

## “Let’s take the mysticism out of it, shall we?”: *Habitus* as Conflict in Mamet’s *Oleanna*

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Perhaps because David Mamet’s *Oleanna* enters the place of academia,<sup>1</sup> it forces scholars to unravel the multiple layers of the play with a hyper-attention to interpretations based on the sexual politics of its drama.<sup>2</sup> For example, after admitting that he has never been a fan of *Oleanna*, Stanton B. Garner, Jr., expresses an academically anxious sentiment about *Oleanna* when he sees the play “harnessing outrage to a gender politics that it does little to question.”<sup>3</sup> After all, when John exclaims, “You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life,” we feel conflicted and on edge about its implications concerning the institution of education.<sup>4</sup> The “in here” is the place of his office and, metonymically, the place of upper education. So this statement suggests that “vicious little” bitches should keep political correctness out of the epicenter of political correctness: the university. The implication: one should not turn on one’s own.

Yet John’s statement, which comes just before he resorts to physical intimidation, contains vital information that connects to the significance of place, in particular Bourdieu’s *habitus*, as a source of dramatic conflict for *Oleanna*.<sup>5</sup> For Mamet, the language playwright, fills the above statement with several loaded, key phrases for this play: “think,” “in here,” “your,” and “destroy my life.” All of these phrases figure in the concept of *habitus*. John specifically states “your” (Carol’s) political correctness, not just political correctness, per se. So John vents his intense out/rage at Carol’s conception of political correctness, which she brings to his office, his professional habitat, to destroy his livelihood and life. The fictions that justify positions of authority, the personal and cultural embodied history of individuals, and the struggle to maintain place all comprise Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*: the dispositions, habits and ways of being that orientate people in and out of social structures.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, two things compel the drama of *Oleanna*: the conflict between John’s and Carol’s *habitus* and the power struggle over the discipline of education—what Bourdieu identifies as a field of cultural production. I argue that *habitus* forms the foundation of the conflict between John and Carol. Repeatedly, Mamet’s *Oleanna* dramatizes a power struggle over *habitus*, depicting a competition between the inculcated fictions that form the basis of an institution’s or group’s hierarchical structure. Ultimately, *Oleanna* teaches us that there are

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no absolutes, no truths, only competitive markets between sanctioned fictions of groups engaged in a field of cultural production.<sup>7</sup>

At the core of the drama in *Oleanna* is a contested cultural market of academic space. Hence, we encounter a conflict over cultural *location*. The play begins with John and Carol acting as agents in their respective academically sanctioned places—teacher and student. But the place of these sanctioned roles shifts as the power struggle ensues, creating a space for the alteration of the habitus. In this spatial conflict we witness how the justification of power is based on the socially inculcated fictions each character maintains. As the embodiment of our cultural history, habitus is the fabric of our place in society or in an institution within which we act as agents. Bourdieu explains habitus as the following:

The *habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world.<sup>8</sup>

Our habits, dispositions, inclinations, speech patterns, and belief systems belong to our habitus. We see our habitus as something constant, but it is not. Each person's habitus has the appearance of being constant since it is what Bourdieu paradoxically states to be subject to a series of regulated improvisations depending on life experiences, and it is such improvisation that we see in *Oleanna*.

My use of habitus as an interpretive tool allows for a multifaceted and complex analysis of place: for place in *Oleanna* is a matrix comprised not only of the struggle for position but the rites of institution, linguistic capital, and securing a way of life. These elements converge in *Oleanna* so that the conflict over habitus is the drama of *Oleanna*—not necessarily the characters, John and Carol, who primarily are “talking heads” of ideologies. In other words, I see John and Carol as postmodern-day allegorical depictions of contemporary power struggles for place. *Oleanna*, then, dramatizes the conflict of habitus in several ways: through John's and Carol's desire for a secure place within the institution of education in American society, through John's lesson on education, and through Carol's and her group's challenge to John's authority.

Often defending *Oleanna* from critics who find the play to be the work of a playwright trafficking in misogyny,<sup>9</sup> many scholars of *Oleanna* have explored its issues of power. Steven Ryan places *Oleanna* within a series of Mamet's plays

that include characters who “rely, or try to rely, on manipulation and intimidation to accomplish self-serving goals.”<sup>10</sup> Most studies of *Oleanna* unravel the various components and ingredients of power that compel the drama. Christine MacLeod focuses on questions of power within the pedagogical relationship between John and Carol, seeing the play as a study of class conflict and the problematic nature of a capitalistic system. The very nature of capitalism forces John and Carol to act in self-interest, using a variety of tactics—like the “control of language”—to compete within the “compulsions of Social Darwinism.”<sup>11</sup> For both of the above studies, gender is a factor as a tactic for power negotiations, and the capitalistic system infiltrating and infesting education in America forces them to attack each other in order to survive. Alan Piette, writing about the shortcomings of a capitalistic system, suggests a similar view of *Oleanna*. With the collapse of communism, Piette argues that the “world is now going through a period of redefinition of its normative political, social, and cultural values.”<sup>12</sup> The absence of a communist-bloc influence creates a gap for the “aegis of the victorious ideology, capitalism.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, Mamet’s *Oleanna* depicts the loss of the utopia of political correctness which has been taken over by a survival-of-the-fittest mentality, providing a “would-be sanitized world in which this utopian theory has become an anti-utopian terrorism of the mind. . . .”<sup>14</sup>

Other scholars have addressed the issue of power in relation to the institution of education and the use of language. These approaches identify communities of prestige in which restrictions limit the access of participants in the cultural market. Marc Silverstein, for example, argues that Mamet grounds *Oleanna* in the New Right’s attack on universities and finds John’s final beating of Carol to underscore “an ideal represented by an anachronistic image of the nuclear family that neoconservative ideology remains intent of resurrecting.”<sup>15</sup> Examining *Oleanna* as a meta-pedagogical play, Stanton B. Garner, Jr. sees it as making us aware of several concerns: “the ambiguous status of the personal and the public in institutional settings, the relationship between speech and power, the politics of interpretation and advocacy, academic constructions of authority, and the uncomfortable erotics of interactions in and out of the classroom.”<sup>16</sup> Robert Skloot demonstrates that *Oleanna* raises questions about “the use and abuse of power in the profession of teaching” while also showing that John and Carol “suffer oppression . . . in both their behavior *and* the place they inhabit.”<sup>17</sup> And Brenda Murphy focuses on the use of “specialized language” as a means to gain entry into “restricted linguistic communities that confer power, money, and/or privilege upon their members.”<sup>18</sup> These studies on power I have briefly cited above offer approaches similar to my own reading of *Oleanna*. They show that *Oleanna* provides us a blueprint for power relations within the academic institution, and they come close to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*.<sup>19</sup> Yet whereas previous studies on power have had a tendency to focus on specifically defined aspects of power, my study seeks to account for

the series or matrix of possibilities of power as an issue for *Oleanna* as I explore the habitus Mamet dramatizes.

In order to explore this matrix, the characterization of John must first be addressed. Because of John's flaws, his tendency to be viewed as overbearing, pedantic, and misogynistic, scholars like Silverstein and Heller have assigned him to non-liberal agendas. But I believe that John is liberal—someone with theoretically Marxist leanings—delivering the voice of the liberal, educated elite who objectifies the power structure of the institution of education—albeit one who also abuses his position of power.<sup>20</sup> Carol is the voice of a reactionary, conservative group that wants to maintain the traditional ideas of absolutes and truths in education—an anti-Marxist view—but who uses (and abuses) political correctness and sexual harassment against John. I focus my reading on the first act in which Mamet scripts an outline of John's post-modern philosophy.<sup>21</sup> John is not someone who teaches the maintenance of the status quo—even though he wants to live it with a new, upper middle-class house and school for his family. Hence, Mamet spends considerable time teaching the audience—through John and Carol—that authority depends upon the one who creates and maintains the best fiction, not the one who necessarily deserves that position of authority due to merit or an innate quality.

John's post-modern lesson on how fictions form the foundation of authority abounds in the first act in his lesson on what is essentially the concept of habitus. From the very beginning of *Oleanna*, deep concerns about habitus compel the drama. Immediately, this verbally active play opens with John's heated conversation with his wife, which is based on a fiction about their dream home. John unsuccessfully tries to remedy the possible loss of his newly located suburbia: "And what about the land. (*Pause*) The land. And what about the land?"<sup>22</sup> Two places occupy John's mind at this time: his hoped for tenure and this upper middle-class neighborhood. Yet unbeknownst to John and the audience the land is not in peril of being lost—at least, not yet. Grace, John's wife, creates a ploy to get John to the house for a surprise tenure party. We can only imagine that Grace intends this hoax to be humorous and at John's expense. Fiction and place come together here as the loss of John's suburban paradise becomes a part of Grace's fabricated story. John has nothing to lose. Thus, at the beginning of *Oleanna* Mamet establishes the opposite circumstance of the loss of place that will occur at the end of the play. In both the play's beginning and end John faces the loss of his paradise due to the fictions concocted by another. Scripting *Oleanna* in this manner makes for an interesting dramatic device as Mamet frames the play within fears about the loss of place—both literally and figuratively.

Carol also has anxieties about the loss of place. Not only does she fear failing John's class and possibly not obtaining a degree, but she fears that she does not fit in the institution of education altogether. So we find that so much of what motivates Carol's actions are her attempts to locate herself within the professional discipline

of education. Several of the strongest complaints she makes to John for herself—and her group—concern the struggles to go to college:

But we worked to get to this school. (*Pause.*) And some of us.  
(*Pause.*) Overcame prejudices. Economic, sexual, you cannot  
begin to imagine. And endured humiliations I *pray* that you and  
those you love never will encounter. (*Pause.*) To gain admittance  
here. To pursue that same dream of security *you* pursue.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps passages such as these fuel the tendency to see Carol as the voice of a feminist group. But Mamet addresses and emphasizes issues of work and class for Carol in ways that suggest that she is not necessarily the voice of feminism. The humiliations she endures can be both sexual and class related. And I think that her search for an academic place is more important than Mamet's scripting Carol's character as female. As a result, Mamet creates a character who is not only self-conscious of her sexuality as she pursues a career but also of her sense of being out of place at college. In this regard, Carol sounds like a first-generation college student trying to acclimate herself to the institution of higher learning: economically, socially, sexually, and academically.

But John tries to assuage her anxieties. Although Richard Badenhausen argues that John is a bad, ineffective teacher, I suggest that John teaches Carol a valuable lesson during their first encounter and proves to be quite a provocative teacher.<sup>24</sup> For in their final two encounters, we see that John has taught Carol a useful lesson on power and how to wield power. But just what lesson does John deliver to Carol in the first act? Although few scholars have focused exclusively on John's lesson and its implications, John's lesson on *how we learn* is vital to understanding this play and the characters' motives for action. When Carol comes to him for understanding, John schools her on the habitus of education, objectifying the educational field of cultural production and removing the "mysticism" of authority. Ultimately, Carol learns a lesson about how fictions form the basis for the justification and maintenance of the educational system. Through this lesson—delivered in John's academic habitat—John teaches Carol the foundation of a postmodern view of education and power. His lesson teaches that authority depends upon social capital and the field of cultural production that creates hierarchies and positions of power, a power that depends upon a series of fictions, not absolute Truths, to maintain the habitus of the discipline of education.

Once John tells Carol "Let's take the mysticism out of it, shall we?" he takes their teacher/student relationship into a radically new direction.<sup>25</sup> At this point, John decides that he wants to quit the "game" of education they have been playing. On one level, he commits himself to an act of honesty that removes the conventional roles of "professor" and "student" from their academic relationship. But Carol, we

will see, expects these roles and believes them. Throughout this initial office-space encounter, John will continue to strip himself of the expected, professorial role. And in this role-removal process he becomes less than a professor, less than an authority figure, divulging his current domestic and professional conflicts, which largely concern his anxieties about his new house and tenure. As a result, a power gap ensues. Without the professorial role of authority he becomes vulnerable and open to Carol's new, usurping voice of authority as she eventually plays a new role as the authority of sexual harassment and political correctness, filling the gap of John's absented role. Interestingly, just as there is a reversal in the loss of place, a reversal of authoritative texts also occurs in *Oleanna*. Carol's notebook becomes the text of authority—not John's “maverick” text, his ticket to the paradise of promotion.<sup>26</sup>

Yet on another level, John's honesty about the hierarchical structure and the reality of the education game signals a simple desire to finalize this professor/student relationship. His decision to remove the “mysticism” amounts to an admission that he cannot help Carol and that Carol cannot compete in the academic game of his classroom. Therefore, John has no reason for them to play the education game. This admission explains John's behavior in this act in both his creation of a radically different class for Carol and in his open expression of his uncensored thoughts. For he completely drops his professorial act and exposes himself for all his flaws and elitist desires—which he confesses to in his second encounter with Carol when he tries to explain himself and his actions. In this sense, John lets his guard down; and in a Mamet play, any character who allows himself to be vulnerable becomes the loser in a game of power. We are taught this lesson, for example, in *Glengarry Glen Ross* when we learn the abc's of power: “Always Be Closing.”<sup>27</sup> So with the “game” already in progress, John needed to be a closer; he needed to play the part until he “won” his tenured position. The education game does not end—or close—until the professor gives the grade.<sup>28</sup>

The stripping of roles begins as soon as John abandons a complete explanation of a “term of art.”<sup>29</sup> John's frank lesson moves their relationship into the realm of the objectified realities of being human with human desires and flaws and also into the objectified reality of what is at the root of the game of education. This entry into de-mystifying the game of education begins when John admits that he is not certain what a “term of art” means and that he cannot explain its meaning. Had John continued in his role of professor he might have offered some kind of definition, whether or not it were a “true” definition. As the voice of authority, he might have maintained a pedantic agenda. Here, we might consider a play often connected to Mamet's *Oleanna*: Ionesco's *The Lesson*. Ionesco's professor amasses his authoritarian role throughout the play, completely believing in and pursuing his dogma on language. Seeing *Oleanna* as a critique of the educational system, Verna Foster makes this connection between Mamet's and Ionesco's plays, asserting

that “Mamet’s play is less an antifeminist statement than it is an indictment of the educational culture in which . . . power-roles and power-games played by both professors and students make teaching destructive and learning impossible.”<sup>30</sup> However, a major distinction between John in *Oleanna* and the professor in *The Lesson* involves John’s stopping the game. Admitting that he does not know the meaning of “a term of art” and that he has forgotten its meaning, John states that a “term of art” is probably an example of frivolous information filed away in the brain. From this point on, John instructs Carol on the rules of the game of power, never thinking that she would use what he teaches/preaches against him.

The idea that such a phrase can be trivial confuses Carol. In amazement, Carol insists that a professor’s forgetting something is not possible: “You don’t do that.”<sup>31</sup> This “term of art” discussion reveals an important characteristic of Carol’s perspective that figures prominently in the conflict and drama of this play: her idealism and her belief in absolutes:

Carol: You don’t do . . .

John: . . . I don’t, what . . . ?

Carol: . . . for . . .

John: . . . I don’t for . . .

Carol: . . . no . . .

John: . . . forget things? Everybody does that.

Carol: No, they don’t.

John: They don’t . . .

Carol: No.

John: (pause): No. Everybody does that . . .<sup>32</sup>

Carol’s insistence that John does not forget underscores her belief that someone in John’s professional academic position is the foundation of knowledge. How could John, a professor, forget anything? Her response suggests her belief that as a professor of education John should know and retain everything. After all, her greatest difficulty, as she tries to explain to John, is that she cannot retain all the information John lectures on in class and provides in his book—hence, her copious note-taking. Carol forgets, but she expects John not to. In short, Carol’s expectations of John and of education are anything but postmodern. Carol believes that the purpose of education and of being educated is to pursue absolute Truths and that if she works hard enough and does what she is told she will obtain and know these Truths.

Because Mamet portrays Carol in this naive manner in the first act, I do not entirely agree with Thomas Porter’s view of Carol as the “postmodern ideologue” of the play.<sup>33</sup> She only becomes the voice of postmodernism after the first-act lesson she receives from John and when she becomes the spokesperson for her

group. And I think that one reason Carol is not a postmodern ideologue in the first act is because of her peculiar and perplexing statement at the end of this first act: "I'm bad."<sup>34</sup> This sudden confession seems to come out of nowhere, leaving one to wonder just why she is bad. Thomas H. Goggans sees this moment as a key psychological confession for Carol, arguing that "Carol constantly traffics in the code words of incest and child sexual abuse."<sup>35</sup> That Carol is a victim of sexual abuse is quite possible. But I think that her sudden confession is rather consistent with what she is learning from John during his lesson. So much of what John offers in this initial encounter involves his confessing. Carol wants to confess that she is bad and that she has "never told anyone this" because she is giving John what she thinks he wants. John also tells Carol privileged information about himself, the type he wished someone would have told him when he was young: "I'm talking to you the way I wish that someone had talked to me."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, as Carol stands before John, an authority figure and her "tenure committee," she thinks that she should expel her badness just as John spews his before the tenure committee: "And yet, I go before the Great Tenure Committee, and I have an urge, to vomit, to, to, to puke my *badness* on the table."<sup>37</sup> However, Carol does not understand that John is trying to teach her about the field of cultural production for education and the way we play these ritualized games to gain entry into its habitus. John has objectified the ritual for its inanity; Carol, while trying to figure out what John wants from her, believes she must perform this confession as a means to the good grade John has promised her.

Over and over, Carol's belief in absolutes becomes evident in her various appeals for help from John. And John's postmodern perspective versus Carol's rather modern one forms the foundation of their miscommunication. John continues to teach Carol that rules and truths are based on fictions. All the while, Carol toes the obedient line, insisting that she follows the rules of the class and telling John that even though she takes copious notes and follows his orders, she does not understand the course:

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

John: No, I'm sure . . .

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

John: . . . but . . .

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

John: . . . please . . .

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

John: I'm sorry. No. I don't think that that's true.<sup>38</sup>



Carol's expectations concerning success in the class depend on following prescribed notions of education. As long as she buys the book, reads the book, goes to class, and takes notes, she should pass the course. Normally, those activities would contribute to one's success in a course. But her emphasis on not understanding the language is vital to my point on habitus as the central conflict of this play. Carol feels as if John teaches his course in an alien language; for she has not acclimated herself to the words of his classroom. Feeling vocally and intellectually marginalized, she is out of place, voiceless, wordless, and powerless. So much of the early drama of *Oleanna* depends upon the price formation of linguistic exchange. And in John's education market, Carol's bank account of words is bankrupt of linguistic capital. Bourdieu explains the power relations in linguistic exchanges: "The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speaker's linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation."<sup>39</sup> This early focus on language underscores the foundation of the changes she and her group propose later in the play. Repeatedly, Carol wants John to use words and a language she can readily understand, and, ultimately, she wants to eliminate John's instituted and academically sanctioned words: his book. One of the possible implications of the final act of *Oleanna* is that Carol—and I imagine the members of her group—could pass John's class if she eliminates John's *langue* and *parole*.

Given John's dismantling of authority and objectification of the institution of education, we can understand Carol's plea for John to "*Teach me. Teach me.*"<sup>40</sup> Carol does not understand John's liberal-elite, postmodern approach to education. So Carol's simple, passionate plea comes as soon as John's lecture suggests that nothing definitive underscores his educational practices and policies:

John: What do you want me to do? We are two people, all right?

Both of whom have subscribed to . . .

Carol: No, no . . .

John: . . . Certain arbitrary . . .

Carol: No. You have to help me.

John: Certain institutional . . .<sup>41</sup>

Carol's strongest, emphatic protest comes at this point in the play with her repeated declarative "No." Even though she wants to save her grade, she also does not want to hear John's lecture because of the language John uses. Here, John addresses the roles of the "professor" and "student." By breaking the "fourth wall" of their academic relationship, he tells her that she and he are playing roles each has "subscribed to." Using language and concepts Carol does not understand, ones not in her habitus, we see John performing what Carol struggles with in the classroom. I find the word "arbitrary" so very important for this moment since "arbitrary" comes to the root

of the practices of authority for this play. John's assertion that they have subscribed to arbitrary rules refers to the rules/roles "professor" and "student" must play. The bulk of the dialogue of the first act involves John breaking these "rules/roles" as a means to teach Carol a lesson on postmodernism.

But Carol's plea for John to "*Teach*" her at this point suggests that his belief that the rules and roles by which they operate are "arbitrary" makes her uneasy and confused. This moment defines the crux of their conflict. John objectifies the social, educational game into which they have "bought." John, therefore, is a professor who is not playing the expected role of a "professor." While John explains that the education game requires that a hierarchy be in place and that they perform a whole series of habits, rituals, and utterances appropriate and appropriated for these roles, he also teaches that the system is arbitrary because a cultural history—which helps to designate and maintain the habitus—established a system by which the roles, the expectations, and the rites of institution exist. And this contemporary educational system has become consumer-based; it needs students to maintain the market. So John compounds her confusion when he speaks of the idea of the "Virtual warehousing of the young" and "artificially" prolonging adolescence.<sup>42</sup> Here, we get another glimpse of what John teaches in his class and book. According to John, the educational field of cultural production operates like a Wal Mart, relying upon large-scale production to maintain its capitalist-driven methods to sustain itself. John provides a Marxist-based analysis of education that describes the system in terms of social economics and its value-base as being dependent upon social capital and student investment. The business of education needs students both as consumers and as products in order to maintain the academic market. Hence, John delivers his lesson on entitlement and education—"that all are entitled to Higher Education."<sup>43</sup> Education, for the sake of educating young intellectuals, no longer exists, only to become a process of "hazing" and "something-other-than-useful."<sup>44</sup> Here, John performs what Bourdieu identifies as heretical practices since he challenges the orthodox, institutionally approved practices, pointing out that in American society, fueled by high-octane capitalism, if one pays for an education, then one is entitled to an education.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, though, Carol wants to be "warehoused," for she expects to be fed information. After John dismissively tells her that "It's just a course, it's just a *book*"—mere items or products in an industry of education—Carol asserts her idealistic perspective that is based on the pursuit of a foundation of knowledge:

No. No. There are *people* out there. People who came *here*. To know something they didn't *know*. Who *came* here. To be *helped*. To be *helped*. So someone would *help* them. To do something. To *know* something.<sup>46</sup>

Carol is the naïve voice of the innocent wandering in from the non-academic wilderness, the one who speaks for those outside of the “elite” institution of upper education. She—and the others she speaks for—has come to boost her intellectual and social class stock in trade. That there are “*people out there*” suggests that there is an entire population of prospective students hungry to consume the fast-food of knowledge in the *warehouse* of education. With her idealism fueling her professional motives, Carol does not see her entry into upper education as a move into a “warehouse.” Mamet scripts these competing ideologies so that John’s perspective on education belittles her plans, making Carol take particular offense to his philosophy. Carol does not want to view upper education as an investment in the profit of distinction; she expects that her education will open doors, not enclose her within a theoretical *warehouse*. She imagines she is in the great outdoors when she enters the Cabela’s or Bass Pro Shop. So when Carol and her group want to ban John’s book, they want to censure an authoritative and heretical text that undermines and undervalues their career goals and future professional positions.

Carol also asserts that they (she and who she speaks for) came to college to “*know*” and “*do*” something and to be “*helped*.” Carol wants concrete products of education, not an abstract lesson on social consciousness; Carol wants facts, not a critique of the system’s arbitrary and artificial practices. In other words, Carol wants the fiction; she wants to be *in* education’s field of cultural production, not *outside* it, critiquing it. So she resists being made conscious of the habitus that comprises education’s system. She does not want to know that fictions orchestrate the hierarchy, so she rejects the notion that the system is not absolutely fixed. Ultimately, she will negotiate her way within the established order to overthrow John’s arbitrary one. In this sense, Carol performs a necessary act in maintaining a habitus. Bourdieu tells us that in order to keep an institution or group in place members of that organization must ignore or not acknowledge that the hierarchies and rules that keep it in existence are arbitrary. To succeed in the education game, then, Carol must ignore the objective mechanisms and practices of its habitus that John tries to teach her so that she can believe in it, which will allow her to practice it and participate within it.

As a result, Carol’s challenge of John’s authority is quite logical. John’s teaching method intends to release students from the “warehouse” of education. But in an American culture where cubicles have become typical spaces for work, John’s liberating agenda and intentions lead him to the destruction of his academic position. After all, if authority is a matter of arbitrary fictions that establish an order that is only an “order,” then why is John important or necessary? How is his job and position justified? Regardless, John “comes clean” with Carol after she proclaims what is at the core of her frustration:

And everybody's talking about "this" all the time. And "concepts," and "precepts" and, and, and, and, and, WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? And I read your book. And they said, "Fine, go in that class." Because you talked about responsibility to the young. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS AND I'M FAILING . . .<sup>47</sup>

I consider this moment in the play a pivotal and very honest one for Carol. Due to the sudden change in Carol's character for the second act, some viewers might believe that the Carol of the first act is playing a part in an attempt to trick John. However, Mamet scripts a character who I find to be quite consistent throughout the play, especially if we see her as a character who wants to follow a prescribed path. At this point in the play, Carol expresses how lost she is in this class. She feels powerless and outside the dominant language of the classroom. Other students are in the theoretical "know" of the class, with its language and concepts that escape Carol's comprehension. Lacking the legitimate competence of the other participants in the class, Carol is outside the linguistic market of this habitus.

And these other students have felt, possibly, liberated by John's critique of the seemingly entrenched system that justifies and establishes authority and a core curriculum. After all, other students told Carol to take John's class because he expressed his "responsibility to the young" and the future generations of teachers. Carol, however, anticipated and wanted a traditional form of education—or at least one where the professor tells her what she needs to know. She does not want an education that provokes her, stimulates her, and leaves the possibilities open for her to discover with no concrete answers. She wants a defined place. Interestingly, she wants what Mamet asserts is missing in modern life:

What is missing from modern life is spirituality—the connection to the greater truths of the universe. What is missing is the feeling of knowing our place and our sense of belonging. It's the theater's job to address the questions of "What is our place in the universe?" and "How can we live in a world in which we know we're going to die?"<sup>48</sup>

Carol experiences an existential crisis in John's class. She wants answers; but John does not provide them. So she experiences the absurd as defined by Albert Camus: "At this point of effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."<sup>49</sup> In this respect, Carol not only faces her loss of place in the university but also a spiritual loss of place; for John tests her belief system. This disruption of her belief system figures

prominently in the final two encounters of this play. Without the need to adhere to specific rules or absolutes, she can determine authority and power by her own model or “paradigm”—a word she insists John not use.<sup>50</sup> For Carol comes to be in the position to assert what she *thinks* is right and matters.

But what is John’s “responsibility to the young”? He dispels the rigid, absolutist methods of education in order to liberate the class and show how the matrix of power establishes an agenda for and the practices of education. In other words, John objectifies the habitus of the institution of education. And we witness his objectification when he informs Carol that what we *know* is based on what we are *told* by someone who is in a position of power and recognized as an authority. Essentially, John also instructs Carol on Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power: power given to an authority figure by the group that sanctions that person’s position.<sup>51</sup> This lesson on symbolic power begins when John tells Carol “a story” about his “earliest, and most persistent memories . . . of being told that [he] was stupid.”<sup>52</sup> When John gets personal by offering an autobiography of his educational experience, he underscores two vital aspects of his lesson: one, by being personal he breaks the expected authority-based roles of professor and student; and two, his telling “a story” helps to demonstrate the fictive nature of the institution of education. John does not tell Carol that rules govern the educational process and that if one studies well and follows the rules, then that person will gain knowledge. He instructs Carol that education, like other institutions, is a game run by people who have only a socially sanctioned, arbitrary right to institute the practices inculcated in the educational field of production. As a result we hear John express disparaging comments about the tenure committee—“Why, they had people voting on me I wouldn’t employ to wax my car”—and about taking tests—“They are not a test of your worth. They are a test of your ability to retain and spout back misinformation.”<sup>53</sup> As is so very typical of John’s attitude about the educational and professional system he works within, he discounts and dismisses its authority figures, its practices, and its rituals, offering a full critique of its habitus.

Additionally, with a post-modern focus on identity and how others *identify* us, John dispels the “mystery” of education when he gives Carol what I call his “How People Learn” speech. This two-part speech introduces the fundamental perspective and guidelines of John’s lesson. The first part of this speech addresses John’s struggle to learn when he viewed education as a specific, absolute practice. Relating to Carol’s own struggle, John tells Carol that he, too, used to believe that “*real people*” held all the keys to knowledge: “*They* were the people other than myself. The *good* people. The *capable* people. The people who could do the things, I could not do: learn, study, retain. . . .”<sup>54</sup> This confession underscores John’s epiphany about the education institution and how he felt and believed that he was an outsider of the institution. There were *others* who were “*capable*” and “*good*” and who were inherently able to do the things that he could not do. Therefore, it

was impossible for him to learn since he could not gain access to some kind of proverbial “Well of Knowledge” that had all the answers. In this moment of empathy for Carol, John expresses that he at one time believed that he lacked the legitimate competence to participate in the academic market.

The second part of this speech introduces John’s epiphany: how all that John thought before about learning was “*garbage*.”<sup>55</sup> And he begins his critique of the belief in absolutes, delivering what I see to be a key lesson on the habitus of education. Here we find out what John has “been talking of in class”: “Listen to this. If the young child is told he cannot understand. Then he takes it as a *description* of himself. What am I? I am *that which can not understand*.”<sup>56</sup> Voices of authority outside of oneself shape identity and self-expectations. A person fails because of a series of descriptors applied to that person. Depending upon our habitus, we have cognitive-based pre-dispositions to act inscribed within us by others. And John realizes that has fed into this de-valuing treatment of Carol. So John admits his mistake—“that’s *my* fault”—when Carol does not understand the concepts he talks about in class.<sup>57</sup> John tries to engage Carol in social awareness, breaking down the practices of authority. Like one schooled and schooling in Marxist thought, he wants to awaken her social consciousness to the methods of oppression by outlining the field of cultural production for the discipline of education.

The irony, of course, is that he does not practice what he preaches. While being the voice of the liberal educator, he comes off as pedantic and arrogant, spoon-feeding his dogma to Carol. And in John’s attempts to teach her the reality of the habitus of education, he insults her rather than helps her. The greatest insult comes when he marks down the value of Carol’s education:

Somebody told *you*, and you hold it as an article of faith, that higher education is an unassailable good. This notion is so dear to you that when I question it you become angry. Good. Good, I say. . . . I say college education, since the war, has become so a matter of course, and such a fashionable necessity, for those either of or aspiring *to* the new vast middle class, that we *espouse* it, as a matter of right, and have ceased to ask, “What is it good for?”<sup>58</sup>

While admitting that he recognizes her anger, John objectifies the discipline of education, revealing the whimsical operation of its practices. Here, his view of education confronts Carol’s view as he explains the conflict between their competing perspectives. Ultimately, we see the conflict of habitus as John critiques Carol’s view of and motives for an education, even outlining a series of reasons why someone would go to college:

*One:* A love of learning.

*Two:* The wish for mastery of a skill.

*Three:* For economic betterment.<sup>59</sup>

John's trivialization and objectification of the discipline of education makes Carol's motives and dreams for her future worthless. In a sense he tells her that her grand notions for pursuing an education are due to a series of lies she has been fed by a thoughtless, capricious system, and that thoughtless, capricious system is the habitus from which she comes.

If we view John's lesson in this manner, then we see that Carol has plenty of reasons to behave the way she does in the second act.<sup>60</sup> As we find out in their next two encounters in Act Two and Three, Carol wants something more than a good grade in the class. John has cleared that problem up for her, giving her a conditional A for the course. But what Carol wants is the institution, the habitus that John dismantles—the tenure committee he would not let wash his car, the system of education he calls hazing, and even the new, “Nice *house*, close to the *private school*” he flaunts in her face.<sup>61</sup> So Carol's motives for action in Act Two and Three are to attack John's habitus and destroy the post-modern philosophy of education that he advocates.

As John goes over the report that Carol and her group sent to the tenure committee, he tries to play the role of the professor we witnessed at the beginning of Act One. Unfortunately for him, he cannot regain that role. Carol is in power, and her definition of reality controls the education game they now play. Finding himself in a submissive and humbling position, John offers a rhetorical strategy that sounds like a confession. Professing his love for teaching, John attempts to explain his motives. He tells Carol that he wanted to be different from his own teachers when he became one: “. . . I swore that I would not become that cold, rigid automaton of an instructor which I encountered as a child.”<sup>62</sup> As a fighter against education's status quo, John wants to define himself as being apart from the place of education from which he came. And Mamet creates a speech for John that is heavily self-conscious of place. John talks of his motives for behavior and what he desires, trying to explain his habitus by defining his past and his present. Ironically, however, John became what he did not want to be—a rigid automaton—making him a product of the habitus he wanted to avoid.

Yet a considerable amount of this speech contains a confession about that which John feels guilty: security and comfort. Due to this aspect of John's confession, I find him to be liberal minded and neo-Marxist in his theoretical approach. For he feels guilty for wanting the trappings of a capitalistic society as he talks about tenure: “I asked myself if I was wrong to covet it.”<sup>63</sup> Mamet offers a character who reflects upon his ambitions for power and who is aware that certain items and positions

he desires are not consistent with his philosophical agenda. This self-reflection is especially evident when he talks of his duties “*beyond* the school”:

That tenure, and security, and yes, and *comfort*, were not, of themselves, to be scorned; and were even worthy of honorable pursuit. And that it was given me. Here, in this place, which I enjoy, and in which I find comfort, to assure myself of—as far as it rests in The Material—a continuation of that joy and comfort. In exchange for what? Teaching. Which I love.<sup>64</sup>

If John were a power-hungry, manipulative character like some of Mamet’s other characters—Roma and Moss in *Glengarry Glen Ross* or Mike in *House of Games*—he would not be reflecting upon this guilt over desiring a tenured position as a means to security.<sup>65</sup> But John has thought through the implications of what he desires and has decided that the practical reasons—a good home and neighborhood for his family—outweigh his political and philosophical perspective. This confession and much of Act Two amount to John’s being in the act of *re-formation*. He wants to re-form the habitus of the game of education he was originally playing with Carol. And he wants to re-form his ways; hence, his attempts to take back what he said in their first encounter. So now good people form the tenure committee, and the process for tenure is good, and teaching is, above all, his primary objective in life. The fictions must be embraced. But now John faces a newly empowered Carol and her mysterious group. Many readers and scholars—like Heller, Bean, and Silverstein—see Carol’s group as a feminist one.<sup>66</sup> Yet to understand Carol we need to imagine a scene not scripted by Mamet where Carol meets with members of her group as they go over her notes. Everything in her notes happened in John’s office—albeit taken out of context: he embraced her; he asked her to return often to his office; he would give her an A if she did what he asked; he told a randy story; and he discussed problems at home. Proving to be a good student, Carol masters, as Richard Badenhause argues, the lesson John gave her in their previous encounter: “a penchant for intellectual bullying; an ability to use language ambiguously so as to get her way; and an outlook on the world informed by a deep-seated cynicism about human relations.”<sup>67</sup> Using fictions to assert her perspective and utilizing the ingredients of the habitus of education, Carol engages her new practices of power by dismantling and attacking John’s habitus: forcing him to speak the words she wants, threatening to ban his book, turning him in to the tenure committee so that he will lose his job, and, finally, linguistically invading John’s home.

As Acts Two and Three demonstrate, context determines meaning. In the first act, we witness the context of the words Carol uses against John in their final two encounters. And I think that if anyone feels sympathy for John, that sympathy is due to our privileged view of John’s and Carol’s actions in Act One. Yet *Oleanna*



also shows us that fictions can construct “reality.” And it is Carol’s “reality” of their experience that she asserts when she claims that John raped her. The law says, according to Carol, that since John “pressed” his body against her that he attempted to rape her.<sup>68</sup> Carol can use this claim against John because of what she learned from him in their first encounter. John taught her that fictions control and construct the perceptions of reality and the matrix of power, and Carol applies that lesson to her attack on John. She plays, then, by John’s rules. Without a belief in absolutes, Carol can assert that John believes in nothing. Carol tells him so when she explains to him that he has only worked for power: “YOU BELIEVE IN NOTHING. YOU BELIEVE IN NOTHING AT ALL.”<sup>69</sup> Carol comes to this conclusion since John advocates an agenda and perspective founded on the idea that truths are fictions. With their designs to eliminate certain books from John’s curriculum, Carol and her group want John out of teaching for ideological reasons. So when Carol asserts to John, “You have an agenda, we have an agenda” Carol underscores my point that she is in pursuit of a conservative agenda, whether or not she is speaking for the “feelings of women. And men” and John’s superiors.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, she wants to strip John of his agenda, his educational game, and his habitus. John’s ““concepts”” and ““precepts,”” which are part of a liberal program that forced her to radically shift her expectations about education, are at stake here.<sup>71</sup> Hence, the banning of his book—an institutionally sanctioned item of power—becomes a means by which to destroy that postmodern agenda.

Scholars and critics have responded to the controversial ending of the play with a plethora of explanations for John’s violent action and Carol’s final statement: “Yes. That’s right.”<sup>72</sup> My reading of the conclusion is consistent with Mamet’s comments on *Oleanna* and with my focus on habitus. For the act that forces John over the edge is Carol’s linguistic invasion of John’s home. Facing the loss of his place in academia, John only has his home and family. Having been absent from home for two days, John had not learned of Carol’s charges of rape and battery against him. Interestingly as a switch in the power dynamics, Carol tells John that he had “better get that phone” when it rings.<sup>73</sup> That John has been “homeless” for a few days underscores the significance of place for this play. John has been absent from home; and he has been absented from his position as professor. And Carol is the force behind those absences. So when Carol tells John not to call his wife “Baby,” she moves linguistically into his home, invading his personal space. By usurping or denying John his performative utterances within the home and with his wife, she attempts to disrupt his primary habitus. The system completely breaks, and John rages with two of the least politically correct words on the list: “bitch” and “cunt.”<sup>74</sup> In the end, from Carol’s victimized perspective her “That’s right” proves her point about John’s obsession with power.

No doubt many who have studied *Oleanna* are familiar with the original, alternative ending for the Royal Court Theatre production in 1993. Harold Pinter

wanted John to read aloud a prepared text, McCarthy style, confessing to his own guilt. And given how often John confesses in this play, his confessing at the end lends a sense of consistency to his character. But Mamet did not think that the confession worked, and even though Pinter believed that the beating does not make sense, he went with Mamet's version. In interviews Mamet has explained the logic for the conclusive beating. Seeing Carol and John as both right and wrong, Mamet intends the ending to be a tragic defeat: "It's structured as tragedy. The professor is the main character. He undergoes absolute reversal of situation, absolute recognition at the last moment of the play. He realizes that perhaps he is the cause of the plague on Thebes."<sup>75</sup> Watching the conclusion of the Mamet-directed film version of *Oleanna*, one sees a dejected and painful recognition on William H. Macy's face as he looks away from Carol who cowers on the floor.

I find this recognition and the conclusion as scripted by Mamet to suit a play that focuses so much on place, on the "failed Utopia of Academia," on the habitus of John and Carol in the field of cultural production for education.<sup>76</sup> John and Carol go to their separate corners, their combatively isolated places. But of what is John guilty? He undermines the American capitalistic ideology's infestation of education. In this respect, John is un-American, not buying into the system. In a society where the practices of big business have taken over the running of upper education—like university being presidents regarded as CEO's—we witness the depletion of a system devoted to knowledge and education. To fit within the corporate model, students are often socio-economically referred to as clients whom educators must satisfy. The warehouse, in other words, will accommodate more and more Carols. Perhaps, we need to ask, as John does, what is education good for if it does something other than educate? Via John's attack, Carol's "That's right" confirms the tragedy of the capitalistic abuse of the system of education. Education under the auspices of a bloated plutocracy forces the survival-of-the-fittest actions we witness in *Oleanna* as each character uses, abuses, and works within the system of the discipline of education to pursue a sense of security based on fabrications of place.

## Notes

1. David Mamet, *Oleanna, The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, ed. Lee A. Jacobus, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001) 1642-57.

2. Generally, scholarship on *Oleanna* focuses on five topics—sexual harassment, sexual politics, power, language, and education—and contains two camps of critics of *Oleanna*—condemners and defenders—making *Oleanna* one of Mamet's most divisive plays. And since Mamet creates humanly flawed characters, he does not provide easy-to-define characters by which audience members can reliably demarcate good from bad. Typically, if a critical approach to *Oleanna* is sympathetic to Carol, then it interprets the play with a reading that uses gender politics or sexual harassment as a focus. If a critical approach is sympathetic to John, then it addresses issues of power, language, or education as the basis of its interpretation. See David Sauer and Janice A. Sauer, "Misreading Mamet: Scholarship and Reviews," *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 220-42; Sauer and Sauer provide a clear, extensive review of this scholarly inclination to either

condemn or defend Mamet and his works (225-226). And nearly all critical analyses of *Oleanna* place their thesis on one side or the other. See Kellie Bean, "A Few Good Men: Collusion and Violence in *Oleanna*," *Gender and Genre: Essays on David Mamet*, ed. Christopher C. Hudgins and Leslie Kane (New York: Plagrave, 2001) 109-123. Bean's essay confronts this split in scholarly approaches to Mamet's problematic play early in its discussion. Seeing a "backlash against interpretations focusing on gender politics" for *Oleanna*, Bean identifies sexual harassment as the issue of *Oleanna*, grounding it within the cultural context of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings (109). For Bean, the critical approaches that "favor discussions of power, language, or political correctness gone horribly wrong" as issues for the play demonstrate a backlash against sexual harassment and feminism (109). Therefore, due to Carol's claim of sexual harassment, critics, scholars, and directors have interpreted *Oleanna* as being a play about sexual harassment. Of course, the timing for the premiere of *Oleanna* in 1992 within the wake of both Anita Hill's testimony on Clarence Thomas's alleged sexual harassment and Susan Faludi's publication of *Backlash* in 1991 helps to fuel the placement of Mamet's contentious play within this historical and cultural context. So it is logical to view this play as one about sexual harassment. My own study, with its focus on power issues, follows Mamet's own assertions about this play: *Oleanna* is "not about sexual harassment. It's about power." See Mamet's above statements in Leonard Lopate, "Interview with David Mamet," *New York and Company*, WNYC, New York, 25 Oct. 1994.

3. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., "Framing the Classroom: Pedagogy, Power, *Oleanna*," *Theatre Topics* 10.1 (2000): 39.

4. Mamet, *Oleanna* 1657.

5. My knowledge of Bourdieu's concept comes from two primary texts. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) and *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

6. *The Logic* 56.

7. Pierre Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 29-37.

8. *The Logic* 56.

9. Those using the sexual harassment argument typically launch an attack on Mamet himself. See Janet Ruth Heller, "David Mamet's Trivialization of Feminism and Sexual Harassment in *Oleanna*," *Midamerica* 27 (2000): 93-105; and see Kellie Bean. Both Janet Ruth Heller and Kellie Bean, for example, see *Oleanna* "as part of a backlash against the feminist movement" (Heller 93). Arguing that Mamet trivializes feminism and sexual harassment, Heller attacks Mamet as one who "indicts feminism as mindless, inherently manipulative, and hostile to men" (93). Seeing Carol as fighting an entrenched patriarchal academic system, Bean contends that *Oleanna* is typical of "works exhibiting anxieties regarding the so-called political correctness movement," and she belittles Mamet as one who "embraces a conservative generic paradigm: American realism" (115). Both of these scholars defend Carol, who, for them, is the voice or representative of feminism and whom Mamet purposely created as the "weaker, less educated, less successful [example] against which the audience is invited to judge John" (Bean 114).

10. Steven Ryan, "*Oleanna*: David Mamet's Power Play," *Modern Drama* 39.3 (1996): 393.

11. Christine MacLeod, "The Politics of Gender, Language and Hierarchy in Mamet's *Oleanna*," *Journal of American Studies* 29 (1995): 202 and 207.

12. Alan Piette, "The Devil's Advocate: David Mamet's *Oleanna* and Political Correctness," *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theatre and Drama*, ed. Marc Maufort (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 177.

13. 177.

14. 178.

15. Marc Silverstein, "'We're Just Human': *Oleanna* and Cultural Crisis," *South Atlantic Review* 60 (1995): 113.

16. 41.

17. Robert Skloot, "*Oleanna*, or, the Play of Pedagogy," *Gender and Genre: Essays on David Mamet*, ed. Christopher C. Hudgins and Leslie Kane (New York: Plagrave, 2001) 97 and 96.

18. Brenda Murphy, "*Oleanna*: Language and Power," *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 126.

19. Scholars like Skloot and Murphy are interested in place and accession into positions of power, examining the ways in which *Oleanna* dramatizes acts of cultural *location*—location both as a specified physical space and as a means to put someone in a professional position. And when Skloot argues that *Oleanna* can be linked to Mamet's "preoccupation with the issue of *teaching*," he points out that Mamet consistently portrays the mechanisms that underscore the act of teaching: "of how facts, customs, and

feelings are transmitted among inhabitants of the same social and cultural spaces" (96).

20. Objectify and objectification as used in this essay mean to strip the habitus of its mystery and present it for what it really is. In this respect, I see the act of objectification as one in which one breaks from the immediate experience of the social world to see it for its reducible parts, social mechanisms and power relations.

21. Here and later in my analysis of *Oleanna*, post-modernism means to reject the concept of essences or established truths. Whereas modernism believes that meaning exists, post-modernism believes there are no essential truths.

22. 1642.

23. 1655.

24. Richard Badenhausen, "The Modern Academy Raging in the Dark: Misreading Mamet's Political Incorrectness in *Oleanna*," *College Literature* 25.3 (1998): 2.

25. 1642.

26. 1654.

27. David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross* (New York: Grove P, 1982) 13.

28. What happens in *Oleanna* happens in many of Mamet's plays. A survey of Mamet's works—like *American Buffalo*, *House of Games*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Wag the Dog*—reveals a consistent focus on power struggles contending within a professional practice (or discipline or game) within which "victors" are those who master fictions and control the perception (or illusion) of reality. In many cases more than providing character studies Mamet creates studies of the ingredients and mechanisms that comprise the structure and components of a group or institution—what Mamet calls his drama of "human interactions." See Leslie Kane, ed., *David Mamet in Conversation* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001) 135. So we view portrayals of habitus: how to play the game of con artistry, of real estate, of politics, or of education.

29. Mamet, *Oleanna* 1642.

30. Verna Foster, "Sex, Power, and Pedagogy in Mamet's *Oleanna* and Ionesco's *The Lesson*," *American Drama* 5.1 (1995): 37.

31. 1642.

32. 1642-43.

33. Thomas Porter, "Postmodernism and Violence in Mamet's *Oleanna*," *Modern Drama* 43.1 (2000): 28.

34. 1649.

35. Thomas H. Goggans, "Laying Blame: Gender and Subtext in David Mamet's *Oleanna*," *Modern Drama* 40.4 (1997): 435.

36. 1646.

37. 1647.

38. 1643.

39. *Language* 67.

40. 1644.

41. 1643-44.

42. 1644.

43. 1647.

44. 1647.

45. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988) 84-88.

46. 1644-45.

47. 1645.

48. Hank Nuwer, "Two Gentlemen of Chicago: David Mamet and Stuart Gordon," *The South Carolina Review* 17 (1985): 10.

49. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991) 28.

50. 1650.

51. *Language* 51-52.

52. 1645.

53. 1646-47.

54. 1645.

55. 1645.

56. 1645.

57. 1645.

58. 1648.

59. 1648.

60. Brenda Murphy offers worthy insight into Carol's motives for action and feelings about her situation under John's direction: "Carol does not object to authority or to the institutions that wield power, she simply wants access to them. Her objection to John is that he tries to deny that he is wielding power and is making *her* feel bad for doing so" (131).

61. 1648.

62. 1650.

63. 1650.

64. 1650.

65. Of course, an actor could read this part at this moment as if John is conning Carol. I also think that John is desperate, so he is trying anything to persuade Carol to see things his way.

66. And because Carol is a less than valorous or powerful figure, scholars have a tendency to see her as a poor representative of feminism, again suggesting that Mamet has deliberately stacked the favor against Carol for rather misogynistic reasons. Heller, for example, finds Carol "not believable" as a feminist (101). And Silverstein suggests that "Mamet's depiction of Carol's feminism is so blatantly unfair that we are asked *not* to regard her as a 'true' feminist" (110). I suggest that she is, in fact, not a feminist. Carol never mentions feminism or identifies herself and her group as feminist. Yet she uses sexual harassment and political correctness as tools of empowerment because they are available to her within the habitus of education. And she uses her notebook—"a sign of 'submission, or 'obedience,' in Act 1" according to Brenda Murphy (130)—as a text of empowerment in Act Two.

67. 14.

68. 1656.

69. 1654.

70. 1654.

71. 1645.

72. 1657. See, for example, Badenhouse 16, Bean 123, and Murphy 136.

73. 1656.

74. 1657.

75. See Leslie Kane, ed., *David Mamet in Conversation* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001)

119.

76. David Mamet, "Mamet on Playwriting," *The Dramatists Guild Quarterly* 30.1 (1993): 10.



# PRAXIS

