as an illustration of different literary aspects (a revival of the picaresque in fiction, for instance). However, the central issue of the conflict between the protagonist and the academia has not been adequately addressed. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts and theories, this paper attempts to turn the focus on the roots of this conflict. Bourdieu believes that in every given "field: the agents compete over positions by fighting over different "capitals"; the ones who occupy a higher degree of capital occupy better positions within the field, which would lead to "symbolic capital". The Welches, representing the upper-middle-class and academic pseudo-intellectualism own more cultural, economic and social capital which gives them power. The paper examines the modality of the relationship between such capital and power, especially in the field of education, as exemplified by Amis's novel.

Key Words: Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, Pierre Bourdieu, the intellectual, cultural capital, symbolic capital, academia, misrecognition

1. Introduction

Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* is a highly class-conscious novel. It has a deep interest in the power struggle present in the contemporary British society and academia. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's discussions on the hierarchical structure present in the society and academia and its relation with daily practices, this article attempts to depict how certain institutions or social positions can be a source of power and how supremacy is shaped within different fields.

In Pierre Bourdieu's *field*-based society, the determinant of one's success or failure within the field is *habitus*, which is formed by one's surrounding conditions, which in turn are determined by one's position within the social space. The place allocated to the social agent is proportionate to the volume of *capital* s/he possesses. The formed *habitus* determines one's dispositions and choices. The following formula represents Bourdieu's view of the way an agent acts:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101)

Since the amount of *capital* one possesses determines the amount of power s/he holds in a given *field*, the agents are engaged in a constant struggle for *capitals*.

In his book *Homo Academicus* (1988) Bourdieu argues that in the academic field this power struggle takes place in three different categories:

- a) The Rivalry of Disciplines
- b) The "Reproduction of the Corps"
- c) The Orthodox vs. Heretic

These key concepts and ideas of Bourdieu are applicable to *Lucky Jim*, which deals with the power struggle present between the new lower-classed academic generation and upper-class professors still in power and the process of socialization in the field of education.

Before discussing Kingsley Amis's novel, Bourdieu's key terms are explained in the following:

2. Definition of Key Concepts

2.1 Capital

Bourdieu extends Marx's economic capital to "all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present

themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation" (cited in Harker, 1990, p. 13). He distinguishes four types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital.

Cultural capital is the most important of the four types of capital Bourdieu has distinguished. Bourdieu defines this type of capital as "a form of knowledge, dispositions, an internalized code that equips the social agent with competency to appreciate or decipher a cultural artifact or relations" (Johnson, 1993, p. 2). Therefore, it includes all the non-financial assets one has in her/his possession such as linguistic competencies and aesthetic knowledge. "Clearly cultural capital is accumulated through the agents' activity in social formations and institutions, and distributed unevenly just like economic capital but separate to it" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 2). Cultural capital is seen in three forms of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized.

For Bourdieu, "**social capital** is membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). To summarize, it is the social relationships that have mutual productive benefits for their holders.

2.2 Field

Unlike his preceding sociologists, who created their societies based on classes, Bourdieu constructs his society based on fields. "His discussion of fields ... integrates a Marxist focus on conflictual relations with a Weberian focus on formal hierarchies" (Eisenberg, 2007, p. 2046). Fields indicate the network of connections between and among positions agents possess within particular structural or organizational systems. The relative positions of agents in the field are determined by the amount and composition of capital they own.

Bourdieu refers to society as **social space** in which each agent occupies a certain position based on the volume and composition of capital one possesses. Such a representation of the society enables him to give a visual representation of agents in the field of society. He defines social space as "a [multi-dimensional] space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active in the social universe under consideration, that is, able to confer force or power on their possessor in that universe" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 229).

2.3 Habitus

It may be the most extensively cited of the trio Bourdieusian concepts. Habitus refers to the array of *dispositions* agents obtain in "their social milieu" that allows the actors to "calculate and determine future actions based on existing norms, rules, and values representing existing conditions" (Eisenberg, 2007, p. 2045). For Bourdieu it is the foundation of many types of ordinary behaviors, such as shaping artistic tastes, speech patterns, food and drink preferences, etc.

Bourdieu has termed the gestures and postures of agents, **bodily hexis**. It can be said that it is the term Bourdieu has given to body language. But for him this body language has more meaning than a part of communication. In his view it depicts the unconscious and all-made-natural level of principles. It is through bodily hexis that Bourdieu emphasizes "the embodiment of social structures" (Maton, 2008, p. 64).

2.4 Misrecognition

Bourdieu uses this term to refer to the manipulation of "possibilities as necessities" (Acciaoli, 1981, p. 28). It is "an alienated cognition that looks at the world through categories the world imposes, and apprehends the social world as a natural world" (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 140-141). In other words, the subordinate agents overlook the arbitrariness of the hierarchical system and rather see the hierarchy that has subordinated them as natural. This naturalization of inequalities results in symbolic violence.

Bourdieu uses the term **symbolic violence** to refer to the form of social or cultural dominations through which inequalities are rendered natural. This process happens through habitus and misrecognition. And once it has been shaped not only the dominated do not see the arbitrariness of the classification in society and in different realms, but also they see it as a necessity and therefore take part in producing their own enslavement. Bourdieu further suggests that this kind of "soft" violence has been mostly overlooked in social theories, which has made it even more powerful.

3. Analysis

Academia, which is the dominant *field* in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, "is an important *field* because of its capacity to confer *capital*, particularly *cultural capital*, upon its participants" (Pirnajmuddin & Shahbazi, 2011, p. 133). Thus, James

(Jim) Dixon (the protagonist) would gain a great volume of *symbolic capital*, if successful in getting the title “lecturer”, which in turn would bestow him with *cultural, social and economic capital*. However, the position he is striving for typically requires a great deal of reading and writing, especially in the form of academic publications; while, Dixon, who not only does not have any publications, is depicted as a young man who is constantly struggling for the right words for expressing himself and in his own words: “...can't sing, ... can't act, ... can hardly read ... can't read music” (Amis, 1961, p. 24), and he has a policy of “read as little as possible of any given book” (Amis, 1961, pp. 16-17). He also has some improper *bodily hexis* such as fidgeting, “tapping his long brown shoe loudly on the floor and whistling” (Amis, 1961, p. 10) and drinking heavily whenever anxious.

Using Bourdieu's concepts all these unacceptable dispositions and *bodily hexis* of Dixon are explainable in terms of his *habitus*. Since *habitus* is “differentially formed according to each actor's position in social space... it is empirically variable and class specific” (Weininger, 2005, p. 91). Dixon occupies a lower-middle class position within the social space, which is evident by his “parents whose money so far [did not] exceed their sense” (Amis, 1961, p. 178) and his current “financial position...[which is at a] usual level of merely imminent disaster” (Amis, 1961, p. 153). To employ Bourdieu's terminology, the low *economic capital* of Dixon and his family accounts for his low social background. Consequently, he does not possess the *cultural capital* essential to the academia. In *Homo Academicus* (1984) Bourdieu explains that changing this acquired *habitus* requires a prolonged self-investment. However, the anti-intellectual disposition of Dixon (displayed in his antipathy to reading) prevents him from investing the required time and subsequently gaining the required amount of *cultural capital* and expected dispositions. Thus, the lower-class *habitus* of Dixon is in conflict with the required upper-class *habitus* within the academia. In other words, Dixon does not have the required *habitus* and *capitals* (in particular *cultural capital*) for entering the *field*. Against all odds, as a result of the 1944 Education Act, he has been able to enter the academic field, but he is not aware of the ‘rules of the game’ of this new *field*, and therefore he feels alienated and out of place. This on its own is sufficient to guarantee his failure in a *field* occupied with upper-class professors.

As to Dixon's failure in the academia, Amis deliberately has placed Ned Welch, an absent-minded tacky pedant and the headmaster of the history department, as a counterpart to the protagonist, who wonders “How had he [Ned Welch] become Professor of History, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how?” (Amis, 1961, p. 8). Nevertheless, in Bourdieusian terms, the “professor” title Welch carries bestows on him an amount of *cultural capital*, which in turn gives him *symbolic capital*, makes him have power over Dixon and puts him in a relatively dominant social position. To confirm his power over Jim may be the reason why “No other professor in Great Britain...set such store by being called Professor” (Amis, 1961, p. 7).

Another element which may have been Welch's source of power is “time”. In his *Homo Academicus* (1984), Bourdieu emphasizes that “time” as a critical element of imposing power in academia; the increase of academic power takes time (Bourdieu, 1988). As such, it can be claimed that the positions within the *field* are hierarchized in time which as a result brings respect for “order of succession” (Bourdieu, 1988, pp. 90-105). Thus, the passed-time has given Welch the title of professor and the position of the headmaster in the department, which consequently has made him have “decisive power over his [Jim's] future” (Amis, 1961, p. 8).

Bourdieu states that in accordance with the academic power mistreatment of opportunities brought with the position is legitimized. These positions (being a professor and the headmaster of the department) bring Ned Welch the right to “to have pupils, to keep them in a relation of dependency... perhaps above all the art of manipulating other people's time, their career rhythms, their curriculum vitae, appointment to university posts etc.” (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 88). These rights permit “Professor” Ned Welch to have control over the “Reproduction of the Corps”. Therefore, he is able to demand a paper from Dixon, who has been “in the game” for only six months, or to assign him to give the lecture and the topic of the lecture, or even order him to go to the library and do his job for him. Welch even has control over Dixon's future job after his dismissal. However, according to Bourdieu, Professor Welch is applying the strategies of the system perfectly: he raises Dixon's hopes and at the same time gives no certainty to Jim. He asks him to give the lecture, to make Dixon hopeful, but calls him Faulkner, the lecturer preceding Dixon, to show that he may have the same destiny. As such, Welch's insistence on his long experience in the *field* and on that Dixon call him “professor” may be to reaffirm his position and remind him of the symbolic power he has over Dixon. Therefore, academia has brought about both *cultural* and *social capital* for Ned.

The mistreatment of Dixon is not limited to the university campus and works or to Welch himself. It is extended to Welch's family too. However, he accepts all the mistreatments. Bourdieu explains that because such mistreatments are incorporated in the academic *habitus* of the members, it is rendered natural (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 88). Therefore, the arbitrary power the Welches have over Dixon has been *misrecognized* as quite natural. And this is the main source of Professor Welch's power.

The lecture Welch assigns Dixon is significant in other ways too rather than being solely an examination of his knowledge. As Bourdieu says, there is a constant struggle among different departments over legitimizing their *capitals*, and consequently increasing their position within the *field* and intensifying their power. The true purpose of the lecture is uncovered when the Principal asks Dixon, "Have you got anything new to tell us, Dixon?" (Amis, 1961, p. 212). As a result, a quarrel takes place between the Principal and Welch.

The quarrel that takes place between the Principal and Professor Welch indicates the conflict between the new and old disciplines: one (Welch and the department of history) sees the present condition of the universities and society in general as disastrous, and wants to return to the past while the other (Principal) demands new subjects and new discoveries.

As for Dixon, at the outset of his career, he pretends to be in line with the academic orthodoxies, while the young Oxford man (another young man striving for the same position) displays his knowledge of the modern theories. The modern theories were a threat to the conventional ideas and views of Ned Welch who constantly wishes to return to "the golden ages" of England. Therefore, despite Jim's "disqualifications" they admit him to the position.

However, Jim Dixon proves to be a threat to the department, or indeed to the academic establishment, when in his lecture he mocks three dominant persons within the *field* and applies a foreign intonation to his speech in order to express his true attitude towards the academia and its old conventional ways; Welch, the Principal and all other faculty members feel offended and they dismiss him. According to Bourdieu, when members of an institution who are benefiting from it feel threatened they tend to react and try to keep the status quo. That is the reason why professors with unorthodox views are usually marginalized. Though, Jim does not have any real views, orthodox or unorthodox, at all, his contemporary attitude questions the very legitimacy of the academia and as such he cannot be accommodated.

Dixon's paper also plays a crucial role here. In addition to depicting the symbolic violence Welch has over him, it is a representation of the rules of the game in the academia. First, Jim has to choose "a perfect title, in that it crystallized the article's niggling mindlessness, its funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems", which was similar to papers he "had read, or begun to read, dozens like it" (Amis, 1961, p. 14). Therefore, he is trying to follow the rules of the *field*, although he is disgusted by them. Second, the publication of the paper links him to Caton, who publishes the paper under his own name in Italian. As a result of the publication of Jim's paper Caton is appointed to "the Chair of History of Commerce, University of Tucuman, Argentina" (Amis, 1961, p. 171). This also implies that much of what Bourdieu calls scientific authority, related to cultural hierarchy, in the academia is bogus.

4. Conclusion

Kingsley Amis's campus novel depicts the travails of an alienated young man named James (Jim) Dixon. Throughout his attempt in getting a position in a provincial university, he is in a constant struggle with the pretentious faculty members, especially Ned Welch. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *capital*, *field* and *habitus* can enhance our understanding of this struggle. It is concluded that:

"The *field* of academia requires a certain *habitus* that includes mental and physical aspects (such as *bodily hexis*)" (Pirnajmuddin & Shahbazi, 2011, p. 140). As James Dixon is from a lower-middle class background and attempts to enter the academic field, dominated by the upper classes in mid-twentieth century British society, he experiences a *class-habitus* clash. This clash has represented Dixon as a dislocated clumsy young man. It is also prevents him from being successful in the field of education.

Also, Amis depicts the struggle in all three Bourdieusian hierarchical categories of the academia, discussed in his *Homo Academicus*. That is: the Rivalry of Disciplines is depicted by the quarrel between Ned Welch and the Principal, who has assigned a lecture to the department of history and demands new findings, the "Reproduction of the Corps" is the main conflict of the novel, which is the Dixon-Welch conflict. Since in the academia "time" plays a crucial role, as a new recruit, Dixon is subjugated to Welch, who apparently has been in the *field* for a long time, and finally the 'heretic' in the novel is James Dixon who seems to defy the old political and social ideas. In his lecture he makes known his hitherto hidden view of the academic field and its conventional faculty members. The orthodox, threatened by a potentially subversive attitude, dismiss the unorthodox, that is, James Dixon.

References

- Acciaioli, G. L. (1981). Knowing What You're Doing: A Review of Pierre Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice. *Canberra Anthropology*, IV(1), 23-51.
- Amis, K. (1961). *Lucky Jim*. Great Britain: Penguin Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus* (P. Collier, Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power* (G. Raymond & M. Adamson, Trans.). Great Britain: Polity Press.
- Eisenberg, A. F. (2007). habitus/field. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (pp. 2045-2046). United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Harker, R. (1990). *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: the Practice of Theory*: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Johnson, R. (1993). Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture. In R. Johnson (Ed.), *The Field of Cultural Reproduction: Essays on Art and Literature* (pp. 1-25). London: Polity Press.
- Maton, K. (2008). Habitus. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*. Durham: Acumen.
- Pirnajmuddin, H., & Shahbazi, S. (2011). David Mamet's *Oleanna*: A Bourdieusian Reading. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 4(18), 130-141.
- Weininger, E. B. (2005). Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu's class analysis. In E. O. Wright (Ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis* (pp. 82-118). New York: Cambridge University Press.