

Performative Subjects & the Irresistible Lack of Understanding in David Mamet's *Oleanna*: a Butlerian Discourse Analysis

Hojatolla Borzabadi Farahani¹ & Mariam Beyad²

¹Department of English language, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran

²Associate Professor, University of Tehran. Email: n_bfarahani@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The present study tends to explore the constitution of power and its formative effects on David Mamet's play, *Oleanna*, a very controversial work dealing with sexual harassment and political correctness. The analysis is going to be done applying views and results of Judith Butler's notion of gender and identity trouble to the play first through explanation of related key concepts like difference, decentering, subject and language, and then utilizing them to analyze the roots of sudden, surprising transformations and role-reversals of the involved characters, John and Carol, through the three acts. Furthermore, it is tried to find out the causes of unavoidable violence within the contexts of the relations going between the characters.

Keywords: gender, identity, difference, decentering, performative, understanding, violence, discourses, language

*"What I write about is what I think is missing from our society.
And that's communication on a basic level"*
(Mamet)

1. Introduction

David Mamet, born in Chicago, 1947, is one of the most influential American playwrights. The vocal point in his work is taken to be both America and its mythic Dream. Mamet (1998) states that

"the American Dream was basically about raping and pillage We are finally reaching a point where there is nothing left to exploit.... The Dream has nowhere to go so it has to turn to itself".

It is this concept of 'Dream' that forms the major bulk of his plays. For him, drama is the only stage where the 'Dream' is explored and possible solution(s) are provoked. Mamet's views on 'Dream' find appreciation among cultural critics. Sacvan Bercovitch, examining American myths, asserts: "What I discovered in America was the simultaneity of *violence* and *cultural formation*". He (1993) observes America transformed into "a barbaric dream documented by a procession of 'great minds and talents' and an interpretive process through which the worlds out there has been triumphantly repressed" (1993). As Catherin Lutz (1997) argues, after the cold war a "bunkered" self-image resulted from a national security state, in which "a

militarized civilian subjectivity” functioned within “an ideology of total defense”. The outcome of this defensiveness would be the exclusion of undesirable groups of people like the homosexual, the communist, the ill-adjusted citizen, the female. We are likely to shout our victory, argues Mamet, “but after shouting we are empty and alone” (1993). The emotions “inform us that everything—understanding, world domination, happiness— is within us and within our grasp”(1993). However, “as soon as ‘our’ victory is proclaimed the anxiety represents itself. We knew it was a false struggle, and we now must cast about for another opponent, another oppressed people to ‘free’ so we reassure ourselves again that we are superior to circumstance”(1993).

Mamet’s dramas basically cope with a terrorist-hunting and haunted America since the characters struggle to get, hopelessly though, a bit of a disintegrated Dream, fighting to dominate by taking popularized American roles. To get a better report of Mamet’s characters as “entropic figures” (Bigsby, 1985), people who are entrapped within vapid spaces, a vapidness that would hardly ever be turned to meaning through their attempts, particularly lingual, , and to observe and apprehend the constructural vanity of American Dream, application of Judith Butler’s gender-based critique would be of revelation. Butler’s views on gender and performativity of it approve of *power* as the course of incessant clash of cultural discourses.

2. Methodology and Critical Approach

Concerning the matter of gender, today, there is a miscellaneous variety of gender researches and distinct ways of understanding these varieties. A plenty of critics are working in the field of gender studies, the list contains three major figures: Luce Irigaray, Elene Cixous, and Judith Butler that some of the key concepts of her theory will be examined as an introduction to get to discussing Mamet’s controversial play, *Oleanna*.

Judith Butler (1956-) teaching rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley is known as one of the forerunners of Marxist feminism, a movement which is considered to be a powerful stand of the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 70s, especially in Britain. In reading her works, the influence of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel must be taken into consideration.

Butler states that there is no fixed definition of ‘subject’, ‘identity’, ‘gender’, ‘language’, due to their constant becoming. Being deeply under the influence of Hegel and having an intense interest in his dialectical model of thinking, Butler (1999), in her first book, *Subjects of Desire*, defines desire as “the incessant effort to overcome external differences, which are finally revealed to be imminent features of the subject itself”. This nonstop spiritual endeavor presents the dialectical progress of man from side of ignorance to that of self-knowledge by means of becoming.

The other element helping the spirit to know itself is the presence and perception of the ‘Other’. To Hegel the way toward understanding the self passes through the Other. Using this Butler (1999) discusses:

The subject can only know itself through another, but in the process of recognizing itself and constituting its own self-conscious it must overcome or annihilate the Other, otherwise it places its own existence at risk.

Therefore, self and the Other are mutually related as they reflect each other.

"Self and the Other are not only initially related to each other; in fact, they are each other and it is through their mutual recognition that they bring each other into being".

This way of self-recognition results in a negative narcissism characterized by self-violence and hatred, since it involves desire for the other and its self-consciousness which in its turn makes the loss of self.

In *the Psychic Life of Power*, Butler (1997) considers the connection between power and the formation of the subject. As she views power, there is an interaction between them. She asserts that for power to act there must be a subject, that is, the subject is the doer of power, and it is power that defines *feminine and masculine* and determines their role out in society. In fact, power creates and classifies the categories of subject, divides them into binary of opposition as homosexual / heterosexual, to establish its legitimacy, to reject the other categories (gay, lesbian). Power gains its legitimacy by means of heterosexual kinship. As Butler asserts (1997) "if the conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration".

Butler draws a demarcation line between *performance and performativity*. The concept of performance presumes the existence of subject, while performativity considers subject in process. To elaborate performativity of subject, Butler denies any pre-determined doer for act/actions. Here she relates this idea to the theory of gender. Alluding to de Beauvoir's (1949) off-cited words that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman", Butler (1999) argues "woman is something we 'do' rather than what we are". It signifies that performance has priority over performer, so gender is a verb rather than a noun. Gender is the product of what we do, the result of the chain of acts, a doing not a being. She adds that subject is confined to discourses and that body is an effect, effect of compulsory regularizing norms. Her definition of gender identity echoes Nietzsche's (1998) notion that reads: "there is no being behind doing, acting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction imposed on the doing; the doing itself is everything". Therefore, gender identities, masculine and feminine, are formed by language and have to act as they are called.

Butler in *Excitable Speech* (1997) considers the interconnectedness of language and subject. In this connection performativity belongs to language. She argues that "all speech is in some sense beyond the speaker's control" (Butler 1997), that is, people are not the user of language, but it is language that speaks them. Butler's assertion does not mean that people have no responsibility of what they utter; as she herself states, "Speakers are to some extent responsible for their utterances, and in certain cases should be prosecuted for uttering words that wound" (1997). To Butler (1990), gender is a discursive term determined by discourse; it is formed by daily talks and actions. As cultural discourse creates two opposite categories, male and female, it allocates different language to them, too. "Men and women" Tannen (1991) states, "have different talking styles and it becomes evident in everyday life. For example, women more often use 'we', while men use 'I' more often"; an unconscious preference that deliberates the cultural self-sufficiency and so-called priority of men.

3. Critical Analysis

One of the most questionable points within the controversial structure of David Mamet's play, *Oleanna*, is the Professor's violence against his student, Carol. This shocking attack is really domineering in the final decision of the audience to wonder whether to take side with

either the professor or the student. To feel sympathy with each of the parties of the running clash which gets to its climax in the ending is to view the play a melodrama, to consider a traditional center around which all the events turn round. However, the presence of some features, basically marginal, defies any traditional unification of themes, characters, and plot structure. Reviewing the play on a larger scale than sexual harassment fed by responding to will to power, the decentering features like the sudden transformations, role-reversals, the aporia in the dialogue and the role of power brokers trigger a ceaseless continuity of violence which ultimately leads to John's physical assault on Carol. This exploration signifies the impact of power and performativity of gender on the subject identity in Mamet's masterpiece: *Oleanna*.

Considering the concepts of difference and decentering as two outstanding elements of postmodernist philosophy, then the notion of knowledge, within the deconstructivist context, would be bound to the unlimited chain of differences, constituting language. So the signifier no longer provides a one-to-one correspondence, such as, presence over absence, or writing over speaking is erodible and possible. The arbitrary nature of signifiers and their associations indicates the absence of any authoritative logos to centralize the meaning and validate the independence of language. In *Positions*, Derrida (1981) offers a general strategy of deconstruction with which he rejects the authority of systematic priorities and challenges the related traditional hierarchies:

We must traverse a phase of overturning. To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a *violent* hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand.

Derrida's abovementioned strategy, along with its deconstruction neutralizing effects, though just deals with the tradition of philosophy, challenges all deep-seated power structure. The existence of power, Foucault (1980) argues, is always oppressive: "it has been almost automatic in parlance of the times to define power as an organ of repression". Therefore, deconstructing any power structure or hierarchy will unavoidably be tinged with violence of a sort either political, rhetorical or physical.

Back to *Oleanna*, the setting of place, John's private office makes the audience to expect watching a pure educational interaction between the professor and the student enriched by mutual understanding. They see Carol coming to John, the professor, requiring him to help her to understand the subject and pass the course, while John's desire is something else. He demands Carol to be a self-assured and independent critic of institutional hierarchies rather than just learn the course material. John's expertise to overturn oppressive educational system is quite revolutionary and postmodern. Since he likes her to get rid of lopsided traditional relationship of a patriarchal teacher and a passive student, John offers her the opportunity to liberate herself from such impersonal and tyrannical system by suggesting that she can begin the course over again. "Your grade is an 'A'. Forget about the paper" (Mamet 1992). Carol, in contrast, has her own expectations about education and expects the professor to teach and to give her vivid explanations of the problems and make her ready for the exam. Unlike John, with his liberal ideas, Carol tends to be a user who sticks to the rules assuring her success. She is there "to be helped, to get on in the world" (Mamet 1992).

Mamet's response to the ambivalence of intentions running in the interaction between the figures and the debate between the critics and audience to take side either with John or Carol, to argue whether sexual equality or harassment is the major concern of the play, reads:

"*Oleanna* is a play about failed Utopia, in this case the failed Utopia of Academia" (1993). The title, which is relic reminding audience of Mamet's own memories of his youth, supports the playwright's editorial comment. *Oleanna* that historically associates one of the failed European efforts to establish a Utopia in America through the 19th century is survived today in the folk song: "Oh! To be in *Oleanna*, that's where I'd rather be/ than to be bound in Norway and drag the chains of slavery" (1992). If the play's focal point is to be the failure of academia to develop into a utopianistic place, *Oleanna* includes one of the crucial themes in Mamet's masterwork: Man's nonstop endeavor to overcome the other. This need to gain power, Steven Ryan (1996) states, "is the sole force that drives such earlier predatory Mamet characters as Bernie Litko from *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*; Teach from *American Buffalo*; and Roma, Moss, and Williamson from *Glengarry Glen Ross*, all of whom rely, or try to rely, on manipulation and intimidation to accomplish self-serving goals".

Assuming a subtext or a through-line as a stage crafting technique to Mamet and the only structural unifying element of every play, including *Oleanna* from the first act to the final scene of the last act, there is the matter of John and Carol's struggle to dominate one another. The playwright says to Leonard Lopate, in an interview, "the play's central interaction is not about sexual harassment. It's about power" (Lopate 1994). Mamet (1993) believes that to be a playwright one needs to be schizophrenic, to accept whatever each and every one of characters says. He puts,

"I agree with what she says as much as what he says. She may do some things that are dishonorable, but then so does he. For me, it's a play about the uses and abuses of power, and the corruption is on both sides" (Mamet 1993).

Since none of the characters involved in the power struggle throughout the first act straight forwardly speaks of their desire toward power/domination, *Oleanna* is quite different in this regard. It is only after intermission that the implicit signs of the through-line are going to be reflected in their dialogue, presenting them in a threatening struggle for power that finally culminates in the final scene.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler explores the matter of subject from a new vantage point. In her exploration, she applies Foucauldian theory of gender which is based on the mutual relation between the formation of subject and power. For Butler (1997), power forms the subject and is formed by subject. She argues that a subject is the agent of power, that is, power of any kind demands its own subject to act then. "If the conditions of power", adds Butler (1997), "are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is site of such reiteration". This reiteration, however, never happens unless the subject is created/ categorized by power; it is power that first signifies terms like *feminine* and *masculine* as its doers and determines their socio-political function. In rereading Foucault's theories, she asserts that to gain and inject its legitimacy and practicality power even uses psychological matters, such as: the normality of heterosexual kinship and love, all to grant domination to one gender (male) and to get repressed the other (female). It forbids some acts, lesbianism, homosexuality, and etc., verbal or physical, as anti-generation to support some other ideal categories and guarantee its legitimacy.

John's democratic method of education that necessitates the overturning of any objective, tyrannical relationship all in favor of an active, cooperative, and social process, in the light of Butler's conception of power, is examined a kind of deviation from the compulsory set of rules toward an empowering education with all its liberty. Certainly such deliberate

negligence of norms can be dangerous and brings about its compensations. “If a democratic teacher begins the curriculum with the student’s questions and understandings, then she or he may become the victim of the student’s disregard for their own knowledge” (Mamet 1992). Unlike John, Carol seems to have no trouble with the traditional schooling system, within which she is to be just the receiver and the teacher the only voice of authority. One of the initial outcomes of this maladjustment/ incongruity of system of powers is the lack of [mutual] understanding, something that both John and Carol yearn for in their relationship, a subject we will come to later; the other resulted effect is losing the other’s [Carol’s] respect and reliance on us/the practitioner. Undoubtedly, practicing violence to the regularizing hierarchy has its risks, that is, such teachers put themselves in danger.

One of the questions frequented by many reviewers of the play and members of audience is the legitimacy of Carol’s sudden transformation in the intermission, a quick change from self-effacing, inarticulate student in the first Act, to an articulate representative of the female student body. In the play’s opening act, Carol, in the eyes of John, is nobody but a timid, isolated figure, victim of a judgmental education system. To him, Carol needs encouragement to rely on herself, to be able to become a self-confident man as he himself is. John offers her a friendly individual relationship to empower her being fit to his educational program. The leading cause of all-of-a-sudden unexpected transformation of Carol can be found first in John’s blindness to the aforementioned warning (not to ignore the normalizing codes of behavior) and secondly in his inability to practice whatever he advocates and teaches. John’s inability to practice what he teaches though intellectually advocates equality of two parties of education is painfully discernible in his failure to take any notice of Carol’s hesitant efforts at self-expression. He feels impatient to listen sensitively to his inarticulate educator, and so frequently interrupts her. Moreover, as a unilateral authoritative professor, he ignores Carol’s traditional perceptiveness on schooling and monopolizes the discussion.

John: Are you checking your notes....?

Carol: yes.

John: Tell me in your own ...?

Carol: I want to make sure that I have it right. (Mamet 1992)

To get a better rapport of irreconcilable contradiction in John’s way of treatment as a self-declared democratic teacher, Mamet’s argument about character development is worth to notice:

There is no such thing as “character”. “Character” doesn’t exist. If you take a piece of writing what you’re going to see is twelve to twenty lines on a page for a hundred and twenty pages. If you turn it upside down, nothing’s going to fall out. There isn’t any “character” there. It’s a bunch of words that people say, period. That’s what Aristotle told us, and it’s true today. There’s no such a thing as “character”. It’s just little words that the writer made up. (Mamet 1993)

Mamet explores these “little words” as sketched correctly, and minimally they give the audience the illusion that these are real people. What the reader infers from the abovementioned words is that for Mamet characterization like any other element of play is affected by the through-line. Reflecting on *Oleanna*, the corresponding subtext or through-line deals with humanity’s inherent desire toward power presented in academia. Mamet’s words of illusive character in terms of Butler’s discursive theory of gender are understood as

discourse. For Butler (1997), gender is considered as a form created by discourse. To explain that gender is not something natural, which anyone is born with, in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, she states:

Gender is not passively scripted on the body and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds. (Butler 1997)

Concerning Foucauldian definition of discourse: “a large group of statements governing the way we speak about and perceive a specific historical moment or moments” (Salih, 2002), it is a regulatory system regularizing things by means of their oppositions, such as: masculine/ feminine, writing/reading, etc.; it is the creative-performative element of gender, puts Butler (1999), from which no escape is thinkable for the subjects, and they must act according to the offered discourses. She adds sex and gender are indivisible, in that sex is gender all along, and every man must act its own gender, that no free person is there out of it. She conceives discourse as a collection of statements limiting and determining the way everyone thinks and perceives. Reconsidering the inconsistencies with John and seeking the roots of misunderstanding that goes between him and his student, it is conceivable that they both are defined and restricted within the framework of their socio-cultural gender roles. It seems that John is powerless to have Carol be a true follower of his commanding theories, essentially due to the incompatibility of their opposite gender identities. Carol's sex, social state, and educational expectations hardly let her make sense of professor's speech act in the conference. John's class and somehow the totality of the academic atmosphere seem to be “a Tower of Babel, where each professor hawks his/her own peculiar, contradictory doctrine” (Ryan, 1996); for Carol, no doorway is there to get in and speak of her needs and demands. Her confrontation in the first act, and the blocked way of understanding, makes Carol drive to the “group” to remedy her exhaustion through the illusion of presence the group grants its members.

Following her own urgent need of the objective information that will ascertain passing the grade, Carol initially views every teacher in general as an infallible, rounded-developed man of knowledge who would respond to her demand. Her incessant plea, “Teach me” quite matches her identity: a young, inexperienced girl set to be a trainee within the patriarchal educational system within which John takes the role of a professor. According to Carol's traditional expectations of schools, this lopsided relationship with [male] authority is a taken for granted issue, since she is named a girl. The sex-identity allocated to her from the time of birth, due to the lack of phallus, is not to be male, and since then she has entered to and fixed into a specific category of norms. To elaborate the concept of subject, Butler says:

Consider the medical interpretation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an ‘it’ to ‘she or a ‘he’, and in that naming the girl is ‘girlled’, brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpretation of gender. But that girling of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpretation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout the various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this neutralized effect. The naming is at once the setting of the boundary, and also the repeated inclusion of a norm. (Butler 1993)

Applying this name-based identity, Carol, as a subject, is named a girl, and so she must behave and live in accordance with the pre-determined roles. John's response to her question about the use of the words "term of art", after stopping his phone call with his wife, unconsciously uncovers his human fallibility and imperfection to her: "I'm not sure that I know what it means. It's one of those things, perhaps you have had them, that, you look them up or have someone explain them to you, and you say 'aha' and you immediately forget what..." (Mamet 1992). Carol then feels shocked so much so that she interrupts him: "you don't do that", a reaction which reveals both obsession and her essential zeal to get certainty and codification of information to get success in exam. The named Carol, within the compass of her relation with her professor has done all the requirements of a mutual comprehension, but when she faces John unable to provide requisite responses, she says to him:

"I did what you told me. I did everything that, I read your *book*, you told me to buy your book and read it" (Mamet 1992).

Her out loud cry linguistically dramatizes both her gender submission to the opposite category having higher hand and specifically her going-to-be transformation to a new man who is going to transfer the guilt from herself and project it on the [male] professor, which marks off, in advance, all the accusations she makes against John in the second and the third act of the play.

Near the end of the first act as John faces Carol's bewilderment on making a sense of his critique of higher education, toward which Americans have "a prejudice", one example of many other cases of misunderstanding between them, he approaches to her with a gesture more like a sympathetic father rather than a professor who meets Carol's response:

Carol: I 'm bad. (*Pause*) O, God. (*Pause*)

John: It's all right [...]

Carol: I always

John:good.....

Carol: I alwaysall my lifeI have never told anyone this

.....

John: Yes, Go on. (*Pause*) Go on.

Carol: All of my life..... (The phone rings.) (Mamet 1992)

Here, she is encouraged to rely on her professor and speak to him of her unspoken secret when unexpectedly the phone, "ever-present symbol of external pressures that hound human existence" rings (Rayan, 1996). John picks it up and insensitively starts arguing his wife about the new house he hopes he would buy after receiving his tenure announcement, a gesture symbolically signifying his indifference to Carol's pain and his real interest to get his academic promotion. Even when he discovers that all the phone calls had been just a trick to prick to persuade him be back home earlier for a surprise party held in his honor, and as Carol, being listening meanwhile, comes to say: "They're proud of you", instead of confirming her satisfying conclusion he denies her authoritatively: "There are, those who would say, that, a surprise is a form of aggression" (Mamet 1992). Now Carol is on the leave, much more confused than the time she came to his office.

But who is John? Is he a critic of traditional system of education or a man of bourgeoisie? The reflection of contradictions or inconsistencies in his position introduces him as a professor who attacks middle-class academic prejudices and regulations on one side and on the other side hopes to be rewarded tenure, status, and promotion. Mamet tells Robert Feldberg (1984), an interviewer:

“basically in any profession when you get past the rhetoric, people are out to make a living. What people do is different than what they say they are doing”.

To be applied to *Oleanna*, it proves that even scholars look for vested interests, and that John's contrarities have their roots in his dishonesty about his own interests. Like any other tradesman, he is after his supremacy in power positions; as Carol puts, challenging John's abuse of language as an element of intimidation:

“you can't do that anymore. You.Do.Not.Have.The.Power”, “You love the Power”, “Do you know what you have worked for? *Power*. For *Power*”, “you want unlimited power,” “Why do you hate me? ...because I have, you think, power over you” and Now you *know*, do you see? What it is to be subject to that *power*” (Mamet 1992).

The other questionable matter is the identification of power. The question is: whose power does John and then Carol, from the second act on, practice? Regarding the differentiation Judith Butler (1999) sets between performance and performativity, that performance pre-assumptions the existence of a subject while performativity considers subject-in-process, she asserts that subject, either man or a woman, is something we do rather than something we are, that is, performance has priority over performer, and in fact, “gender is something one does, an act, more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a doing rather than a being”. Quoting Nietzsche's idea about the authentic being, she declares that no being is presumable behind doing, and since the doer is merely a fiction projected on the doing, everything derives from doing. As Edvard Pechter (1987) sees, identity is constructed “by the power relations that govern, anonymously and without human face, even the governments”. Mamet, with no appeal to theory, approves of the fictionality of being/identity, he says: the will of the individual [is] to be a fiction, since “society is the master whose necessities of the moment create our identities” (1986). Back to the play, John and then Carol's identity are shaped by the acts they are just the agents of; their subjectivity is the product of compulsory regulatory forms of the sociopolitical institutions they work for, and they perform the needs, demands and social assumptions of some ever-present power brokers like John's Tenure Committee and Carol's feminist group. They are the spokesmen of the master discourse, representative of their ideological rulers, and the corresponding rivalry.

Butler, in her Hegelian definition of desire, states that desire is the spiritual motivation of a human to overcome obstacles and understand its errors; moreover, desire helps the spirit to know itself through a progressive recognition and overcoming of difference. Barbara Johnson, a well-known feminist, like Butler sounds straightforward about identity; she says: “as a literary theorist, I have come to regard ‘identity’ as a constantly shifting, discontinuous, ungrounded fiction” (1994). Another feature, Butler adds, helping the spirit to come to recognition of itself passes through the Other, through overcoming and annihilating it. It means that the subject in the course of self-recognition needs the presence of a differentiating, opposite Other. Alongside, in *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir (1949) affirms that “otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the one without at once setting up the other over against itself”. When

Carol appears in the second act, she has undergone a very astounding transformation which sets up a new relationship with her professor. Now she has come back at John's *request*, as a resolute representative of feminist group with a charge of sexual abuse against John with the Tenure of Committee.

"Professor, I came here as a favor. At your personal request. Perhaps I should not have done so. But I did. On my behalf, and on behalf of my group" (Mamet 1992).

The ending of her words here confirms the fact that what Carol needs is not reflected on herself as an individual but on the collective thoughts and feelings of the group.

The following lines present the emergence of a new-formed knowledge achieved through the membership of radical feminism:

John: I want to hear it. In your own words. What you want.

And what you feel.

Carol: I

John: yes

Carol: my group.

John: your "group".....? (*Pause*)

Carol: The people I've been talking to(Mamet 1992)

Carol's contribution in feminist ideology helps her to be changed from a confused student to a poised, articulate one with a new perception of her sex of which she is assured to resolve her life's confusions. Considering the long list of charges she sets against her male professor: being 'elites', 'sexist', 'self-aggrandizing' and ... frames paradigm of radical feminist consciousness and ideology. To John's surprise, whatever has been of ordinary inoffensive talks between a teacher and students now turned to charges of seduction and sexual harassment.

(John 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". "He told me [...] that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me ..." (Mamet 1992). In this perspective, John is seen as the Other from whom she differentiates her "self". She changes from traditional yes-sayer to a new-found no-sayer. In a way, John is the opposition, the Other that must be overcome if Carol yearns for her self-recognition. In this opposition John is that oppressor, the patriarch, the "unexamined, often unacknowledged [...] priority whereby males rule females". Carol's words of accusation against him are quite overt:

What gives you the *right*. Yes. To speak to a *woman* in your private... Yes. Yess. 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 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. (Mamet 1992)

Certainly any attempt, either verbal or physical, to embrace a female student in accordance with Carol's feminist ideology is interpreted as a sexual practice of male power that permeates the other fields: economics, psychological, legal, and ideological. Now that the professor is the Other, Carol is required to fulfill her gender role if she is a real proponent of

the feminist group. Recalling Butler's assertion of gender reality to the extent that "[it] is performative ... that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (1993), to support her new formed identity and the collective spirit of feminism she has to protest against the male teacher's authorship foot by foot. Regarding Karl Mannheim's emphasis on [feminist] totality, "a utopian, in that it carves out a space within which the effects of patriarchy could be remedied" (1936), the membership of the group appeals its subjects, including Carol to give a hand to the development of feminist totality through her resistance against systematic male abuse of power. To do the important, her self-assurance ensures her resistance as she boldly asserts: "You. Do.Not.Have.The.Power" (Mamet 1992).

To retaliate the indictments against him, John comes to reiteration of the power structure of which he is a subject, too. He is quite sure that the tenure committee will defend him and defy her complain. The present contradiction in John's behavior— to take the side of committee, whose members he would not trust to wax his car— must be understood as his stratagem to keep safe his tenure position and the deposit he can put on the house he is going to buy; in fact, his concern about his personal benefit(s) makes him blind to his theoretical ideals and Carol's feminist posture. The dichotomy which is there between John's behavior in reality and the ideal(s) he is absorbed to mentally well matches Butler's declaration that gender is something a man does 'do' rather than what she/he is, in that it is an act which is created by what it is called (1999). Having no perception of Carol's identity as a woman and the objectives of her group, (due to his heterosexual-oriented behavioral dictums which consider the Other/the female as an absentee object) he attempts to convince her to discuss the matter of complaint based on humanist talks, and as she manages to leave his desk, he violently holds her arm:

Carol: LET ME GO.

John: I have no desire, to hold you. I just want to talk to you...

Carol: LET ME GO. LET ME GO. WOULD SOME BODY help me? WOULD SOME BODY help me please....? (Mamet 1992)

John's gesture, to restrain Carol, E. Porter (2000) states, "has impinged not only on her space, but on her body. This trespass can be viewed as a fundamental form of intimidation" ; in this regard, Susan Brownmiller (1975) states that the threat is emblematic, signifying the critical function of rape as a secret prehistoric weapon causing intimidation whereby all men scare all women. Certainly, from the view point of feminist ideology, John's touching Carol to stop her leaving the office is identified as an attempt of rape that makes her cry for help.

In the third act, the final confrontation of characters, the other role-reversal occurs: John appears to be the student and Carol becomes the teacher who has the upper hand nearly till the end of the play. The subject of this interaction like their first conference is enlightenment and understanding, but now John *invites* Carol back to settle down the matter of indictments. The committee has decided to punish John, to discipline him for attempting rape though blindly he is hopeful to receive their support. Being won her point Carol addresses John:

You asked me in here to explain something to me, as a child, that I did not understand. But I came to explain something to you. You Are Not God. You ask me why I came? I came here to instruct you? And your book? You think you are going to show me some "light"? You "Maverick". [...] and you say you believe in free intellectual

discourse. You Believe In Nothing. You In Nothing At All. ...you believe *not* in 'freedom of thought', but in an elitist [...] protected hierarchy which rewards you. (Mamet 1992)

In continuation, Carol exercises her power in language to open up all the historical objection and oppression. She and her fellow people have tolerated either at school or throughout their lives. Carol along with her audience expects John, representative of patriarchy and male gender, to sympathize or even more to empathize with them as being *subject to power*. When John again rejects her documented accusation asserting that his verbal and physical action have all been away from seductive and sexual connotation, which stresses on his quasi-paternal approach to her, she comes out to shout him down by calling him a fool:

"You Fool...You think I want 'revenge'. I don't want revenge. I WANT UNDERSTANDING. (Mamet 1992).

Certainly, the understanding that Carol, Porter (2000) argues, is longing for needs John—the man of opposite gender—to admit the validity of her position, to give up his patriarchal assumptions.

To explore the cause of John's failure to understand both Carol's motives and identity, let's have a review on Butler's theory of language and its linkage with gender. Butler states that subject is created by language, that is, she considers an interrelation between the study of language/discourse on one side and the formation of gender on the other side. To define discourse, Bucholtz (2003) asserts: "Discourse, in this view, is language in context; that is, language as it is put to use in social situations, not the more idealized and abstracted forms that are the central concern of much linguistic theory". So it is discourse that affects gender, another way put, discourse as a determiner socially constructs the language this or that gender is to use. Butler (1997) remarks, "all speech is in some sense beyond the speaker's control". Actually, it is not the human but the language that speaks gender, so that no gender identity can be imagined beyond the expression of gender. Butler (1997) concludes, "Identity is performatively constructed by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results".

Near the ending of the play, out of 'an act of friendship', Carol offers John a deal. Under the very condition of singing a statement to remove some books from reading list (it includes his own book, too), her group agrees to disclaim the charges against him. Since John observes their proposal a sort of abandonment of free speech, particularly at university, his reflection is quite intense, marking off his answer to Carol and the feminist group. "You want to ban my book? ... Get the fuck out of my office" (Mamet 1992). The professor's defensive response to Carol's suggestion, when once again she speaks to him of the group's decision to retract the indictment if and only if he signs the document, is quite tinged with the lingual names and labels whereof he is the user. His defiant reaction reads: "You are dangerous. You are wrong and it's my job ...to say no to you"; he adds that he is a teacher; it is his *name* on the door (Mamet 1992). Again he falls back on the academia discourse and uses it as a shield behind which he defends his official position, no matter theoretically he has been criticizing and mocking the system. In another way, not John as an exponent of free speech but the aggressive, patriarch-figure teacher articulates his defiance; his words depict him as a true advocate of masculine priority who will not yield response even any modification or correction, either political or cultural. Like his name, representing his gender identity, fixed on the door, John expects all his gender privileges (the tenure, the deposit, the authority, and etc.) being transfixed. The language he speaks, in fact, in the final scene guarantees this fixation for him.

What triggers the final scene of violence in Act III has a lingual cause, too. As John asks Carol to leave the office and to stop any further discussion, the phone rings again. The telephone call has nothing to do with Carol and her interaction with John, but she intrudes and asks him not to call his wife a 'babe'. To Carol, the very pet name reveals a chauvinistic, less -than-equal relationship; that is, the language John uses to address his wife reflects his general view over women, as a second-sex who needs a man for support and protection. Carol's intrusive admonition to John means to get into the privacy of his treatment with his wife, an interference going beyond his tolerance so much so that he knocks her down and holds a chair to hit her on the head:

John: You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life? You should be *Rape you*? Are you kidding me? I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. You little cunt.....

(She cowers on the floor below him. Pause. He looks down at her. He lowers the chair. He moves his desk, and arranges the paper on it. Pause. He looks over at her.)

..... Well

Carol: Yes, that's right. *(She looks away from him, and lower her head. To herself :)* Yes. That's right. (Mamet 1992)

4. Conclusion

That the ideal of the academic interaction between the student and the professor, with all the continual reversion of the roles, throughout the play, *Oleanna*, ends in the physical assault dramatizes the inevitability of violence fostered by gendered difference. To have John uplifting the chair, threatening Carol, and Carol being cowered on the floor, menaced, is a vivid showpiece of failure of characters to establish bonds of mutual apprehension; it pictures the failure of cool reasoning and humanist civility on part of John by invading her space and threatening her, and concerning the duality of Carol's response, 'Yes. That's right', it approves of her affirmation of either the deserved punishment she receives due to provoking his anger or the confirmation of the charges she and her Group level against him. Deborah Tannen (1991) argues that in man-woman interaction we "want above all, to be heard ... and to be understood— heard for what we think we are saying, for what we know we meant". They both, accordingly, do efforts to install and structure a common ground of reciprocal acceptance and understanding either by their political correcting attempts or humanist consideration. To Mamet, two of the figures in *Oleanna* have a lot to exchange in their speech due to their legitimate affection for each other, a fact that leads them toward demanding a long-lasting interaction; however, as discussed in the lines above, what they gain for themselves out of their endeavors was nothing but irreconcilable frustration caused by differentiating requests of social groups they are a subject to.

Being under the influence of Derridian deconstruction, Judith Butler sees gender identity as social constructions needing to be deconstructed. For her, such identities are just temporary positions within the differential structure of society, none of which, of course, is privileged. Butler (1991) puts, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression". If this is the case, as Butler argues, that what we consider as identity is not fixed at all, but instead "the effect of a certain repetition,

one which produces the semblance of continuity or coherence”, in *Oleanna*, both individuals, John and Carol are the product of certain set of activities who ceaselessly present themselves as gendered under the sovereignty of social forces. Taking into account the differential influence of the corresponding discourses the characters use, and concerning the through-line of the play (seeking power), there lies an impassable gap of postmodernist misunderstanding between John, the professor and Carol, the student.

Both of them (Carol and John) are a mere subject, with no individuality, manipulated by the dictums of invisible power systems. In the rear end of each scene, always there is an authentic voice of power: the Tenure Committee, the family and the radical feminist group demanding them to perform the predetermined acts. Being just the agents of self-serving and ravenous source of power none of them, as Rayan (1996) puts, “is capable of embracing concepts like ‘dialogue’, ‘compromise’, and ‘agreement’”. In fact, the behind-the-scene hierarchies of social institutions work as determinants of John and Carol’s ideology and their fate within which they turn to have no free hand and from which no escape is presumable for them. What each of them, John and Carol, achieves through the repetition/reiteration of their performative acts against each other by the process of role—reversal is the produced effect of an illusory identity which they misconceptionally call their own.

This subservience of one’s freedom to invisible power structures/discourses is a share quality of Mamet’s plays. For instance, in Glengary Glen Ross (1983) the real estate bosses function as the absent source of power that dictates an intra-office competition of a kind in which all the employees are involved and no one dares complaint. These plays miniaturize, puts E. Porter (2000), “a neo-Hobbsian war of every one against everyone with no legitimate authority to police the combat and no foundational principles to adjudicate it”. Though Butler declares that gender norms, formative of identity, are defined and limited by power structures, and that she cannot help being pessimist about the effectiveness of any resistance against the normative regimes, she advocates the efficiency of parody in this case, that is, to find a space in the social context of power and then to mock it through liberatory attempt. This is what Butler (1998) ideally wants people to do: ignoring the restrictive discourses by trying them in a non-conventional way.

What we hope for emerge is a provocative and poly vocal interrogation of gender as a cultural manifestation of interrelated institutions and discursive practices and regulatory power they exert upon bodies, identities, and erotics.

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