

## I. General Introduction

### David Mamet as a Writer and the Context of *Oleanna*

David Alan Mamet was born to a Jewish family in Flossmor, Illinois, suburb of Chicago in 1947. He was educated at Francis W. Parker school, attended Goddard College in Vermont and there discovered the passion for theater. He was trained as an actor under the famous acting teacher Sanford Meisner, whose emphasis on practical, outward techniques - rather than the method of internalization – influenced Mamet's philosophy of acting as well as his writing.

When Mamet's first plays *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Duck Variations* (both 1972), were published in off – off Broadway in 1975, they quickly established him as a writer. *American Buffalo* (1975), set in Chicago junk store startled audiences and critics with its bleak outlook and antisocial underpinnings. Mamet received a Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for his *Glengarry Glen Ross*, about a group of troubled Chicago real estate agents. His other successful plays include *A Life in Theater* (1977), *Speed-the-Plow* (1988), *Oleanna* (1993) and *The Cryptogram* (1995).

David Mamet's work epitomizes controversy. His plays are sparse on action with notoriously realistic dialogue and his dramatic style reflects the inarticulateness and violence in alienated members of lower-middle class. Poetic, comically fragmented and often shocking, Mamet's use of language has been compared to the Greek dramatist Aristophanes, Earnest Hemingway, Irish author Samuel Beckett and he is in many ways considered to be the American successor to British playwright Harold Pinter.

Regarding the themes and issues in Mamet's plays Michael Portillo in his article

entitled “Pass Master” remarks:

Mamet’s plays often deal with the decline of morality in a world which has become an emotional and spiritual wasteland. Though his plays differ in style and intent, most of them share some characteristics: a sense of life as tangle, of truth as prismatic and mercurial and of secrecy and deception as contemporary dynamics.(24)

Mamet having taught at Goddard College, at Yale Drama School, and at New York University, has a big personal base for writing on the life of a professor and teacher- student relationship which is the focal point of the play *Oleanna*. Mamet wrote *Oleanna* soon after the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, which were the main factor in bringing the term “sexual harassment” into household usage. Clarence Thomas, a nominee for the United States Supreme Court was charged of sexual harassment by Anita Hill, the University of Oklahoma law professor. The case became “he said, she said” and highlighted the balance in gender politics in the early 1990’s, particularly the inequalities of the primarily masculine workplace. Thomas was confirmed despite the accusations, but national awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace and in other institutional settings increased dramatically. Combined with its growing concerns with political correctness, American culture was primed for the issues that *Oleanna* raises.

The play holds a unique place within the rest of Mamet’s body of work. He has often been accused of writing females as males, and *Oleanna* tests the bounds of this characterization. Carol is not particularly feminine, but Mamet signifies her sex by giving her several undesirable, weak traits that contrasts John’s, such as her depression and her consumption by self-doubt. The characters’ inability to communicate is expressed in the

play's rhetorical structure, its stops, its interruptions, and its false starts; this is Mamet's realistic dialogue in top form. The action is sparse, as usual and the play does not deal with anything fantastic or extraordinary. Mamet instead emphasizes the subtext behind the common exchanges - how that which seems mundane is seldom uninteresting. This is very much in the spirit of Pinter and is a common strain throughout Mamet's works. Unusually, *Oleanna* is almost entirely lacking in the profanity that characterizes Mamet's works. This absence may be due to the play's educational setting or simply the nature of characters; in this sense the play is an example of Mamet's breaking stereotype and proving his range as a writer.

### **Reversal of Power in *Oleanna***

David Mamet's *Oleanna* reflects dynamics of ideology and power shift which operates in discourse practices. In the play Mamet portrays unequal power relationship between the male professor John and the female student Carol. John the professor who is an epitome of patriarchal ideology exhibits power in his every gesture because of being in powerful hierarchical position in the university and because of his race. The student Carol's resistance to John's power and position and her charges against him of sexual harassment ultimately results in power reversal in the play.

The Foucauldian definition of the term 'power' is the theoretical base on which this thesis illustrates and analyses the reversal of power in *Oleanna*. While defining 'power', it would also be appropriate to see its position in relation to the terms like truth, discourse, language, knowledge, domination, and resistance.

'Power' means: "a position of ascendancy; ability to compel obedience; dominion, a military force; ability to wage war; capability of acting or producing effect; a

mental or physical ability or aptitude; political sway, social sway; legal authority, one that has influence or authority”(*Oxford Dictionary*). Power is any and every capacity to produce result, and thus indicates a state of possessing the ability to wield coercive force, permissive authority and substantial influence. Any system is both principally and pragmatically based on the persistent circulation of power and its influence and sway generates and gathers the further force for its own effective consolidation that ultimately brings about the marking of distinction and hierarchy in a situational entity. Though generally, power is viewed with negative conception, as an unnecessary force to confirm truth, it can also be creative and productive if it is used to serve the people and humanity.

The dictionary meaning of ‘reversal’ is: “a change from being successful to having problems or being defeated; a change of something so that it is the opposite of what it was; an exchange of positions or functions between two or more people” (*Oxford Dictionary*). In this manner power reversal signifies the reversal of power between unequal power relations or in other words the domineering force losing its position and the dominated one coming into power.

The generally held conception of power is centralization within the system of hierarchy. The absolute power is conceived as the center from where the things around are dominated and ruled. In this pattern power is practiced for more power. Furthermore, the exercise of power always tends to be in the favor of its masters simply for their benefits and rule in the everlasting way. From the side of discrimination, power is exercised from characteristically two aspects: creative and destructive. However, as a natural trait, power is a universal tool to determine one’s subject position and hegemony.

Power creates a shift in the direction of thinking that forms basis for the

production of truth which implies for the status of human subjects in society. Power comes from discourse which produces knowledge. It highlights the basic link between power relations and their capacity to the truths humans live by.

In any society there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourse of truth which operates through and on the basis of its association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power.

The major concern of power is with language and society. Language is a social system. Knowledge, which is the basis of power is associated with language, because it is produced through the later, and the language is related to the society but not with the individual mind and consciousness because language is not a personal individual component. So, it is the language that plays vital role in controlling and losing power. In this sense language is the means of replacing and displacing the power.

In *Oleanna*, the male professor, John, possessing power appears as a representative icon of the established ideology in comparison with the female student, Carol, representing the powerless class. The confrontation with language between professor and student illuminates the hierarchical relationship within institutions. Moreover, there is the power shift of language between male and female characters. One who has the power of language can control and suppress others' voice.

Through the unequal relationship between professor and student, this text is concerned with the 'subject position' and 'the other'. It can be possible to be a subject if

one may have domination over language. Also, the control of language is associated with the will to knowledge. Most importantly, Carol attempts to accomplish the reversal of ideology of power by engaging in plays on signifiers.

In *Oleanna*, we can identify Mamet's grim perspective on higher education and controversial aspects of political correctness. As a social institution including the patriarchal culture, the educational institution functions as one of the fundamental social ideologies. The issue of sexual harassment in the play is essentially linked with power relationship. Apart from all these things, the concern of this research is also to investigate how language use can affect the formation of power and how power of language use transfers through this text.

### **Critics on *Oleanna***

*Oleanna*, a play by David Mamet, has received acclamation and stirred great controversy since its publication and production in 1992. The play has been interpreted and analyzed by various critics, scholars and writers from different perspectives. They have focused on different issues like sexual harassment, political correctness, play of language, power imbalance between male and female and about the failed utopia of academia.

In *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, Lee A. Jacobus views John's downfall as the result of the struggle of ideas and for power. He explains:

The struggle of ideas between, professor and student, the concern for power, and the issues of patriarchy and sexual harassment become manifest in John's ultimate realization that the price for what he has done

(if only he could understand what he has done) is the loss of his house and an ultimate threat to his family and security. (1615)

In *Oleanna*, the truth for Carol is totally opposite of what John believes about which Michael Feingold explains in his review. He says:

Oleanna is a tragedy built as a series of audience traps; the minute one get suckered into thinking it says one thing, one is likely to find it saying the exact opposite. The point is that from one position – that of power – a gesture will mean one thing; from another position – that of powerlessness – a gesture will take on another meaning. (1615)

Richard Badenhausen, in his article entitled “*The Modern academy raging in the dark: Misreading Mamet’s Political Incorrectness in Oleanna*” says:

Oleanna ultimately explores the perils of inferior teachings and the subsequent misreadings that necessarily follow in a pedagogical environment that tacitly reinforces (instead of collapsing or bridging) hierarchical differences among its participants. In fact, this is more a play about teaching, reading and understanding: how to do those things well and the consequences of doing them poorly. (1)

He further goes on to say, “*Oleanna* is a play about failed Utopia, the failed Utopia of Academia” (5). We can notice that in his understanding, it is the hierarchical difference that widens the gap between the participants in a pedagogical environment or it can be a matter of any process that invites unequal power relations into play. As we can see in *Oleanna* that the hierarchical difference that gives the feeling of superiority and inferiority leads to the misuse of power and antagonism between the so-supposed

superior and inferior power positions.

Critic Thomas H Goggans, who assumes Carol's exhibition of low self-esteem, depression and guilt to be the result of her experience of incest in her childhood says, "Carol appears to embrace the ideological rigor of the Group because it provides her with a ready-made tool allowing her to identify and challenge a world which she perceives as her victimizer" (433). According to him her charges of sexual harassment against John seems to be fated by her personal history and merely mis-channeled by the self-interested Group which pursues, in John, a legitimate perpetrator of hierarchic abuse, but the wrong representative of Carol's literal 'patriarchal' abuse.

Critic Paul Trout, criticizes the fraudulent education practices illustrated in *Oleanna*, as he believes that in academic institutions students are constantly subjected to potentially shameful experiences as their limitations of mind and character are repeatedly and publicly exposed. He says, "Nowhere is the shame of education given more powerful expression than in David Mamet's *Oleanna*. Often said to be about sexual politics, *Oleanna* really depicts an explosion of pent-up shame that academic etiquette can no longer contain"(3).

Miracky James, in his theater review, says, "On a deeper and more successful level, the play is an often brilliant representation of the relationship between language and power and a sobering exploration of the possibility of human communication"(16). He sees Mamet raising fundamental questions. Does language reflect 'reality' or actually create it? Is shared meaning possible, or does 'truth' boil down to individual interpretations that are often in conflict? Is genuine human communication ever possible?

Another critic Jack Kroll, admires the power of Mamet's writing in *Oleanna*. He



says:

The disturbing power of Mamet's play lies in its cunning logic. We don't know what happened between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas, but we see exactly what happens with Carol and John. On the surface, her accusations seem frightening in their lethal absurdity. But inexorably we realize that she is telling the truth- her truth. She sees his compliments as sexist put-downs coming from his position of power. Gestures like his hands on her shoulder are "paternal prerogatives" amounting to rape. What is truly Kafkaesque is not these accusations but John's shaken sense, through his helpless rage, that he may harbor a guilt he's never examined.

Critic Jack Kroll sees the accusations made by Carol, as absurd. He views everything that goes on between Carol and John as Kafkaesque. He seems to believe that Carol does the whole thing solely with the intention to counter and challenge the position of John. He thinks Carol's accusations as lethally absurd for John as they can deprive him of his tenure and may even bring dismissal from his job without any proper reason because he believes that Carol's purpose is only to resist and challenge the authority of John. But here a question can be asked, "Why the truth for Carol is different from what John perceives it?" John's position of power and superiority blinds him and he misuses his power to the maximum. It is the difference in power and position that leads them to see truth differently.

Thus, it can be seen that critics have various different approaches and perspectives in viewing this text. But, the significance of this study is that it will enable the readers to understand how complicated and unequal power relations encourage

resistance and how power is related to language and truth. This study will try to examine the shifting power relations between John and Carol and will also analyze and interpret how there comes a reversal in power positions between John and Carol. John, the one with power, of whom, at the beginning Carol remains as supplicant, loses his power and becomes submissive to Carol as she gains power over him through the sexual harassment charges, at the end of the play.

## II. Foucauldian Concept of Power

### Power

Michel Foucault, one of the most noted French philosophers and historians, is renowned for his historical studies that reveal his thought over power, truth, language, discourse and knowledge. Foucault draws upon an anti-Enlightenment tradition that rejects the equation of reason, emancipation and progress arguing that an interface between modern forms of power and knowledge has served to create new forms of domination and power. Foucault being preoccupied with power, finally came to an understanding of it which is largely inspired by Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. Nevertheless, in his searching for the particular and concrete locus of the generation of this power, the seminal manifestation of particular power eluded him. Foucault eventually came to admit:

in the substantive sense, "le" pouvoir, doesn't exist. The idea that there is either located at or emanating from a given point something which is a "power" seems to be based on a misguided analysis, one which at all events fails to account for a considerable number of phenomena. In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations. (124)

So it was that for Foucault power became a function of the sociological underpinnings of society made manifest in hierarchic relationships.

Michel Foucault, in most of his books, has sought to show that western society has developed a new kind of power which he calls bio-power – that is a new system of control that traditional concepts of authority are unable to understand and criticize.

Rather than being repressive, this new power enhances life. Foucault encourages people to resist the welfare state by developing individual ethics in which one turns one's life into something that others can respect and admire. Paul Rabinow writes about Foucauldian concept of power in the following way:

Foucault calls a new regime of power 'bio-power': he explains that bio power brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and mode of knowledge and power became an agent of transformation of human life. He further describes that the other pole of bio-power is the human body: the body approached not directly in its biological dimension, but as an object to be manipulated and controlled.

(17)

In "Truth and Power", Michel Foucault revisits the major theoretical trends and questions of his career. He is a thinker who knows no bounds of subject or field. His ideas stretch from literature to science, from psychology to labor. He deals with a currency that is accepted everywhere: 'Truth and Power'. Foucault spends much of his career tracing the threads of truth and power as they intertwine with the history of human experience. He especially loves to study asylums and prisons because they are close to an encapsulated power structure. Using techniques gathered from psychology, politics, anthropology, and archaeology, Foucault presents a highly politicized analysis of the flow of the power and power relations. He further says about the power exercised method in his essay 'Truth and Power' as:

The way power was exercised – concretely and in detail – with its specificity, its techniques and tactics, was something that no one attempted

to ascertain; they contended themselves with denouncing it in a polemical and global fashion as it existed among the 'others,' in the adversary camp. (1137)

Foucault sees every action and historical event as an exercise in the exchange of power. He has spent a large bulk of his career analyzing the ebb and flow of power in different situations and with relevance to different aspect of human life. Structure organizes and broadens the web of power. The overall volume of power rises with every individual's involvement in the play. The society is a huge web, and much of the power tends to be concentrated towards the higher echelons. Foucault sees the exchange of power in very active terms: "isn't power simply a form of War like domination?" It is difficult to sort out just who is fighting the war, since Foucault seems to lean toward the war of all against all notions. Power flows simultaneously in different directions and different volumes according to various forms of "power relations" in the "network" of power exchange. Regarding power and truth Foucault states:

Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientific or truth and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourse which in themselves are neither true nor false. (1139)

For Foucault, repression is negative conception of power. And as such, it is incomplete. He further states that power is not only repression it is something positive. Sometimes power need to prohibit unnecessary and negative things. To control bad manners and attitudes power is necessary. By applying power positively order, justice

and equality can be created in the society and country. Similarly if the power is forcefully applied it eventually turns into domination and therefore may result in violence and disorder. He further says:

In defining the effects of the power as repression, one adopts purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition... what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasures, forms knowledge, produces discourse. (1139)

Power according to Foucault is a creative source for positive value and it is always practiced under the influence of hegemony. It is in fact not top to down flow and is never used vertically to dominate others. Unlike other theorists, his power theory is not compatible to the repressive hypothesis that sees the functioning of power in the trend that confines power into a small group of society. He argues that power is not just the ruthless domination over the weak by the stronger. Of course, this idea is very akin to Nietzsche who says that power is not to be 'bad' at all. Foucault in his work mentions the nature of power in such a way:

Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything uniformly, but because it comes from everywhere. Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between ruler and the ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from top down and reacting on more and more limited

groups to the very depths of the social body. (93)

Because of the complexity of Foucauldian power theory, the word ‘power’ is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings – misunderstandings with respect to its nature, its form, and its unity. Foucault does not mean ‘power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. He does not mean power as a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. He also does not mean by it a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body or in other words a system of domination in which there are rulers and the ruled. Rather, he says: “Power must be understood as a multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization”(92).

Foucault views that power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, or something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; rather he believes that power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations. Another indispensable thing in his power theory is ‘resistance’. Foucault believes that where there is power, there is always resistance. Resistance is never exterior to power. One is always inside power and there is a plurality of resistances which exists in the field of power relations. He says:

Resistances do not derive from a few heterogeneous principles; but neither are they a lure or a promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite. Hence they too are distributed in irregular fashion: the points,

knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior. (96)

Hence, it becomes quite clear now that in his concept of power, Michel Foucault's main idea was against the hierarchical notion of power. He sees power not simply as a repressive tool of scheme, but as a complex force that produces what happens in society. It is not wielded by somebody because one is himself or herself caught in certain discourses and practices that wholly constitute power.

### **Discourse**

When we probe deeply in Michel Foucault's conception of discourse we find that his usage of the word "discourse" is not generic. His employ of the term is derived from the epistemological and linguistic speculations of the Ideologues, Condillac, and Locke. "Discourse" is language which strips from itself all self-reliance, all inner play, and all metaphorical distortion. Its sole function is to serve as a transparent representation of both the ideas and things which stand outside it. Therefore discourse and language (langue) are adversarially and antithetically poised. In language, the "direction of meaning" is wholly inward, for language hypothesizes a direct correspondence between signifier and signified; it pretends itself to be mimetic of the world. Conversely, discourse is entirely outward, recognizing itself only as a mere representation of the world with only an arbitrary nexus existing between signifier and signified. As the pretense of "language" disappears, all that remains is its "function as representation: its nature and its virtues as discourse". Should language return, then discourse must again dissolve into



vacuity.

In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Foucault continues his definition of discourse in terms of its effect. More than being merely a simple speech-act, he interprets discursive practices as both verbal and non-verbal means of manipulating and defining the hierarchy of power within a society. They are both tools and weapons. In Foucault's view, all evidences of discourse must confess their pretense of feigned naiveté and innocence:

Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are often embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behavior, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them. Power is the operative element in maintaining a political society and discourse is the medium through which power is exercised. (86)

Foucauldian theory of discourse is developed in relation to the power structures operating in the society. His main concern is that discourse is involved in power. He views that discourses are rooted in social institutions and that social and political power operate through discourse. The discourse, therefore, is inseparable from power because discourse is the ordering force that governs every institution. This enables institutions to exercise power and dominate. Those who possess the authority to define discourse exclude others who are not in power. M. H. Abrams in his book *Glossary of Literary Terms* writes:

Discourse has become the focal term among the critics who oppose the deconstructive concept of a "general text" that functions independently of

particular historical condition. Instead they conceive of discourse as social parlance, or language-in-use and consider it to be both the product and the manifestation of a timeless linguistic system, but of particular social condition, class-structures, and power-relationships that alter in the course of history. (241)

Discourse is the way of presenting something. In straight sense, it is talking and communicating using signs to designate things. It also shows implication for speech and the relationship between signifiers and what they signify. But, in broad sense, it can help us to interpret many slices of our social and political systems that we have never even considered before. It also helps to illuminate part of the ordinary world that is controlled by the expert in the society. Thus, discourse is a major point in society that effects how we can speak, act and interpret things. As Michel Foucault views:

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statement, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who changed with saying what counts as true. (1144)

In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault says: “A discourse is a ‘series of sentences or propositions’ and that it ‘can be defined as a large group of statements that belong to a single system of formation’ – a so-called discursive formation (125)”. The working of power is always through discourse; acknowledging this fact Hans Bertens says:

In any case, power works through discourses and discursive formations. In its policing of abnormal behavior, the power of human sciences derives from what they claimed to be knowledge; it derives from their claims to expertise. Such a cluster of claims to knowledge is what Foucault calls a discourse. To be more precise, a discourse is a loose structure of interconnected assumptions that makes knowledge possible. (154)

Discourse is not merely a sign but it is a set of practices that constitute the object in which it is speaking of. Most importantly it is a system of constraint or exclusion which sets boundaries for what can and cannot be said or done in our everyday lives. The experts define the situation and then divide the line between reason and unreason for society. And it determines for us what is proper and improper through the eyes of the experts. In most societies, it has never been a matter of what you do. The only thing that really matters is what is thought about it according to what can and cannot be said. The system of discourse in regard to everything constantly changes within years, decades and centuries according to who has the power. And power holders use the discourse according to their benefits.

In any society, the production of a discursive act is always controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to mores or social conventions whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. Individual freedom of expression is surrendered to a particular, exterior, determining demeanor acting interiorly within the whole of society. Logic shows that this is good: without these governing procedures anarchy will reign. It is the characteristic of these procedures that they are not affirmative, but they rule by exclusion.

They speak to a society in terms of what is prohibited to do. As Foucault has put it simply:

“We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. We obey power, are loyal to it, even to the point of policing and repressing ourselves, because it makes us feel what we are. (125)

The subtle phrasing of “not just anyone” is most intentional in Foucault’s sentence. For, in fact, there are those for whom it is possible to ignore the exclusive procedures that the rest of the society must follow. These exceptions are the individuals who wield power in that milieu. They are able to exempt themselves from the prohibition because it was they who invented them.

While talking about discourse it becomes essential to acknowledge the fact that discourse is the site where power and knowledge are joined together; and because of this reason discourse must be conceived as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise one must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominated discourse and the dominating one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects – according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated – that it implies; and with the shift and reutilizations of identical formulas for

contrary objectives that it also includes.

Discourses can be an effect or instrument of power but they may also be a point of resistance. Throwing light on this fact Foucault says:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (101)

Foucault further says:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (102)

According to the Foucauldian theory, following propositions can be drawn about discourse: discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about, and “representing” a topic or in other words it is a discursive formation; a discourse refers to the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true; a discourse is a question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern

each other; a discourse is about production of knowledge through language, and through practices; a discourse is used as a means to gain or sometimes even to subvert power.

### **Language, Truth and Knowledge**

Language shapes the way we think, and what it is possible to communicate. It also allows us to convey information from one person to another. During the twentieth century two conflicting pictures of the relationship between language and reality has developed. According to one, language represents a reality that exists independently of it. While language may colour or distort reality, it remains responsible to it. Truth is a matter of correspondence to this reality. According to the other picture of the way language works, language constructs the reality that we are able to represent. There is no language independent reality and truth cannot be correspondence. This leads to the conclusion that language is not politically neutral, for the language we speak constrains what we can think and the world we experience and the mechanisms behind the formulation of language are enmeshed in institutionalized forms of power.

In any society, there are many systems that people practice and language is interwoven with social practices by the circulation of power. Power that diffuses itself in systems of authority has the effect of truths, which are produced within the discourses of knowledge but the discourse are neither true nor false. The truth is related with power and it changes with the change of power. Truth is like sliding ground which is not lacking in power. It induces regular effects of power. Each and every society has its regime of truth. What power does is conceived as truth, it cannot be condemned because it functions as true and fact by the types of discourse and with the mechanisms and instances, which enable one to distinguish true and false statements. Language is nothing but the system

that operates within itself. Power has profound and deep rooted relation with systems and it changes as the systems change. It circulates through society and literary cultural texts that are a part of it. Interpreting the power-truth relationship, Foucault in his essay 'Truth and Power' says:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and myth would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirit, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.

(1144)

Each society creates a "regime of truth" according to its beliefs, values, and mores. Foucault identifies the creation of truth in contemporary western society with five traits: the centering of truth on scientific discourse; accountability of truth to economic and political forces; the "diffusion and consumption" of truth through societal apparatuses; the control of the distribution of truth by "political and economic apparatuses;" and the fact that it is "the issue of whole political debate and social confrontation." Individuals will do well to recognize that ultimate truth, "Truth," is the construct of the political and economic forces that command the majority of power within the societal web. There is no truly universal truth at all; therefore, the intellectual cannot convey universal truth. The intellectual must specialize, specify, so that he\she can be connected to truth-generating apparatuses of the society. As Michel Foucault goes on to explain it:

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.

‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (1145)

Because of this, Foucault sees the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of ‘science’ and ‘ideology,’ but in terms of ‘truth’ and ‘power.’ The question of how to deal with and determine truth is at the base of political and social strife.

Though truth and power are inseparable, it is the linguistic discourse that originates the truth and truth produces the power and again it is the knowledge that brings the better discourse and effective power is produced through the better knowledge. In this regard Raman Selden says:

The real effects of power is exercised through linguistic discourse which is the result of knowledge because all knowledge is an expression of the will to power, and therefore, the discourse of knowledge is involved in power but Will to Knowledge is not power rather it is and impersonal force. (83)

Thus a conceptual connection can be made that knowledge and discourse are inseparable. Language is the only instrument of knowledge and it is creative and active. It is not the role of mind and consciousness which is important in holding the power but the role of language over the mind and consciousness of human faculty. It is the system of the society that controls the language and knowledge through which the power is exercised. The society is not only tied to knowledge but also language. Knowledge is



produced through society from where originates the power which is related with the subject and the object and the ruler and the ruled ones. It is knowledge, which is used to exercise power; and this knowledge is generated out of doubts. The determination of power is through the use of knowledge that is product of the system of language which has relationship with society. All modern political organizations are framed within the association of knowledge and power.

Viewing Michel Foucault's interpretation on knowledge, it would be appropriate to say that power is the operative element in maintaining a political society and that discourse is the medium through which that power is exercised. Foucault talks about conditions through which discourse affects power. These conditions with which power is generated, he terms the "rules of formations". The most straightforward method to understand these particular rules may be through the dissection of the concept of "knowledge."

Foucault breaks open this term as he outlines four crucial inter-relationships between power, discourse, truth, and knowledge. In his own words, the French critic explain it in the following way:

-knowledge is an "invention" behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other; ... .

-its production is not the effect of their harmony or joyful equilibrium, but of their hatred, of their questionable and provisional compromise, and of the fragile truce that they are always prepared to betray. It is not a

permanent faculty, but an event or, at the very least, a series of events; ... .  
 -knowledge is always in bondage, dependent and interested (not in itself, but to those things capable of involving an instinct or the instincts that dominate it); ... .  
 -and if it gives itself as the knowledge of truth, it is because it produces truth through the play of a primary and always reconstituted fashion, which erects the distinction between truth and falsehood. (48)

Michel Foucault considers knowledge to be nothing more than an artificial “invention,” and as such, devoid of any natural ontology. As a human construct, knowledge is the produced fruit of humankind’s conflict. Therefore, as conflicts arise and are squelched in political society, so also is knowledge in a perpetual current of flux in epistemological formulations. As knowledge is the effect of power, the conscious control or manipulation of power dictates whatever presumed knowledge is or is not taboo within that society. As Foucault says:

‘These power-knowledge relations are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to power, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations.’(66)

Therefore, it can be said that power is the necessary condition for the construction of knowledge. And ultimately, through the assertion of power which defines knowledge, “truth” emerges as a temporary non-absolute thing, relative only to a particular moment

in history and to particular exercise of power at that moment.

### **Power Relations and Resistance**

One of the perennial issues of social and political philosophy is the matter of power that some people have over others. Many of our relationships, indeed our very ways of living, can be characterized as relations of power; teacher and student, parent and child, owner and worker, and it goes on indefinitely. Our lives are enclosed by power relations which are not arbitrary. They inevitably serve to maintain the social structure in which they occur. For example, why does a teacher hold power over the student? It is the student who pays the tuition that provides the teacher's salary. Yet in the modern educational system, we can clearly see a constant strong power imbalance between the teacher and student. It is worth noting that it is not the particular teacher and student who determine the relation, but the power relations are built into the institution of education.

Michel Foucault's notion of power is in the form of power relations, rather than understanding power as an absolute term and concept. He sees power relations as more complicated and sophisticated than the ruler-ruled relation. Delving into the concept of power relations, he says: "what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act immediately and directly on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or future (103)."

Similar to Foucault, Forester sees power as political communication and concludes:

Power works through the management of competence, or obfuscation; of trust, or false assurance; of consent, or manipulated agreement; and of

knowledge or misrepresentation. Each of these three modes of power works in this way, either to thwart articulate democratic participation and encourage positivity, or to encourage articulate political action and the rationalization of a democratic planning process. (45)

Forester, following the argument of Foucault, argues that these three modes of power derive their effectiveness from differential levels of knowledge existing in society.

One important concept of power that we need to understand is that people do not have power implicitly. Rather, power is a technique or action that individuals can engage in. Power is not possessed, it is exercised. Essentially, 'Power is'. Power is existential. Power creates and is created by organizational attributes, social or cultural attributes and individual attributes. A power relation occurs where there is the potentiality for resistance, that is to say it only arises between two individuals each of whom has the potential to influence the actions of other and to present resistance to this influence. Resistance is the sine qua non condition for power as Foucault suggests, "where there is power there is resistance (95)." The power relationship can be challenged and/or modified. Social relationships, he argues, not only exist as attraction but also generate resistance. Foucault further says:

My way of studying power relations consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out the point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing

power relations through the antagonism of strategies. (48)

This is saying that we are not born with power, but we may (or may not for that matter) come into power at some stage in our lives. Power relations are not static, but dynamic, transforming and constantly changing. Foucault claims that power is transformable, that we may have power at one point in our life and then at another point in our life have no power. Foucault states: “power is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere (93).”

Foucault has discussed in his works that power is affected by differential levels of knowledge existing in society. He argues that power is inseparable from knowledge and since knowledge requires records and a system of communication, it in itself is a form of power. He says:

Power and knowledge directly imply one another. There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These power-knowledge relations are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. (98)

Power, as well as other forms of social practices, is jointly constructed through a

complex of interactions and a variety of discourses.. Foucault suggests that it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. As discourses are not only about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses represent meaning and social relationships; they form both subjectivity and power relations. Viewing this nature of relationship between power and subject position, we can ascertain that they are ever resisting and defending for the ultimate goal of power seizure. In modern society people by participating in multiple discursive practices, where they can be positioned differently in relation to knowledge and power, and indeed can be active in shifting the discourse from one in which they are less powerful into another, in which they are positioned more powerfully.

### III. Textual Analysis

Human beings by nature have a lust for power and they always want to have power under their control. They have the instinct to demonstrate power-intended activities through their behaviours and their living. They want to live ensnared by power and thus perform activities for its possession. Their daily exercise of living is definitely backed by this want. They live through power and its operation and try to produce its various subordinate allies to justify its role and to drive the situation into their own favour.

In this procedure of power conduction, power gets into various forms and in the process transforms itself to get out accordingly. Human struggle is entirely subjected to power and command over it. Regarding it, David Mamet's entire play *Oleanna*, is literally the portrayal of struggle that aims at achieving power by creating truth by the play on language. Language becomes the essential tool as well as weapon for the creation of truth which leads to power shift in the play.

Action for power and resistance against it is human nature. To a great extent, Mamet's *Oleanna* is a manifestation of power, resistance against it and struggle to achieve it. Therefore, through his writing Mamet wishes to picture out that man is by nature ever craving for controlling power and consequently other group which is under control always tends to resist the powerful. Human being is gifted with everlasting longing for power. Sarah Mills writes regarding power and resistance that: "Foucault argues that resistance is already contained within the notion of power. Where there is power there is resistance. (37)" Due to their integral relation, power imposed upon other creates resistance in accordance with its nature.

The supposedly superior hierarchical position within any society or institution gives a person power over his/her subordinates as this is the way by which any society or organization can function. Yet the subordinated don't easily tend to be subordinated as according to the power theory, the ruled always resist the rulers. When power is over imposed and misused, there begins a struggle to resist it and eventually the focus turns to gaining power over the opponent. In this struggle for gaining power and control over the opponent linguistic discourse are formed and new truths created which can be done either by hook or by crook. This kind of power struggle has been pictured by David Mamet, between two major characters John and Carol, in his play *Oleanna*.

In *Oleanna*, the male professor John enjoys power wielded by his position within the university. Being in authority he has power over his students. His use of this power over his student Carol reaches the extreme, to the extent that it can be termed 'misused.' Being blind in his possession of power, he is unable to notice that he is irritating her and making her feel inferior. In the process her beliefs, thoughts and position are mocked by him. To resist John, she in her own way, interprets his words and gestures and puts charges of sexual harassment on him. The issue of sexual harassment in the play is essentially linked with power relationship. Harassment can only be possible if there is inequality in power positions. Moreover, this same harassment which Carol charges upon John helps her to gain power over him.

Carol's charges of sexual harassment over John, can be doubtfully viewed. Though it becomes a strategy for her to counter John's power, one has to remember that it is her truth, the truth she sees from her marginal position. The inequality in power positions brings the difference in the way they observe the facts.



### **The Plot in Short**

As David Mamet's *Oleanna* opens, Carol is seated across John in his office. It is quickly obvious that he is a professor and she is one of his students whom he has asked to his office to discuss her class performance. John's explanation that Carol is a bright girl who is performing poorly in class is punctuated with phone calls from John's wife Grace and friend Jerry during which they discuss John's purchase of a new house. Carol tells John that she is worried about her grades, but she also wishes to understand what he teaches; she simply cannot understand anything that is going on in the class. In fact, Carol says she is stupid, that people have always thought her stupid, and that now John, too, is aware of her stupidity.

John shows that he sympathizes with this feeling; he tells Carol he, too, was brought up to feel stupid. He has turned himself around, however and says that he wishes to help her see, how she can improve herself. John pompously, takes the blame for Carol's lack of understanding in his class and vows to fix it. His wife calls again about the house and here Carol makes the connection that the new house is to accompany John's tenure at the college. John connects his situation of possible tenure to Carol's problem, suggesting that texts, like those of tenure committee, which has announced but not yet approved him are meaningless; much of the structure of higher education is artificial, and the established teacher-student relationship is not necessary or important. Carol asks again about her grade, but John interrupts, assuring her that she will receive an A, if the two of them meet a few times in his office.

They discuss some topics from class about which Carol has questions, and John explains his views of higher education, which is that a criminal trial is not a necessity to

live a complete life, yet college – a similar right in the modern age – is regarded as a necessity and taken for granted. To John higher education is not such a good thing, a view with which Carol takes opposition. He explains more, and Carol cannot understand some points and becomes frustrated. John goes to comfort her physically, but she denies him and walks away. She cannot be placated and is about to explain to him something she has never told anyone before when the phone rings. It is John's wife and she again tries to lure him out to talk about the house. Finally, she puts on his friend Jerry, who spills the beans; it was a surprise party to celebrate the new house. John is shocked and the first act ends.

As the second act opens, we discover that Carol has filed a complaint with the tenure committee regarding John. He feels guilty because of his own self-concern and selfish desire for tenure, but he ultimately feels her charges are out of line. He reads some of these charges aloud: he is sexist, elitist, racist, was alone with her, told her a sexually explicit story, and offered her grades in exchange for private visits to his office – all charges substantiated by actions in the first act. She tells him that he is powerless to deny the actions but he is steadfast that she is wrong in her charges and that he wishes to help her.

Carol attacks John for his views on higher education and his inherent role in the system; he defends this, showing her that they are merely people who agree to take part in an exchange. His role is to provoke her and, more so, to tell her what he thinks; he cannot correct her, but he merely shares his views as a professor with her, for her to do as she will. Carol mentions that she has consulted on this matter with her "Group," and Grace calls again; John brushes her off to talk to Carol, who tells him the proper venue of

these discussions is at the hearing of the tenure committee. Carol turns to go, but John physically restrains her, the act ends with her call for help.

By the third act, John has lost his job and with it, his security. Carol insists that the charges are absolute facts, and though John endeavors to apologize, Carol takes advantage of her newfound power over him, lecturing him on how he exploits students who have every right to learn in college, perpetuating the elitist paradigm. Carol takes her charges very seriously, and she tells John, she desires not revenge but understanding.

John is insistent in attempting to discover how he may end Carol's attacks, and she ultimately offers a bargain; she and her group will drop their charges if John recommends the banning of certain books at the college and signs a statement of support. John is repulsed and refuses, snapping out of his kowtowing to Carol and becoming firm in his denial. He reveals that he has not been home in days, worrying about this, but now is steadfast in his acceptance of the repercussions of his actions. The phone rings and Carol urges him to pick it up; it is Jerry, advising him that Carol and her group are considering pursuing criminal charges against John for battery. John's wife calls and as he talks to her, he asks Carol to leave. She begins to oblige, but warns John on the way out not to call his wife "baby". John knocks Carol down begins to beat her, and grabs a chair as if to hit her with it. As he attempts to regain composure, she sits on the floor, saying to herself, "Yes. That's right."

### **Unequal Power Encounter**

The first act in Mamet's *Oleanna* pictures the meeting between John and Carol with uneven power positions. Here John possessing power appears as a representative icon of the established ideology in comparison with the female student Carol, who

represents the powerless class. The confrontation with language between a professor and a student illuminates the hierarchical relationship within institutions.

When we first see John in the first act, we find him to be confident, swaggering, a bit condescending, overbearing and he generally enjoys being in a power position. To the contrary, Carol is tentative, uncertain and struggling with John's vocabulary and course. Moreover John has full control over the language and the type of conversation that should take place. It can be seen in the following conversation:

Carol: what is a "term of art"?

John (pause): I'm sorry...?

Carol (pause): What is a "term of art"?

John: Is that what you want to talk about?

Carol: ...to talk about...? (1617)

John's power position leads to power domination as he solely tries to determine what should and should not be talked between them.

John's position and exercise of power can be seen in the phrases and words he chooses to use. Carol, who so sincerely expresses her weakness and is servile to him, is further perplexed by his vocabulary which she does not understand:

John: what don't you understand?

Carol: Any of it. What you're trying to say. When you talk about...

John: ...yes...? (She consults her notes)

Carol: "Virtual Warehousing of young"...

John: "Virtual warehousing of the young." If we artificially prolong adolescence...(1620)

Here it seems that John enjoys his power position by perplexing Carol by his words and phrases which only adds to her problems by developing her nervousness.

Carol is, as she states early on, from a lower social and economic class than the faculty and many of the other students. She has worked hard and sacrificed to come to college and is diligent and earnest. She finds that despite her hard work, she doesn't understand most of what transpires in her classes: her determination to succeed makes her aggressive about her failure to understand. This can be seen from her following expression:

Carol: 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. To get, what do they say? "To get on in the world." How can I do that if I don't, if I fail? But don't understand what anything means... and I walk around. From morning till night: with this one thought in my head. I'm stupid.

Again she says:

Carol: Nobody tells me anything and I sit there ... in the corner. In the back. And everybody is talking about "this" all the time. And "concepts" and "precepts" 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 ... (1620)

John wants to define all the things in his own terms and wants Carol to accept and

believe them. He tells Carol, who so sincerely wants to be educated and get good grades, that taking tests, grading systems in the educational institutions are absurd in themselves and they are nothing more than a joke:

John: ... Look the tests, you see, which you encounter, in school, in college, in life, were designed in the most part, for idiots. By idiots. There is no need to fail at them. They are not a test of your worth. They are a test of your ability to remain and spout back misinformation. Of course you fail them. They're nonsense.

Carol: ... no ...

John: Yes they're garbage. They're a joke. (1622)

John tells Carol that education's obsession with learning, studying, memorizing is just a bunch of garbage. John by mocking and attacking on higher education, is in fact mocking and attacking Carol's deep-rooted beliefs on education and on her aim in life. This is seriously humiliating to Carol as she holds very high regard about education. How John directly mocks education and indirectly Carol can be seen in the following extract:

John: Somebody told you and you hold it as an article of faith, that higher education is an unassailable good. The notion is so dear to you that when I question it you become very angry. Good. Good, I say. Are not those the very things that we should question? 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?"

What might be some reasons for pursuit of higher education?

One: A love of learning.

Two: The wish for a mastery of skill.

Three: For economic betterment.

(Stops. Makes a note.)

Carol: I'm keeping you. (1624)

The above extract presents Carol as unable to engage with esoteric issues, to find a space for her own thinking or understanding in her appraisal of other academic works. The irony is that in such an unequal encounter, the professor John exerts power over her by pontificating his critical approach to life.

Throughout the first act, it can be seen that in every way, John has power and control over Carol. He interrupts when she speaks, mocks her beliefs and tries to impose his own ideas and definitions of things upon her. Instead of helping her and making her feel easy, he frustrates her and increases her nervousness. To an extent, it can be said that the power he possesses, has made him corrupt when we find him unfairly offering grade 'A' to Carol if she comes and meets him personally in his office, a few more times. We find him telling a sexually explicit story about the difference in copulation between the rich and the poor. Later on, he reaches to the extent of putting his arms around her shoulder:

(He goes over to her and puts his arms around her shoulder.)

NO! (she walks away from him.)

John: Sshhhhh.

Carol: No, I don't under ...

John: Sshhhhh. It's all right. (1625)

David Mamet, in this play, has rightly depicted that unequal power relations, might sometimes lead the one with power to the acts of power exhibition, domination over the inferior ones and its abuse. This, again, necessitates resistance, which according to Michel Foucault goes along with power. The unequal power encounter between John and Carol in the play later on leads her to strategically resist the power of John.

### **Struggle for and Resistance to Power**

The play *Oleanna* approves with the theory of power that unequal power-relation leading to domination and abuse of power, paves the way towards power struggle. In this struggle for power, either side dominated or the domineering one, wants to keep or gain control over power. This longing for power is natural for humans, who understand the worthiness of power, for the recognized living in the human society. People's value and importance in the society or any institution is attached with their relation to power and whenever they feel they are losing their space and identity, they start struggling for power which would help them in restoring their position.

Mamet's *Oleanna* is a play on how the humans struggle among themselves for identity and marked existence. In this play both the opposing characters John and Carol are driven with their interest to remain over power. The abuse of power by John makes Carol feel inferior and powerless and she struggles to find her space and position. Michel Foucault says: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. (95)" Carol accordingly, struggling against John's power and to subvert his power by asserting her own, comes up with a strategy of resistance.



Throughout the first act in the play, it has been seen that Carol feels powerless in front of John. She feels weak, stammers and is unable to speak her ideas to him. John in the meantime, gaining control over her, goes on blowing his own trumpet. He differs in ideas from things which are generally held to be true and tries to impose his opinions upon her. Carol's anger comes out after she gains some power over John, by putting charges against him:

Carol: How can you deny it. You did it to me. Here. You did ... You confess. You love the power. To deviate. To invent, to transgress ... to transgress whatever norms have been established for us. And you think it's charming to "question" in yourself this taste to mock and destroy. You don't value the aspirations of your students. Of hardworking students, who come here, who slave to come here – you have no idea what it cost me to come to this school – you mock us. You call education "hazing," and from your so-protected, so elitist seat you hold your confusion as a joke, and our hopes and efforts with it. (1628)

In the extract above we can smell power in Carol's language. She is not afraid anymore to accuse John of what she thinks to be power abuse.

To resist John's power, Carol complains about him of sexual harassment to the tenure board which is about to grant him tenure. There is a feminist group which advises her this strategy of resistance. By complaining to the tenure committee, she puts under question John's sense of social and economic security which he will achieve after the grant of tenure. The charges are such that they can completely deprive him of his authority. John is aghast as he reads the charges:

John: (He reads) I find that I am sexist. That I'm elitist. I'm not sure I know what that means, other than it's a derogatory word, meaning "bad." That I ... That I insist on wasting time, in nonprescribed, in self-aggrandizing and theatrical diversions from the prescribed text ... that these have taken both sexist and pornographic forms ... here we find listed ... instances "... closeted with a student"... "Told a rambling, sexually explicit story, in which the frequency and attitudes of fornication of the poor and rich are, it would seem, the central point..." (He reads) That I used the phrase "The White Man's Burden." (He reads.) "He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me.' He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office." He told me he has problems with his wife; and that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me..." "He told me that if I would stay alone with him in his office, he would change my grade to an A." (1626-1627)

John is horrified as he reads the charges. He thinks Carol going too far in her charges. To him her sole purpose seems to gain power and she doesn't mind by what means she is achieving it.

Here, how much true Carol's charges are is a matter of argument. But that is not the question because it is her truth – the truth that she sees from her position of marginality. It can also be said that the difference in power-position is also a factor for the difference in perception of reality. Moreover, now she has the persuasive power of her arguments on her charges by which she can give them the appearance of a convincing

truth.

### **Language as the means to Power and Truth**

Through the play, the dialogues spoken by the either characters take and express power relationship. Whether be it in the beginning when John controls the dialogues or later on Carol, when the power shifts to her. It can be seen that language is in complete control of the one who assumes power over the other. Moreover, language also becomes a tool to demonstrate power.

The dialogues spoken by John in the first act, expose his confidence, his overbearing and condescending nature. He is in authority because of the hierarchical relationship between them. He exhibits his power by executing his dialogues with Carol in an off-hand and patronizing manner. This can be seen when early in the play he says, “Let’s take the mysticism out of it, shall we? Carol? (1627), when Carol simply wants to know about a “term of art”. He frequently uses difficult academic allusions which Carol can not grasp. It seems he does this to express his power status by perplexing Carol. This characterizes him as a well-educated but haughty man.

The dialogues in the play are also indicators, which demonstrate that John is speaking just for speaking’s sake. It seems he is talking to the student at the surface level, but deep down he is more concerned with the tenure and the new house he is about to buy. Instead of helping her with her problems, he says he would give her an ‘A’ if she came to his office everyday. She is upset and says that was breaking the rules. She does not want to be the part of it. John moves and puts his arms around her shoulders as if to comfort her. Carol sensing something wrong shouts ‘No’ and walks away.

Carol takes the issues discussed with John as an assault upon her right to

education. She views that she has worked very hard for it, but teachers like John make it more complicated. Carol sees John as mocking her. She sees him as someone who holds up her confusion as a joke; does not take seriously; neither does he pay respect to the educational process, which Carol and other students hold as extremely dear to their own self-improvement. Towards the end of the first act we find Carol growing negative and totally overflowing with self-doubt, hence obsessed with her own failures.

In the second act, we find Carol more in control than in the previous act. She has now sought advice from an unidentified “group.” She has brought charges of sexual harassment against the professor, based on statement and physical behaviour she found offensive in the first act. John stands to lose his tenure and his beloved house. It is very difficult for him to accept his losses. What damns John in Carol’s report, is the selective incidents and quotes – verbatim – word for word, and action for action he had said and done during their previous conversation. Carol now challenges John at every step and reflects the same kind of unconcern that John showed to her in the first act. Carol asserts her newfound power and upbraids him for refusing to take responsibility for his sexist ways:

Carol: Do you deny it? Can you deny it...? Do you see? (Pause) Don’t you see? You don’t see do you?

John: I don’t see ...

Carol: You think, you can deny that these things happened; or, if they did, that they meant what you said meant. Don’t you see? You drag me in here, you drag us, to listen to you “go on”; and “go on” about this, or that  
...(1627)

The entire play *Oleanna* is the network of controlling, losing and searching of power. The stability and instability of power is always in and around the power of linguistic discourse. Through the unequal relationship between professor and student, this play is concerned with the subject and the other. It can be possible to be a subject if one may have domination over language. One who has the control of language can control and suppress others' voice. Most importantly, we can see Carol accomplishing the reversal of ideology of power by engaging in plays on signifiers.

To gain power over John, Carol adheres to the signifiers from his rhetoric. She takes advantage of them by making them a weapon to attack him. All the demeaning words, phrases and gestures that John uses without giving any importance to her position, are noted down by her. She finds him elitist because he is engaged overbearingly and in a pedantic manner in "theatrical diversion from the prescribed text"; a racist when he uses the phrase "The White Man's Burden." She thinks he is exploiting the "paternal prerogative," when he touches her and says, "Have a good day dear." She finds him exploiting her when he tells her a rambling, sexually explicit story, in which the frequency and attitudes of fornication of the poor and rich are, it would seem, the central point; when he says, "I like you"; when he says, "I like being with you"; and when he says, "Your grade for the whole term is an 'A' if you will come back and meet with me a few more times." She mentions all these things in her charges against him and traps him with his own words.

Language becomes a means to gain power in the play when Carol complains John in the tenure board sticking to his signifiers and using them against him creating the truth that he sexually harassed her. She knows that her charges will eventually make him lose

his position of power as she presents him as her exploiter and victimizer.

Once the charges are put, Carol suddenly starts gaining power and John's power starts fading. Now unlike the first act when John controlled the talk, Carol starts doing that. She now interrupts John constantly while talking, doesn't listen to him and asserts her power by delivering long, bold and strong sentences. From the following dialogue, one can clearly sense her power over John:

Carol: What can you do to force me to retract?

John: That is not what I meant at all.

Carol: To bribe me, to convince me...

John: ... No.

Carol: To retract... (1626)

Language works to construct the reality. There is no language independent truth and language has the power to colour or distort the truth. Truth is not outside, opposed to or lacking in power. Linguistic discourses are created to resist power, gain power and by the power holders to prolong their hold on power. It means language can be the means for one to obtain power and once that is achieved that can justify and confirm the truth. This is proved in the play, which can be seen from the following dialogue:

John: All right. I cannot... (Pause.) I cannot help but feel you are owed an apology. (Pause.) (Of papers in his hands.) I have read. (Pause.) And reread these accusations.

Carol: What "accusations"?

John: The, the tenure comm... what other accusations... ?

Carol: The tenure committee...?

John: Yes.

Carol: Excuse me, but those are not accusations. They have been proved.

They are facts. (1629)

Here, we find John helpless in front of Carol. Carol has now acquired power and though the charges have not been proved yet, she insists on saying them facts, to which John cannot resist. She now becomes the sole decider of the case between them and justifies her allegations as she has the power and control over the language. She, in fact, is now in the position to interpret John's actions, which can be felt, when she says:

Carol: Then say it. For Christ's sake. Who the hell do you think that you are? You want a post. You want unlimited power. To do and to say what you want. As it pleases you – Testing, Questioning, Flirting...

John: I never...

Carol: Excuse me, one moment will you? (She reads from her notes)

The twelfth: "Have a good day, dear."

The fifteenth: "Now, don't you look fetching..."

The seventeenth: "If you girls would come over here..." I saw you, Professor. For two semesters sit there, stand there and exploit our as you thought "paternal prerogative," and what is that but rape; I swear to God.  
(1630)

Writing down John's pedantic jargons, Carol tries to assimilate his values of the established ideology. Carol's insight into particular signifiers from John can channel a route for learning the relationship between language and power in the play.

In conclusion, Carol's adherence to John's signifiers shows the ideological shift

from male-dominant discourse to discourse of marginality. With analysis on the relationship between language and power, power over language may allow one to have hegemonic priority. Therefore, the hegemony of language provides Carol a possibility to exist as a subject.

### **Reversal of Power**

Reversal of power occurs towards the later part of the play *Oleanna* when Carol becomes able to get a position, from where she can decide John's fate. Her transformation from a timid, nervous and servile student to a bold and menacing girl becomes possible when she being advised from a feminist group, puts charges of sexual harassment on John. Though it can't be said exactly whether John's action were devoid of any sexual content or not, it becomes a strategy for her to resist the power position of John. The same power position from where he acting like a dictator, mocks her beliefs and dismisses her grave concern of being educated.

The charges of sexual harassment are essentially linked with power as they are put with the intention to obtain it. Once the charges are put, John suddenly becomes weak as he senses a threat to his job which might lead in social and economic insecurity to his family. Carol becomes strong as she now is able to damage John's life. Carol, hence, very similar to what John did at the beginning of the play, starts asserting her views on him. This can be seen when the following conversation takes place:

Carol: You think I am a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants, power and revenge. Don't you?

John: Yes. I do.



Carol: But I have come here to tell you that you have been wrong. That I think you have been terribly wrong. Do you hate me now?

John: Yes.

Carol: Why do you hate me? Because you think me wrong? No. Because I have you think, power over you. It is the power that you hate. (1631)

John, now, is in absolutely no position to resist Carol. However, Carol too after her newfound power starts behaving like a dictator. She now starts talking for the benefit of the 'group' which advised her the strategy of resistance. She wants to get advantage of his now lowly condition. So much so that, she says that she wants John's book to be removed from the university course, which is also the wish of her group. She says: "We want it banned or removed from inclusion as a representative example of the university. (1632)" Finally to destroy John fully, she put charges of battery on him, misinterpreting John's action of trying to forcefully stop her, in his office. This shows that she too is abusing the power to get the intended result, and it is also the indicator of the fact that there has come an absolute reversal in their power position.

Mamet's power play *Oleanna* represents the human society consisting of actions and reactions, that are all meant for grabbing power. The world is ever longing for power that has a direct association with existence and living with pride and position. The play, acknowledging the fact, shows that humans struggle, work and live to gain power and position in order to keep an uncompromising identification among themselves.

Through the character of John, at the beginning, and later on Carol's, the play wants to show that one's power position can lead the person to the abuse of power which might result in domination upon others. The play also depicts the truth that resistance to

domination is essential and is prevalent in every human society. It is inherent in human nature that they want to thwart the power of the dominator for their own sake and benefit and that sometimes can also be guided by their personal interests. Carol charges John of sexual harassment to resist his domination at the beginning, and later on charges him of battery and demands the ban to his books. In power struggle such actions are no more than the means to gain power and hold it in one's own grip to continue the exercise of power on other. Her motto seems to be 'have power at any cost' and Mamet also seems to show that all is justified and okayed in a struggle for power. Anyway, Carol ultimately becomes successful to achieve her goal of power reversal in the play.

## Conclusion

David Mamet's *Oleanna* presents the practical depiction of human's desire and need for power that normally determines one's authority and subject position. For the possession of authority and subject position, in every society, struggle between humans almost certainly takes place. To come out being successful from this struggle, people can make right or wrong moves which they can justify by gaining power. It is the power that has the potential to right or wrong something. Keeping these things in view, this thesis has strived to raise the topic related questions as required to prove the hypothesis through the illustrative introduction, theoretical modality and textual analysis. The subject of study has been the struggle between characters because of the unequal power relation that brings power reversal in the play.

The unequal power relation between a male professor who appears as a representative icon of the established ideology and a female student with low status, becomes the cause of strife when they encounter. The pompous and haughty professor mocks the students beliefs, values and aim and imposes his ideas on her leaving her no space. He uses tough vocabulary though the weak student persists on saying that she doesn't understand. In the course of their encounter, he uses certain phrases, gestures and physical actions that seriously offend her. The actions of the professor, which she finds as sheer misuse of power, angers her and she starts finding for the way to subvert the authority of the professor.

When the power turns into domination, it is inevitable that it draws resistance. Power makes and maintains "otherness" which is the basic cause of fighting and that justifies any struggle for reaching the topmost point of ascendancy. Carol, desperately

trying to make John powerless, charges him of sexual harassment; a strategy of resistance that has been advised to her by a feminist group, though is arguable among the audience as they can't say exactly whether John's actions carried sexual content or not. This shows that Carol, at any cost, wants to get the subject position which she would achieve only by subverting the position of John.

Mamet has given language a very significant role in *Oleanna*. The confrontation with language between professor and student illuminates the hierarchical relationships within institutions. Through the unequal relationship between the professor and student, this play is concerned with conflicts between the 'subject' and the 'other.' Mamet has shown that it can be possible to be a subject if one may have domination over language. Carol takes advantage of the signifiers from John's rhetoric as a weapon to attack him. She selects his words and phrases and interprets them in such a way by which she can prove him guilty. She accomplishes the reversal of ideology of power by engaging in plays on signifiers. In the beginning John has been shown as controlling Carol's voice and when the power shifts, we find Carol doing the same. The play depicts the fact that one who has the power can control and suppress others' voice.

The main function of power is to be exercised between subject and object. Being in subject position is humans innermost desire as by which they can assert and confirm their existence and identity. For those who find their existence or identity under crisis, struggle remains as the only process through which they can gain power to assert themselves upon others. In this struggle, humans come up with various ways of resistance whether right or wrong to challenge the power holder. The resistance made by Carol in *Oleanna*, by putting charges of sexual harassment, is one of the types that can be

questioned as whether it was the right way or not. But the thing that should be understood is that truth is not independent of power and many-a-times the truth with the one in power position is different from the one in marginality. Furthermore, truth can be changed, created or justified through power. However, not going to those aspects, this thesis has tried to study why power struggle takes place, how language is related with power and how resistance through a strategy can reverse the power position.

To conclude the research, it can be said that David Mamet's play *Oleanna*, is a practically successful play to give the true account of human nature to struggle for power, through the brilliant presentation of characters like John and Carol, wherein, power reversal occurs when the former character faces downfall by the latter's strategy of resistance; the strategy of resistance which is guided by the desire to achieve power at any cost, by which only she might be able to remain as a subject and have marked existence.

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