

Judith Butler's Gender and Identity Trouble in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna*

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Abstract

Judith Butler as a rhetoric, comparative, and poststructuralist professor exhibits a far-reaching influence in a number of fields. Butler also is one of the following of 'Gender Studied' and her notion of gender as a cultural choice is useful for representing subject-formation and self-construction. Her outstanding books consist of "Gender Trouble" (1990) and "Bodies that Matter" (1993), are argued in drives literary theories such as "feminist theory" and "Gender studies". Butler's first book examined the contact of Hegel's work on twentieth-century French philosophers. The following books drag extensively from psychoanalytic, feminist and poststructuralist theories. Judith Butler tries to focus on the terms performative acts and gender constitution in order to argue that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo (Butler, 1988, p. 520). She further believes that gender is something that is not a corporeal "social fiction" but is continuously reproducing, changing and moving. In Butler's view, gender is only an "essential" part of a body's identity that is presented in the world, so that a body constituted essential core identity through a set of preexisting characteristics that have been imposed on that body. Queer theory is another work of Butler's notion that is in relation to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. By queer theory, Butler has emphasized on Differences that is in terminology and methods are based on performance and Foucault's reliance on formulations such as "power-knowledge" and "the deployment of alliance."

Keywords: Gender, Identity, Difference, Violence, Disidentification, Power.

Introduction

David Mamet, who was born on November 30th 1947, is an American playwright, essayist, screenwriter and film director. Mamet as a best known playwright won a Pulitzer Prize and also for *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) he could received a Tony nomination. His notable works include *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974), *American Buffalo* (1975) *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984), *Oleanna* (1992) and *Speed-the-Plow* (1997). Mamet has written several books such as *The wicked Son* (2006). He also is an effective member of the Atlantic Theater Company and also in screenplay, his first produced was the 1981 production of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* that is directed by Bob Rafelson, based on James M. Cain's novel. His works consist of a theater of language—the lines spoken by his characters do not entirely include words that declare a particular notion or emotion rather they are the reflection of emotion itself. Since over a decade, Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna* as a postmodern realism plays are famous for the skillful styles of their writer that is his dramatic language.

The plays attack with the view of reality that is hierarchical position between different individuals in the stage of the society. Within this world, Mamet's characters appear neither as puppets nor quite like individuals, but more as creatures feeding at the same language pool. Any relationship formed between Mamet's male and female characters is doomed to failure. The men are unwilling—or unable—to view women as anything other than sex slaves and receptacles for their pleasure and, not surprisingly, the women regard men as natural enemies and emotional cripples.

Mamet has focused both the cultivated expression and also the apparent wasteland of Middle American speech based on the language of the lower classes of the United States. His characters have a tolerance for speaking, a scatter energy that penetrates all their conversations. Mamet takes advantage of every trivial difference of dialogue in order to forward his plots and to depict character. With his created rhythms he considers the action of his plays bound up insolubly. *Glengarry Glen Ross* is the story of four Chicago salesman—Shelly Levene, Richard Roma, Dave Moss, and George Aaronow and their supervisor, John Williamson. They all sit together and speak in incomprehensible way. They have the same aim to sell undesirable real estate at inflated prices. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, instead of its real-estate setting, the play obviously has focused on some of the simplest contracts of detective stories. Moss's plan in act one is good instance in this case to rob the office as a clichéd lead for a detective story. Mamet through his works has couraged to make the main characters commit a small, but crucial error.

Mamet is so famous due to his exploitation of verbal dexterity, sexual taboos and writing for social correctness. *Oleanna* consists of two-character play by David Mamet. The play is centered by the power struggle between a university professor and one of his female students. Carol (the student) is in the office of her professor, John, and seated in front of him. *Oleanna* considers some of the most origin failures of American education and its damage to the young people in the long term effect. As *Glengarry Glen Ross* is about the real-estate business, *Oleanna* is about education and Mamet uses the education system as a vehicle for his permanent subject, what he names “human interactions,” in this regard the ironic desire for both power and understanding in human's relationships.

Gender and Identity: The Role of Women and Men

The women characters in Mamet's plays are disobedient resisters of male hypocrisy and manipulation such as Mary Rooney in *The Verdict*. Those women are constant cavillers of male failures. They are the most effective vehicles of Mamet's brilliant inquisition of male self-aggrandizement and of his agenda of contemporary spiritual reparation although they suffer most and are most oppressed. The rare women in *Glengarry Glen Ross* have specific role to Mametian process that converts male triumph into male tyranny and self-destruction. To more extent they encourage male aggressive desire only to undermine and weaken it. In fact, women characters are as important dramatic presences who inquire ordinary male desire. These women are frighten and mistrusted, but they have the ability to interrupt the male bonding.

In *Oleanna* gender identity is a sequence of acts as Mamet's characters, John and Carol, in turn, exchange their position to take the power, so the sex/gender distinction offers an essential cutting off between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. In *Oleanna*, Mamet's characters explicate themselves in ways that will bring them a desired objective. In Act I, Carols recounts John as someone great important who has a support group who are proud of him and also he is a person who has power over her, and she has tried to get his help in order to bring her what she desired, which is a passing grade. John describes himself as a victim of the same system of higher education that is victimizing Carol. In fact John tries to craft for himself an identity which Carol rejects.

Mamet's male character use many more gender slurs than the female character and the following binaries reflect cultural and traditional historical stereotypes of gendered behaviour: subject/object, active/passive, strong/weak, dominant/submissive. Butler offers that, "Gender is also discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts" (1990, p.11). In this regard, gender crosses with sexual, ethnic, class, racial and regional manners of discursively constituted identities.

In the play Mamet's women characters are the source of conflict for men. In this case Hall (1992) argues that, "Mamet's women are not only "mirror...[or] objects of male desire; they have access to a revolutionary method which violates the dialectic designs of their male oppressors (p. 139). Women have a strange and startling power in Mamet's plays, so that they are central to the men's images of themselves, to their sense of power—or lack of it. Although Women are frightened and mistrust, they can interrupt the male bonding that is the main feature of Mamet's characters. As Christopher Bigsby (1985) inserts, "underscores the emptiness" of the frontier myth of masculine self-sufficiency and also helps account for the sterility and hardness of Mamet's world (p. 15). That is related to his view toward the women's absence in Mamet's play. Although the women have a rare presence, they are able, with little or no effort, to lessen the male's unstable or self-inflated ego. In fact women obtain increasingly central and more powerful places, discovering their way in power plays and business deals. It can observe in those lines, relate to speech of Roma and Lingk:

Roma: Who did she call? Lingk; I don't know, the Attorney Gen ... the ... some Consumer office, umm... Roma: Why did she do that, Jim? Lingk: I don't know. (Pause) They said we have three days. (Pause) They said we have three days. (Pause) They said we have three days. Roma: Three days. Ling: To ... you know.(Pause.) Roma: No I don't know. Tell me. Lingk: To change our minds. Roma: Of course you have three days (Pause). (Mamet, 1984, p. 49)

Those lines indicate the power of Lingk's wife to be as a first person who manages the most important decision in their lives. As Dean (1990) says, "Roma senses his fear and tries to undermine his confidence still further with aggressive tactics:[No I don't know, Tell me.]" (p. 215). It shows that Roma's mind deliriously works to get ways in which he can seize the time first to confuse Lingk and also to think up other strategies.

In the one hand in *Glengarry Glen Ross* women as the leaders show us how they incite threats to a man's sense of masculinity with little struggle. There are very few characteristics of male as brute strength, facial hair and muscularity that identify inherently: "Are you man enough to take [their money]" Blake whispers to Levine. In Blake's speech, the word "man" is used as a motivator to indicate how masculinity is implied to incentivize the employees. There is a general idea based on gender norm to associate femininity with emotion, displaying feelings, or seeking support, so that males who identify as emotional are found out as feminine, or weak. In this respect, vindication mechanisms create barriers in organizational conflict since for an individual feeling an emotion is necessary to create resolution. As Butler says, "Gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be (1990, p. 33).

Verbal Power and Violent Language

David Mamet's has represented a foray interest in male characters, their fears and desires, loyalties and rivalries. The males' characters are put into traditionally masculine words that reflect the power of language. All of the issues like the dirty side of business, of the failure of the American dream, cutthroat nature of capitalism explore certain expectations about man-hood. Language has the most important role to create good or bad relationships based on families, relationships between

men and women, and how Mamet's view translate onstage into the relationships he creates between his stage characters through dialogue.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the language of salesmen is strictly self-referential, filled with characteristics typical of 'sales talk', and indicative of real and imagined power relationships that usually demonstrate with using offensive words and injurious language. Through the play, aside from the repetition of less vulgar words, such verbs like say, said, tell, told, talk, talking, and speaking are used by the characters over two hundred times. These verbs most of the time are utilized as seemingly unnecessary recalling that the speaker is speaking and the hearer is listening: 'What I am saying ...'. Not only talking is not enough to the formation of identity and power, but also the speaker must call attention to his speech. In addition, in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, to declaring verbal authority, the semantic constructions such as 'let me tell you' or 'what I am telling you is ...', often act as a verbal 'filler' that are the ways for the speaker to keep talking and to hinder the hearer from taking his turn in the conversation. Above mentions can recognize through those lines of play relate to Moss and Aaronow: "Moss: Someone should stand up and strike back. Aaronow: What do you mean? Moss: Somebody ... Aaronow: Yes ...? Moss: Should do something to them. Aaronow: What? Moss: something. To pay them back". (Mamet, 1984, p. 26)

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, power—verbal, sexual and economic have specific role, so that majorities of words and discourses are based on violently asking others to shut up and listen to keep their powers. In fact the use of violence during the play is for getting power back or removes other's power, forcing another person to speak when he desires to be silent. If talking considers as a power can control the utterance of another by violence, so in this regard it will get all power away from the hearer. Through the play, two of the most offensive moments take place as characters are pushed to speak. At the end of the play, Williamson has revealed that Levene is a person who broke into the real state and stole the leads. Williamson urges Levene to tell him who is his collaborator:

Williamson: If you tell me where the leads are, I won't turn you in.[...] I'm walking in that door, you have five second, to tell me: or you are going to jail. Williamson: [...] How much did you get for them? Levene: Five thousand. I kept half. Williamson: Who kept the other half? (*Pause*) Levene: Do I have to tell you? (*Pause*) Williamson starts to open the door) Moss. (Mamet, 1984, pp. 100-11)

And also another moment to this one is when Roma compels Lingk to admit the he has no power to make a deal. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* speaking is based on ideological definition a demanding to power, to force a person to speak in order to denial of power—to say that he cannot really 'talk' in where it is the ultimate humiliation: Roma: What does that mean? Lingk: That ... Roma: ...what, what, say it. Say it to me ... Lingk: I ... Roma: What ...? Say the words. Lingk: I don't have the *power* (*Pause*) I said it. Roma: What power? Lingk: The power to negotiate. (Mamet, 1984, p. 92)

The only power that calls to the aggressive salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is the power to negotiate the 'actual talk' in order to make for the purpose for a deal. In that scene, power is in the hands of Mrs. Lingk and her ability to cancel the contract and say 'no' to the salesmen. Roma gives an assurance to Lingk that "we'll talk to her", but lingk replays: "she won't listen" (Mamet, 1984, p. 90). As a result a customer who will not listen cannot be sold. Positively Williamson and Mrs. Lingk are two characters that possess verbal authority although they are not salesmen and perhaps Aaronow as a third character who keeps a extent of strength and respect by refusing to speak is perceived as an unsuccessful salesman by the other characters, because his speech become disjointed by their power and as Salih (2002) asserts, " In fact , the suggestion that there is no hate speech behind the expressions of hate speech dovetails with Butler's idea that there are no sovereign agents of

language is a citational chain preceding and exceeding speaking subjects who are retroactively installed by and in discourse” (p. 104).

David Mamet’s *Oleanna* enters the place of academia and the core of the drama is a contested cultural market of academic space. *Oleanna*’s stage language is the musical qualities that Mamet brings to speech. It is poetic language and it is not only an attempt to capture language, but it is an attempt to create language. *Oleanna*’s language is very stylized and it has a lot of four-letter words and it gives his work great emotional impact and rich them with a variety of interpretative possibilities. The basic Mametain dialogue is all repetitious phrases and bases on disjointed exchanges. His characters recognize their personal power and also their identity through language. However, every character in *Oleanna* uses language for his or her own purpose to get what he or she wants and no one ever talks except to fulfil an objective. In other words, the play is based on a politics to human relationships. The characters reveal themselves in their actions, and whose broken language expresses what is seldom uttered and the words are used to seduce, to charm, and to misdirect. *Oleanna* specializes in language or jargon and it is about the use and abuse of the terms of art which serves into restricted linguistic communities that transfer power, money, and/or distinction upon their members.

In *Oleanna* John’s self-described duties as a professor are completed by his personal treatment. Carol becomes more confused and frustrated by longer John’s speech, but John convinces her, however, her response is appropriate and even to be expected, “John: ...that’s my *job*, don’t you know. Carol: What is? John: To provoke you. Carol: No. John: oh. Yes, though. Carol: To provoke me? John: That’s right. Carol: To make me mad? John: That’s right. To force you ... Carol: ...to make me mad is your job? John: To force you to ... listen...” (Mamet, 1992, p. 32)

Moreover, John continues to summon Carol with loquacious language, fuddling progression of thought and a harsh, patronize tone. The précis shift above include the language of provocation, rage, and “force,” each of which is crucially tied, at least for John, to the art of listening. Besides, it shows that John controls not only the succession of the conversation, but the specific language that is used. In fact, through act one John’s language is performative and he could keep his hierarchy and his gender as male.

By using the proper words and effective language John in this act appears more powerful than Carol and makes a sense of nothingness and foolishness for Carol and frustrates her. There is the moral causality between subject and act that is taken for granted by the law. As Butler declares “Put very simply, the law requires someone or something to blame in cases of hate speech and ‘obscenity’, so it points the finger at a subject that *it creates* in order to prosecute.” (qtd. in Salih, 2002, p.105)

Carol’s identity is clearly constructed from her language, so it causes she appears powerless and has a lower position. In Act I, Carol’s language vagrants off because she cannot understand the language of the university, so she cannot form an identity within the community of the university. So John is confronted by an agitated and anxious student. Through Act II and III the place of power is exchanged by Carol and she tries to use of John’s lessons and words to frustrate him. In fact, this two Acts are named shocking and inevitable tragedy as characters becomes more attacked in a potentially empowering position. Meanwhile Carol has attempted to convey her need and desire to John, he is involved in a parallel struggle to dispute a new specialized discourse, that of real-state law, which is caused him feel as futile and unsure of himself as she is.

A transfer of power does not occur until act two of the play when Carol begins to move more freely around John’s suit of rooms. She repeatedly raises her voice in wrath and forcing John to look her in the eyes. In the play power is being claimed and disclaim with the menace of closure as well

as with the ability to prevent it. Carol opens the door and decides to leave, “I came here to, the court officials told me not to come.” (Mamet, 1992, p. 60)

When John hears this statement, requests what she means by “court official,” and then with his intricate speech continues to force on, his question. Carol obviously is aware something John does not. It is no chance for John to reveal this information till Carol leaves him. After closing the door, John tells her that he grasps her suffer, that he can support her if she would just allow him. There is a linguistic modes of authority are continuously carried out by both John and Carol.

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Great deal of the early drama of *Oleanna* depends on the price formation of linguistic exchange. As Bourdieu explains that, “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” (qtd. in Kulmala, 2007, p. 109). In this regard, Carol and her group propose the language to underscore the fundamental of the changes later in the play. Carol wants John repeatedly to practice a language she can understand easily. But, ultimately, she wants to eliminate john’s position and also his book. In this regard, the word “arbitrary” has specific role in the play and it comes to the root of the practices of authority for *Oleanna*’s characters. As Kulmala (2007) says, “John assertion that they have subscribed to arbitrary rules refers to rules/roles “professor” and “student” must play” (p. 110).

There is no magical impression in the interpellative name of the law. In fact, the interpellation is a citational utterance that depends upon context and convention in order to be effective. It means that the similarity of contingent utterances is not different to other. Carol interpellates John’s utterance because she wants to be in education’s field of cultural production, not outside it, so critique it. In order to overthrow John’s arbitrariness, Carol performs a necessary act in maintaining a habitués. Therefore, in order to protect an institution or group in place members of that establishment must pretend the hierarchies and rules that keep it in existence are arbitrary. As Butler asserts that “the linguistic constitution of the subject may take place without the subject’s even registering the operation of interpellation”. (1997, p. 3)

Difference and Disidentification

Glengarry Glen Ross embodies a world of men and men's relationships that the sign of manhood is manifested by selling. There are only two females; Lingk's wife and Levene's daughter are mentioned in the play. In a real estate office is a alternative shifting power relationship, performed through language patterns of domination. As it is mentioned, power is the crux of Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, because it is the ever-expanding capacity to distinct identity in difference that is on the shoulder of Mamet's characters in the play. In this regard the "difference" between consciousness and its object becomes the field for a new identity. By breaking the silence and claiming the power of the female voice, Mamet's female characters, like Jinny Lingk takes a new identity, therefore she shifts her position. Although she is a woman, she acts like man, so we can consider her a male. As Butler asserts that, "gender identity is a sequence of acts (an idea that has existential underpinnings), but she also argues that there is no pre-existing performer who does those acts, no doer behind the deed" (qtd. in Salih, 2002, p. 45). Hence, the subject or doer in every action can be posited as a male or female. Jinny lingk's power of her voice can study through lingk, her husband and Roma's conversation, "Lingk: I can negotiate. Roma: What does that mean? Lingk: That ... Roma: ...what, what, say it. Say it to me. Lingk: I... Roma: What ...? Lingk: I... Roma: What ...? Say the words. Lingk: I don't have the power" (Mamet, 1984, P. 54). In fact, Lingk have no power to talk over the real estate deal, but it seems, in performance, is the feeble dejection of a man who is unable to communicate. There is a dialogue between male and male, client to seller, with no gender involve.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, both males and females acquire access to the distinctions and struggles of multiple genders. As Levene's daughter, for whom he has prepared an education, is unexpectedly sick. This merely mentioned daughter seems to provide the only glimpse of human warmth in this group of men. Again, although she has no notable appearance, she has power to shift the situation, so she changes the power to posit a new identity. Butler declares that, "the satisfaction of desire is the transformation of difference into identity: the discovery of the strange and novel as familiar, the arrival of the awaited, the reemergence of what has been absent or lost" (1999, p. 9). In other words, desire means the power of the negative in human life in order to pursue a substance or new subject. This desire could find between Mamet's characters that cause the transformation of difference into identity so that first 'disidentification' should takes place till the subject loses its self and then the new identity appears. On the other hand the subject can be considered as a performative construction which is based on the ways of doing one's identity that leads to appear oppositions such as male/female. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the characters themselves choose their gender identities by showing their actions, so that there is no absolute identity with the determinate objects because there is a movement between differences.

Obviously, it is the oppressive struggle to secure one's own position, and so that the brutal acts to save their hierarchy take place that are the reflection of being winner or loser. Moss by "making it concrete," has handled to demand an offence out of a hazardous or speculative conversation. In sum, both, male and female characters of *Glengarry Glen Ross* can take the equal position and their genders and differences do not have any role to control the power. Because the subject is described and constituted it is available within existing power structures so that it can be considered a port of a becoming or a process which has neither origin nor end.

In *Oleanna*, the gendered difference between Carol and John as a student-teacher is not the pivot of matter rather the power of teacher as a lecturer and the weakness of student conduct from their respective and relative status, not from their sex. In fact, *Oleanna* is only a kaleidoscope of exchanging power relationship laid down through language pattern of predominance, capitulation, and reversal. In Act II, the accents are different and when Carol faces with her new-found power,

the lovely semantic chains of “Do you see? Don’t you see? You don’t see, do you?” (Mamet, 1992, p. 48) transfer an identical slander of blinkered satisfaction. In this respect the subject is extent in order to effects a relationship to exteriority, but a non-relationship makes shape as the constitutive “difference” of all signification, so that the subject is evidenced as a fiction language gives itself in a struggle to cover up its own ineradicable structure. Carol uses of dexterously technique to trap John, by turning his words against him. The another version of the same technique is Carol’s intention manipulation of John casual or ill-judged remarks in which he damns the antagonist out of his own mouth. Thus the dispute and linguistic control in Mamet’s drama is not necessarily dependent on gender difference. Indeed, where identity is posited difference is concealed and there is a denial of difference for the sake of positing a counterfeit identity.

When Carol discovers that she can use the rhetorical strategies of sexual politics to change her position in the hierarchy, so the gender becomes a crucial factor and it shows that the Subject is an effect rather than a cause based on Butler’s theories of performative identity. Carol uses of this tactics as the best available weapons to posit her identity and fades the present and also power of John, her lecturer:

Carol: I thought you know. John: what. (Pause) What does it mean (Pause) Carol you tried to rape me. (Pause) According to the law, (Pause) John: ...what...? Carol: You tried to rape me. I was leaving this office you “pressed” yourself into me. You “pressed” your body into me. John: ...I... Carol: My Group has told your lawyer that we may pursue criminal charges. John: ...no.... (Mamet, 1992, pp. 77-8)

On the other hand, the explicit nature of Carol’s weaponry repays something must be said about the off-stage “Group” to turns for advice and support after Act I:

John: There’s no shame in that. Everybody needs advisers. Everybody needs to expose themselves... Carol: You said that we should agree to talk about my complaint. John: That’s correct. Carol: But we *are* talking about it. John: Well, that’s correct too. You see? This is the gist of education. Carol: No, no. I mean, we’re talking about it at the Tenure Committee Hearing”. (Mamet, 1992, 55-6)

This “Group” turns her into a mere slogan-spitting mouthpiece for its own political agenda, but Carol with or without her group might actually be capable of thinking and acting for herself. Hence the group as a simple matter becomes to discount her complaint against John as a manufactured animosity cranked up by a malevolent outside agency. In fact, by this way Carol tries to fade John as other subject to posit her identity and in this case to show her difference and escapes of disidentification. As Butler says:

The subject who speaks is a “fading” subject, one who is constantly fading into the unconscious that the subject represents i.e, the loss that the subject represents, that which the subject *desires*; the subject is constantly vacillating between its own particularity and the lost other who, in effect, is also represented by it. (1999, p. 193) In Mamet’s *Oleanna*, the violence of the professor John against the student Carol or vice versa is precipitated by a perceived attempt to erase identity and through control of language this identity is posited.

Conclusions

The most significant conclusion from the article is that there is no absolute or final certainty, but just positing ideas that cannot be stabilized as ‘truths’.. It is not logical to say that if one sees a man dressed like a woman or vice versa then one in his/her first insight takes those terms as a “reality” of gender. In this sense, an ostensible reality and an unreality are coupled in order to takes such perceptions in where one thinks he knows what the reality is, and takes the secondary manifestation of gender to be entire illusion, falsehood and artifice. In this regard, when the body is

not read by other one, the usual cultural perceptions fail and we do not know how to recognize the reality from the unreal. Thus what is considered as naturalized knowledge of gender is changed to a gender that is a changeable and revisable reality.

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