“Art and life are not one, but they must be united in myself--in the unity of my answerability.”
(Bakhtin, “Art and Answerability”)

“What can be preserved? What can be communicated from one generation to the next?
Philosophy. Morality. Aesthetics.”
(Mamet, “Theater as Art”)

“ALL IT IS, IT’S A CARNIVAL”:

READING DAVID MAMET’S WOMEN CHARACTERS WITH BAKHTIN

I wish to express my gratitude to those institutions and persons which and who have given me both professional and moral support. First and foremost, the exchange program between Lajos Kossuth University and Indiana University in Bloomington made it possible to research my theme at Indiana University for a five-month period, for which I am grateful. My thanks are also due to all my colleagues at the North American Department of Debrecen University for their intellectual support, their conversations, and their friendship during the writing of the dissertation. I am also thankful to the three librarians at the Institute of English and American Studies for their assistance. Last but not least, I want to express my sincere thanks to my academic advisor, Professor Zoltán Abádi-Nagy, whose encouragement, guidance, and advice have been invaluable throughout the preparation of this work.

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this work is to explore how the changing aspects of *womanhood* and *femininity,* as presented in the drama of a leading contemporary American dramatist **David Mamet** (1947-), are symptomatic of and serve as literary records of crucial transformations in present-day American society. The dissertation offers a comprehensive and multifaceted study of female protagonists in representative plays by Mamet and seeks to examine the extent to which shifts in women's socially and culturally ascribed roles, as portrayed and diagnosed by Mamet, have generated an erosion of a traditional value-system in a male-dominated world. Owing to a subversive impulse manifest in these women characters' acts, decisions, and behavior, as well as in consequence of the presence of a chaotized world characterized by radical transformations of conventional routines (degraded value-system, aborted human relationships, profanation of language) and reversals of traditionally assigned status and role of male and female characters, it is legitimate to claim that a profoundly *carnivalized* world emerges in Mamet's drama. Therefore, the concept of "carnival," as transposed into literature by the late Russian philosopher of language, literary scholar, and theorist, **Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin** (1895-1975) provides an adequate theoretical input and methodological point of entry into Mamet's texts. Postulating that Mamet's drama has absorbed carnival forms and images allows for the application of a selected conceptual apparatus ("self/other," "carnival," "polyphony," and "dialogism") and theoretical framework of Bakhtin's system of thought.

One of the fundamental conclusions of the present study is that the presence of carnival in Mamet's texts serves purposes analogous with those defined by Bakhtin for literature in general: "[c]arnival forms, transposed into the language of literature, became a p*owerful means* for comprehending life in art, they became a special language whose words and forms possess an extraordinary capacity for *symbolic* generalization, that is for *generalization in depth*"

(*Problems* 157). In the study offered here, I will combine two crucial aspects of carnival: first, carnival used as an *aesthetic category* to reveal instances of carnivalization in literature; second, carnival conceived as a critique of any hierarchical order. Accordingly, I will isolate and diagnose instances of carnivalization in selected plays and explore the female characters' carnivalization of the patriarchal order with an intention to trace the way Mamet is mapping the changes in the women's culturally and socially sanctioned roles. Ultimately, I expect to answer the following essential questions: What are the shaping factors of women's new gender identity as presented in Mamet's plays? In what ways do women transgress and dismantle the social and cultural roles ascribed to them by dominant and restrictive male myths? How does the subversion of long-established male myths affect gender attributes traditionally associated with women? How does the concept of femininity change as a result of these subversive and transgressive transactions?

Despite the fact that my critical investigation focuses primarily on the portrayal of women characters, as a corollary of this enterprise, I expect that the Bakhtinian framework will provide enriching insights in establishing distinctly Mametian structural and compositional features in his drama. Thereby I can offer a new perception into Mamet's art and go beyond merely labeling him with one of the inevitable "isms," and will also be able to better locate his oeuvre in the development and continuity of American drama and theater, while also indicating to what extent he has integrated the postmodern dramatic idiom.

Since the present wok is the first consistent scholarly study on Mamet's female characters—before the completion of the dissertation, to my knowledge, no publication in this field has appeared—the choice of the subject matter requires some clarification. Notorious for celebrating male camaraderie and bonding while marginalizing and presenting women characters in a disrespectful and contemptuous manner in his plays, Mamet has been invariably pigeonholed as a misogynist playwright who is concerned predominantly with issues of masculinity. Moreover, he achieved public fame and critical acclaim with his all-male cast plays

including *American Buffalo* (1975), which earned him several prizes such as a Joseph Jefferson Award (1975), an Obie (1976), and a New York Drama Critics' Award for its Broadway premiere in 1977. Another major play, *Glengarry Glenn Ross* brought him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1983—also confirmed further the stereotypical and monolithic image of Mamet as being solely a "male-experience playwright." Inescapably, the largest bulk of Mamet criticism that has extensively dealt with the anxieties and dilemmas of (un)stable masculinity as treated in his dramatic output, as well as the scant attention that his women characters have so far received also contributed to the image of a "misogynist Mamet." The present work offers a balancing counterpoint to the limited and narrow perspectives of previous critical studies that tend to view his women characters merely from a *male-experience-centered* viewpoint and against the background of male identity crisis. Here, applying a synthetic and complex literary–critical approach to Mamet's female characters, I propose the deployment of a *woman-experience-centered* critical filter, whereby women's acts and behavior are evaluated in their own right.

In selecting representative texts for this study from the immense body of solid work Mamet has produced over the last thirty years, my first delimiting criterion was generic. Being a most prolific and versatile author, Mamet has so far written more than fifty dramatic works including radio plays as well as one-act gems. Mamet also happens to be the author of more than a dozen screenplays, the director of five movies, the writer of two novels, and also an essayist. Because Mamet's focus on the problems of establishing and maintaining female identity seems to have crystallized primarily in his dramatic works, and especially, with his plays from the late 1970s, my intention has been to choose works, on the one hand, that register Mamet's shifts in his views and attitudes and on the other hand, to select plays that present women in a variety of contexts. Thus my discussion will primarily target a corpus of seven plays—including one film script—that comply with the requirements outlined: *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974) and *The Woods* (1977) from his early phase of his career; *Speed-the-Plow* (1987), *House of Games,* originally a film script but treated here as a play (1987), and *Oleanna*

(1992) as all the three situate the female protagonists in the public realm of life; while *The Cryptogram* (1994), and *The Old Neighborhood* (1997), comprising three short plays, *The Disappearance of the Jews*, *Jolly*, and *Deeny* locate the heroines in domestic environment.

The Bakhtinian approach will be tested whether it is capable of offering a new reading of Mamet's texts and of providing a substantial dimension for a systematic and extensive investigation of the portrayal of the women protagonists in the selected plays. Thus, what I am actually offering in the present study is a case of intersystemic transfer: I will be using concepts of the Bakhtinian system to illuminate another "system," the dramatic topography of Mamet's world. Thus ascertaining the applicability of selected aspects of Bakhtin's theory is crucial. A detailed justification of the applicability of Bakhtin's system for the study of women characters as well as the legitimacy of transferring his concepts, originally developed for the genre of the novel, to drama will be provided in the second chapter of the dissertation. There is one more cogent argument for "wedding" the Russian scholar Bakhtin "the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century" (Todorov ix) and Mamet, a highly acclaimed, successful American dramatist, writer, director, and essayist. This cohesive link between Bakhtin's theory and Mamet's drama does not readily fall into the category of a clearly identifiable and textually evident reason. Instead, it emanates from their works: a deep concern about basic human values, *morality* and *humanity*. This is what operates at the heart of their "systems" transcending spatial and temporal borders as well as generic delimitations. What I expect to demonstrate throughout the analyses of the individual plays is that Mamet's preoccupation with situating his characters in a chaotic world does not entail his negation of basic values. On the contrary, in certain underlying ways, he invokes these values. I believe that these aspects in Mamet's plays can be effectively pinpointed and understood only through the medium and mediation of Bakhtin's system both in terms of the values mentioned as well as the conceptual apparatus and theoretical framework to be subsequently highlighted. The ultimate impact of Bakhtin's thought was convincingly articulated by David Lodge as follows: "Bakhtin's greatest contribution to

contemporary criticism is [. . .] to have made a timely reaffirmation of the writer's *creative* and *communicative power*" (7, emphasis added).

The conceptual cluster I am going to use from Bakhtin's vast arsenal will be restricted to "polyphony," "dialogism," "carnival," and "self/'other" identified by Bakhtin as basic devices of character portrayal in carnivalized literature. Furthermore, I will employ the external and internal manifestations of carnivalization in order to isolate features of carnivalization in Mamet's texts, whereby I expect to demonstrate their generic specificities. Although Bakhtin's new insights pertaining to prosaics, dialogue, unfinalizability, ethical and aesthetic acts, language as uttered discourse, double-voicing, etc. have had both enriching and disputed impacts on subsequent critical discourse, I have refrained from taking a comprehensive account of these insights and the numerous reactions since this is not the central focus here. Instead, my primary concern lies in employing *his* ideas and concepts in creative and productive ways for my purposes.

Also, the synthetic, coherent nature, and especially the accommodating quality of Bakhtin's system, which ultimately integrates a methodological apparatus that can be applied to uncover a character's mimetic and formalist functions as well as the inevitable ideological dimension has invalidated the necessity of including any other critical discourse within the scope of this work. On the face of it, a focus on women characters would warrant a feminist approach, however, I have come to realize that the broad spectrum and the commendable flexibility of Bakhtin's ideas make it unnecessary. For instance, evident affinities between the subjectivity-formation models as proposed both by Bakhtin and the poststructuralist feminist critic Judith Butler attest to the Russian critic's broad conceptual range. The strength of the Bakhtinian approach rests on its ability to offer a set of methodological tools that is applicable to the study of other carnivalized texts irrespective of their actual genre.

The dissertation is organized in the following manner: the first chapter surveys conceptions concerning the images of women in Mamet's drama, the second provides a justification for the selected framework, while in the subsequent chapters, the conceptual cluster

serves as an organizing principle for the critical exploration of the women characters. Thus, after a discussion of the operational validity of each concept in the dramatic genre, the ensuing analyses will testify their applicability in this new terrain.

In the opening chapter Chapter ("Images of Women in Mamet's Drama"), starting with a brief overview of the disparaging and insulting labels attached to Mamet's women characters by his male characters and critics alike, I will argue for the necessity of a female focus in order to dispel these reductive and inauthentic images of women. The second part of this chapter will unmap continuities between dominant tendencies in American literature—the centrality of the construction of manhood and a palpable disregard for women—and Mamet's writing. Viewed from this perspective, Mamet's drama appears to have sustained a received attitudinal pattern prevalent in American literature: the misogynistic treatment of women. Yet, the carnivalization approach will enable me to modify this commonly held assumption and to propose that indeed Mamet considerably revises the male-conventional treatment of women characters. This claim, however, can be fully ascertained with assurance only when evidence based on concrete analyses is in, that is, at the end of this scrutiny. The third subchapter will provide a detailed survey of and offer comments upon the critical responses of the women protagonists in the plays selected. Concurrently, bearing in mind shifts of emphasis in Mamet's gender focus throughout his career, I will offer a periodization of his plays, dividing them into three distinct phases. Inevitably, I wish to and can safely prove that his plays serve as records of an increasingly accurate and personal rendering of human relationships.

Chapter II ("Crossing Borders: The Rationale for a Bakhtinian Framework") provides a comprehensive and detailed justification for selecting Bakhtin's system of thought. With special emphasis on criteria defining drama as well as the relationship between plot and character, this chapter includes an extensive survey of certain historical (Aristotle's, realist-naturalist, Bertolt Brecht's) and ahistorical theories of drama (Manfred Pfister's) that in one way or another can be linked to Mamet's dramatic vision. In addition to revealing the irrelevance of these approaches to

the purposes of the present study, inevitably, fundamental generic properties in Mamet's drama will also be touched upon. Taking a somewhat polemical stance with Mamet, I will challenge his claim that his drama follows a basic Aristotelian tenet, the "primacy of plot over character". I will provide *plot patterns* typifying the composition of his works that indubitably show a tendency of shrinking plot designs. By underscoring the conceptual transformation of key terms such as *catharsis* and *purification* in Aristotle's theory, I will address the shifts of meaning they have undergone in Mamet's drama. Further highlighting some contradiction between Mamet's own views relating to his dramatic vision and the actual dramatic devices he employs, I will argue that, contrary to his claim, Brecht's and his thinking on drama as well as their conception of the presentation of character and acting style show clear analogies. Indeed, both dramatists, as I will show, are in favor of the notion of theater as a socially responsive and responsible instrument, and in actuality, both of them argue for the actor's necessary detachment from his character. In order to underscore the synthetic nature of Bakhtin's thought, I will address the inadequacies and inherent deficiencies of dramatic theories of character deriving from the three main literary theoretical paradigms—humanism, formalism, and poststructuralism—that dominated literary theory in the twentieth century. By contrast, Bakhtin's system of thought comprising all these aspects serves as a counter example to these theories.

For the purposes of exploring Mamet's affiliation with postmodernism in recent American drama, I will situate his dramatic works in the postmodern American scene. After a brief survey of theatrical trends prevalent in this period, I will outline specificities of the new dramatic writing in terms of character portrayal techniques and thematic concerns. Taking Pfister's model devised to specify the sender and receiver positions in dramatic texts as a point of departure, I will offer a graphic illustration of the role and status of monologue versus dialogue in performance art and Mamet's drama. Finally, by elucidating the theoretical and methodological implications of the notion of *liminality*, inherently characterizing Bakhtin's system of thought, I will argue: it is precisely this property that allows for extensions and borderline negotiations of his

categories, thus excluding slavish adherence to the precepts of his concepts. Therefore, Bakhtin's own critical stance validates a smooth transfer of his categories, initially developed for the description of the novelistic genre, to drama. I will also emphasize that the concept *liminal*, employed in its original sense when introduced by Arnold Van Gennep to describe rites of passage in life crisis situations, can function as a helpful supplementary notion to describe the stages in the women characters' transformations.

The main thrust of the argument in Chapter III ("Dialogized Polyphony: The Multi-form Workings of Dialogue") is that *polyphony* and *dialogism*—regarded by Bakhtin himself as legitimate modes of character portrayal in carnivalized literature—retain their functional validity, therefore their applicability as literary critical categories to Mamet's drama. In substantiating my claim, I will highlight the presence of "novelized" features such as *indeterminacy, unfinalizability*, and the withdrawal of the authorial voice also apparent in Mamet's works. To further highlight the added significance of dialogue in character portrayal, I have introduced the term *dialogized polyphony* to describe the formal specificity of the dramatic dialogue in Mamet's works as opposed to *undialogized polyphony* primarily used to (re)present split character prevalent in a large number of drama in the postmodern scene. The second part of this chapter provides linguistic evidence for the character-portraying force and the multi-functionality of the Mametian dialogue. Applying two different approaches, a conversation analytical method and Bakhtin's concept of the internal dialogism of the word for the analysis of a stretch of dialogue exchange from *Oleanna*, I will identify recurrent patterns in the characters' strategies of communication, whereby certain latent sides of the protagonists can be disclosed.

Chapter IV ("Aspects of Carnivalized Discourse") discusses two crucial aspects of carnival that will form the basis of the analyses of the business plays in the two subsequent chapters. Carnival, as an aesthetic concept, is employed to uncover the external and internal manifestations of carnivalization in all the selected plays. With this method, "carnival" forms and symbols can be shown as having permeated Mamet's texts. To put it in other words, the

presence of these elements attests to the legitimacy of qualifying Mamet's drama as carnivalized. When carnival is conceived as a critique of any hierarchical order, it can provide the theoretical underpinning for exploring shifts in power relations between male and female characters. In Mamet, this is most conspicuous in the business plays.

Chapters V and VI contain multi-dimensional investigations of the female protagonists in the three selected business plays. While the former chapter focuses on disclosing the external and internal manifestations of carnivalization and the extent to which these elements contribute to character portrayal, the latter explores the women characters' fight for autonomy and their clashes with their male counterparts in the arena of business. To supplement the descriptive-analytical categories elucidated earlier, in Chapter V ("Topsy-Turvydom: Transactions of Chaotization"), I will introduce the new carnival image of *business space* that appears to be a determining factor in character portrayal and also functions as a structuring agent. Endowed with the ambivalent potential to destroy as well as to renew, this carnival image can exert its impact on characters in both ways. The first part of the chapter will concern itself with revealing the destructive effect of the *business space* on higher education and the human relationships as depicted in *Oleanna.* The second part, however, will include an in-depth analysis of the heroines in *House* and *Speed*, with special emphasis on the role of carnivalistic contrasting pairs.

Chapter VI ("The 'New Woman': Reverberations of the Pioneer Woman") will bring into focus the "new woman," which paradigm, I propose, tends to surface in the business plays. At the core of the argument lies the assumption that acting as their male counterparts' parodying doubles, the women protagonists adopt male acts and behavior, whereby they challenge and subvert the male-dominated world. Applying carnival categories developed by Bakhtin to describe the nature of the popular festivity, I will look at the particular manifestations of shifts in power as well as the accompanying changes in the characters' discourse and gender attributes. In attempting to locate antecedents to the formation of the "new woman" in American cultural

history, I suggest that this type seems to echo some of the properties of the pioneer woman roaming with men on an equal footing in the vast spaces of the West in the nineteenth century.

Chapter VII ("Self-Completion: A Bakhtinian Formula") introduces and elucidates the theoretical context for a subjectivity formation model devised to describe and account for the women characters' *dysfunctional self* manifest in the private realm of life. The proposed model abstracted from Bakhtin's discussion on the relationship between the author and hero in an aesthetic activity and from Butler's ideas on gender formation posits that a *dialogical relationship* is necessary for the meaningful operation of the self and for self-completion. In analyzing these transactions my conclusion is that in Mamet's drama, the model assumes a distorted incarnation, which is contributory to the characters' inevitable alienation.

Chapter VIII ("The Self [Un]Dialogized") has a double aim. On the one hand, applying the Bakhtinian analytical categories, I will chart a process of carnivalization of human values running through Mamet's plays. On the other hand, employing the model introduced in the previous chapter, I will examine the problematics of self-construction and the disfigurement of the dialogical relationship between the self and the other as manifest in the plays set in the private realm of life. On the evidence of the analyses of the family plays, however, I will highlight the presence of a de-carnivalized world evolving subtextually in Mamet's drama.

The version of English used in the text of the present study is American English. It will be most apparent in the spelling of some lexical items such as "theater," "labeling," "focusing," etc. As regards matters of manuscript style, in documenting sources, the text largely conforms to the current MLA standard: parenthetical citations keyed to a *Works Cited* list at the end of the work. However, to facilitate a more convenient readability, and also, for aesthetic considerations, in one minor respect I have chosen to diverge from the MLA standard. Thus, for instance, the lines are fully justified instead of aligned to the left.

I. IMAGES OF WOMEN IN MAMET'S DRAMA

> ROMA. "Some poor newly married guy gets run down by a cab. Some *busboy* wins the lottery. (*Pause*) All it is, it's a carnival. What's special . . . what *draws* us?" (Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*)

[1] Mamet's Women Characters: Conceptions and Misconceptions

In an interview over a decade ago David Mamet observed: "[w]hat's missing from modern life is spirituality--the connection to the greater truths of the universe. What is missing is the feeling of knowing our place and a sense of belonging" (qtd. in Nuwer 10). Indeed, the loss of spirituality seems to pervade the totality of his dramatic output. Surfacing in his plays to varying degrees, the spiritual emptiness is a haunting presence in the characters' conversational dissonance, in their fragmented, disjointed, and incomplete utterances, as well as in the abusive language they use to conceal their innermost feelings. The frequently diagnosed failure of Mamet's characters to communicate is both symptomatic and strongly reflective of their miscommunication, and eventually, this aspect of dysfunctionality tends to lead to their failure to build genuine human relationships. The lack of articulate discourse can thus be seen and interpreted as the symptomatic representation of the underlying absence of a firm center of sustaining beliefs and convictions.

The spiritual void "plaguing" Mamet's plays finds its most blatant manifestation in the demythicized way that women are treated and presented in his dramatic works. "If women are not simply banished altogether," David Richards has remarked, "they are peripheral figures, limited to the roles of sex object, punching bag or sometimes, when men need respite from the hurly-burly, dispenser of Tender Loving Care" (1). The other type Richards distinguishes is the "warrior" woman, who challenges male authority. Also, the language used by the male characters to refer to women is highly abusive, ranging from slurs such as "bitches," "broads," and "inanimate objects" to "chicks" and "dykes." The stance that critics take of Mamet's female

characters, especially of the "warrior" type, are far from being flattering either: Joan in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* is "cynical" (Richards 5); Karen in *Speed-the-Plow*, Dr. Ford in *House of Games*, and Carol in *Oleanna* are "manipulative, monochromatic heroines" (qtd. in Mufson 11); Donny in *The Cryptogram* is labeled as "narcissistic" (Lahr 73). Carol rates the most "imaginative" adjectives such as "a dishonest, androgynous zealot" (Showalter, "Violence" 17); "a mousy nonentity," and "a cipher" (Richards 1), to mention only a few. In general, critics tend to underscore "the primacy of male friendship" (Radavich 124) between the male characters, against which women feature as "intruders" (Radavich 124), or "contamination" and "threat" (McDonough, "Every Fear" 203-4).

Given the unfavorable--sometimes bordering on hostile--treatment the women characters receive from their male counterparts, as well as in view of the reductive classification of female characters, apparent even from the brief selection of comments cited above, it is both an arduous and challenging critical task to investigate the portrayal of women in Mamet's plays. It is likewise intriguing to attempt to answer the following deceptively simple question: why are women presented in this, undoubtedly contemptuous, disrespectful, and derogatory manner?

The present inquiry into Mamet's female protagonists has been inspired by the realization that alongside a prevalent Mametian theme, namely, the crisis of masculinity, it is the issue of the changing aspects of *womanhood* and *femininity* in recent American society that constitutes a dominant and recurrent thematic preoccupation in Mamet's dramatic works. However, with the exception of a few critical studies--to be commented upon later in this chapter--the overwhelming majority of responses tend to view the female characters' acts and discourse solely from a *male-experience-centered* focus and against the background of male identity crisis. This perspective, as mentioned above, inescapably produces one-dimensional and somewhat distorted images of women. This simplistic view, I believe, requires a corrective.

Thus, in order to counter the overtly one-dimensional and reductive evaluation of female characters as provided by the *male-experience-centered* viewpoint (irrespective of the gender distribution of the relevant critics), I recommend the deployment of a different critical filter. What I actually suggest is

that the previous perspective be replaced with a *woman-experience-centered* focus, whereby women's acts are evaluated not through the filter of the crisis of masculinity, but in their own right.

The present inquiry is thus premised on the assumptions that [1] Mamet's plays address a pressing contemporary issue, namely, women's changing roles and positions as women impact on men's gender identity in recent American society; [2] Mametian drama traces and diagnoses crucial transformations in women's gender identity; [3] it is precisely through the female characters that Mamet actually offers a profound critical angle on an America that is in the process of cultural dissolution, and he exposes some of the most disturbing aspects of American society in the "postmodern age"[i]: the decline and collapse of once viable set of American myths, a debased value system, and human relationships devoid of love and intimacy.

The presence of a degraded value-system, the profanation of language, and abortive human relationships--conspicuously prevalent in Mamet's drama--posit an intrinsically carnivalized world that M. M. Bakhtin's description of a carnivalistic life aptly characterizes: "life is drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent 'life turned inside out,' 'the reverse side of the world" (*Problems* 122). Viewed in this light, Mamet's drama appears to have adopted the carnival spirit since the world emerging in it is profoundly and inescapably carnivalistic in a double sense. First, the world that the characters inhabit can be described in terms of radical transformations of conventional routines, chaotized order, and uprooted patterns (for instance, business is degraded into crime, love is devalued into aggressive sexuality). Second, female protagonists "carnivalize," i.e., subvert the male-dominated world, whereby they challenge and reverse the inferior status and roles traditionally assigned to them in patriarchy. Prompted by this observation, I propose that the concept of "carnivalization"--in the sense Bakthin defines it in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*[ii] (1929): "the transposition of carnival to literature" (122)--provides a useful methodological point of entry into Mamet's dramatic texts. It follows that I

consider Mamet's drama an example of *carnivalized literature* that bears the special stamp of carnivalistic folklore and because it has preserved the traditions of "serio-comical genres, in which the "one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its reationality, its singular meaning, its dogmatism" weaken (Bakhtin, *Problems* 107). From this vantage point, the concept of "carnival" as well as its conceptual satellites such as "polyphony," "dialogism," and "self/other," which constitute inherent features of carnivalized literature, can serve as adequate tools of description and interpretation for a better understanding of character portrayal in Mamet's works. To cite Bakhtin's words:

> Carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content; it is, rather, an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things. (*Problems* 166)

Thus, the primary aim of this work will be to identify the presence and diagnose instances of carnivalization in selected plays by Mamet, and to explore the female characters' carnivalization of the patriarchal order with an intention to trace the way Mamet is mapping the changes in the women's culturally and socially sanctioned roles. Moreover, the carnivalization approach offers an insight into defining generic properties typically characterizing Mamet's plays. Thereby it can be established to what extent his drama has adopted the new postmodern dramatic idiom.

Since a more direct and sustained justification of giving preference to Bakhtin's system of thought over certain other dramatic theories must wait until the second chapter, here I am going to merely outline some of the most pertinent reasons that make my methodological decision clearer.

Although for Bakhtin it was the epic domain, in particular Dostoevsky's novels that served as the supreme examples for carnivalized literature, Bakhtin himself asserts that carnivalization is not restricted

to any literary genre, as "[c]arnival was [. . .] *reincarnated in literature*, and precisely into one specific and vigorous line of its development" (*Problems* 157). I will even take the risk proposing that despite the obvious spatial and temporal remoteness, as well as the generic differences between Dostoevsky's novels and Mamet's works, I find that Bakhtin's rationale for the presence of carnivalization in Dostoevsky's novels elucidates, by analogy, the carnivalized atmosphere saturating Mamet's plays:

> It [carnivalization] proved to be remarkably productive as a means for capturing art in the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into "rotten crowds" and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human thought was being nakedly exposed. (*Problems* 166-7)

In a similar fashion, Mamet is also preoccupied with revealing disturbing aspects of the times we are living in. Describing the essence of his own dramatic works, he maintains: "[a]ll plays are about decay. They are about the ends of a situation which has achieved itself fully, and the inevitable disorder which ensues until equilibrium is again established. ("Decay" 187)

Furthermore, I suggest that from the crucial angle of considering Mamet's drama carnivalized, there are two--frequently commented upon but not sufficiently explored--aspects in his works that can be fully and more adequately illuminated. On the one hand, the most commonly accepted critical interpretations for the presence of a chaotic world, and, on the other, the disfiguring misinterpretations of Mamet's women characters can be challenged.

The sense of a chaotic, "topsy-turvy world" emanating from Mamet's works has been widely recognized,[iii] yet it has not been specifically articulated that it is the notion and presence of *carnivalization* that saturates his dramatic world, and that this permanent quality functions as an *overarching principle*. For example, when Bigsby and Roudane offer their views pertaining to the existence of a devalued world in Mamet's drama, they both seem to locate the reason for it in human disengagement from nature. Bigsby asserts that our relationship with the natural world is disrupted in the post-industrial world, and "the self becomes a primary value, hedonism a logical result, power and money, [. . .] a means and an end [. . .]

(*Modern* 202). Roudane claims that the particularly American view of Nature variably advocated by the Puritans and Emerson "has for Mamet so lost her *energia* that the playwright must [. . .] re-figure, re-negotiate, re-furbish the stage into a postmodern secularism ("Mimetics" 5). Accepting Bigsby's and Roudane's propositions concerning the impact of human separation from Nature on postmodern life, I postulate that there is a more immediate reason for the dissonance in the Mametian world, namely, the *woman's changing role and position in postmodern society*, or more precisely, *men's attitude to and perception of this change* that, to a large extent, create a sense of chaos and uncertainty that *men* share.

Also, with the carnivalization approach, it is possible to challenge generally held assumptions present in a large body of critical explanations for the apparently misogynist treatment of women: [1] the male characters or Mamet himself, for that matter, are misogynistic; [2] the banishment or marginalisation of women characters is necessary as the realm of business has become the site of male characters' re-definition of their masculinity.

I believe it is fallacious to claim that misogyny, perceptible in Mamet's plays is rooted in a hatred of women. Instead, it is indicative of a carnivalized world, where the old codes and formulas have been disjointed and dislocated, causing male uneasiness and discomfort. When defending himself against accusations of misogyny, Mamet implicitly also posits a carnivalized world:

> I think it's absurd to accuse me of misogyny, simply because I have been unable or unwilling to describe female characters as readily as men. It's just that I know men better and this is the duty of a writer to describe what he knows best . . . . Even if the codes of masculinity have been eroded and there is no easy formula for identity, let alone happiness. If my characters seem to hate women, it's because they hate everything and seek any single-mindedness that will keep them afloat. That doesn't make me or them misogynists. (qtd. in Joki, *Addressivity* 212)

Mamet critics are unanimous in asserting that the banishment of women characters from a large number of all-male cast plays (*Lakeboat*, *The Duck Variations*, *A Life in the Theater*, *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*) is necessitated by the fact that the realm of business has become the site of male characters' re-definition of their masculinity.[iv] Hersch Zeifman underlies that the values of machismo, toughness, strength, and cunning have become apotheosized by American business (125). McDonough maintains that in business "male characters seek to establish and defend their psychic space" (*Staging* 72).

I find that this explanation for the marginalization, even banishment of female characters, which I term the "male re-definition model," seems to account sufficiently for the elimination of women in some of the *business* plays. It fails, however, to elucidate roles and positions of women characters who are present in some *other* business plays, such as *Speed-the-Plow*, *House of Games*, and *Oleanna*.[v] The questions that arise at this point are these: how can male characters define/re-define themselves, and how does this affect women's definition of their own gender identity? Furthermore, women characters do appear in plays like *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974), *Reunion* (1976), *The Woods (1979)*, *Edmond* (1982), *The Cryptogram* (1994), where the issues of *private* life are in focus--and the "male re-definition" interpretative pattern does not have enough scope to allow for women's roles in the private spheres of life.

As opposed to the "male re-definition model," carnivalization as an interpretative tool will be restricted to no particular site or theme. First, with Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, I regard it as a "broader concept of symbolic inversion and transgression" (18) that makes it a powerful method to study the women protagonists' carnivalization of the male world. My contention is that the women characters challenge the authority of the patriarchal society, thereby they shake its foundations and also subvert some of its long-established social and cultural conventions. Concurrently with this transaction, the women characters lay bare the corrupt and debased value

system of patriarchy. Second, the inherent feature of carnival, namely, that "it celebrates the shift itself" and that "it absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 125) can be effectively deployed to explore the dynamics in the change of power in the Mametian male-female relationships in both the public and private spheres of life.

The foregoing conclusion requires that I locate Mamet within the broader context of American literature as well as within the American dramatic tradition by highlighting continuities and discontinuities in modes of presentation of women, with special emphasis on tracing the misogynist streak in the treatment of women.

[2] The "Women Left Behind" Paradigm

Some staple features of Mamet's drama, such as the centrality of male friendship and bonding, as well as the predominance of vividly portrayed male characters and the marginalisation of women protagonists, align his writing with two closely linked tendencies within American literature: [1] the recurrent theme of the construction of masculinity and manhood; [2] a blatant disregard for women.

Traditionally, the construction of American manhood is a thematic manifestation as well as a confirmation of the historically defined "Americanness" of American literature. Alan Trachtenberg observes that "the inner substance, the essential content of all significant American writing is, (virtually by definition) America itself--that is, America as an idea of selfhood, or the writer himself as America" (qtd. in Bercovitch 8: 327). Certainly, this constructed "America" excludes "multitudes of women and men of different origins, creeds, classes, and colors"; instead, this "America" was rather "a state of personal transcendence achieved--or, more typically, tragically quested for--by a solitary male hero" (Bercovitch 8:327). As a corollary of the essentially male experience defining the "Americanness" of American literature, and as

prompted by the theories of early feminist critique of American literature, the powerful paradigm of a general disregard for women emerges:

> *American* literature, more specifically, was typically a story about a would be autonomous self who revolts against corrupt or stultifyingly conventional society-–a society, as Fetterley and others noted, characteristically associated with the women left behind. This paradigm had been powerfully articulated in Leslie Fiedler's study, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), which accorded Americanness to works that exemplified Fiedler's mythic vision of a "nation sustained by . . . the dream of an escape from culture and a renewal of youth [. . .]." (Carton and Graff, qtd. in Bercovitch 8:327)

Despite the fact that precise statistical data are hard to come by as to the validity of Trachtenberg's and Fiedler's universalizing claims, Peter F. Murphy's conclusion regarding Fiedler's book, appears to be symptomatic and supportive of the feminist assessment: "For Fiedler, men's struggle to avoid women has been a dominant theme. Escape and flight, manifest in bachelorhood and male camaraderie, represent appropriate means to eschew women" (Introduction 3).

American drama itself is not exempt from "the escape and flight from women" pattern. Feminist critic Gayle Austin observes that the mode of treating women characters in American drama has been set by canonical texts such as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1947):

> **The overpowering impression the play leaves is that, for men, sex with women is empty, mothers and wives are necessary but ineffectual, and the most important thing is to bond successfully with other men. The problem is that this play has become a paradigm for what the "serious American play" should be. (50)**

The validity of Austin's claim is dubious on the grounds that: [1] she identifies a "paradigm" on the evidence of merely one play by Miller; [2] she seems to ignore some other

male-authored canonical works of American drama where the women protagonists considerably depart from the pattern she has established. For instance, in her book *"A Kind of Alaska": Women in the Plays of O'Neill, Pinter and Shepard* (1993), Ann C. Hall's convincingly argues that many women characters in these dramatists' plays "resist being transformed into mirrors of male desires" (15).[vi]

In stark refutation to Hall's claim, the main thrust of Carla McDonough**'**s argument in *Staging Masculinity* seems to reinforce the continuity of the diachronic prevalence of the "women left behind" paradigm in American drama. She claims that a new breed of young dramatists, Mamet, David Rabe, and Sam Shepard can be grouped together on the basis of their "overt masculinity" manifest, among other things, in their marginalizing women characters in their dramatic works (1). Emphasizing that these playwrights follow the traditions of the "canonical forefathers," Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams[vii] (2), McDonough confirms the "escape and flight from women" pattern dominant in mainstream drama.

Undeniably, Hall's and McDonough's differing observations concerning O'Neill's and Shepard's female protagonists' challenging or failing to revise their stereotypical roles evidently show—in compliance with what I have termed the *male-experience-focus* or *female-experience focus*--how mutable the appreciation of the female characters may be. As McDonough is primarily concerned with exploring the issue of staging male identity in American drama, she focuses on the problematics of the recurrent father-son conflict in several plays by O'Neill (*Desire under the Elms*, 1924; *Mourning Becomes Electra*, 1931; *Long Days Journey into Night*, 1956). For instance, in *Desire*, McDonough ignores considering to what extent the female protagonist Abbie Putnam's violations of self-sacrificing stereotypical feminine roles affect the re-definition of the father-son relationship between Ephraim Cabbot and his son Eben. Conversely, Hall's perspective is entirely different as in her analyses of individual plays by O'Neill, Pinter, and Shepard, she demonstrates that in these dramatists' works "the audience and the male characters are confronted with the female stereotypes they have taken for granted, only to find

them misleading, inaccurate, and often displaced" (*Alaska* 16). With her intention to reveal the techniques whereby the women protagonists expose the limitations of patriarchy, Hall's approach to the female characters in the plays of these dramatists, who are traditionally considered overtly masculine, is definitely unique.

From another point of view, however, the male dramatists in question, Mamet, Rabe, and Shepard were "responsible" for further "distorting" the "escape and flight from women" pattern, paradoxically at a time when the women's liberation movement peaked in the 1970s. In spite of the consciousness-raising efforts of this movement and of the resulting increased public awareness of women's experience, the young triumvirate failed to respond by providing more space for female subjectivity. On the contrary, women characters appear to be either eliminated or totally marginalized in their works. A fear of women that tends to imbue the presentation of female characters in their drama may derive from a male recognition that

> The contemporary women's movement offers striking illustrations of how women's own experiences can bend the direction of American characters into new shapes. In the course of denying male supremacy, women are nurturing a cultural revolution that may alter the structure of power in America. (Kessler-Harris 227)

In view of the tendencies outlined above, Mamet, indeed, appears to follow a received pattern pervading American literature: treating women as peripheral creatures. In light of this assumption, the misogynistic treatment of women in his plays is thus neither an exclusively Mametian feature, nor is this attitude bound to a specific genre or time. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the present work, Mamet considerably revises this male-conventional treatment of women characters. It is precisely the carnivalization approach to his drama that makes it possible to "bring to life aspects in the character and behavior of people which in the normal course of life could not have revealed themselves" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 163).

In an attempt to further explore links and parallels between Mamet's and other American playwrights' dramatic vision, I find it essential to include Lanford Wilson. From among contemporary dramatists, Mamet mentions Wilson as a decisive influence, especially Wilson's early plays such as *The Madness of Lady Bright* (1964), and *Rimers of Eldritch* (1966) (qtd. in Savran 135). Wilson's thematic concerns such as the decline of a community in general as well as its treatment in *Rimers* in particular, are explicitly echoed in Mamet's output. In Wilson's portrait of a small town somewhere in the Middle West in America "we are offered an account of a community slowly edging towards extinction, its coal mines redundant, its land exhausted, its movie theatre closed, its buildings crumbling" (Bigsby, *Contemporary* 382). In this abandoned place human relationships are equally disintegrating, dysfunctional, and falling apart. The image of the town evokes a "carnivalized world" in a fashion carnivalization pervades Mamet's plays.

As regards European influences on Mamet's drama, Mamet himself has acknowledged that the greatest influences on his drama were Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett. "Beckett and Pinter-–of course I'm influenced by them," Mamet has conceded and he went on to say, "If you're in modern dance, how could you not be influenced by Martha Graham?" (qtd. in Bigsby, *Critical* 287). Apparent parallels between Mamet's and his European counterparts' dramatic techniques have already been stated: "[l]ike Beckett, he is concerned with dramatising a largely plotless world in which nuance and gesture become of central significance. Like Pinter, he tends to locate his plays in an ostensibly realist environment only to deconstruct the assumptions of realism as they relate to plot, character and language" (Bigsby, *Critical* 287). Yet, I should also add that a general disregard for women also dominates, to varying degrees, the plays of Beckett and Pinter. Nevertheless, only an extensive comparative study on the presentation techniques of women characters in Beckett's, Pinter's, and Mamet's works could safely establish direct intertextuality between these dramatists.

Subsequently I will offer a periodization of Mamet's plays, and will survey the most important critical responses to the female characters in each period. This will be done primarily

to test my assumption that the Mametian texts of the past three decades have registered significant shifts in the author's personal views and attitudes.

[3] From All Male-Cast Plays to Family Plays: Shifts in Mamet's Gender Focus

It must be noted at the outset that though sequential, the following periodization of Mamet's plays, with special emphasis on the mode of the presentation of his female characters, does not affirm or imply any progress or regress in the larger ramifications of his oeuvre. The three stages I propose come to full circle in terms of the sites where the women characters' lives unfold: there seems to be a movement from the private realm of life into the public and a shift back again to the private realm.

Mamet's first phase extends from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s; his second lasts into the early 1990s; while the final phase covers the second half of the 1990s and continues into the present. The first phase includes plays with an all-male cast such as *Lakeboat* (1970), *The Duck Variations (1976), A Life in the Theater* (1977), *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983); and plays where women appear only as sex objects of male desire, as in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, *The Woods* or are simply family members as in *Reunion* (1976).

Owing to the prevalence of male-cast plays in the first period, Mamet criticism was not concerned with the women characters at all, or women protagonists were merely tangentially commented upon. In his comprehensive analysis of Mamet's work up to *Glengarry*, Guido Almansi created the image of Mamet being solely a "male-experience playwright," when he stressed that "Mamet is the poet and critic, chronicler and parodist, of the stag party and of all social occasions and situations precluding women. His best plays are immune from any female contamination; the existence of women filters on the stage through the preconceived ideas of the opposite sex" (191). Almansi further reinforced "the male-experience playwright" image of Mamet by adding that

> the playwright's ear is especially attuned to the sounds, rhythms, cadences, allusions, contradictions, vulgarities, dirty and stupid anecdotes, interjections, and exclamations that fill the conversation between two pals, working and drinking mates, colleagues, or rivals. (193)

Almansi also appears to have articulated main motivating factors for male camaraderie dominant in Mamet's plays:

> The subject of their complaints is often a woman, or that more forward, buxom, and aggressive woman, America, who has bestowed upon them a dream, the Great American Dream, only to prove a prick-teaser, or that other woman, more mammary, plump, and vigorous yet, Mother Nature, a female God, rancorous and vindictive, who fucks up every single thing and every single man. (193)

Certain strikingly opposing critical remarks concerning the treatment of the theme in *Chicago* and *The Woods*--two major plays in the period--underscore the presence of carnivalistic ambivalence manifest primarily in the carnivalization of passion in these play.s While Stephen Gale points out that "[t]he relationship between man and woman here [in *The Woods*] is also deprived of any romanticism" (221), Esther Harriott claims that the play is an "extremely boring--romantic outing in the woods" (70). Gale ascribes the success of this play to the "theme of love," which produces "a more intimate, personal, and closer view than that of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. As a result, the characters and situation are more fully drawn and the rendering is more accurate and maybe more typical" (220), whereas Harriott suggests that "out of two full acts, sustained dialogue, and careful structure conflict, climax, and denouement in *The Woods* emerges nothing more than an encounter with no resonances beyond its slight occasion" (70).

In the second phase, which I date from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Mamet considerably departs from his pattern of marginalizing women characters in his works. The

novelty of portraying women in *House of Games*, *Speed-the-Plow* and *Oleanna* lies in two facts: first, the women protagonists embody a new type of woman who challenges the power structures established in patriarchy; second, closely linked to the previous one, these characters are autonomous human beings located outside their domestic environment. My assumption is that by diagnosing the formation of women's new gender attributes Mamet captures the aftermath of the women's movement, or in other words, a new kind of femininity evolving in 1980s America.

The critical reception of Mamet's plays starting in the mid-1980s focuses increasingly on women characters because his business plays call more and more attention to women's place in contemporary American society. Since these female characters do not fall neatly into categories defined by long-established patriarchal rules and laws, Mamet's "new women" attracted critical attention primarily because they challenged and upset those expectations. Accordingly, critical responses clustered around two main issues: a crisis of masculinity and the female character's violation of her socially and culturally sanctioned roles. While in her study "Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet's Drama," McDonough investigates the reasons for and the presentation of "unstable masculinity" in Mamet's drama, Hall is the first to devote due attention to female characters. Her interest lies in exploring the modes in which women operate to undermine male power in *House of Games* and *Speed-the-Plow*. She asserts that "[p]hallic power, characterized by the oppression of women by men, is overturned in both plays by the female characters' subtle subversive strategies" ("Playing To Win" 158-9). Both critics employ a psychoanalytic, feminist perspective in their works.

In contrast with the previous studies, there is no depth of critical insight to David Richards's brief survey of Mamet's female characters. Understandably, the journalistic style of the *New York Times* must have imposed restrictions on both the linguistic formulation and the scope of Richards's article. Nevertheless, I consider it a significant contribution to Mamet criticism as it

was the first attempt to provide a cumulative overview of the female protagonists in all the plays up to *Oleanna.* Richards's article also accurately diagnosed the puzzlement as well as the shock experienced by many male critics at the apparently violent, disruptive Mamet heroines, especially, Dr. Ford in *House* and Carol in *Oleanna*. The main thrust of Richards's argument is that "there has been a progressive development in the playwright's female characters over the years"; nonetheless, the ironic overtones of "progressive" become evident when we glimpse at Richards's full title: "Mamet's Women: From Wimp to Warrior" (5). By highlighting the women characters' increasing adversity and hostility towards male power and authority, Richards depicts the "warrior-like" features intensifying in them. His final question--"What's next?"--is a condensed formulation of the worries and concerns shared, presumably, by a large number of men.

Oleanna, the most provocative and controversial play in Mamet's second period, engendered the most heated critical debates. Interestingly, however, the socio-political charge of the play appears to fade away through time and, especially since the mid-1990s, critical attention has focused on the issues of gender/power discourse in the play. The first critical responses to *Oleanna* were largely politicized on account of its subject matter: a female student accusing her professor of sexual harassment. The play responds to the shock of the Anita Hill/Thomas hearings that "gripped" America in the early 1990s. Defenders of the play, like Arthur Holmberg, stated that "[t]he halls of ivy are now patrolled, on the one hand, by the guardians of political correctness, and on the other, by semi-literate students [. . .] who deploy a brilliant array of blackmail tactics to con a grade" (95). By contrast, Elaine Showalter remarked that "[i]n making his female protagonist a dishonest, androgynous zealot, and his male protagonist a devoted husband and father who defends the freedom of thought, Mamet does not exactly wrestle with the moral complexities of sexual harassment" ("Acts" 17). Carol was seen as representing "political

correctness as an intellectual carapace that substitutes dogma for thought, mission for mastery" (qtd. in Mufson 112).

Contrariwise these observations, Christine Macleod's analysis of *Oleanna* (1995) marks the beginning of a new stage in the critical reception of the play. She maintains that

> the narrow critical preoccupation with sexual harassment, political correctness and beleaguered masculinity in *Oleanna* has obscured what is in fact a far wider and more challenging dramatic engagement with issues of power, hierarchy and the control of language. (202)

Thus, in her understanding, "the gender difference between student and teacher is not the crux of the matter" (204). Also, Steven Ryan's study "*Oleanna:* David Mamet's Power Play" (1996) addresses the issue of power in the play and emphasizes the thematic links between Mamet's earlier works and *Oleanna*. He notes "Oleanna is developed around one of Mamet's most basic themes: human beings' never-ending battle to dominate one another" (393).

The most problematic side of Carol's character--her transformation from a shy, tongue-tied student in Act One to a solemn orator explaining "class exploitation and academic morality" in Act Two (Showalter, "Acts" 16)--has been interpreted in different ways. In the first reviews, typically, the transition in her discourse and character was considered unaccounted for:

> Was [Carol's] near imbecility in Act One [. . .] an elaborate act of entrapment? Or is she a genuine idiot savant whom the Group has couched in some fancy lingo? Or is Mamet simply playing fast and loose with authorial responsibility? (qtd. in Mufson 112)

By contrast, exploring the professor's and the student's linguistic strategies to gain dominance, Macleod powerfully argues that "with or without her group--Carol might actually be capable of thinking and acting for herself" (207). Macleod's conclusion is that "she [Carol] is a far better

student than either her teacher or her detractors care to admit" (208). Thomas H. Goggans joins the controversy by stating that Carol is unable to gain her own voice, and "merely becomes the Group's mouthpiece" (439). He predicts this claim upon certain insecurities in Carol's personality that are rooted in some "incestuous abuse" in her past life: consequently, in her present confused and disturbed state, she can merely replicate the Group's teachings (436).

In my view, the conflicting interpretations of Carol's personality can partially be resolved by regarding her--like the other female characters by Mamet--as "a parodying double" of her male counterpart. Following this line of argumentation, the seemingly ungrounded changes and shifts in her subject position and discourse will appear as a hyperbolic emulation of certain aspects of the male counterpart's character.

In Mamet's third phase, extending from the mid-1990s up to the present time (2002), the two major works, *The Cryptogram* and *The Old Neighborhood*--comprising three short plays, *The Disappearence of the Jews, Jolly,* and *Deeny*--display shifts from the public into the private realms of life both thematically and dramaturgically. Family life becomes foregrounded, and, following the conventions of the American family plays by O'Neill, Williams, and Miller, the domestic setting is the locale where the characters' lives unfold and their relationships play out. Martin Schaub claims that "Mamet's family den in *The Cryptogram* has completely lost its function as a protective haven; his [Mamet's] protagonists are drifting and, quite literally, on the move" (327). The loss of the "protective haven" function of the living-room is a metonymical indicator of mothers' and wives' inability to sustain this vital function. The loss is also another indication of a carnivalized world where the most protective familial setting is degraded into a transitory shelter. Curiously, however, the mothers and wives in the family plays of the canonical forefathers possessed the ability and the skill to preserve some of the intimacy of the living-room (e.g., Amanda Wingfield in Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, Linda Loman in Miller's *Death of*

a Salesman). By contrast, in *The Cryptogram*, the image of "broken family and broken home" is established as the play opens. While John, the ten-year-old boy and Del, his father's friend are in conversation in the living-room, Donny, the mother's offstage appearance is marked by a crash (her breaking the teapot). The incident evokes a dysfunctional, distanced mother figure who is but a disturbance to home life.

It is difficult to resist the temptation to associate her with another mother character, Halie in Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978)--another disinterested mother figure. She "frames" the drama in a peculiar way: both at the beginning and at the end of the play, for long minutes, only her voice can be heard from her room upstairs as she is trying to "communicate" with her husband, who is staying in the living-room downstairs. It is acutely ironic that she ends up "talking" to her dead husband--a circumstance that underscores her utter isolation. In Mamet's *The Cryptogram*, the mother's *distanced presence*--an oxymoronic combination in a Bakhtinian sense--and her breaking the pot convey to us a sense of her spiritual "brokenness" as well as her alienation from her family. As Schaub notes, "[f]ew playwrights have made the American family look as bleak as Mamet does" (328).

The pattern of spiritual brokenness equally applies to *The Old Neighborhood.* The protagonist, the middle-aged Bobby Gould returns to the old neighborhood in a series of encounters with his past only to realize his depressing present. In *The Disappearance of the Jews*, Bobby and an old friend fantasize about a shtetl paradise while revealing the failure of their marriages; whereas in *Jolly* and in *Deeny,* the previous male point of view is replaced by a female perspective since Bobby's past is narrated by Bobby's sister Jolly, and his former lover Deeny. Through recalling her childhood grievances, Jolly remembers the loveless childhood her brother and she had. Deeny's meanderings concerning gardening, molecules, her work, and tribes

mutilating themselves conceal her agitated state of mind when confronting the man she once loved.

Ultimately, the failed and distorted human relationships depicted in Mamet's "family plays," and the utter solitariness that the characters suffer from bespeak of a discordant, aleatoric universe. To put it in metaphorically applied Bakhtinian terms, human relationships are reduced to be "monologic" rather than "dialogic."

In recent Mamet criticism, the issue of masculinity has still received considerable attention: the first chapter in Robert Vorlicky's *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (1995) discusses the macho world of businessmen in Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and, related to that, the absent women characters in the play; in *Staging Masculinity*, McDonough devotes a chapter to the study of the crisis of male identity in several plays by Mamet. While certain thematic conventionalism apparently dominates Mamet's critical reception, a new postmodern approach is evident in recent writing on his work. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's "oddly giddy commentary on postmodernity" (124), Stephen Watt provides a "postmodernly" reading of Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* in Chapter Five of his *Postmodern/Drama: Reading the Contemporary Stage* (1998). With the aim to uncover magic meanings in Mamet's *The Cryptogram*, Martin Schaub deploys Paul Ricoeur's ideas on semiotic crisis in examining the communicational impasse in the characters' dialogue.

In sum, with the few exceptions listed above, (Richards, Hall, Showalter, McLeod), Mamet's female characters have been either overlooked in Mamet criticism or have been considered without deep critical insight. So far there is no comprehensive scholarly work treating the female protagonists in Mamet's dramatic works.

Finally, it must be mentioned that there have already been attempts to appropriate Bakhtin's concepts to Mamet's drama. In his article "David Mamet's Drama: The Dialogicality of

Grotesque Realism" (1993), Ilkka Joki studies the issues of dialogicality and addressivity in Mamet's early plays from the late 1970s. Joki's primary interest lies in examining the male characters' use of the "American demotic, vulgar, marketplace speech" (89), thereby, the women characters' role is reduced by him to the usual "disturber-of-the-male-world" pattern. He argues that "the presence of women" is a "threat to demotic male familiarity" (92). Though he briefly considers the "demotic speech genres" of the women protagonists in *Chicago* and *Speed*, he concludes that these genres "do not figure as comparable ideologemes for Mamet's female characters" (94). Joki devotes a full-length study to the same questions in *Mamet, Bakhtin, and the Dramatic: The Demotic as a Variable of Addressivity* (1993), in which he proposes a "Bakhtinian analytical model for focusing the sociolinguistic dimension of (written) dramatic texts," and he links it "to an institutional sociology of performance and broadcasting" (3). Joki provides an insightful analysis of a large number of plays, films, and radio plays by Mamet, and situates them in their media contexts.

The study I am conducting differs from Joki's in several respects: first, my main concern is to investigate the *female characters* from a Bakhtinian perspective, with an emphasis on the carnivalizing deflation of male myths and the American value system as triggered by the changing aspects of women's roles in contemporary American society. Second, in the present study, Bakhtin's system of thought will be used as a comprehensive, synthetic framework offering literary-critical tools as well as a theoretical framework for the purposes of the investigation. Third, I will consider only printed works including the most recent ones, with the exception of the film, *House of Games* (1987).

* * *

The chronological sequence of Mamet's women characters, and the thematic concerns of the plays suggest two main areas where the female characters carnivalize the male world as well as the myths and values supporting it: the business world and human relationships. Accordingly, the carnivalistic tendencies unfolding in these areas as prompted by women's disruptive acts and discourse will be investigated in the subsequent chapters. What such an

examination is expected to yield are some answers to some essential questions. What are the shaping factors of women's new gender identity in the public and private spheres of life in Mamet's plays? In what way do women dismantle and subvert male myths? Do women also subvert the value system based on the myths? How does the subversion of male myths affect gender attributes traditionally associated with women? How does the concept of femininity change because of this? Is there a crisis of femininity in Mamet's drama? Are there new norms and standards emerging as a result of changing gender identities? Before attempting to answer these questions, however, the theoretical underpinnings of this study need to be highlighted and elaborated.

II. THE RATIONALE FOR A BAKHTINIAN APPROACH

> And there are plays—and books and songs and poems and dances—that are perhaps upsetting or intricate or unusual, that you leave unsure, but which you think about perhaps the next day, and perhaps for a week, and perhaps for the rest of your life.
> Because they aren't clean, they aren't neat, but there's something in them that comes from the heart, and so goes to the heart. (Mamet, *Three Uses*)

In the present chapter, I will establish the practical reasons as well as the theoretical considerations that led me to deploy Bakhtin's system of thought for the investigation of Mamet's female characters. Although, as mentioned before, carnivalization, used as a literary-critical approach, solicits a Bakhtinian framework, it is necessary to underscore why other apparently relevant theories of drama and character have a limited appeal, as well as why the Bakhtinian framework appears to be applicable for my purposes. Nevertheless, this endevour will not be confined to merely surveying the (ir)relevance of certain historical (Aristotelian, Brechtian, realist-naturalist) and ahistorical (for instance, Pfister's) theories of drama to apply to Mamet's plays--to be treated in the first subchapter--but it amounts to much more than that. Thus the ensuing discussion will also touch upon certain generic properties in Mamet's drama, with special emphasis on the status of character and plot patterns evolving in his plays. Furthermore, the fact that Mamet gained recognition from the beginning of the 1970s, a period that marks a paradigm shift in American theater and drama, commonly designated as the emergence of postmodern theater and drama, raises the legitimate question of whether his plays can be studied within the postmodern idiom in drama. The second subchapter will thus explore the extent to which his drama integrates or departs from this new idiom. The last subchapter will look at specific aspects of Bakhtin's system of thought that warrant the flexibility and dynamism of his concepts.

[1] Mamet and Theories of Drama and Character

On first consideration it should be self-evident to study Mamet's drama within the Aristotelian framework since Mamet's numerous essays and prose writings[viii] on theater and drama reveal that his perception of drama closely resembles Aristotle's principles, especially in the claim of the primacy of character over plot. Thus Mamet's reflections on these two fundamental elements of drama, *action* and the *status of character* can serve as an appropriate point of departure for addressing the relevance of certain theories for Mamet's dramatic works. Let us, therefore, begin with Mamet's own formulations:

> It is not the themes of the play to which we respond, but the *action*--the through-action of the protagonist, and the attendant support of the secondary characters, this support lent through their congruent actions. ("National" 113)
>
> There is no such things [sic] as "character." "Character" doesn't exist. If you take a piece of writing, what you're going to see is twelve to twenty lines on a page for a hundred and twenty pages. If you turn it upside down, nothing's going to fall out. There isn't any "character" there. It's a bunch of words that people say, period. That's what Aristotle told us, and it's true today. (qtd. in Ryan 394)

These views unambiguously echo Aristotle's basic rule of tragedy: "[t]he Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy: Character holds the second place" (63). Despite Mamet's avowed indebtedness to Aristotle, it would be naïve to assume that his dramatic works could be studied within the Aristotelian framework. First of all, Mamet's insistence on this time-embalmed rule set by Aristotle seems to profoundly contradict a prevalent tendency in modern American drama--the priority of character over plot--as well as his own dramatic practice.

The question as to which has precedence, plot or character, is a "historical variable" (Pfister 160). Yet, the pendulum seems to have swung to character from about the late 19th

century when drama passed from “the primacy of Plot [. . .] to the primacy of Character, which the romantic critics--Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel--saw as a governing absorption of modern drama (modern in this case being defined broadly to mean renaissance and on)” (Fuchs 169). This major paradigm shift embracing a definite move “from the physical realm outside the mind, and often outside the entire human order, to the psychic and spiritual realm within” (Fuchs 169) both signals and anticipates the fading-away of the notion of an *active* subject/character. The traditional character capable of heroic deeds transforms into *action–less*, static, and inert character. Nonetheless, I agree with Manfred Pfister’s claim that ”the structural interdependence of the two categories” (plot and character) is constant, which entails that “in drama the presentation of a figure without even the most rudimentary plot and the presentation of a plot that does not contain even the most drastically reduced form of a figure is inconceivable” (160). In this sense of mutual dependence, plot and character should be viewed as twin concepts.

A short detour from the central line of this discussion is necessary here to clarify Pfister’s term *figure,* which he has introduced to replace dramatic *character* in order to make *“*the ontological difference between fictional figures and real characters” more accentuated (161). In the present work, however, I still prefer to adhere to *character* since I find Pfister’s re-naming neither practicable nor fully justified. His reasoning for the change that “’figure’ [. . .] hints at something deliberately artificial, produced or constructed for a particular purpose” (161) as opposed to character--which refers to a real person—-is not entirely convincing. I suppose that tuning into a literary work of art immediately triggers the reader’s or spectator’s “horizon of expectation,”[ix] which facilitates understanding as well as the acceptance of the fictitiousness of characters.

Thus, in principle, Mamet observes the Aristotelian rules. Yet, on the evidence of his plays, in terms of plot and character, a shift in structural focus appears manifest. Mamet’s plots, in the conventional sense of the notion, became increasingly more tenuous as plot was reduced to a minimum in virtually all of them. I suggest that Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s typology of

character acts, initially developed to apply to narrative texts, proves to be helpful in setting up *plot-patterns* as emerging in Mamet's dramatic works. Her categories aptly illuminate the interdependence of minimal plots and character action. She distinguishes the type of unrealized plans, termed as "contemplated acts," the "acts of omission" designating a kind of act when the character should act in a certain way but s/he is incapacitated to actually comply with this expectation for some reason, and "acts of commission" embracing planned and realized acts (61).

In Mamet's plays, the thematic focus largely determines the types of actions required from the characters. Thus, the "acts of comission" type prevail in business plays (Ross in *Glengarry*, Bobby Gould and Karen in *Speed,* Carol in *Oleanna*, and Dr. Ford in *House*). *American Buffalo* serves as an exception since Don's and Teach's inactivity and incapability of acting thwart the actual performance of an "action," which, however, involves committing a crime in this particular case. Typically of the carnivalized world in Mamet's plays, intrusion into business partners' or counterparts' *public* spaces--with a variety of means such as manipulation, force, violence and deceit--lies at the core of the characters' planned and realized acts. For instance: in order to garner the prize for the best salesman in the real estate agency, Ross in *Glengarry* deceives his customers by selling worthless pieces of land in Florida; using manipulative strategies, Karen *plows* her way to secure a job for herself in Bobby Gould's office*;* Carol destroys the professor's career by accusing him of violating the codes of political correctness; Dr. Ford achieves her professional and personal metamorphosis after closely studying and adopting con men's strategies, which even involves annihilating the leading con man.

The categories of "contemplated acts" and "the acts of omission" most commonly occur in plays that are set in the private realms of life. Character action there is frequently restricted to spatial movement embracing attempts to create human relationships: *moving* into/out of another character's *private* terrain (Debbie moving to/out of Danny's place in *Sexual Perversity in*

Chicago, Edmond leaving his wife in *Edmond*, the husband leaving his wife in *The Cryptogram).* Hidden, not necessarily articulated "acts of omission" dominate here as the characters' failure to act in a certain way will eventually result in their moving out of their partner's space. These protagonists, I suggest, exhibit some resemblance to the "inarticulate or desensitized characters" most typically featuring in "the minimalist world" evolving in American minimalist fiction (Abádi-Nagy 197). Nevertheless, on account of the fact that Mamet's characters are invariably located in a definite social context, "whereas the zoom lens minimalist technique excludes the wide-angle lens social perspective" in minimalist fiction (Abádi-Nagy 198), in my view, the Mametian characters cannot be typified as minimalist.

The category of "contemplated acts," by its nature, carries a sense of frustration in it since the character's incapability and/or lack of intention to act prevent him/her from performing certain acts. In Mamet's plays, this category appears in the following configuration: highly charged verbal combats between characters, often resulting in violence. For instance, in *Chicago*, Bernie and Joan's dialogue at their first encounter resonates with frustration, bitterness, and violence in its every line; in *The Woods* Ruth and Nick battering each other is an expression of their aborted rage.

As a consequence of the re-evaluation of acts (un)performed by the characters, the shrinking plot design in Mamet's works entails the enhanced significance of *character*. By virtue of this minimalist tendency, Mamet's assertion that "character doesn't exist," echoing Ronald Sukenick's annihilations in "The Death of the Novel," is dubious, or rather, the claim merely implies that he simply fails to employ specific techniques (stage directions, inserted narrative descriptions) to more fully elaborate on the nature and ethos of his characters. As Mamet himself has emphasized, "to *characterize* the people or scene is to take time from the story--to weaken the story" ("Radio Drama" 118). Nevertheless, his characters are both identifiable and definable as situated in a particular chronotope (a Bakhtinian term for temporal and spatial context), they possess human traits, and are involved in various relationships, however thwarted

and abortive these latter may be. Indeed, “it’s a bunch of words” that his characters utter, yet, Mamet is able to characterize them even with the “limited” device of their dialogue. In the next chapter, I will specifically illustrate how the Bakhtinian analytical concept, “dialogism” can throw into relief precisely this aspect of sparseness and economy in his plays.

From the wider perspective of Mamet’s dramatic and artistic vision, his adherence to Aristotle’s drama theory with its clearly set rules and principles is symptomatic of his sense of responsibility for preserving time-tested structural assets that have proven to be constant through centuries. The evocation of an “ancient” dramatic form and principle is a subtle but effective way of rendering the need for harmony, order, and unity; and also it is suggestive of the persistence of basic values that are enduring. One such value *humanism* has already been observed as operative in the subtext of his plays, as Bigsby claims, Mamet “seems to be arguing for the necessity of humanism for which he cannot always find space within his plays” (*Critical* 290). However, let me add there are certain structural transactions in the Mametian text that are contributory to conveying this apparently hidden message. For instance, the compositional design of tragedy in *The Woods* (to be treated in Chapter VII), and correspondences between musical and literary form that are manifest in dialogue exchanges (to be addressed in Chapter III) subtextually render a de-carnivalized world.

In addition to the constraints of employing Aristotle’s notions and concepts for the investigation of Mamet’s female characters as elucidated so far, some other aspects and facts also need to be considered. Each drama theory is historically bound and conditioned. Aristotle’s theory, for example, derives “epagogically from the text corpus of Greek tragedies” (Pfister 1). It is legitimate, therefore to maintain that due to the radically different socio-political contexts of ancient Greek drama as contrasted with Mamet’s plays, it is both misleading and unfeasible to apply Aristotelian concepts to Mamet’s texts. Over the centuries, the key term in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy ”the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of certain magnitude [. . .]; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” [61])

have retained virtually none of their original meaning. Instead, his terms have undergone a series of transformations in both their denotative and connotative meanings. Mamet himself acknowledges the difficulty of categorizing his works as tragic: “[a]ll the comics like me always want to be tragedians” (qtd. in Savran 136); second, his characters’ action cannot be conveniently qualified with adjectives like ”serious, complete, and of certain of certain magnitude,” since their acts, if identifiable at all, are based on manipulation and deception. Further, the catharsis the spectator/reader of a Mamet play may experience is not comparable to Aristotle’s “purgation of emotions” experienced by the audience of an ancient tragedy. The endings in Mamet’s plays tend to reinforce a sense of uncertainty, de-centering, ambivalence, doubt, and will certainly raise more questions (and eyebrows) than answers. This radically different “catharsis” is the product as well as the indicator of ontological and epistemological doubts, indeterminacy, and crisis prevalent in the social-cultural scheme of things in the postmodern age. Yet, the new type of catharsis can also effect *purification,* though not necessarily through the medium of pity and fear. I propose that this new kind of tragic catharsis can be aptly described trhough Bakhtin’s clarification of the “unfinalizable” nature of truly polyphonic novels (like Dostoevsky’s):

> *nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.* (*Problems* 166)

Having dismissed the Aristotelian theory of drama on the grounds of the inapplicability and obsoleteness of his notions, I presume that definitions of drama based on the criteria of *conflict* and *crisis* that become dominant in the wake of European naturalistic and realistic drama are more adequate for describing the essence of Mamet’s plays. Yet, the question arises what aspects of Mamet’s characters’ acts and/or discourse can be qualified as *conflict* and *crisis* since both terms seem to be too broad and vague. In fact, Tamás Bécsy argues that neither is a valid concept for drama theory, as neither possesses a precise definition (12). Conflict has

become a “metaphore [sic] of any contradicting, painful, agonizing, or difficult situation independently of whether this situation is external or internal, or both” (12). Furthermore, Bécsy believes, *conflict* cannot be regarded as “a valid concept of drama theory” (10) as originally it derives from the Hegelian philosophy of history, and “was made the key concept of drama by Hegel” (9), “subsequently a category of historical materialism” (13). *Crisis,* identified by William Archer in P*laymaking* (1912) as the fundamental criterion of drama (12),[x] also appears to be rather tenuous and inaccurate.

In downscaling these concepts, Bécsy propounds a generic definition of drama, which I find appropriate in its application to Mamet as it foregrounds the changes and shifts in human relationships:

> The drama concentrates on relations and changes in relations between the characters; in fact the dramatic world itself consists of the changes of relations since its ontological basis is a material medium to carry, express, represent and reflect relations and changes in relations between the characters. (76)

Coming to terms with this type of drama calls for analytical tools that enable their user to formulate a description of and account for the dynamism of the relationships between the characters. As I will argue in the third subchapter, flexibility and dynamism, inherently characterizing Bakhtin’s concepts, will allow for meeting these requirements.

As so many dramatists, directors, and actors all over the world, Mamet has also been influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s dramatic works. Admittedly, Mamet considers Brecht “a great playwright” and his plays “extraordinarily charming and beautiful and lyrical and upsetting” (*Three Uses* 47). Yet he finds Brecht’s thinking about drama and performance “problematic” (47), and expressing it even more outspokenly: “[a]ll that nonsense he wrote about his writing I think is balderdash, a direct contradiction of the writing itself” (qtd. in Savran 136). What Mamet has repeatedly underlied is that Brecht’s “quintessentially dramatic writing” (qtd. in Savran 136) fails to embody his theoretical position: “Brecht wrote about the alienation effect and the agitprop

uses of theater. But these writings bear little relationship to his plays [. . .]. *Coincidentally*, they happen to be on social issues" (*Three Uses* 47).

I would argue that despite Mamet's categorical disaffiliation with staple elements in the Brechtian theory of Epic theater such as the alienation effect and "agitprop uses of theater," the two playwrights' dramatic vision show some parallels. First, they share a common ground in their insistence on dealing with *social issues* in their drama, second, they have similar views on acting style. They both raise the fundamental question of what theater is for and essentially, both are in favor of a notion of theater as a socially responsive and responsible instrument. Nevertheless, their theoretical stance on the social function of the theater diverges. For instance, Brecht clearly endorses a kind of theater that aims to educate and change people: "[w]e need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself" (238). By contrast, Mamet gives preference to a theater that entertains: "[i]t's not the dramatist's job to bring about social change," and adds that "the purpose of art is not to change but to delight. I don't think its purpose is to enlighten us. I don't think it's to change us. I don't think it's to teach us" (*Three Uses* 26). These declarations, however, cannot be taken at face value. Mamet's numerous statements concerning the enlightening and redeemer role of drama and theater in this "very confusing world" when "our civilization is convulsed and dying" (Mamet, "Decay" 191) and also, the necessity to pursue one's moral imperative underlying in his plays bring into focus and reinforce the social responsiveness of the theater. Here are some examples to illustrate Mamet's thinking on drama: "[w]hen you come to the theater, you have to be willing to say, 'we're all here to undergo a communion, to find out what the hell is going on in this world'" (*Three Uses* 19). Similarly, [i]n the theater we must strive to recognize and to ratify the universality of our desires and our fears as human beings. If we continue to shove them under the rug [. . .] we will continue to live in an unhappy land" ("Stanislavski" 129). Also, while claiming that "[t]he power of

the dramatist [. . .] resides in the ability to state the problem" (30), Mamet acknowledges the social responsibility of a playwright. In Bigsby's succinct formulation, for Mamet "[t]he theater itself was to be a means of exploring the collapse of community and a mechanism for recuperating community" ("David Mamet" 65).

The other latent parallel between Brecht's and Mamet's credo lies in their similar conception of acting style. The kind of acting Brecht considers appropriate in Epic theater is based on the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), elucidated by Brecht as follows: "[a] representation which alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" ("A Short" 240). As he goes on to explain, "[i]n order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays" (241). Mamet's advice to actors on the craft of acting in his *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense For the Actor* (1997) appears to echo Brecht's ideas. For instance, Mamet stresses that the actor should forget about "emotional preparation" (64), and dissuades him from interpreting the play: [t]he actor is on stage to communicate the play to the audience. That is the beginning and the end of his and her job" (9). Obviously, Mamet's model of acting rejects the interpretative exercises of the Stanislavski Method as it "and the technique of the schools derived from it, is nonsense" (6). In sum, Brecht's and Mamet's thinking on the presentation of a character and worthwhile acting show definite similarities. Geis has also astutely observed that Mamet's works display "a Brechtian refusal of immersion in the characters and 'story' in favor of alienation from them" (89). This tendency affiliates his plays with postmodern drama.

Having shown the inadequacy of some historical drama theories for the study of Mamet's plays, I find it expedient to consider the relevance of an *ahistorical* theory. Pfister's theory of drama, based on the structures within dramatic texts, answers the needs for an *ahistorical*, or *metahistorical* theory of drama that eschews all the shortcomings of historically grounded theories. In elucidating his reasons for establishing such a system, Pfister claims that "previous

theoretical discussions of the dramatic genre all tend to elevate a historically specific form to an absolute norm, thereby narrowing the concept of 'drama' in a most decisive way" (1), and that the operational and functional validity of the various constituents of drama carries with it changes in the temporal and spatial parameters of drama. Influenced by communication theory, structuralist ideas, and the achievements of semiotic analysis, he has developed a most coherent and systematic poetics of dramatic texts, which provides a highly accurate typology of drama. Yet, ironically, the main asset of his models--their abstract and universal nature--proves to be precisely its basic limitation. The predominance or the elimination of certain dramatic devices and dramaturgical elements cannot be fully accounted for without considering the place and the communicative function of drama in a particular society. For example, Mamet's idiosyncratic use of dramatic language and the derogatory treatment of women characters, as well as the commodification of human relations and values require considering the impact that late capitalist economy, commodity culture, and business mentality that saturates all aspects of life exert on his texts.

Finally, because my focus rests on Mamet's portrayal of female characters, the pragmatic and theoretical value of available theories of dramatic character must be briefly addressed. In Brian Richardson's view, "the presentation of character in modern drama remains not only undertheorized but in principle incomprehensible as long as reigning theoretical constraints are observed" (87). He proposes a tripartite model of character, which should be "suspicious of the possibilities of mimetic characterization," while it should acknowledge formal constructs, and be alert to the operation of ideology (96). When he surveys the theories of character deriving from the three literary theoretical paradigms--humanism, formalism, and poststructuralism--dominating literary theory in the twentieth century, he concludes that "each paradigm neglects, marginalizes, or ignores two crucial aspects of the literary transaction in order to concentrate fairly exclusively on a third" (88). This statement implies that humanism stresses the importance of the author, formalists banish the author, while poststructuralists shift

the focus to the reader by stating that the text is unstable. Accordingly, each approach highlights merely one aspect of character: by postulating correspondences between literary personages and living human beings, the humanistic accounts illuminate the mimetic function (89); the formalist accounts emphasize the formal functions of character, while the poststructuralist accounts insisting on "unmasking the ideological underpinnings of discursive practices" (92) reveal the ideological aspect of character. Richardson concludes that there should be a move

> toward a more capacious, comprehensive, and genuinely synthetic model of fictional literature, one that incorporates the undeniable insights of humanism, formalism, and poststructuralism without uncritically assuming the blindness inherent in each. (96-97)

Attractive as Richardson's model may be, it remains an abstraction. Applying diverse methodological approaches with their distinct critical discourses, divergent aims, and analytical apparatus requires a constant negotiation between the different elements of the individual critical paradigms, which in turn would result in an undue emphasis on the theories at the expense of promoting and illuminating meanings in a literary work.

[2] Oscillations: Mamet and the Postmodern Situation

In situating Mamet's dramatic works on the contemporary scene of American drama, and discussing the legitimacy and viability of *postmodern drama theory*, I will address the following questions: one, from the vantage point of a commonly held claim that a historically determined and conditioned form of drama is usually treated as an absolute norm, I will consider if there exists a historically specific form of American drama in the closing decades of the twentieth century that could be elevated to a norm typifying drama; two, is it viable to develop a theory of *postmodern drama;* three, if so, what are the distinctive aesthetic and stylistic features that

collectively coalesce to unmistakably identify *postmodern drama*; four, what relation these inquiries bear to Mamet's drama.

By virtue of the multiplicity of viewpoints and aspects to consider attempting to set the temporal boundaries of artistic and literary trends, it is an arduous endeavor to define the exact beginning of postmodern impulses in American drama. Nevertheless, the 1970s appear to be dividing lines as several commentators emphasize a departure from previous dramatic idiom.[xi] Mamet and two of his contemporaries, David Rabe and Shepard, definitely represent a new breed of American playwrights, and share certain common characteristics in dramatic style and theme. Though these white playwrights are "critically usually presented as universal American voices, not qualified by gender (or race, or ethnicity) in the way that so many other contemporary playwrights find themselves qualified" (McDonough, *Staging* 2), they represent merely one color on the wide palette of American drama and theater. In order to locate Mamet in the contemporary theatrical scene, I will provide a brief survey of the main trends and tendencies that have evolved in American drama since the 1970s. The overview inevitably will be sketchy and reductive and will focus on isolating a central thematic concern, the fragmentation of identity, that seems to dominate the American stage in this period, and also, on tracing transitions in the status of character and character portrayal techniques.

Variety and diversity both in form and theme constitute basic properties of American drama in the postmodern age. In the motley scene of dramatic works, the experimental productions of the Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, the Wooster Group, as well as the performance art of Karen Finley, Spalding Gray, and Richard Foreman co-exist with the refigurations of realism in the plays of Wendy Wasserstein, August Wilson, David Rabe, Marsha Norman, and, in a residual form, in the dramatic works of Sam Shepard and Mamet. Also, there is room for generic transgressions in the unconventional merging of hitherto compartmentalized spaces and entities (film and theater), a combined use of the means of multimedia in the works of Luiz Valdez, Adrienne Kennedy, Shepard, Cherrie Moraga, David Henry Hwang, as well as

the revival of blackface performance traditions of minstrelsy in Ntozake Shange's works. In most cases, the formal innovations, or rather the unorthodox juxtaposition and mixing of elements from diverse genres, styles, and cultures (rock music, pop, TV sitcoms, Kabuki theater, movie Westerns, Chinese opera, Western opera, etc.) manifest more than just a neoavantgard fascination with signifying practices and surfaces of art. On the contrary, their programmatic function is to debunk the representational[xii] force of those components, while simultaneously thematising *non-verbally* the *construction/deconsctruction of identity(ies).*

The thematic diversity of the plays manifests itself in the dramatization of the tensions and dilemmas arising from the characters' attempts to defy and erase the de-centering multiplicity and complexity of images, languages, attitudes of the dominant mainstream culture impacting on and defining their identities: racial (African-American, Asian-American), ethnic (Chicano, Chicana), gender (male and female), and sexual identification (gay, lesbian). Indeed, the dramatic works of this period develop a critique of social and cultural stereotypes, inherited clichés, and stereotypical roles by exposing the "performative" nature of these identities, and also that they are "part of the essentially fictive means with which a culture reproduces itself and its lines of legitimization and empowerment" (Worthen 735). On the evidence of the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the formal and thematic multifariousness of American drama not only invalidates but also makes obsolete the establishment of *criteria* defining the generic specificity of drama.

Just as it is difficult to have a consensus about establishing any normative criterion that can reliably pin down the concept of *drama*, it is equally difficult to define the highly elusive notion of *postmodern drama.* The phrase itself--frequently debated in recent criticism--is "paradoxical, even oxymoronic," as Watt suggests, since the two elements are in sharp contrast: "*postmodernism* seldom connotes the national, the nurtural, or the univocal," while these are the fundamental features of ancient Greek *drama*, which "serves as a catalyst to unite disparate populace into a national version of the Attic city-state" (Watt, *Postmodern* 2). He also claims that

postmodern is “an empty intellectual marker” on the grounds that from landmark works on postmodernism[xiii] *drama* has disappeared, and if drama is mentioned at all, it is “often ‘theatricalized’ or ‘performanced” (18).

As opposed to a basic impulse of postmodernism to eliminate boundaries[xiv] between traditional genres, styles, and cultures, there is also a counter-tendency emerging on the American postmodern stage, namely, a *deepening gap* between drama as a literary genre, a written form, and drama perceived merely as a kind of script, an open text for performance on the stage. It merits consideration that retrospectively, the two aspects, drama and performance, had either roughly identical emphasis in the definition of drama,[xv] or content-based criteria were prioritized,[xvi] or the theatrical performance was foregrounded.[xvii]

The primacy of the “performanced*”* aspect of drama, as well as the predominance of *performance art* on the theatrical scene are inextricably connected to a fundamental critique of *representation*, a basic tenet of postmodern aesthetics. In dramaturgical terms, questioning the legitimacy of representation means the critique of the so-called “fourth wall” convention or the illusionist theater, where all the paraphernalia of a production (set, costumes, footlights, music) as well as the manner of acting create the illusion of reality and real life is simulated on the stage. It is precisely this aspect of the dominant mode of theater productions--prevalent “for four hundred years, that is since the Renaissance” (Artaud 76)--that Brecht’s Epic Theater and Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty severely criticized. The actual techniques for dismantling “the fourth wall,” the modes of breaking down the illusion of simulated life on stage vary in Brecht’s, Artaud’s theaters, and in performance art, though they share the need for narrowing down or entirely eliminating the distance and the borders between the spectators and the actors. The fundamental difference between them, however, lies in the immediate factors triggering changes in dramaturgy. Brecht’s and Artaud’s ambitions were, primarily, to renew the outdated representational modes in theater, and they were rather concerned with the revitalization of theatrical art, whereas, in performance art we are confronted with the theatrical manifestation of

an epistemological crisis stemming from, predominantly, the disappearance of the clear distinction between the real and the "represented." Baudrillard's views on the radical shift in the subject-object relationship can elucidate the last statement: "[t]he description of this whole intimate universe--projective, imaginary and symbolic--still corresponded to the object's status as mirror of the subject, and that in turn to the imaginary depths of the mirror and `scene'" (126). "But today," he argues, "the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead there is a screen and network" ("Ecstasy" 126). Ultimately, reality is replaced by simulations, "[t]oday everyday, political, social, historical, economic, etc., reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality" (*Symbolic* 74).

In this paradoxical situation that reality--meant here as the world outside the theater--is already *simulated*, or it is already a *simulacrum*, and "the old distinctions between the self and world, being and thing" are blurred (Fuchs 170), it becomes nonsensical to provide an illusionist, "imitated" world inside the theater. The new kind of reality can best be grasped "through the development of a performance art 'about' performance itself," which is a "stage turned curiously in upon itself" (Fuchs 170).

The postmodern condition engenders an alternative way of (re)presenting the simulated reality. Of special importance for isolating distinguishing factors between drama and performance is the status and value of the dramatic text. First of all, "the notion that the stage performance 'reproduces' the text in some direct way [. . .]" is challenged (Worthen 734). Consequently, the initial dramatic text functions merely as a kind of script which is performed by the artist to the audience directly, in the first person. In identifying certain features of "[n]ew dramatic writing," Patrice Pavis claims that this writing "has banished conversational dialogue from the stage as a relic of dramaturgy based on conflict and exchange: any story, intrigue or plot that is too neatly tied up is suspect" (59). Pavis denies "[t]he specificity of the dramatic text," and "the existence of rules and regulations governing dialogue, character, dramatic structure,

etc." By contrast, the "novelistic text" is used "as a point of departure for a theatrical reading more or less dramatized by the improvisations of its various readers" (59). The dominant mode of presenting the text is monologue, in which it is usually very difficult "to make a distinction between factual autobiography and a more 'performed,' fictionalized 'self,'" like in the monologues of Finley and Gray (Worthen 734).

In performance art, the communication channels of a dramatic text are radically altered, resulting in a peculiar mixture of channels reminiscent of both narrative and dramatic modes. I find that Pfister's drama model introduced to specify the sender and receiver positions in dramatic texts can conveniently be adapted to charting the communication channels in performance art. Let us first see Pfister's initial model for dramatic texts:

The model is designed to classify the sender and receiver positions according to superimposed communication systems. **S4** stands for the actual author, **S3** for the "ideal" author, **S2** for the fictional narrator, the narrative medium, **S/R1** for the fictional characters communicating with each other through dialogue, **R2** for the fictional addressee of **S2**, **R3** for the implied "ideal" receiver, and **R4** for the actual reader (3). The dark-shaded area represents the "internal" (L1), the light-shaded area the "mediating" (L2), while the rest (L3 and L4) are designated as the "external communication system" levels (3). In the traditional drama model above the mediating communicating system, i.e., **S2** and **R2,** is absent, as the receiver is directly confronted with the characters. As regards the mediating fictional narrator's function (S2), it is taken over either by non-verbal channels, or some narrative functions are transferred to the internal communicating system through the introduction of commentators, producer figures, chorus, etc. (4).

The model of performance art below, however, illustrates that in the mediating fictional narrator becomes *visible* as s/he is *embodied*, *personified:*

The consequences of the fictional narrator's *visibility* are manifold: first, s/he may assume the role(s) of a narrator/several characters/the artist himself/herself, and can alternately oscillate between these roles; second, by stepping into the internal communicating system, the fictional narrator eliminates the difference between the mediating and the internal communication system levels, thereby creating an uncanny combination of narrative and dramatic genres, where the mediating level--originally covertly present in narrative texts--coalesces with the internal communicating level, inherently characterizing drama; third, stepping in and out of various roles entails obliterating *dialogue* as a means of communication. Instead, *monologue* gains prominence as the chief, and ultimately, the only means of "communication"; fourth, the boundary between fictional and actual selves, and concurrently, between real and imaginary worlds disappear.

As the "character representation" and a "major shift in the relationship of character to other elements of dramatic constructions or theatrical presentation" are the manifestations "of a change in the larger culture concerning the perception of the self and the relations of self and the world" (Fuchs 8), it is legitimate to suggest that this kind of characterization technique is the dramaturgical manifestation of the central theme prevalent on the American postmodern stage: the construction/deconstruction of identity.

Nonetheless, there are certainly other viable means to render the fragmentation of character. The multiplicity of conflicting identities or selves may be presented in the following modes: [1] differing identities can effectively be rendered via the *non-verbal* channels of movie

and video, as for instance, in Adrienne Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976) Clara, the heroine, in her personal quest for identity, can see episodes from her life performed by actors within recreated scenes from Hollywood movies; [2] characters may appear in *objectified* versions: either "as a collection of *objects*" like Rhoda, an "artifact" in Foreman's *Particle Theory*--"face in one direction, shoulder another, eyes and mouth surgically distinguished from each other and from other features" (Fuchs 172)--or as a split "I" like "the accreted self of Breuer's texts, located in no particular body or mind, divided sometimes between human actors and puppets [. . .]" (173); [3] when the "dispersed self" is not objectified in any visible manner but is manifest in the discourse of the characters, as in Mamet's plays.

The tendency to reify, dehumanize, and "de-subtantiate" (Fuchs 35) characters does not hold for Mamet's protagonists. Although they are not "walking experiments in disassemblage"--Fuchs's term to describe postmodern character (34)--they demonstrate a "dispersed idea of self," presented, though, not in easily recognizable, blatant split selves manifest in dislocated objectified images of character but in a hidden and subtle manner, in their dislocated, discontinuous, and disjointed discourse. Consequently, the characters' utterances, are virtually the only means of characterization that Mamet exploits to describe them.

What markedly distinguishes Mamet's drama from both performance art and the traditional model for drama is the absence of the fictional narrator. The lack of a narrator in the internal communicating system considerably reduces the necessity for *monologue*, whereas the not even covertly present fictional narrator in the mediating communicating system (whose function is conventionally displaced to the dramatic text or some extra-textual devices) results in the enhanced significance of *dialogue.* In other words, as *dialogue* is stripped off any extra-communicational, narrative aspects transferred to it, and also, as virtually it is the only means of character portrayal, the *subtext* in Mamet's plays is of utmost importance. My schematic model for Mamet's drama below illustrates the character (re)presentation type in his drama. In my graphic presentation, the arrows between the characters indicate dialogue.

Predicated upon the tendencies outlined above, it can be safely suggested that the development of a coherent and comprehensive *postmodern drama theory* is self-contradictory, unfeasible, and inconceivable. In spite of the emergence of certain commonly recognizable features (banishment of conversational dialogue, reduction of plot, "death of character") that could function as normative criteria for a theory, I assume that postmodernism's radically deconstructive, subversive attitude to conventions, and to authoritative discourses would easily deflate any attempt at canonizing these conventions as models and rules.

From the perspective of the central thematic concern in postmodern dramatic works, Mamet affiliates with the group of postmodern dramatists, as the socially and culturally sanctioned stereotypical roles of women and, concomitantly, their traditional gender roles are revised in his plays. Considering the formal attributes identified and listed in postmodern dramatic writing, we cannot label Mamet's drama as postmodern, as *plot*--even if it is rudimentary, as in most of Mamet's plays (exceptions are: *Edmond*, *House of Games*)--*dialogue*, and *character* still exist in his plays.

[3] The Liminality of the Bakhtinian Approach

In contrast to the critical practices just discussed, a main asset of Bakhtin's system of thought lies in the fact that it links theory and practice. Moreover, I find that *liminality,* a fundamental concept that intrinsically characterizes his thought serves as a key to both his theory and methodology, and also, it has theoretical and methodological implications for the majority of his concepts.

Bakhtin borrowed *liminal* from anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, who had introduced it in *The Rites of Passage* (1960) to examine individuals' and groups' ritual behavior in life-crisis ceremonies (birth, initiation rites, betrothal, marriage, etc.). Bakhtin expands the scope of application of this concept and uses it to describe a main aspect of his work. In his own formulation, the essence of his system is *liminal*:

> our analysis must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary or any other particular kind of analysis. . . . On the other hand, a positive feature of our study is this: [it moves] in spheres that are liminal, i.e., on the borders of all aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersection. (qtd. in Holquist "From *Dialogism*" 95)

Relying on the original sense of liminal "transition," and considerably extending its operational validity, Bakhtin qualifies his critical position *liminal*, which enables him to move in between disciplines and concepts. The theoretical and methodological ramifications of his critical stance are far-reaching and numerous. However, I will merely highlight aspects and features that most convincingly justify a Bakhtinian approach to the study of female characters.

I contend that the liminal critical perspective is conducive to the systemic and coherent nature of Bakhtin's system of thought. Without claiming that I will resolve the issue of coherence or discontinuity of Bakhtin's thought, a much disputed dilemma in recent Bakhtin scholarship,[xviii] I believe that the concept of liminality permeating Bakhtin's thought, attests to the coherence of his system.

As regards the theoretical implications, essentially, a liminal perspective suggests *dismantling boundaries,* which, in my view, encapsulates the epistemological theoretical groundwork of Bakhtin's work. A tendency of *dismantling boundaries* manifests itself in Bakhtin's hostility to "all 'instantiation' models--Saussurean, formalist, structuralist, Freudian, Marxist" (Morson and Emerson, "Bakhtin, M. M." 64). He rejected "theoretism," a way of thinking "that abstracts from concrete human actions [. . .], transforms the abstraction into a set of rules, and

then derives norms from those rules" (Morson and Emerson, "Introduction" 7). Theoretism's main drawback lies in its ignoring "the very thing in which the soul of morality is to be found: the 'eventness' ('sobytiinost') of the event" (7). However, "to explain what sort of knowledge is possible without 'theoretism,' Bakhtin developed numerous conceptual alternatives: 'live entering,' 'dialogue,' 'novelness' [. . .]" (30).

Owing to the fact that Bakhtin's thought is informed by the basic impulse of *dismantling boundaries*, it can provide sufficient theoretical underpinning of Mamet's female characters' aspiration to deconstruct social and cultural borders and barriers erected by patriarchy. Similarly, the concepts developed by Bakhtin to confront "theoretism" provide adequate analytical instruments for the investigation of the portrayal of women characters, since the concepts such as "self/other," "polyphony," "dialogue," and "carnival" all dismantle boundaries in one way or other. A more detailed discussion of their applicability to Mamet's drama will, however, be specifically addressed in the subsequent chapter.

To further illustrate the significance of liminality, I suggest that the extremely wide range of fields and disciplines[xix] where Bakhtin's notions and ideas have been applied is partly due to his liminal critical stance that rejects insistence on any rigid, closed systems and theories. Bakhtin's thought has been productive in a large number of fields "including psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, communication theory, semiotics, and literary theory" (Carlson 313) and also, has been "used to elucidate an extraordinarily heterogeneous mass of individual texts, genres, disciplines, theoretical problems, and cultural situations" (Thomson 214).

From a methodological point of view, the liminal critical stance allows for [1] permeability, thus the extension of analytical concepts and tools beyond the specific borders of disciplines that are traditionally and institutionally defined; [2] borderline negotiations, thus exploiting and relying on the interface between disciplines, and different discourses. Consequently, the liminal perspective validates an unlimited transposition of concepts, and tools intra- and inter-

paradigmatically. In this Bakhtinian spirit, I will apply Bakhtin's ideas and notions ("carnival," "self/other," "polyphony," and "dialogism")--originally developed for his favored genre, the novel, to drama. In other words, liminality, by its intrinsic feature, validates the transfer of Bakhtin's concepts to the genre of drama.

It is exigent to note at this point that Bakhtin's downgrading of drama--as explicated by him primarily in *Problems* and, to some extent, in his essay "Discourse and the Novel" (1934-35)—should not be taken at face value. In *Problems*, Bakhtin's first and foremost aim is to demonstrate and explore the features of a "fundamentally new novelistic genre," the "polyphonic novel" created by Dostoevsky (7), therefore he contrasts the "ultimate dialogicality" of Dostoevky's novels with the "monologic quality" of "the dramatic whole" (17). The target of his critique is reduced to the obsoleteness of the principles of classical tragedy (its monolithic quality, unitary vision, finalizability). For example, as opposed to *"a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices"* in Dostoevsky's novels (6), in drama, Bakhtin argues, "the world must be made from a single piece," and "[a]ny weakening of this monolithic quality leads to weakening of the dramatic effect" (17). Bakhtin's disregard for other dramatic forms[xx] which may contain elements displaying dialogicality--even in an embryonic form--is justified as they would have weakened his point about the superiority of the novel. My initial claim that downgrading the status of drama in *Problems* as well as in "Discourse" functions as an effective discursive strategy can be supported by Bakhtin's own statement inserted in a footnote in his essay. He claims that in the comparisons between the novel and drama, he invariably refers to "pure classical drama as expressing the ideal extreme of the genre," adding that "[c]ontemporary social drama may, of course, be heteroglot, and multi-languaged" (405).[xxi]

Without referring to liminality, several Bakhtin scholars have already anticipated the extension of Bakhtin's concepts. Dentith regards polyphony as a "true aesthetic description: that is, it not only describes a particular aesthetic object [. . .], it also provides a basis for evaluating

those aesthetic objects" (43). Stallybrass and White regard carnival as an "epistemological category" (6). Following a different line of argumentation, Graham Pechey also maintains that Bakhtin's concepts call for transposition: "movement or *migration* is inherent in them [concepts] from the beginning: it is their normal condition" (40). He even encourages a "carnivalized" approach to Bakhtin:

> Fidelity to Bakhtinism may well demand of us a reversal of the procedure whereby he took his stand in the novel and contemplated the other forms from that defamiliarising vantage-point; it may now be necessary to occupy the similar vantage-point offered by "drama" in its manifold contemporary incarnations. (41)

Another crucial aspect of Bakhtin's work, the tripartite model of language that assigns equal significance to each element of a verbal transaction: speaker, listener, and the context can also be conceived as a further example for the operation of liminality. By comprising formal and contextual aspects of language, Bakhtin underscores their intrinsic unity as well as points of intersection between these entities, which are usually treated separately in traditional critical paradigms. The relevance of this practice to literary analysis is articulated by White as follows:

> Bakhtin's work prefigured both structuralist and deconstructionist views of the language of literature, but crucially placed them both in a sociolinguistic framework which thereby makes them responsive to an historical and thorough social comprehension of literature. (*Carnival* 135).[xxii]

There are, however, manifold implications inherent in Bakhtin's liminal perspective. In addition to the previously surveyed functions, *liminal*, in its original Gennepian sense of "transition" accurately describes the transformations in the female characters' gendered roles and identity in the Mametian texts under scrutiny. Gennep's basic thesis "has direct relevance for theories of change" (Kimball x). From an anthropological perspective, the transformations the women characters undergo in their "life-crisis" context, when under cultural compulsion, their old identity is deconstructed and their new is being constructed, show much resemblance to the

three-stage structure in rites of passage as distinguished by Gennep. He includes: "*preliminal rites*," rites of separation from a previous world, "*liminal* (*or threshold*) rites" executed during the transitional stage, and "*postliminal rites*," the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world (21). Translating these categories, on an abstract level, into stages that women may go through in the process of gaining full autonomy in patriarchy, the first stage corresponds to women's recognition and endeavor to separate themselves from patriarchal oppression, which can be accompanied "by rites of preparation for the transitional stage" (21), the second to their transition to the new surroundings, which may be accompanied by "rites of preparation for union" (21), while the third to stage of integration where "rites of incorporation" occur (20). From these subcategories, the rites of transition and integration gain prominence in the playscripts to be studied. Gennep's categories, then, can effectively supplement the Bakhtinian critical analytical tools for tracing and exploring the women characters' transformations.

Endnotes to Chapter II

III. DIALOGIZED POLYPHONY: MULTI-FORM WORKINGS OF DIALOGUE

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.
(T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

As argued in the preceding chapter, the liminal critical perspective guarantees a smooth transplantation of Bakhtin's categories to another generic field or category, thus, no specific "tailoring" transactions are required in the transfer of polyphony, dialogue, and carnival from the novel--their original site of application--to drama. The adaptability of the conceptual cluster borrowed largely depends on the specific generic context of the new terrain of drama. However, an interface between Mamet's drama and the genre of the novel ensures that the categories identified by Bakhtin as modes of foregrounding characters in the novel retain their original function in drama as well. In Bakhtinian terms, Mamet's drama complies with the ontological environment of a "novelized" drama. Thus, in this chapter, I intend to show that the polyphonic arrangement of characters as well as dialogism--distinct modes of character portrayal in carnivalized literature--retain their functional validity, hence their applicability to Mamet's drama as well. In the first part of the discussion that follows, I will introduce the term *dialogized polyphony* to qualify the specifically Mametian dialogue, and to distinguish it from the *undialogized polyphonic* character arrangement dominant in postmodern drama. From the vantage point of my claim that dialogue is employed by Mamet as a chief dramatic resource to portray his characters, in the second part, using two different approaches, I will explore patterns of communicational strategies that the two protagonists' talk exchange in *Oleanna* discloses. First, drawing on the regulative conventions of the Co-operative principle in conversation as introduced by H. Paul Grice, I will consider the characters's violations of these maxims. Then,

relying on Bakhtin's understanding of internal dialogism of the word, I will attempt to account for the characters' inarticulacy from this perspective as well.

[1] "The Affirmation of Someone Else's 'I'"

As Bakhtin argues, under the dominant influence of the novel, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, "in an era when the novel reigns supreme, almost all the remaining genres [drama and lyric poetry] are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized'" ("Epic and Novel" 5-6). He underlies that the novelized genres "become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia" and, as a result, "they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody [. . .]" (7). Most importantly, as Bakhtin points out, "the novel inserts into these other genres an *indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality* (7, emphasis added).

Essentially, parallel with identifying the chief qualities of the novelistic genre, Bakhtin, incidentally, recognized the necessity of a paradigm shift in how the concept of drama had been viewed. By distinguishing *indeterminacy* as a central concept permeating the novel, Bakhtin defined a crucial aspect that radically influenced and altered the compositional design, the modes of (re)presentation, and the means of characterization in the signifying practices in the twentieth century. In addition to establishing perhaps the most fundamental change in the genre of the novel, the gradual withdrawal of the authorial voice (a major aspect of Roland Barthes' death-of-the-author thesis), Bakhtin located the major impediments to the development of drama in the ubiquitous presence of the author. Yet, Bakhtin himself recognized the gradual elimination of the authorial voice in the dramatic works of "Ibsen, Hauptmann, the whole of Naturalist drama" ("Epic and Novel" 5-6).[xxiii]

The gradual withdrawal of the authorial voice runs parallel with developing strategies to foreground characters in drama as well. Whether the polyphonic structural design gaining prominence in drama from the turn of the twentieth century was the result of the influence of the novel or whether it was the outcome of the intrinsic development of the dramatic genre is difficult to decide. With the authorial voice pushed into the background, the most effective way of character arrangement is the polyphonic structural design, whereby each character is granted his/her own voice. Bakhtin's main objection to drama that "drama by its very nature is alien to genuine polyphony" (*Problems* 34), is no longer valid for the new type of drama. Thus, Bakhtin's explanation of the essence of polyphony, as employed most successfully by Dostoevsky in the novels, is equally applicable to the dramatic genre:

> [a] character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines with the full and equally valid voices of other characters. (*Problems* 7)

With much foresight, Bakhtin anticipated what path the development of drama might take in the twentieth century. Yet, he could not have foreseen certain "detours" in that process. With the advent of postmodernism, the persistence on the "novelization" of drama culminates in a rather idiosyncratic use of "novelistic" elements, which involves transferring actual textual features into the genre of drama: "the novelistic text has been taken up, not so much as a basis for plot and character, but as a point of departure for theatrical reading more or less dramatized by the improvisations of its various readers" (Pavis 59). The novelistic text transforms into a mode of presenting the multiple voices of a split "character," or of the co-existing voices of several characters. Albeit the "characters" are thus arranged in a polyphonic design--thereby displaying a multiplicity of consciousness--no dialogical relationship persists between them. I

suggest that we regard this as an *undialogized polyphonic structure* in which the various texts may present a multiplicity of consciousnesses, yet, dialogicity between them--in the Bakhtinian sense: "to affirm someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (*Problems* 10)--disappears and dissolves. The undialogized polyphonic structure is an effective way of character arrangement to convey the disintegration of the subject and identity in the case of split or multiple characters.[xxiv]

Without spelling out the word "polyphony" itself, Mamet is guided by very similar principles in character portrayal: "[g]ood drama has no stage directions. It is the interaction of the characters' objectives expressed *solely* through what they say to each other--not through what the author says *about* them" ("Radio Drama" 118). In contrast with *undialogized polyphonic design* prevalent in postmodern drama, in his plays, *dialogized polyphonic structure* operates. Polyphony functions as a basic structural device of arranging the characters, even though most often the theme is set for a duet (*A Life in the Theater*, *Reunion*, *The Woods*, *Oleanna*, *The Old Neighborhood*), occasionally for a trio (*Speed-the-Plow*, *The Cryptogram*) or for a quartet (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*), and sometimes for several voices (*House of Games*, *Edmond*). Even though "[f]or Mamet the natural focus of drama seems to be the irreducible component of the speaker and the listener" (Bigsby, *Modern* 217), I believe that the principle of polyphony is still firmly rooted in his dramatic works.

The polyphonic structure warrants a sense of *indeterminacy* that imbues Mamet's plays. His own comments with respect to his dramatic vision distinctly underlie his disinclination to provide any judgmental solution: "[t]he power of the dramatist, [. . .] resides in the ability to state the problem" (*Three Uses* 30). Again, when provoked for not taking a position on the issue of sexual harassment in *Oleanna*, Mamet responded: "I have no political responsibility. I am an artist. I write plays not political propaganda. [. . .] If you want easy solution, turn on the boob tube" (qtd. in Holmberg 94). David Skeele's critical remark concerning the "unfinalizable" nature of the endings in Mamet's drama also testifies the "semantic openendedness" [sic] of his

dramatic works:

> Though he [Mamet] often addresses specific sins in his plays (rampant greed is the most common), he seldom tells us directly that he is doing so, and even more rarely offers any kind of clear solution to the problems that succumbing to the sin creates. (513)

Paradoxically, though not surprisingly, the polyphonic design cannot completely conceal the authorial voice. Even though the author remains *alongside* the characters, as Bakhtin explains, the author's worldview becomes explicit. With reference to Dostoevsky's novels Bakhtin states: "the affirmation of someone else's consciousness--as an autonomous subject and not as an object--is the ethico-religious postulate determining the *content* of the novel," and "from that vantage point the author understands the world of his characters" (*Problems* 10). This principle, then, is refracted onto thematic planes, and the theme unfolds: "the heroes suffer destruction because they cannot wholeheartedly affirm the other, 'thou art.' Affirmation (and nonaffirmation) of someone else's 'I' by the hero--this is the theme of Dostoevsky's work" (10).

In a similar vein, due to the suppression of their dialogical self, Mamet's characters are incapacitated to affirm the other, "thou art," which leads to their isolation from each other. The aborted and conflictual relationships between female and male characters, as dramatized by Mamet, exemplify the prevalence of "nonaffirmation" of the other "I." Such an attitude results in hostility to and distance from the other sex (hostility between Bernie and Joan, estrangement between Danny and Deborah in *Perversity*), or it can lead to physical violence (Nick and Ruth battering each other in *The Woods,* John's attempt to hit Carol *in Oleanna*) or even to murder (Dr. Ford killing Mike in *House*). Yet, paradoxically, due to the polyphonic arrangement of the characters, the affirmation and appreciation of the other "I" is reinforced by Mamet, which, I believe is expressive of his *Weltanschaung*.

[2] Consonance and Dissonance in Dialogue

While the polyphonic arrangement provides the framework for a plurality of voices, *dialogue*, as an actual conversational practice, and, on an abstract level, *dialogism*, form the connecting link between them. Discontinuous, distorted, and nonsensical as the Mametian dialogue may seem at first glance, it features as a crucial means of characterization. Its highly fragmented, elliptical, and repetitive nature has invariably been stated as indicative of the characters' lack of communication and/or miscommunication. Yet, the exact mode of how patterns of conversational strategies are at work, how they are negotiated, and how certain generally accepted conventions are flouted leading to a communication failure, mis-communication or non-communication, have been unexamined with reference to Mamet's plays. Therefore, the ensuing analysis of a short segment of dialogue between the professor and his student in *Oleanna* aims to provide sound linguistic evidence for the mis-communication palpable in their talk.

Since the Gricean Co-operative principle was developed from studying actual speech samples between people, it needs some explanation on what grounds this technique may prove to be a valid approach for the examination of a *created*, dramatic text. In a detailed comparison of conversation and dramatic dialogue in *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays* (1995), Vimala Herman offers some comments pertinent to my discussion. Underlying similarities between everyday conversation and dramatic dialogue, she convincingly argues that "conversational and dramatic speech share areas of commonality in being speech exchange system, which set them apart from poetic genres like the ode or the lyric; or narrator language in the novel" (4). After an extensive treatment of this issue, she concludes that both everyday speech and dramatic dialogue are governed by the same interactional strategies: "certain underlying *rules* and regularities operative in day-to-day exchanges are at work as 'authenticating conventions' which are also enabling conventions in the interpretation of dramatic dialogue" (76). In fact, she maintains, any dramatist exploits the "rules" and mechanics of everyday speech for his own dramatic purposes, therefore understanding these resources

should be useful in analyzing a dramatic dialogue (76). Thus, the insights gained from conversation analytical frameworks can legitimately be deployed for the evaluation of characters' talk in drama. Furthermore, the highly fragmented, repetitive, and elliptical nature of the Mametian dramatic dialogue reminiscent of everyday speech makes the study of dialogue segments feasible.

Grice defines the four maxims of the Co-operative principle as follows:

(1) The *maxim of quantity*: make your contribution as informative as required--don't give too much or too little information;

(2) the *maxim of quality*: make your contribution one that you believe true;

(3) the *maxim of relation*: be relevant;

(4) the *maxim of manner*: avoid unnecessary prolixity, obscurity of expression and ambiguity, and be orderly (qtd. in Cole and Morgan 45).

In order to describe the particularities in the characters' talk more thoroughly, I find it necessary to introduce the categories of what I term *meta- and diversion sequences.* These are embedded sequences that do not forward the conversation but hold in abeyance the answer either via *meta-sequences*, i.e., the repetition throughout a few utterances of what has already been said, or, via *diversion sequences*, which are deliberate digressions from a topic introduced earlier.

The two characters' utterances in the extract below will be numbered for easy reference.

(1) JOHN. I'm sorry . . .
(2) CAROL. (*Pause*) What is a "term of art"?
(3) JOHN. (*Pause*) I'm sorry . . .?
(4) CAROL. (*Pause)* What is a "term of art"?
(5) JOHN. Is that you want to talk about?
(6) CAROL. . . . to talk about . . .?
(7) JOHN. Let's take the mysticism out of it, shall we? Carol? (*Pause*) Don't you think? I'll tell you: when you have some "thing." Which must be broached. (*Pause)* Don't you think . . .? (*Pause*)

(8) CAROL. . . . don't I think . . .?

(9) JOHN. Mmm?

(10) CAROL. . . . did I . . .?

(11) JOHN. . . . what?

(12) CAROL. Did . . . did I . . . did I say something wr . . .

(13) JOHN. (*Pause*) No. I'm sorry. No. You're right. I'm very sorry. I'm somewhat rushed. As you see. I'm sorry. You're right. (*Pause*) What is a "term of art"? It seems to mean a *term*, which has come, through its use, to mean something *more specific* than the words would, to someone not *acquainted* with them . . . indicate. That, I believe, is what a "term of art," would mean. (*Pause)* (4)

In this opening scene all the four Gricean maxims are flouted: the professor only in turn (13) answers the student's question in turn (2), after a series of embedded utterances (sequences of 4-5 and 8-12 are meta-sequences, while sequence 7 is a diversion). Relying on a series of analyses of this sort I conducted earlier, I propose that the dialogue exchange here is typically Mametian: a topic is introduced, then it is repeated and confirmed, next a diversion topic is inserted, and finally, the original topic may recur, and some kind of answer may be provided. Evidently, the characters exhibit mutually alienating strategies rather than mutually supportive ones. The pattern emerging here seems to show parallels with the exposition of the classical sonata form in music as it also has an introduction of the theme followed by transposition, which matches the "confirmation" part here, then comes the auxiliary theme, which corresponds to the "diversion" here, and finally the closing theme, which is always a slightly modified version of the initial theme.

I believe that the compositional similarity between segments of Mamet's dialogue and the sonata form cannot be handled merely as a formal coincidence. Though René Wellek and Austin Warren do not ascribe much importance to "literary imitations of musical structures" on the grounds that "literary devices of recurrence, contrast, and the like [. .] are common to all the arts" (127), I am more inclined to agree with Péter Egri, who claims that "correspondences

between literature and music enhance and refine the auditory perception of literature" (7). Indeed, the dynamism, innate in the majority of the dialogue exchanges in Mamet's plays, is due to a rhythm pulsating in the cyclical recurrence of this pattern within his works, and also, to the inherent rhythm within the isolated pattern itself maintained by the alternation of the seemingly irregular longer and shorter, frequently broken, unfinished utterances and pauses. Additionally, I believe that the compositional correspondence serves as a structural means to convey the hidden message of a need for humanism and peace subtextually present in the play. The sonata form associated with calmness and peace is in stark contrast with the conversational pattern it describes in *Oleanna* since it aims at misleading, deceiving, and giving false information or no information at all to the listener.

Undeniably, the Gricean principles can adequately categorize the types of communicational strategies employed by the protagonists. Yet, a deficiency of this kind of formal description is that it cannot account for the characters' inarticulacy. Therefore it should be supplemented with a study of the internal dialogism of the word as proposed by Bakhtin to account for the forces and elements shaping the *style* of the characters' language.

The conversational failure, as well as the characters' inarticulacy can be attributed to the Mametian agent's uncertainties, and to the linguistic pressure imposed on Carol by the professor, who is in an authoritative position. From the perspective of the internal dialogism of the word, certain reasons for their incomplete and discontinuous utterances can be more profoundly elucidated. Bakhtin claims that dialogue is not simply "a compositional form in the structuring of speech," but also "the internal dialogism of the word [. . .] the dialogism that penetrates its entire structure, all its semantic and expressive layers," which "has such a power to shape style," and that it finds expression "in a series of peculiar features in semantics, syntax and stylistics" ("Discourse" 279). Bakhtin distinguishes a dual process whereby discourse is shaped: first, "the word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements [. . .] (276); second, "every word is directed

toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (280). In a living conversation, "the contradictory environment of alien words is present to the speaker not in the object, but rather in the consciousness of the listener, as his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections" (281), and "every utterance is directed toward this apperceptive background of understanding, which is not a linguistic background but rather one composed of specific objects and emotional expressions" (281).

The adequate operation of the "apperceptive background" is the key to conducting meaningful conversation. Improper or dysfunctional internal dialogism may occur when the speaker encounters passive understanding—as Carol does in the above example--in which, as Bakhtin claims, "nothing new can be introduced into his discourse" (281). Consequently, "indeed the purely negative demands, [. . .] leave the speaker in his own personal context, within his boundaries" (281); in other words, the speaker remains in his solitary confinement, which inevitably results in his/her inarticulacy. In Bakhtin's view, a list of negative demands "could only emerge from a passive understanding (for instance, a need for greater clarity, more pervasiveness, more vividness and so forth)" (281). Certainly, the list can be expanded, and what is most relevant to the pattern of the Mametian dialogue is the presence of the linguistic pressure due to the differences in the characters' hierarchical positions. Carol confronts passive understanding, which does not facilitate meaningful exchange. The "teacher-student paradigm," a pervasive tendency in Mamet's male-cast plays, as identified by Pascale Hubert-Leibler (558) appears here in its "genderized" form with the male character cast in the "teacher" while the female characters cast in the "student" role. This seems to be a recurrent pattern with boss-secretary in *Speed-the-Plow*, conman-psychologist in *House of Games*, professor-student in *Oleanna*.

The aspects of an assymetrical dialogue are not treated by Bakhtin, though the problem of "unequal dialogues" is tangentially addressed by him in his "Notes of 1970-1." There he observes that "the sphere of true (which is to say truly open) dialogue is easy to destroy; that all

sorts of speech genres (threats, commands, prohibitions) hostile to dialogue fill our lives" (Morson and Emerson, Introduction 59).

It is precisely the lack of emphasis on assymetrical dialogue in Bakhtin's notion of dialogue that Aaron Fogel critiques. He claims that "in practice not all dialogue is free, natural, spontaneous, informal, and lively. On the contrary, it may be true that most real dialogue is variously constrained and forced" (174). With Joseph Conrad's novels as his examples, Fogel writes:

> The theme of his work is not "lack of communication" but the recognition that communication itself is by nature more coercive and disproportionate than we think when we sentimentalize terms like dialogue and communication. (195)

As opposed to passive understanding, "an active understanding," Bakhtin claims, "establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on" (282).

I assume that the speaker's orientation, openness, and frankness toward the listener are just as important prerequisites of an active understanding as the success of the speaker's "combat" on an "alien territory." The former aspect of an active understanding is somewhat ignored by Bakhtin. Instead, he focuses rather on the speaker's "fight" in this form of internal dialogism: "the speaker [. . .] constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background" (282). Therefore, the speaker orientates himself toward

> a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another. (282)

In Mamet's plays, however, this kind of active understanding between characters is impeded, mainly, by the infiltration of business-like discourse habits requiring brevity and terseness in form, and communicating strategies aiming at manipulating and deceiving the "buyer" for the self-serving interests of the "seller" (Gould and Karen in *Speed*, Mike and Ford in *House).* Consequently, such a discourse practice removes any possibility for intimacy, which is feared and evaded by characters (*The Woods*, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*). Therefore various strategies of avoidance are developed ranging from verbal abuse (frequency of scatological words) to actual physical abuse (*The Woods*, *Edmond*, *Oleanna*).

Endnotes to Chapter III

IV. ASPECTS OF CARNIVALIZED DISCOURSE

> Gertrude Stein said to Picasso, "That portrait doesn't look like me." Picasso said, "It will." [xxv]

Of the Bakhtinian conceptual cluster, *carnival* has by now become the most widely touted and championed notion. It is also the most "dialogized" one in the sense that it has inspired substantial critical attention and generated the largest number of studies in a great variety of fields. Yet, or precisely for this reason, the semantic groundwork of the concept has been somewhat fuzzy. Bakhtin scholars tend to view it, as Caryl Emerson does, "the weakest, least consistent, and most dangerous category in Bakhtin's arsenal" (qtd. in Dentith 65), while others, for instance Dentith, would describe it as "a richly suggestive topos [. . .] which condenses many crucial and highly contested aspects of European history over the last five centuries" (79). It appears safest to accept Viacheslav V. Ivanov's judgement, who considers carnival as a key concept alongside with dialogue (3). Alternately, to Robert Stam, "Bakhtin's formulations about 'carnival' almost inevitably bring to mind similar formulations by Nietzsche concerning the 'Dionysian,'" and subsequently, in a perceptive analysis, he draws parallels between the Bakhtinian and Nietzschean conceptions (*Subversive* 87). Surveying "carnival"-inspired critical studies, however, is not the central point of concern in the present inquiry as it would be both pointless and futile to survey the sheer bulk of such studies.[xxvi]

The flexibility of Bakhtin's concepts can be further corroborated by the fact that in spite of his avowed lack of enthusiasm for drama, especially his concept of carnival has been productively used in drama and theater studies. In the overwhelming majority of these works, "[t]heater theorists have been particularly interested in Bakhtin's book on *Rabelais*, with its concept of carnivalization and the challenge posed by carnival to social hierarchies and structures of authority" (Carlson 313).[xxvii] The approach I intend to apply to Mamet's female characters will combine two crucial aspects of carnival: [1] carnival used as an *aesthetic*

category to reveal instances of carnivalization in literature that has been saturated "with a specific *carnival sense of the world* (Baktin, *Problems* 107); [2] carnival viewed as a *critique of any hierarchical order*. Thus, the primary objectives of this chapter are twofold: first, to provide a list of descriptive-analytical categories that will be instrumental in uncovering instances of carnivalization in the individual plays under scrutiny; second, to theorize on the implications of carnival as a critique of hierarchical order.

[1] Carnival's Genre-Shaping Potentials

For the purposes of identifying the formal, genre-shaping elements of carnivalization in Mamet's plays, I will rely on Bakhtin's distinction between *external* and *internal* manifestations of carnivalization. Depending on the degree of carnivalization penetrating the structure of a literary work, the manifestations of carnivalization, as distinguished by Bakhtin, are "of a more external sort" and "a more profound assimilation of the carnival tradition" (*Problems* 158). While in the former "a deep and free carnival sense of the world is almost entirely absent" (158), in the latter "carnivalization penetrates the very construction of the major strong characters and the development of the passions" (*Problems* 159).

The external manifestations, apparent "in carnivalistic antitheses and contrasts, in abrupt changes of fate, in mystifications" (*Problems* 158), are primarily operative in the plot design in Mamet's dramatic texts. Additionally, I find that the generic essence of what Bakhtin terms "the carnivalistic genres"--menippea, the Socratic dialogue, the diatribe, the soliloquy, and the confession (*Problems* 156)-- can also serve as useful analytical criteria for identifying external elements of carnivalization in the selected plays. Therefore, I will supplement the above categories with some essential properties of these genres: "[s]harp dialogic syncrises,[xxviii] extraordinary and provocative plot situations, crises and turning points and moral

experimentation, catastrophes [sic] and scandals, contrasts and oxymoronic combinations" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 156).

Usually embedded in the dialogue exchanges, *internal* manifestations of carnivalization in Mamet's plays prove to be complex but subtle means of characterization. The devices such as "*pairing* of scenes" (*Problems* 162), carnivalistic *locales*, and "carnivalistic contrasting pairs" (163) can be subsumed in this group. In essence, "*pairing* of scenes (and individual images) that reflect one another or shine through one another--one given in the comic plane and the other in the tragic [. . .] taken together, these paired scenes create an ambivalent whole" (Bakhtin 162). Owing to their economy--they dispense with lengthy outer and inner descriptions of characters--these techniques prove to be particularly effective in constructing characters, therefore they tend to be the most often employed modes of character portrayal in Mamet's plays.

In carnivalized literature, the locale, where the action of the plot unwinds, also turns into an extremely important element of carnivalization. The setting "becomes two-leveled and ambivalent," whereas other places of action take on "additional carnival-square significance" (*Problems* 128). Therefore, all the locales in Mamet's plays also transform into "carnival squares," and all the other places of action which become "meeting-and contact-points for heterogeneous people" (128) turn into "carnival squares." For instance, the places where "business" is done--hotels, streets, bars, and the airport in *House*, the home of the production manager in *Speed*, and in the university professor's room in *Oleanna*--take on "carnival-square significance."

The range of the elements of carnivalization in the listed repertoire as well as their operational validity certainly varies in individual plays. Since the primary aim of this work is to explore Mamet's female characters, in the course of the analyses, I will give preference to categories that decisively contribute to character portrayal. Furthermore, for easy reference, the deployed Bakhtinian categories will be marked within inverted commas.

[2] Carnival as a Critique of Hierarchical Order

Yet another aspect of carnival, conceived as a critique of any hierarchical order, provides the theoretical underpinning of exploring the shifts in power between the male and female characters as well as the accompanying changes manifest in their acts, discourse, and gender roles as presented in the three business plays selected--*House of Games*, *Oleanna*, and *Speed-the-Plow.*

Carnival understood as a "festive critique" (Stallybrass and White 7) was conceptualized by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (completed as an unpublished dissertation in 1940, revised for publication in 1965, and published in English translation in 1968). From the vantage point of "carnivalesque" in the sense of "a potent, populist, critical inversion of all official worlds and hierarchies in a way that has implications far beyond the specific realm of Rabelais studies" (Stallybrass and White 7), it is legitimate to suggest that female protagonists "carnivalize," subvert the male-dominated world, the patriarchal order by assuming a role that the Bakhtinian term of "parodying doubles" (*Problems* 127) aptly describes. By emulating and usurping male acts and discourse, the heroines parody their male counterparts, whereby the female protagonists expose the tenuous grounds that male phallocentric power is based on.

The question arises how women's entry into the world of business can function as an occasion of carnival? Drawing parallels between the temporal and spatial conditions of a medieval carnival, and women's entry into the male world can be helpful. In medieval carnivals "the public square" was the central place for people of all ranks to meet, whereas its time was linked to "moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9).

In Mametian carnivalized literature, *work* creates a *space* (physically and potentially) for a carnivalistic situation to arise between the characters. To put it in another way, *work* serves as an occasion for carnival both spatially and temporally. Work both provides the actual physical

context for the encounter of the male and female characters and enables them to enter into a new kind of relationship. With one exception in *Speed,* all scenes in the three plays are located outside the domestic environment: a pool-room, streets, a hotel in *House*; the office of the film producer in *Speed;* and the university professor's office in *Oleanna*. The "moment of crisis" corresponds to women appearing at work, where familial ties do not determine the new relationship between men and women. Women's appearance on the job front entails the opportunity for them to strive for their own American Dream, which inescapably involves intrusion into male spaces, thus clashes with male individuals in what could be labeled as a gendered turf fight. In this struggle for space in a male-dominated world, the women protagonists challenge and invert the initial hierarchical order, and simultaneously, they lay bare corrupt practices in the phallocentric order.

Taking my cue from the principle of liminality, I also suggest that the carnivalization process as triggered by the women protagonists involves "postmodern metamorphic transactions"--meant to describe in their original sense "radical and programmatic interventions" in ancient, inherited mythological material (Virágos 47). In Mamet's texts, the transactions comprise, for instance, debunking and subverting long-established male centered myths (social and cultural), disrupting roles and expectations conventionally ascribed to women, and thus re-shaping male and female gender attributes.

For the investigation of the actual dynamics of the role shifts, I will deploy the four carnival categories that go into effect in carnival life--"free and familiar contact between people," "a new mode of relationship between individuals," "carnivalistic mesalliances," and "profanation" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 123)--and, also, those of the carnivalistic acts of crowning and decrowning. On account of the fact that the definitions of these categories as well as the clarification of their functional validity can more effectively illuminate my argumentation within the analyses themselves in Chapter VI, I will describe these analytical tools when they are actually applied.

There is one more point that has remained to be addressed. In one crucial respect, the Mametian carnival pattern departs from the medieval one. While the women's fight for space in Mamet's plays is clearly *anti-authoritarian* since they attempt to obtain power and authority over their male counterparts in the social and cultural planes of life, a medieval carnival, by nature, is *not anti-authoritarian.*[xxix] On the contrary, it was merely "the second life" of people, "who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Despite this major difference, I suggest that indirectly, Mamet's drama reinforces the basic principle of carnival: "[c]arnival is a general refusal to understand any fixed and final allocation of authority" (Bristol 212). This aspect gains prominence in the fact that the newly gained power by women exhibits the same kind of oppressive practices, as the power and authority exerted by men, thus, according to the carnival rule, it is not celebrated either. Instead, the *relativity* of power, as well as striking similarities manifest in the empowered male and female characters' acts, discourse, and gender roles are accentuated.

Finally, the subversive and transgressive nature of carnival induces to address correspondences between the concept of carnival and postmodernism as a social and cultural trend. Mary Russo's conception of carnival, as a mode of understanding the historical, cultural, and ideological currents in Europe, gives rise to drawing parallels between a paradigm shift, namely, between high modernism and postmodernism in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Europe and the United States. She argues:

> Without pretense to historical neutrality, Bakhtin's focus on carnival in early modern Europe contains a critique of modernity and its stylistic effects as a radical diminishment of the possibilities of human freedom and cultural production. He considers the culture of modernity to be as austere and bitterly isolating as the official religious culture of the Middle Ages, which he contrasts with the joy and heterogeneity of carnival and the carnivalesque style and spirit. (218)

Prompted by Russo's observation, I suppose that in some underlying terms, the subversive and decentering carnival spirit and style have much in common with similar impulses in postmodernism, which emerged as a reaction "against the established forms of high modernism" that were felt by the generation in the 1960s "dead, stifling, canonical" (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 111-12). Simplified as this conception of the genesis of postmodernism may be, in my view, it is not a mere coincidence that the positive and energizing force carnival has both received and generated in multifarious disciplines, genres, and cultural situations in Western societies since the late 1960s coalesces with postmodernism gaining prominence in every facet of the social and cultural scheme of things.

In sum, I suppose that the assimilation of the carnival spirit into Mamet's drama is indicative of the adoption, by him, of the new postmodern idiom of drama.

Endnotes to Chapter IV

V. TOPSY-TURVYDOM: TRANSACTIONS OF CHAOTIZATION

> "There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange and mixed affair we call life." (Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*)

The main objective of the present chapter is to explore the extent to which the external and internal manifestations of carnivalization in the three business plays selected--*Oleanna*, *House of Games*, and *Speed-the-Plow*--contribute to the portrayal of women protagonists in them. In addition to the repertoire of Bakhtinian analytical categories described earlier (Chapter IV [1]), I consider it necessary to include a new carnival image of *business space* that appears to considerably determine and influence character portrayal in the scripts under scrutiny. First, I will clarify the reasons for the introduction of this new category, then I will discuss the degenerating influence of *business space* on the Academia and human relationships as presented in *Oleanna*. Following the same methodology in the closing part of this chapter, I will explore the portrayal of the women protagonists in *House* and *Speed*.

[1] "Business Space" as a Carnival Image

Business appears to be a congenial *site* into which Mamet projects all his worries, concerns, and criticism about an America that is portrayed as falling apart. In the space and context of business, he can address nearly all the themes he has been haunted by: the prevalence of corruption and venality in business, the degradation of business ethic into deception and betrayal, the decline of American values, the decay of American idealism, the loss of the American Dream and of the frontier spirit, urban alienation, the communication breakdown between people, the conflicting and discordant relationship between men and women, and women's swapping place and roles in the shifting ambience of gender expectations. By virtue of

the fact that business acquires a large number of various functions, it follows that business transforms into a multi-dimensional and multi-functional *space* that absorbs and assumes the characteristics of a *carnival image.* Like the traditional images of carnival (fire and laughter), which "unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death (the image of pregnant death), blessing and curse [. . .]" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 126), *business space* also encompasses *ambivalence* and *dualism*. Therefore it meets the fundamental requirements of an artistic image as initiated by Bakhtin. With reference to "images of decrowning," (regal vestments stripped off, crown removed, etc.) Bakhtin notes that "[i]f carnivalistic ambivalence should happen to be extinguished in these images of decrowning, [. . .] they became single-leveled, lost their artistic character, and were transformed into naked journalism" (*Problems* 126).

When endowed with artistic qualities in representation, the Mametian *business space* possesses an enormous character-shaping force since it considerably determines the reactions and actions of characters. The negative pole of *business space* manifests itself most blatantly in the *degradation* of human values and *disfigurement* of human relationships. In accordance with its dualistic nature, the "blessing" of *business space* is embedded precisely in its "curse": its immensely degenerating effect may bring to a character a lucid insight into his own nature and his relations with others (the professor in *Oleanna*, Gould in *Speed*), or may engender the women characters' revolt against the corrupt occurrences and practices in the patriarchal order (Carol in O*leanna,* Dr. Ford in *House*, Karen in *Speed*).

The operational force of this new image, however, is not restricted to merely the business plays under study here. Assuming a *protean nature*, this image tends to intrude both the public and private realms of the characters' lives in the rest of Mamet's drama. For instance, imprints of this image are inscribed in the love relationship of Nick and Ruth in *The Woods*, to be discussed in Chapter VII. Thereby *business space* seems to acquire a sense of *quasi-transcendence* that can substitute for the lack of transcendence conspicuously absent from Mamet's plays. With business assuming the role and the function of a carnival image, I believe, Mamet has not only

significantly enriched the carnivalistic tradition but has also contributed to the renewal of the genre of drama, to its "contemporization" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 106).

[2] The Academia as a Carnivalized Space

The uneasy welding of the Academia and business space and its effects on human relationships as thematized in *Oleanna* can serve as a blatant example of the degenerating influence of *business space*. What on an archetypal level may seem to be an "unending struggle for power between male and female" (Holmberg 95), from the perspective of carnivalization, the conflict between the university professor and his female student dramatizes the destructive effect of business space on human values and relationship.

Influenced by business space pervading the "Groves of Academe," both John and Carol view their careers in a purely business framework. The negative side of the carnival image of business space gives rise to the emergence of their *business-oriented selves,* which means that for both John and Carol, a drive for existential security has replaced a genuine and devoted interest in teaching and pursuing studies in college, respectively.

> **"Critical carnivalistic situations" illuminate to what extent their business-oriented selves have gained control over their acts. By studying for a college degree, Carol is planning to make herself marketable. Her ambition is perfectly in tune with the American ethos of vertical mobility and, clearly, this pragmatic understanding of education seems to be the best chance for her social advancement and economic betterment. Yet, the system that takes her money in tuition cannot "guarantee" her education. The problem**

Carol confronts at the college can be translated into business terminology: she does not get good value for her money. As her complaints below reveal, apparently, besides her money, she invests her energy into learning, and she does what she is expected to do, yet she fails the professor's course:

CAROL. I'm just: I sit in class I . . . (*She holds up her notebook*.) I take notes . . .

JOHN. (*simultaneously* with "notes"): Yes. I understand. What I am trying to tell you is that some, some basic ...

CAROL.. . . . I . . .

JOHN. . . . one moment: some basic missed communi...

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

JOHN. No, I'm sure you . . .

CAROL. No, no, no. I'm doing what I'm told. It's *difficult* for me. It's *difficult* . . . (6)

However, swamped by the multiple pressures of his career options, John is unable to comprehend Carol's grievances. This brief dialogue exchange also illustrates his impatient and arrogant attitude toward Carol, which can be attributed to the distorting effect of *business space* on *his* personality. From the first moment of their encounter, he is distracted by the financial troubles of a new house that he has already contracted to purchase, counting on the advancement of his expected tenured position. The professor's acts and discourse--obviously, under the influence of his *business-oriented self*--are reminiscent of a businessman rather than a professor. I suppose that the italicized words in John's excuse below, in the drama, function as explicit subtextual indicators of John's agitated state of mind and a business-like lexis dominating his discourse: "I have a *telephone* call that I have to make. And an *appointment*,

which is rather *pressing*; though I sympathize with your concerns, and though I wish I had the time, this was not a previously scheduled meeting" (12-13).

A "carnivalistic paired scene" underlies that both Carol and John give priority to financial security over a love of learning and a love of teaching, respectively. Desperately trying to convince the professor why she needs the pass grade, Carol alludes to the difficulties arising from her different social and economic background:

> JOHN. . . . wait one moment. I . . .
> CAROL. It *is* true. I have *problems* . . .
> JOHN. . . . every . . .
> CAROL. . . . I come from a different *social* . . .
> JOHN. . . . ev . . .
> CAROL. a different economic . . .
> JOHN. . . . Look:
> CAROL. No. I: when I *came* to this school:
> JOHN. Yes. Quite . . . (*Pause*)
> CAROL. . . . Does that mean nothing?
> JOHN. ...but look: look...
> CAROL. . . . I . . . (7-8)

Again, the professor's business-oriented self prevents him from taking any notice of Carol's plea. A "paired scene" of the above incident in the second act, however, spotlights a totally different side of the professor, for whom financial security and upward mobility seem to be the first priorities. The two scenes taken together reflect "the ambivalent whole," namely the professor's hypocrisy when in power and his true motives when deprived of power. In *his "*critical situation," the impending threat of losing the tenure brings to John a revelation about his own nature and his relations with others. As his chances of obtaining the tenure severely diminish, due to the student's charges against him, he discloses his true motivation for the tenured position: "That tenure, and security, and yes, and *comfort*, were not, of themselves, to be scorned; and were even worthy of honourable pursuit" (44). By complaining about the personal loss, he would suffer

if he did not get the tenure, he tries to win Carol's sympathy: "I will lose my *deposit*, and the home I'd picked out for my wife and son will go by the boards" (45). The empowered Carol, however, turns out to be an excellent student who has mastered her professor's strategy. Adopting the same cynical attitude as John exhibited toward her in the first Act, she entirely ignores his plea, and replies: "[w]hat do you want of me?" (45).

In addition to its character-shaping power, *business space* also operates as a structuring principle in *Oleanna*. As a result of the destructive influence of *business space*, higher education has undergone a process of *commercialization* both in its aims and practice: knowledge has been *commodified,* and simultaneously, the method of instruction has been *depersonalized.* Concurrently, both the professor and the student appear to be the beneficiaries as well as the victims of these phenomena, as I will argue below. Ironically, the professor's opinion highlighting these disturbing tendencies in higher education unambiguously reveals a fundamental "carnivalistic contrast" between his discourse and his acts. His disregard for Carol's problems, and the evidence of his own university career, which is basically motivated by working for power and security, prove to be the most precise illustrations of all the aspects of his critique.

The professor claims that higher education does not educate but "it is something-other-than-useful" (28), and he even degrades it to a mere "ritual" that "all are entitled to" (28). He ascribes the loss of clearly set objectives in higher education to its democratization process whereby masses of people have gained access to colleges: "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* to [sic] the new vast middle class, that we *espouse* it, as a matter of right, and have ceased to ask, 'What is it good for?'" (33) Yet, *he may well be* one of the beneficiaries of this crucial transformation, as his earlier confessional remark suggests: "I came *late* to teaching. And I found it Artificial. The notion of 'I know and you do not'; and I saw the *exploitation* in the education process" (22). Nevertheless, from the aggressive and condescending style the professor exhibits toward Carol at the beginning of their encounter, one can conclude that he

has completely adopted the “I know and you do not” model as well as the principle of *exploitation* condemned by him initially.

The professor’s vivid description of the deficiencies of a *ritualized* form of college education illuminates that the concept of *educate* has undergone a drastic semantical carnivalization: “[w]e shove this book at you, we say read it. Now, you say you’ve read it? I think that you’re *lying*. I’ll *grill* you, and when I find you’ve lied, you’ll be disgraced, and your life will be ruined. It’s a sick game” (28). This kind of *depersonalized* method of instruction leads to the “mass production” of graduates rather than *education* in its genuine, original sense. In other words, the original meaning of the etymologically related Latin *e-ducere* meaning “to foster” and “to bring forth” hidden capabilities and talents from a disciple has degraded *to grill.*

Furthermore, a *“*carnivalistic contrast” between the professor’s apparent *achievements* in his professional career (he has published several books, he will be granted tenure) and his *failure* to teach the student in *his* own special field of research, namely, in *higher education*, exemplifies the distorting effect of business priorities on his professional approach of teaching. He may well be successful in the *quantifiable* aspects of his career (number of books, rise in payment), yet he has failed in all the roles that a student demands of a teacher: “to acknowledge him in whatever ‘role’ it may be--authority, benevolence, militancy, knowledge, etc” (Barthes 384). In a scene that I qualify as a “carnivalistic scandal,” Carol admits that she does not understand *any* of his books and spells out the help she needs “*Teach* me. *Teach* me” (11). Ironically, the title of his book, *The Curse of Modern Education,* carries with it a striking, undercutting “carnivalistic overtone” as well as the dualistic effect of business space: this is the book whose ideas the professor is unable to communicate to the student, yet its success has greatly contributed to his expected promotion. In a “paired scene” in the third act, Carol’s effort to ban the professor’s books from the curriculum seems to be legitimate from *her* point of view. There is no need for *his* books if he proves to be incompetent in communicating through the ideas in them.

John's confrontation with the student's desperate plea to teach her intensifies John's sense of responsibility, and apparently, he turns into an understanding and helpful educator. He acknowledges that Carol cannot blame herself for not having understood a thing: "that's my *fault*. And that is not verbiage. That's what I firmly hold to be truth. And I am sorry, And I owe you an apology" (17). Feeling shattered by this realization, and also, urged to be acknowledged and appreciated by the student, the professor attempts to restore and build a positive self-image through a reassuring relationship with Carol. So, on the face of it, he becomes generous, considerate, and sympathetic with the student. Paradoxically, the disfiguring influence of business space also saturates these newly evolving traits, and they will completely confuse Carol. John's apparently generous offer to change her grade to "A" signals the operation of business principles: "Your grade for the whole term is an 'A.' If you will come back and meet with me. A few more times" (25). By transgressing the rules and norms at the university, he actually *buys* and *trades* in the student's appreciation. Eventually, he employs corrupt, manipulative practices for his own interests.

Also, in order to fascinate the student with a *personal* and *ancient* mode of instruction, John begins to teach her, somewhat belatedly. He employs *anacrisis,* a basic device of the Socratic dialogue, "a means for eliciting and provoking the words of one's interlocutor, forcing him to express his opinion and express it thoroughly" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 110). The professor exhibits the method in this fashion:

> JOHN. So we confound the *usefulness* of higher
> education with our granted right to equal
> access to the same. We, in effect create a
> *prejudice* toward it [. . .]
>
> CAROL. . . .that it is prejudice that we should
> go to a school?
>
> JOHN. Exactly.

CAROL. How can you say that? How . . .

JOHN. Good. Good. *Good*. That's right! Speak up!

(30)

John's attempt to show Carol this remarkable method of teaching is badly misunderstood by her. Though the professor clarifies to the utterly amazed Carol that: "that's my *job*, don't you know. [. . .] To provoke you" (32), Carol feels not only puzzled but also grossly embarrassed. Instead of promoting reflection on the aim of schooling as perceived by the professor, the anacrisis prompts *ambivalent* reactions in Carol, and will accelerate an "abrupt change of fate," a reversal of roles between the professor and the student from the second act. She is confronted with a new method of teaching and a more personal voice that puts her on the alert. Carol can justifiably suspect some ulterior motives in the professor's radically altered behavior. Viewed in this light, Carol's decision to report the professor to the Tenure Committee appears to be legitimate.

There is, however, also another side to the coin, which exemplifies the destructive effect of the *business space* on Carol. To obtain knowledge that is taught in this new way defies the utilitarian principles of business as this knowledge should be worked for and not just simply *bought* and *consumed* like a commodity. The generation of "Carols," however, view their university careers in terms of a business enterprise, where *knowledge* has degraded into a *commodity* that can be purchased at a university that has decayed into a *market*. This *commodity-nature* of knowledge evokes Lyotard's anticipation concerning the state of knowledge in a postmodern society: "Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be *sold*, it is and will be *consumed* in order to be *valorized* in a new production: in both cases, the goal is *exchange*" (*Postmodern* 4, emphasis added).

Paradoxically, when the professor discloses his *human* side—not yet distorted by his business-oriented self--he tries to fascinate the student with a new effective mode of teaching, and in general, he treats Carol on equal terms--leads to the student's hostile reactions and

eventually, precipitates John's disempowerment. The student will base her charges against the professor exactly on his apparently human acts and discourse. This incident palpably shows that carnivalization penetrates the deepest core of this play: what is human is not even recognized, and the evidently human seems to be inauthentic.

[3] Locales and Paired Scenes: Harbingers of Character Metamorphosis

The portrayal of the women protagonists in *House of Games* and *Speed-the-Plow* exemplify a particularly effective way of applying the internal elements of carnivalization. The devices of "carnivalistic locales"--predominantly in *House*--as well as a consistent use of "paired scenes" coupled with the technique of portraying a character with his/her "carnivalistic contrasting pairs" constitute dominant modes of presenting the women characters in both plays.

At the beginning of *House*, a scene located in a house of games functions as a harbinger of the metamorphosis Dr. Ford will go through, and also, sets its deeply carnivalized atmosphere. A tense and mannish Ford, masquerading herself in masculine clothes (she is wearing jeans and a bomber jacket) enters the male sanctuary of the house of games as a psychoanalyst. She is determined to fight with Mike, a con man, for the interests of Billy, her patient as Mike has allegedly threatened to kill him if he does not pay his debt. On confronting Mike, she talks to him in a cynical and menacing manner: "Let's talk turkey, Pal. One: you threatened to kill my friend. You aren't going to *do* that because if you do you're going away for Life" (13). Surprisingly, however, having been immersed in the male world of con games, she leaves the house of games transfigured by her experience there. On departing with Mike, avoiding answering his probing question, "[w]ho are you, by the way?," she thanks him "for the lovely evening" (27).

The seemingly ungrounded change in her discourse and mood can be attributed to the influence of the extraordinary circumstances and locale, which call forth a part of Ford's psyche

and spotlight her latent *compulsive gambler* side. Bakhtin's observations concerning the psychological dynamics of gambling are instrumental in illuminating the pattern of behavior Dr. Ford follows in the house of games. Since "[g]ambling (with dice, cards, roulette, etc.) is by nature carnivalistic," experiencing the thrill of gambling, she goes through "sudden and quick changes of fate [. . .] minor crownings and decrownings" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 171).

The series of changes she undergoes boils down to shifts of power between her and Mike from the moment they face each other. Her apparent initial control over Mike quickly begins to wane. In a carefully calculated way, producing his notebook with the evidence of Billy's actual debt, Mike builds trust in her, and he even compliments on her looks: "I am showing you this because I *like* you, okay? 'Cause you got blond hair" (14). Then Mike flatters her by appreciating her professional gifts as well: "How come you *made* me so quick, I'm not a hard guy? How did you size me up so quick?" (14). Ford stammers, and nearly betrays herself that she works as a psychologist:

> FORD. I, I don't know . . . in my work . . .
>
> MIKE. What work is that?
>
> FORD. Well, it's none of your *business* . . . (14)

To further strengthen the confidence in her, Mike offers to cancel Billy's debt, if she identifies a cheat in a card game. Her consent to do so means making herself equal with the con men and tacitly accepting their rules. Evidently, with this move, she radically deviates from the role that her high social status as a psychologist would demand from her. She is decrowned. Nevertheless, her behavior is perfectly in tune with carnival rules. As Bakhtin explains, "[p]eople from various (hierarchical) positions in life, once crowded around the roulette table, are made equal by the rules of the game," and "their behavior at the roulette table in no way corresponds to the role they play in ordinary life" (*Problems* 171).

Indeed, Ford goes through a critical situation in the house of games, "[t]he *stake* is similar to a *crisis: a person feels himself on the threshold"* (*Problems* 171). Gradually, it dawns

on Ford that Mike and his fellow con men have masterminded a “bluff.” The cheat she is supposed to identify merely pretends to be one only to con her out of her money. She loses six thousand dollars and is threatened with a revolver to pay it immediately. However, expertly reading the “tells,” she notices that it is merely a *squirt gun*. This stage definitely qualifies as her crowning whereby she wins the conmen’s appreciation, and gains some control over them.

Despite the seemingly humiliating experience of being used by the con men the first time she has encountered them, she expresses her fascination at their pranks: “You guys are fantastic. What do you, do this [sic] for a living . . .?” (25). What is more, this incident *prompts* her to study their con games as she believes that she will retain mastery over the con men’s confidence game.

The operation of the carnival rules extends to the debasement of business into crime. In the con men’s perception, business is clearly equated with a con game:

> FORD. You were going to con me out of my money.
>
> MIKE. It was only business.
>
> FORD. It was only business, huh?
>
> JOEY. It’s the American Way . . . (25)

Joey’s qualification underlies that this kind of business conception is not confined to this particular house of games but it is extended to the outside world as well. Eventually, he defines the *ethos* of an American businessman, and thus, the *house of games* in the play metonymically refers to America.

Ford’s liminal state, her being between two worlds--she is no longer a member of a culturally well-defined social position or status as a psychologist, neither is she incorporated into the male world of the con men--she is presented as a profoundly carnivalized character. Clearly, Ford finds herself in limbo.

I suppose that in carnivalized literature, the inclusion of carnivalistic contrasting pairs can most vividly express the in-between state of a particular character since in that state, to borrow

Bakhtin's words, the character "does not coincide with himself, he is not equal to himself, he cannot be given a monosemantic finalizing definition," therefore he is presented in carnivalistic contrasting pairs (*Problems* 163). By analogy, this description also applies to Ford. She is presented with two of her analysands, a compulsive gambler and a murderess.

Her pairs turn out to be the "embodied voices" of her inner world as their discourse and acts articulate her inside worries and foreshadow her actions: she will turn into a gambler and will become a murderess. By juxtaposing appropriate scenes, I can justify my claim. For instance, the words Ford delegates to her analysand Billy accurately describe her, whereas *his* response filled with uncertainty actually voices *her* innermost worries. The implications of these utterances become evident in the subsequent events unfolding in the play:

> FORD. Today and tomorrow you say this: "I am a compulsive gambler. The reason for this . . .
>
> BILLY. Oh, maan. . . oh, maan . . . I don't know . . . what am I *doing* here . . . ? What am I *doing* here . . .? (*House* 10)

After her unique experience in the house of games, she realizes the futility of her work, and rehearses Billy's words slightly modified, with *I* italicized to underlie her own crisis of identity. Thus, Ford unnoticeably adopts Billy's compulsive gambler side: "I know why she is in hospital, she's sick. The question is what *I* am doing here. It's a sham, it's a con game. There is nothing I can do to help, and there is nothing I can learn from her to help others to avoid her mistakes" (30). The continuation of the dialogue above between Ford and Billy also signals *her* sense of confusion, though outwardly she seems to be confident and determined:

> FORD. "You're here to take control of your life."
>
> BILLY. I lost, what do *you* care maan, you're rich, you're comfortable, you got your goddam *book* you wrote, you don't do *dick*, you don't do *nothing*, maan, it's all a con game, you do nothing. You say you want to help? You want to help. . . ? Help me with this. (*He produces*

small, nickeled automatic pistol.) (10)

Again, Billy articulates exactly that it is *she* who is lost as she does not know a thing about reality. At the same time, her advice to Billy describes herself. Indeed, this is a world turned upside down where the analysand gives the correct diagnosis of the analyst. Furthermore, Billy's pistol acquires a *carnival coloring*: fearing that Billy kills himself, Ford gets hold of the revolver and eventually, it will "help" *her* to get rid of Mike at the end of the play.

Ford's other side, her being a whore--meant not in its narrow sense (a woman offering sexual services for money) but broadly, referring to a *corrupt* person irrespective of his or her sex--is subtly interwoven in a series of dialogue exchanges. The idea of making a woman a whore first occurs in Ford's woman patient's account of her row with her husband. Here Ford merely attentively listens and meticulously documents everything:

> WOMAN PATIENT. He said, "I can make any woman a whore in fifteen minutes."
>
> FORD (off camera). . . . and what did you say to that?
>
> WOMAN PATIENT. I said he couldn't make anybody a whore that was not a whore to start out with. (29)

Then, in a dialogue with her colleague Maria, Ford slips and identifies herself with her analysand:

> FORD. That poor girl, all her life my father tells her she's a whore, so all her life she seeks out . . .
>
> MARIA. "My father . . .?" (30)

The "prophecy" of Ford becoming a whore becomes reality when Mike "makes" her a whore:

> MIKE. Be *real*, Babe. Let's up the ante here. (*He stops*.) Do you want to make love to me . . .?
>
> FORD. *Excuse* me . . .?

MIKE. Because you're blushing. *That's* a tell. The things we want, we can do them or not do them, but we can't hide them. (38)

When, after their intercourse, Ford turns sentimental momentarily, Mike fairly clearly defines their "roles" in the game:

FORD. Some people would say you're an interesting man.

MIKE. I'm a con man, I'm a criminal. You don't have to delude yourself. You can call things what they are. You can call yourself what you are. (41)

This time Ford fails to perceive the "tell" but will face the sad truth of being used sexually when she spies on the con men and overhears their talk:

Mr DEAN. Took her money, and screwed her, too.

MIKE. A small price to pay. (62)

This is the most devastating news for her. She feels shattered since for Mike, having sex was merely a part of the business transaction to get her money. In revenge, Ford shoots Mike with Billy's revolver. In his death agony, Mike hurls a "diatribe" at her: "I knew it the first time you came in. You're worthless, you know it. You're a whore. I knew the first time you came in" (70).

Typical of a profoundly carnivalized world in Mamet's plays, the relationship between the parodying double and the hero radically deviates from the pattern identified by Bakhtin. According to the nineteenth-century schema, "the hero dies (that is, negated) in order to be renewed" (Problems 128). By contrast, in *House* the heroine completes her metamorphosis by killing her major parodying double, Mike, and fully adopting his "business" principles, his "Unbeatable Gambler" identity, and incorporating all the traits of her doubles. Thus, she turns into a thief who steals a golden lighter in this closing scene. The sheer irony is that in the last scene, Ford emerges as an enigmatic woman whose femininity has been re-defined by a strange mixture of masculine and feminine attributes. She appears dressed casually in tropical clothing, and ostensibly, she has become a successful writer and psychoanalyst as her new

book entitled *Forgive Yourself* has been published. At the same time, she is a murderer, but she "doles out punishment."

The woman protagonist of *Speed*, Karen embodies an inherently ambivalent and unfinalized, profoundly carnivalized character. Acting as a parodying double of Gould, the newly appointed head of a Hollywood studio, she exposes most vividly a clash between "Art" and "Entertainment," a basic dilemma in the film industry that Gould articulates in the opening scene: "I'm in the midst of wilderness. If it's not quite 'Art' and it's not quite 'Entertainment,' it's here on my desk. I have inherited a monster" (3). On account of this fact, she seriously threatens the phallocratic world and the male harmony between Gould and his long-time "friend" and "associate" Fox. Brilliantly exploiting and combining her archetypal feminine roles ("Magna Mater," the "Virgin," and the "Siren" [Wheelwright 232]) as well as the roles sanctioned to her by a patriarchal society, Karen makes use of Gould's uncertainties and dilemmas, thus trying to secure a job for herself in the film industry.

Working as a temporary secretary in Gould's office, Karen first virtually employs the *subversive doctrine*, a strategy that inevitably brings to mind the grandfather's words in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). The grandfather advises to his son: "I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree' em to death and destruction [. . .]" (Ellison 16). Subverting the enemy, i.e., those in power (the white people in Ellison's novel or the male world Mamet's *Speed*) by seemingly agreeing with them appears to be a most effective mode to undermine their power. Karen deliberately degrades herself, accepts being treated as a "sexual object" and a commodity only to challenge the male power. She masquerades herself as a "cute broad" (23), pretends to be "silly" and "naïve," yet, she turns out to be a most skilful and conscious user of Gould's discourse and tactics. For instance, Gould's "carnivalistic confession" to arouse sympathy in Karen will be deftly employed by her in a "carnivalistic paired scene" for the same purposes. Gould complains: "this job corrupts you . . . Can we keep ourselves pure? Hey, I prayed to be pure. . . . I did, I said God give me the job as Head of Production. Give me

the platform to be ‘good' and I'll be good" (43). In Gould’s home, the empowered Karen immediately reminds Gould of his initial intention with his new job and of the chance he has if he “greenlights” *The Bridge* film instead of “A *Buddy Picture*” (11) that Gould and Fox have agreed to produce.

As Gould’s double, she voices the thoughts of *his* self that is not yet distorted by the business space of the “Entertainment” industry. For instance, Gould is also aware that the “prison film” is just “degradation,” that “it’s despicable” and that “it’s degrading to the human spirit” (55) as she describes it. She convincingly argues that there is no need for such a film: “this rage . . . it’s killing people, meaningless . . . the sex, the titillation, violence . . . people don’t want, they don’t *want*, they . . . they don’t want this” (55). Or, enacting her Magna Mater role, she articulates *his* innermost worries: “I know that you’re frightened. I *know* what you are” (58). She knows that he feels “depraved” and “bad” so his soul “bought” by his business-oriented self must be saved. Adopting the “redeemer” role, she persuades him to greenlight the “radiation film,” yet, she is doomed to fail, or as Watt puts it: “Karen and the threat she represents to phallocracy must be overcome” (*Postmodern* 147). Concurrently, the “entertainment” film is bound to be made, since “Karen and those like her fail to recognize the extent to which masculinity of producers like Gould are connected to the ‘commercial potential’ of buddy films” (Watt, *Postmodern* 145). Indeed, when Fox learns that influenced by the “temp,” Gould has changed his mind not to greenlight the “prison film,” the loss of this potential business deal sends Fox in a rage that is symptomatic of some paranoid fear. Fox explodes: “You talked and you decided to throw your career away . . .? And my, and my, and *my* chances with it . . .” (69). He bursts out in a “carnivalistic diatribe” that illuminates the shaky foundations of their “friendship,” and also, a total debasement of human relationships manifest in the extremely vulgar, obscene and abusive language:

> *Fuck* you . . . Fuck you (*He hits GOULD*) *Fuck* you. Get up. (*He hits him again*.) I’ll fucken’ kill you right here in this office. All this bullshit; you *wimp*, you *coward* .

> . . now you got the job, and now you're going to *run* all over everything, like something broke in the *shopping* bag, you fool--your fucken' sissy film--you squat to pee. You old *woman*. . . all of my life I've been eating your shit and taking leavings . . . *Fuck* you, the Head of Production. [. . .] (70)

Additionally, Karen's downfall is precipitated her attempt to exploit her "redeemer" role to achieve her own self-serving goals, to ensure a job for herself in the film. On the evidence of the play it can be safely suggested that purely business considerations and materialist rewards do not reconcile with idealist aims.

Acting as the parodying doubles of their male counterparts, the three women protagonists in the selected plays have effectively exposed a chaotized, "topsy-turvy world" manifest in the commodification of the Academia, the film industry, sexuality, and friendship. Being the victims of the degenerating effect of the business space, all the three women characters challenge the male-dominated world. Carol is the victim of a depersonalized instruction method, Dr. Ford gets ahead in the world when she understands that business equals with crime, while Karen experiences the irreconcilibility of business mentality and her "savior" role.

VI. "THE NEW WOMAN": REVERBERATIONS OF THE PIONEER WOMAN CONFIGURATION

> **"For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks . . ." (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*)**

The primary objectives of this chapter are twofold: first, to look at how Bakhtin's concept of "carnival" in the sense of a *critique of hierarchical order* can be a tool of diagnosis and interpretation in *House*, *Speed*, and *Oleanna,* and second, to what extent the dynamics of character change can be regarded as an incarnation of liminality as understood by Gennep. In contrast with the simplistic critical explanations that have categorized the women protagonists'

acts and behavior in the selected plays transgressive, violent, and aggressive, I propose that Dr. Ford, Karen, and Carol embody “the new woman,” a type that was envisaged by Simone de Beauvoir nearly half a century ago:

> [w]e must not believe, certainly, that a change in woman’s economic condition alone is enough to transform her; though this factor has been and remains the basic factor in her evolution; but until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural, and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear. (10)

Mamet captures this ultimate stage in the evolution of “the new woman” in the context of America in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The women characters in the plays under study have reached a phase in their evolution that meets the expectations highlighted in Beauvoir’s metaphorical description: the new woman “must shed her old skin and cut her new clothes" (10), that is, she must deconstruct her old and construct her new gendered identity. In considering the women characters’ entry into the male-dominated world of business a *carnival act* is likely to account for their seemingly ungrounded behavior, which has both puzzled and baffled the critics. I also claim that these radical shifts in Mamet’s women, their careers, outlook and means of attaining unconventional status positions, are indicative of a kind of liminality inherent in these crucial transactions.

Liminality, however, is not a *one-way* process of crucial turning points in Mamet’s world. Radical change is often achieved through means of expedient and calculating strategy, and there is often a reversal to a previous stage. Liminal transactions in Mamet’s texts can be manifestations of a two-way process.

[1] “The New Woman” and her American Dream

Since the practice and principle of business is closely linked to the attainment of the American Dream, and because placing women in the business world, a conventionally male-dominated realm, is itself a rarity, as a first step, I find it essential to consider women's role and participation in business activity, as well as their chances to achieve their own American Dream. This is all the more important as, on the one hand, Mamet's treatment of the American Dream in *Speed*, *House*, and *Oleanna* marks a turn away from the dominant mode of presentation of this fundamental myth in the American literary culture. In the selected Mamet's plays, the American Dream is "genderized"--a term borrowed from McDonough ("Every Fear" 204)--as the focus in the selected plays is clearly on *women's opportunity* to work for their own American Dream. On the other hand, the pattern of behavior the women protagonists display in the business plays deviates in many respects from the expected range of behavior ascribed to women in patriarchy. Discarding old role behavior such as submissiveness, piety, and subservience--typical feminine role models--the women characters adopt masculine role models such as independence, self-reliance, and competitiveness. The kind of "femininity" the Mamet heroines exhibit in the business plays raises a legitimate question concerning the roots or antecedents this femininity has in the specifically American social and historical scheme of things.

Since by definition, the American Dream is based on the aspiration for *equal* opportunity for each individual as its driving force, I suppose it would be both self-contradictory and non-sensical to isolate its gender-specific version. In my understanding, as thematized in Mamet's drama, a woman's version of the American Dream is identical with that of men's, and thus it is also associated with progress, upward mobility, wealth, power, a promising future, and a special destiny. However, although never actually spelled out to restrict its applicability, the American Dream defined in this way, as well as the Frontier myth, tend to subsume only the masculine population. Consequently, the male-centred myths are conducive to shaping stereotypical masculine attributes, but, I would add, to fashioning stereotypical feminine gender features as well.

Curiously enough, a recurrent pattern of two contrasting elements in the American Dream--materialism and idealism (Flibbert 106)--seems to have induced some typically masculine and feminine properties. The dualistic nature of the American Dream, deriving from the early settlers' recognition that due to the harsh circumstances "[t]heir concerns over spiritual destiny shifted to preoccupation with material problems" (Flibbert 108) has posed a constant dilemma to the American people. The distribution of roles along gender lines, however, partially solved this problem, namely, the swing between the two features of destiny-seeking [i.e., idealism] and predilection toward more tangible aspirations and goals [i.e., materialism]. While men were engaged with empire-building, the westward movement of the frontier, the women's role was, as Kessler-Harris claims, to nurture and support men in the struggle as well as to salve "the moral conscience of a society otherwise propelled towards competitive lifestyle [. . .]. Women, in other words, harbor values, attitudes, and behavior patterns potentially subversive to capitalism" (228). Undeniably, there existed a division of labor between the women and men, one presupposing the other. The frontier woman was indeed involved in securing the infrastructure and gratifying the community needs for the smooth functioning of the group.

Yet, as regards the kind of femininity the Mamet heroines' exhibit in the business plays, I tentatively suggest that it has its antecedents in a genuine manifestation of *American femininity* rooted in the "pioneer woman tradition." In exploring the construction of distinctly American femininity from a historical perspective, Lesley Ferris argues that there is a gap between the social and historical reality of the pioneer woman--taking "an active and often hazardous role in settling the West," and the emergence of a particularly American notion about women, which "developed from the 1830s until it matured and became firmly and gloriously established in the 1860s, namely 'the cult of true womanhood'" (133). In her view, "[t]he rise of this 'cult' shows a determined effort to stabilise the 'domestic sphere' by instilling feminine ideals such as 'piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,' through sermons, etiquette books, women's novels, child-rearing books, and ladies' magazines [. . .]" (133-4). Thus the "cult" appears to be an

“ideologically promoted myth,” arising from the necessity that new feminine ideals had to be “disseminated” since “in the reality of frontier life women pioneered their way west on an equal footing with the men, often, out of sheer necessity, discarding any pretence of ‘femininity’” (134).

Viewed in the light of the “pioneer woman tradition,” the new Mamet heroines shake off the false feminine ideals inflicted upon them by the “cult of true womanhood,” apparently, a European import, though, at the same time, a necessary requirement of supporting men in attaining their American Dream.

As “the cult of true womanhood” exerted a kind of disciplining effect on women, behavioral components such as individualistic attitudes, efficiency, self-reliance, and competitiveness--essential to the attainment of the American Dream--could not historically develop in women. Since the wilderness did not offer opportunities for women, as Potter claims, an opportunity for women began where the frontier left off, “in the growing cities” where “employment began to proliferate” (212). Thus, Potter goes on,

> **as symbol, the typewriter evokes fewer emotions than the plow, it played a vital part in the fulfillment of the American promise of opportunity and independence. The wilderness may have been the frontier for American men, and the cabin in the clearing the symbol of their independence, but the city was the frontier for American women and the business office was what gave them economic independence and the opportunity to follow a course of their own. (213)**

I suppose that incompatibility between the two sides of the American Dream, materialism and idealism, as well as a general devaluation of this myth finds its vivid expression in Karen’s character in *Speed*. In attempting to attain *her* American Dream, her aspirations for material rewards are disguised in her redeemer role. Her insistence on getting the novel *The Bridge* filmed as it is the only way to save people’s soul means in fact, her trying to secure a job for herself in the film. To convince Gould Karen argues “[t]hat our life is ending. [. . .] These are the

Dark Ages. They aren't to come, the Dark Ages-–they are now" (49). Through this film, however, people can understand "radiation has been sent to us by God. To change us" (48), thus the film can bring about a long-expected change. This is a re-definition, a re-interpretation of the American Dream in the novel within the drama, as the land of promise has not brought spiritual salvation to the people of America, neither has the New Jerusalem come yet, now the deadly, murderous phenomenon, radiation is sent to change them. As the redeemer role is exploited to achieve self-serving goals, it is doomed to failure. Thus Karen cannot, yet, achieve her own American Dream.

[2] Female Empowerment and (De)Crowning

By placing the women protagonists in the world of business in the three plays under scrutiny here, Mamet dramatizes the “cutting the new clothes” phase in their transformation. In the course of this change, however, the misuse and abuse of male power tends to hinder the women characters in pursuing and achieving their own specific goals, which prompts them to deflate the conventional hierarchical arrangement in patriarchy.

In a graphic representation of the liminal stages the women protagonists go through, I propose that a two-directional pattern evolves in the plays. As it is schematically indicated below, the hierarchical relations between men and women at the beginning of the plays, with the male characters in the dominant and the female protagonists in subordinate positions. In the course of the plays, however, this order is completely reversed. Accordingly, the woman psychologist shifts into the role of the con man (*House of Games*), the secretary assumes the role of the boss (*Speed-the-Plow*), while the woman student shifts into the role of the professor and vice versa (*Oleanna):*

<u>HOUSE OF GAMES</u>

Mike		Dr. Ford
CON MAN	⇄	PSYCHOLOGIST

<u>SPEED-THE-PLOW</u>

Bob		Karen
BOSS	⇄	SECRETARY

<u>OLEANNA</u>

John		Carol
PROFESSOR	⇄	STUDENT

In fact, shifts in female empowerment shape Mamet’s plots. Having been deeply

impressed by the con men's tricks in the house of games, Dr. Ford, the successful psychoanalyst decided to closely observe their acts in order to write a book on the psyche of the confidence tricksters. However, while "doing business" with them, she is badly cheated and humiliated, which eventually prompts her to commit a violent act for the purposes of gaining power and control over the male world. In *Speed,* Karen works in a Hollywood studio as a temporary secretary with the unconcealed intention of finding a job there, which would involve "the making decisions" [sic],(44). She succeeds in obtaining power over her boss by using her sexual allurement, but is unable to attain her final objective. Carol in *Oleanna* studies for a university degree in order to ensure her social advancement, but she does not receive the necessary education nor the expected help from her professor. Therefore she destroys his career by reporting him to the Tenure Committee for elitism, sexism, and racism (47-48), and even charges him with sexual harassment.

Located in the context of work, the female protagonists in the business plays are explicit about their aspirations, and apparently, their legitimate aims are acknowledged by the "superior caste" (Beauvoir 9). In terms of carnival categories, this corresponds to the "crowning" stage in carnival. The act of crowning is a decisive moment in carnival since it involves the oppressors handing over some symbols of authority to the oppressed. By definition, crowning is ambivalent as it

> [. . .] already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start. [. . .]--the symbols of authority that are handed over to the newly crowned king [. . .]—all become ambivalent and acquire a veneer of joyful relativity. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 124-25)

Moments of crowning, that is, "handing over some symbols of authority," are realized in some ritualistic "masculinization" process such as taking on masculine habits like playing poker (dr. Ford), being entrusted with a professional task (Karen), and being treated as a personal friend (Carol).

Dr. Ford is integrated into the male world only after her feminine identity has undergone a ritualistic debasement and "bringings-down-to-earth" manifest both in language and acts. Entering the poolroom, a sanctuary of the male world, she is treated as a "buddy": she is addressed by Mike, the leading con man in a rude, obscene language: "[w]hat the fuck is it?" (13). Further ritualistic acts involve allowing her to join a card game to identify a cheat, initiating her into some confidence game, and letting her participate in a operation of the confidence tricksters.

Though Karen in *Speed* is merely a temporary secretary working for Gould, a new production manager in a Hollywood studio, she is entrusted with the prestigious task of reading and reporting back on a film-script to her boss. Unlike Ford, Karen is fully aware that her ritualistic initiation disguises some ulterior motive of her male counterpart, which is to sexually conquer her. Karen is ready to follow the script of the "confidence game" faithfully. Accordingly, she plays the role of a subservient, dumb, naive but sexy woman in order to give a sense of importance to the men in the office. However, all her moves are geared towards breaking out of this role to achieve her own aim, a better position in the film industry. Ironically, her "crowning" can be attained only if she tacitly accepts the usual status relegated to woman in a patriarchal society: the status of "commodity." In Toril Moi's terms: "[. . .] her [woman's] value resides not in her own being but in some transcendental standard of equivalence (money, the phallus)" (141). Thus, when Karen agrees to read the film script on radiation written by an Eastern "sissy," she knows that through her sexual charms she will be able to reach her aim in Bob's home.

As opposed to the previous male characters, who consciously use the strategy of crowning to attain their ultimate aims (to rob Ford of her money, to sexually obtain Karen), the professor in *Oleanna* "crowns" Carol inadvertently. Urged by his selfish need for affirmation and acknowledgement by the student, he breaks down the institutionally set barrier between them and is ready to share his personal problems with her: "I'm talking to you the way I wish that someone had talked to me. I don't know how to do it, other than to be personal . . ." (19). He also

adds, “If we’re going to take off the Artificial Stricture, of ‘Teacher,’ and ‘Student,’ why should my problems be any more a mystery than your own?” (21).

Having been “crowned,” the women characters gradually adapt themselves to the newly gained, empowered position, and a temporary equilibrium sets in. A definite equalizing tendency in each play triggers marked changes and shifts in the women’s gender attitudes. Two carnival categories, namely “the free and familiar contact among people,” and “a new mode of interrelationship between individuals” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 123) adequately describe this stage. According to the first one, “all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it-–that is everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people” is dissolved (123).

This is the phase when the role shifts occur. For instance, Ford slips into the role of the “con man,” while Mike assumes the role of the psychologist. An added twist in this phase is the conflation of *confidence game* and *psychology,* as they turn out to be identical and interchangeable. This fact is a further obvious manifestation of the carnivalized world emerging in the play.

Let us see the stages of Ford’s transformation into a “con woman.” First, she comes to the conclusion that her work as a psychologist is a sham. Referring to one of her patients, a murderess, Ford remarks: “I know why she is in the hospital, she’s sick. The question is what am *I* doing here. It’s a sham, it’s a con game” (30). Second, she is made into a whore. In a “Freudian” slip of the tongue during a conversation with her friend, Maria, Ford explains:

> FORD. That poor girl, all her life my father tells her she’s a whore, so all her life she seeks out . . .
>
> MARIA. “My father . . .” (30)

This foreshadows her being made a whore by Mike, which seems to be an inevitable part of the “business transaction” she is involved in. Third, her transformation into a “woman con man” is completed when she has fully adopted the “values” of the male world: she cheats in her job,

steals and even “kills” a man. It eludes her that the real analyst and psychologist is Mike, who has shrewdly planned and calculated every move of hers only to cheat her out of her money. Having entered the carnivalized version of existence, Ford realizes that her job to cure obsessive gamblers and murderers in the “noncarnival life” appears to be eccentric. This shift in her evaluative apparatus exemplifies that her filter is affected by the carnival versus noncarnival dichotomy, reinforcing Bakhtin’s argument on the differences between carnival and noncarnival life: “[t]he behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate” (*Problems* 123).

Also, a “new mode of relationship, freed from all socio-hierarchical inequality” evolves between Bob and Karen in his home. Bob is freed from his institutional power, and apparently Karen is treated as a human being: she is allowed to elaborate on her views and ideas concerning the theme of the book. She even comments on the mission of Bob’s new job, “. . . you were put here to make stories people need to see. To make them less afraid” (*Speed* 59). At this phase, “Karen begins to move from sexual object to acting, thinking subject as she seeks to convince Gould the book he has asked her to give a ‘courtesy read’ should be made into a film” (McDonough 93). Subsequently, Karen gradually slips from the role of the seduced to that of the seducer and eventually to that of the “boss.”

The equalizing phase in *Oleanna* differs from the previous two in several respects. One, in *House* the equalizing phase takes up nearly the whole play, in *Speed* it is restricted to Act Two, whereas in *Oleanna* it is limited to the second half of Act One. Two, a similar tendency of decrease occurs in the variety and the number of the locales, as well as in the eventfulness of the plot. A fairly rapid change of scenes packed with actions in *House* is in stark contrast with the two different settings (Bob’s office and home) with hardly any action in *Speed*, and with merely one setting (John’s office) and virtually no plot in *Oleanna*. Three, unlike Ford and Karen, Carol seems to be oblivious of the equalizing state between the professor and herself.

Having been crowned, Carol can experience a dramatic dismantling of the socio-hierarchical inequality between the professor and herself. This is both unexpected and rather surprising in the given institutional setting, which, by rule and convention, puts constraints on both parties' discourses, gestures, and acts. The professor violates some basic rules: he treats Carol as a personal friend to whom he talks about the inefficiency of education, the copulation habits of the rich and the poor, and intimacies of his marriage. According to the carnival rule, the professor's behavior, gestures, and discourse are "freed from authority of all hierarchical position." When Carol cries out in utter confusion: "You tell me I'm intelligent, and then you tell me I should not be *here*, what do you want with me? What does it mean? Who should I listen to . . . (*The professor goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder*)" (36). Completely lost and rather surprised, Carol interprets this ambiguous gesture as a sexual advance.

Gradually, she becomes alert and self-aware, and, maybe, motivated by fear rather than out of self-serving interests, she begins to note down the professor's views for instance, on college education, which will form the basis of her charges brought against him. From Act Two, then, the power and authority shift to Carol.

In accordance with the temporally limited nature of carnival, decrowning inevitably follows crowning. As formulated by Bakhtin,

> Decrowning is similarly an important symbolic event: regal vestments are stripped off the decrowned king, the other symbols of authority are taken away, he is ridiculed and beaten. All the symbolic aspects of this ceremonial decrowning acquire a second and positive level of meaning--it is not naked, absolute negation and destruction (absolute negation, like absolute affirmation, is unknown to carnival). Moreover, precisely in this ritual of decrowning does there emerge with special clarity the carnival pathos of shifts and renewals, the image of constructive death. (*Problems* 125)

Strictly speaking, only Ford and Karen undergo “stripping off their regal vestments,” which leads to their greater awareness and self-recognition. In Ford’s case “the constructive death” will entail her inner and outer metamorphosis, accompanied by a violent act of murder. Karen is ridiculed and learns a lesson but she is unable to renew herself. Paradoxically, Carol being *beaten* by the professor at the end of the play strengthens her empowered position, and also affirms her belief that “John’s after-the-fact physical battering of her body justifies all that she has previously done to him” (Ryan, “Power Play” 401), thus I term this stage “quasi-decrowning.”

The initial order is restored in *Speed,* where after a temporary “carnival kingdom” the female protagonist, Karen, is pushed back to her subordinate position. By contrast, in *House* and *Oleanna* the women characters, Dr. Ford and Carol respectively, are able to confirm their newly gained empowerment and assume not only their former oppressors’ discourse and value system but also their dominant positions. Apparently, this change departs from the “temporary transgression” nature of carnival, however, from another perspective, it reinforces the open-endedness of carnival as illuminated by Bakhtin’s own observation: “Carnival [. . .] absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything" (*Problems* 125).

Ford’s decrowning, however, follows the carnival pattern. Having been badly humiliated, and having been conned out of her money, she is pushed out of the world of the confidence tricksters, as she is useless to them either as a fellow “con-man” or as a woman. She gets rid of objects reminding her of this world: Mike’s pocket-knife she stole from him after their lovemaking, her blouse splashed with the blood of the policeman she allegedly “murdered,” and a file on Billy Hahn, her analysand, whose file cover reads: “Compulsive succeeds in establishing a situation where he is out of control” (59). The acute irony is that this observation now aptly describes Ford in her present state. Having committed a mock-theft and a mock-murder, though it will dawn on her only later, she is also qualified as “a compulsive gambler”

(11). The fact that she has been exploited both morally and sexually becomes clear to her when she happens to overhear a conversation between two con men:

> MIKE. The broad's an addict. . .. The bitch is a born thief . . .
>
> MIKE. We showed her some *Old* style. . .Some Dinosaur con men. Years from now, they'll have to go to a *museum*, see in frame like this.
>
> MR DEAN. [you] Took her money, and screwed her, too.
>
> MIKE. A small price to pay. (*House* 62)

Having experienced the misuse and abuse of male power, Ford has to renew herself, which, curiously, means the physical annihilation of Mike. In their final confrontation, Ford demonstrates that she has completely mastered all his techniques of deception. She deludes him into believing that she is ready to wholly offer herself to him, her money and sex. In the best tradition of the confidence game, she builds trust in her victim, thereby she gains power over him. When she shoots him, she echoes Mike's words that justify crime: "I can't help it—'I'm out of control'" (69). Ford adopts Mike's discourse, rehearses his acts and strategies, so the restoration and renovation of her identity are complete. Adopting Mike's innermost psyche, Ford transforms into a *woman-con man.* Paradoxically, her inner metamorphosis is accompanied by a definitely feminine change in her outer appearance. In the closing scene she appears not only as a highly successful author of a book written on confidence tricksters, but also as an attractive woman wearing a flowery patterned summer dress. The label she has given to Mike, "Unbeatable Gambler [. . .] who doles out punishment," (59) is a precise description of her at the end.

Although Karen in *Speed* manages to convince her boss, Bob, to film the novel *The Bridge*, as she has ruined the original business deal between Bob and his life-time friend, Charlie, she is destined to lose this battle. Nonetheless, the immediate cause of Karen's

decrowning is her confession that she would not have slept with Bob if he hadn't approved of greenlighting the radiation film. So, ironically, it is not the condemnation of the means she has used to achieve her aim--trading in her sex--that results in her downfall but her straightforwardness and sincerity about revealing her true motives. In giving reasons for Karen's momentarily inverting the patriarchal structure, Hall argues: "[I]n this world, [. . .], women are not permitted any flaws. Gould [Bob] wants a saint. In order to have an opinion, in order to make any changes or even to think about making them, Karen must be pure" ("Playing To Win" 157). I would add that in order to be admitted to the male-dominated world, the women characters have to fully adopt male strategies of trickery. Karen has not become a perfect "con woman" yet, as she has retained some of her naivete and sincerity, which are out of place in the realm of the male-dominated business world. Therefore she is not yet able to subvert the male oppression; however, she creates disruption in the life of her male counterpart (Hall, "Playing To Win" 157).

The "crowned" Carol can wield her newly gained power, and she can even sustain it. Unlike Ford and Karen, Carol is not solitary in her fight against patriarchal rules and expectations curtailing her rights. She is backed up by an invisible and rather mysterious support group that has adopted the ideology of political correctness invading the Academia at the beginning of the 1990s. They effectively intrude into every facet of university life in order to gain complete control. Thus the corrupt Tenure Committee, clearly under the mysterious group's influence and control, accepts the charges against the professor. By acquiring the group's "lingo" with fascinating speed, Carol can instruct John, thereby completing the changes in roles. Paradoxically, the very words Carol uses to explain to John his motivations for work, equally apply to her since she has understood that she can get ahead only if she obtains power: "Do you know what you have *worked* for? *Power*. For *power*" (64). Again, the acute irony is that when Carol accuses John: "You want unlimited power" (66), these words adequately express the invisible group's intentions to control public as well as private life at the university. They plan to ban certain books from courses, while Carol's intrusion into John's personal life, that is, not letting him call his wife

"baby" on the phone, prompts him to violence. The "quasi-decrowning" stage is condensed into this final moment with Carol reacting: "Yes. That's right. (*She looks away from him, and lowers her head. To herself*:) ". . . yes. That's right" (80). Though these last words by Carol, as Ryan notes, "leave no room for comfortable conclusions," her "constructive death" phase brings her the revelation of "the legitimacy or morality of her own tactics" ("Power Play" 401).

In sum, by adopting certain basic male "values" such as deception, venality, hypocrisy, violence, transgression of rules and laws, which appear to be necessary requirements of wielding power in the realm of business, Mamet's "new woman" is able to wield power, and also to hold a mirror to the male world. The image is certainly much disliked by them. "The new woman" is at a transitory stage since "disguised as a man she feels herself as ill at ease in her flesh as in her masculine garb" (Beauvoir 10). The subversion and reversal of the existing order is achieved by "the new woman" who, in an attempt to obtain moral, social, and cultural recognition in the male-dominated world, slips out of her old, culturally and socially sanctioned roles and acquires new ones that enable her to work for her own goals.

Beauvoir does not explicitly define what multiple factors actually affect the appearance of "the new woman," yet she states that the transformation of woman is bound to happen under cultural compulsion. The three plays by Mamet testify that in the course of "the cutting the new clothes" phase the women characters are continually thwarted in their endeavors, which makes them realize that the misuse and abuse of male power hinder them in pursuing and achieving their goals. Urged by this realization, the women characters revolt, and eventually, subvert the existing hierarchy.

VII. SELF-COMPLETION: A BAKHTINIAN FORMULA

> "If there is only one unitary and unique participant, there can be no *aesthetic* event. An absolute consciousness, a consciousness that has nothing transgredient to itself, nothing situated outside itself and capable of delimiting it from outside—such a

> consciousness cannot be 'aestheticized'; one cannot commune in it." (Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity")

This chapter introduces the Self⇒Other⇒Self subjectivity formation model and theorizes on its functional validity. A need for devising and synthesizing such a model was prompted by the assumption that the women protagonists' transgression of their socially and culturally ascribed feminine roles in the province of private life is generated by a *dysfunctional self*. More precisely, the dialogical relationship between the self and the other, which is essential for the meaningful and functionally valid construction of the self, ceases to operate or is objectified in a somewhat fragmented and distorted version in Mamet's plays.

I expect that the proposed model can describe and account for the transformations in the female characters' gender attributes in the private realm of life to be treated in the subsequent chapter.

[1] The Self⇒ Other⇒Self Model

Essentially, the Self ⇒Other ⇒Self model posits that defining and positioning the self in the external world of actuality is unthinkable without a relation of self to other, and, conversely, of other to self. Owing to the transformation the women characters undergo, their coherent selves are damaged and consequently, they face a basic problem in defining and positioning themselves in the world they inhabit.

The proposed pattern exemplifies the operation of the principle of liminality, namely, an interface between Bakhtin, feminism--especially the poststructuralist strand--and Mamet. The model is inspired by and abstracted from Bakhtin's notions of "self" and "other" as explicated by him in his early essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (1920-24), and the conception of identity construction as understood in postsructuralist feminism, particularly by Judith Butler in

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). Thus the specific point of departure for bringing together Bakhtin, feminism, and Mamet is the observation that, in their own ways, all the three of these raise what constitutes personal identity, and all the three theorize it as a *process*.

Without getting entangled in a maze of conceptual clarification, suffice it to say that by "identity" I mean a set of intellectual, moral, and emotional qualities that are shaped by social, cultural, and historical practices. It is more inclusive than "self," though I do not intend to apply "self" in its special and restricted sense as traditionally used in psychology. Instead, "self" will be closer to or synonymous with the notion of "subject," which is "generally construed epistemologically as the counterpart to the phenomenal object and is commonly described as the sum of sensations, or the 'consciousness,' by which the external world can be posited" (Smith xxvii). As I will argue below, Bakhtin's understanding of "self" and "other" as explicated by him in his essay "Author and Hero" shows similarities with this idea of the "subject/object."

On first consideration, the significance of drawing on Bakhtin's and Butler's ideas concerning the construction of *subject* lies in the similarity in their treatment of *subject,* as they both take into account theoretical and practical considerations. For the purposes of the investigation of female identity in Mamet's drama, the combination of these angles is particularly important as

> current conceptions of the "subject" have tended to produce a purely theoretical "subject," removed almost entirely from the political and ethical realities in which human agents actually live and that a different concept of the "subject" must be discerned or discovered. (Smith xxix)

Just as the *self* in Bakhtin's understanding must *experience* reality, and participate in the *eventness* of the present moment, "the 'subject' feminism speaks for [. . .] is not abstract" either as "the question of the 'subject' for feminism is properly and crucially accompanied by recognition of the need for effective political strategies of resistance" (Smith xxxii).

The proposed model of subjectivity formation is abstracted from Bakhtin's "general formula for the author's fundamental, aesthetically productive relationship to the hero" ("Author and Hero" 14), which, I propose, can be diagrammatically illustrated as follows[xxx]:

Author ⇒ Hero ⇒ Author

That relationship is characterized by certain features (the author's outsidedness, mutuality between the author and hero, the significant role of the hero/other) that will equally apply to the Self ⇒ Other ⇒ Self. For instance, owing to the author's outside position in relation to the hero "with respect to every constituent feature of the hero—a position *outside* the hero with respect to space, time, value, and meaning," the hero is removed

> from the open unitary and unique event of being which encompasses both him and the author—as a person and within which he, as a person, would stand beside the author—as the author's partner in the event of life, or against the author—as the author's antagonist, or finally, inside the author—as the author himself. (Bakhtin, "Author and Hero" 14)

The author's outsidedness seems to be the prerequisite of a mutual relationship between the author and hero. Bakhtin maintains that such a relationship "gives birth to him [the hero] as a new human being on a new plane of existence" (14), whereas "the author must take up a position outside himself [. . .]. He must become another in relation to himself, must look at himself through the eyes of another" (15). Bakhtin claims that an aesthetic activity proper

> actually begins at the point when we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself. (26)

The two stages of aesthetic activity, namely, “experiencing” the Hero/other, and then stepping outside the Hero/other—the phase of “outsideness,” “exotopy” (Hitchcock 200) —are closely interrelated, and at the same time they exemplify the interdependence between Author and Hero. The Author does not view or consider his/her Hero from a fixed position, on the contrary, he/she moves into and away from his/her Hero. In a similar fashion, in the Self ⇒ Other ⇒ Self subjectivity formation model, the properly functioning self should constantly move into and away from the other. Strictly speaking, the diagrammatic representation of the model should be refined to the pattern illustrated below--to suggest the infiniteness of the process.

Self ⇒ Other ⇒ Self ⇒ Other ⇒ Self . . .

By rejecting “consummatedness” of the individual, Bakhtin emphasizes the essentially process-like nature of identity constitution:

> If I am consummated and my life is consummated, I am no longer capable of living and acting. For in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself—at least in all the essential moments constituting my life; I have to be, for myself, someone who is axiologically yet-to-be, someone who does not coincide with his already existing makeup. (“Author and Hero” 13)

The significant role of the other is underscored by Bakhtin like this: “[t]he organizing power in all aesthetic forms is the axiological category of the *other*, the relationship to the other, enriched by an axiological ‘excess’ of seeing for the purposes of achieving a transgredient consummation” (189). Translating this assertion into the general, interpersonal nature of relationship between self and other means that only through the other’s “excess of seeing” can the self position himself/herself in the world. As Bakhtin points out: “[i]t is only in the category of

the *other* that [my exterior] is thus experienced, and I have to subsume to be able to see myself as a constituent in the unitary pictorial-plastic external world" (35).

In order to be able to find and define his/her being in the world, the *self* has to position or project himself/herself in the place of the *other*, and virtually, has to adopt the other's perspective. Self can "experience" as well as place, and enrich himself/herself in the "external world" only in and through the category of the other. Thus constructing the self (and its satellites) is always a result of a *social comparison process*, and it is also a *me-creation*, and further, an attempt to give a voice to this attempt. In the same line of thought, the category of the Bakhtinian other is not restricted to one particular person but, as Michael Gardiner maintains, it embraces "a network of discourses":

> [t]he self for Bakhtin is not constituted through a unified, monadic relation to the external world; rather, the phenomenon of self-ness is constituted through the operation of a dense and conflicting network of discourses, cultural and social practices and institutional structures, which are themselves bound up with intricate phenomelogy of the self-other relation. (qtd. in Thomson 212-13)

"The operation of a dense and conflicting network of discourses" is realized through *dialogue*, or more precisely, through a dialogical relationship between self and other. *Dialogue*, or more exactly, the principle of *dialogicity* appears to pervade all of Bakthin's concepts and categories, and in building the self it has a crucial role.

The philosophical groundwork of dialogue can be traced back to Bakhtin's highly critical attitude towards nineteenth- and early twentieth century "epistemologism," which, in his words, posits a "unitary and unique consciousness" (qtd. in Holquist "From *Dialogism*" 98). By contrast, Bakhtin's thought is based on dialogue "precisely because, unlike many other theories of knowing, the site of knowledge it posits is never unitary" (Holquist 98). Dialogue is the *means* and the *route* of gaining knowledge about the world, and corollary to this, dialogism is the principle of constituting the self. As pointed out by Holquist:

> [c]onceiving being dialogically means that reality is always experienced, not just perceived, and further, that it is experienced from a particular position. Bakhtin conceives that position in kinetic terms as a situation, an event, the event of being a self. (100)

Within Bakhtin's philosophy of knowing, the *self/other* dichotomy also serves to highlight his major concepts such as dialogism, carnival and, polyphony in the sense that they can all be conceived as the actual modes and means of building a dialogic *self/other* relation. Within this frame of reference these concepts function as descriptive as well as analytical categories.

As Mamet's drama does not employ any faddish devices to spectacularly de-humanize, and de-substantiate his characters, the "reification" of his characters (both female and male) is embedded and encoded precisely in the dramatic dialogue. The characters' discontinuous and repetitive dialogue, most often devoid of any meaningful exchange of ideas, and replete with aggressive, obscene outbursts, both discloses and hides their fragmented selves, and also testifies the absence or the malfunctioning of their dialogical selves.

A dialogical relationship between self (itself a construct of discourses) and various discourses of the other as well as the process-like nature of identity formation can serve as an interface between Bakhtin's theory and the poststructuralist conception of subjectivity formation. Poststructuralist feminist critic Jill Dolan argues that "according to poststructuralism, subjectivity is never monolithic or fixed, but decentered, and constantly thrown into process by the very competing discourses through which identity might be claimed" (*Presence* 87).

In light of this, the prerequisite of the formation of subjectivity is a dialogic relation between self and the various "competing discourses." Conversely, the interdependence existing between subjectivity and the network of discourses proceeds from their dialogic relation.

When it comes to applying this multiform cluster to gender-construction, I would recommend the introduction of "dialogized gender" to identify Butler's conception of gender. Her understanding of the formation of a gendered identity seems to be identical with that of

Bakhtin's, since she also conceives it as a never-ending process that emerges, transforms through acts and performances, and is realized only through the individual's constant interaction with social and cultural practices. She claims, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *stylized repetition of acts*" (*Gender* 140). By asserting that gender attributes are not expressive but performative, Butler not only deflates the radical feminists assumption of taking woman as a coherent and stable subject, but also emphasizes the process-like nature of identity construction:

> the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (141)

Despite the differences in the immediate focus of Butler's and Bakhtin's studies (Butler's intention is to deconstruct the stable category of woman, whereas Bakhtin's interests lie in aesthetics, and his concepts of self/other are gender-less), the parallels between their conceptions of identity testify to a similar approach to the status of subject/self:

> neither Bakhtin nor Butler subscribes to the notion of a pre-discursive, given, stable material world beyond consciousness. Nor do they believe possible or desirable [. . .] the construction of systematising models that would account for how identity is achieved. For both, the process of constituting one's identity is precisely that--a process. (Thomson 221)

Yet, my overall impression is that Butler's subject appears to be more at the "mercy" of the "competing discourses" constantly shaping him/her (her subject appears to be more *subject* to the discourses—pun intended), whereas Bakhtin's subject/self is a conscious being accepting and even controlling to some extent the dialogical relationship with the outside world, thus retaining human agency.

A blind spot in Bakhtin's thought, his gender insensitiveness can sufficiently be remedied by Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow's understanding of this frequently cited complaint. I fully agree with their claim that the lack of focus on gender seems to be the most progressive aspect of Bakhtin's system. They argue that "rejecting him [Bakhtin] because he does not treat gender as a determining factor in language/ideology would be like rejecting any and all literature written by straight white men" (viii). They claim that to give undue prominence to gender would mean "as if gender determines all that one is [. . .] [and also] that experience is pure--purely masculine or purely feminine--thus monologic, closed, dead, a question of static being instead of a process, a becoming, a movement Bakhtin himself would insist on"[1] (viii).

Bakhtin's and Butler's conceptions of identity formation, together with the model proposed above help in exploring the subjectivity formation of women as presented in the selected plays. In the just-established theoretical context my proposition is that Mamet diagnoses the *malaise* of recent American society: the lack of the dialogical self. The model of subjectivity/identity formation, the Self $\Rightarrow$ Other $\Rightarrow$ Self paradigm emerges in a *truncated* or *distorted* version: either [1] the self is unable to project himself/herself into and experience the other, or [2] with the purpose of gaining the power of the other who is empowered, the self adopts the other's perspective and the discourse. The first version typically applies to women characters in the private realm of life, whereas the second occurs in the business world. Apart from a few exceptions (Jolly and Dr. Ford), in both cases, and on the levels of self-definition and identity construction, the result is a failure of the protagonists to find and define their selves in the male-dominated outer world. I believe, though, that Mamet offers a remedy for the malaise: by presenting the crucial consequences of the lack of a dialogical self, namely, utter isolation, he affirms the necessity of a dialogical relationship with the other, which is, in the broadest sense, a promise of relief from the isolation. Furthermore, as it is clear from the shifts in the women characters' gender attributes, it can safely be concluded that Mamet—just like Bakhtin and

Butler—does not subscribe to a preexisting, fixed gender identity. Thus the model of subjectivity evolving in his plays does not confine women to a passive, silent position--a circumstance that corroborates my initial claim that Mamet is not a misogynist playwright.

Endnote to Chapter VII

VIII. THE SELF (UN)DIALOGIZED

> "As the Victorians assiduously expunged reference to sex, so we expunge direct reference to that which *we* desire most, which is love and a sense of belonging." (Mamet, "Some Thoughts" 133)

Having investigated the female characters' violations of their prescribed stereotypical social roles in the public realm of life (in the male-dominated business world), in this chapter, I will look at the extent to which women protagonists transgress and subvert their socially and culturally ascribed feminine roles in the province of private life. My premise is that there is a gradual devaluation and dehumanization of love running through the three stages of Mamet's drama (cf. Chapter I [3]): in his early plays, love decays into *violent* and *aggressive sexuality;* in the business plays, sexuality becomes transformed into a commodity that forms part of business transactions; whereas in the family plays love seems to vanish entirely or degenerate into a swamp of indifference.

In the ensuing discussion, my aim is twofold: on the one hand, deploying the theoretical and methodological apparatus introduced and applied earlier, I will explore the process of carnivalization of the human values. On the other hand, relying on the subjectivity formation introduced in the previous chapter, I am going to examine the problematics of self-construction and the disfigurement of the dialogical relationship between the self and other.

The first subchapter sets out to study the devaluation of love and the absence of intimacy in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago,* while the second focuses on revealing the young couple's aborted efforts to create a genuine relationship in *The Woods.* The third subchapter discusses how the carnivalizing force of sexuality impacts on relationships in the public realm of life in the business plays, *Speed-the-Plow*, *House of Games*, and *Oleanna.* The closing subchapter shifts

the emphasis on charting the monologic nature of relationships in domestic spheres, in the family plays including *The Cryptogram* (1994), and *The Old Neighborhood* (1997),

[1] Urban Anonymity

The inherently antagonistic attitude of Mamet's women characters to the other (which involves a dense network of discourses, cultural and social practices that are structured on patriarchy's basic principle of male superiority and female inferiority) disrupts their dialogical selves. In their attempts to reconstitute themselves as autonomous subjects, the women heroines challenge, subvert, or reject the status-based role expectations prescribed to them by the male-dominated world. As a result, the female characters face a status and role conflict due to the incompatibility of their traditionally expected functions and roles associated with their subordinate statuses and their newly acquired roles involved in their subject positions.

Apart from a few exceptions (Jolly in the playlet of the same title, and to a certain extent, Deborah in *Chicago*), the female characters are unable to project themselves into and experience the other, which, in turn, leads to their estrangement from the world as well as from their male counterparts. Like satellites destined to revolve around a planet, the women protagonists are doomed to their solitary "orbits" round their own selves that are unable to provide and share love. In other words, these women heroines with fragmented identities seem to lack dialogical love, which, in Bakhtin's formulation is also a form of constituting the self:

> **After all, it is only the other who can be embraced, clasped all around, it is only the other's boundaries that can be all touched and felt lovingly. The other's fragile finiteness, consummatedness, his here-and-**

> **now being--all are inwardly grasped by me and shaped, as it were, by my embrace; in this act, the other's outward existence begins to live in a new manner, acquires some sort of new meaning, is born on a new plane of being. ("Author and Hero" 41-2)**

In the two early plays, *Chicago* and *The Woods*, the female protagonists debunk stereotypical sexual roles ascribed to them by patriarchal society. Through the subversion of a former male-centered sexual myth, "[t]he birthright priority whereby males rule females" (Millett 25), the women characters expose their traditional role as objects of male perception and desire. To put it in another way, they carnivalize basic male-centered sexual myths, the objectification of female sexuality and the denial of female subjectivity, whereby they expose violence and aggressiveness in love relationships. In accordance with the carnival rule, acting as their male counterparts' parodying doubles, the female characters subvert these myths in the two plays (except for Deborah in *Chicago*). Before examining the actual mode of the inversion of these myths, I find it necessary to briefly highlight in what way some elements of carnivalization manifest themselves in the compositional design and how the locales accentuate the failure of establishing intimacy in female-male relationships.

The compositional design of *Chicago*, with a rapid succession of brief scenes located at venues typical of a big city (restaurants, a Health Club, a peep show, a department store, offices, a library, etc.) faithfully renders the neurotic pace as well as the impersonality of city life. The kaleidoscopic and fragmented structure of the play both reflects and induces a similar sort of haste and shallowness apparent in the human relationships that lack any depth of emotion or intimacy. Though the initial quartet of characters cast for two same-sex "mentor-disciple" (Geis 91) pairs--Bernie and Danny, Joan and Debbie--is reshuffled, neither the duet of the "mentors," (i.e., Bernie and Joan), nor the duet of the "disciples" (Danny and Debbie) are capable of building close

relationship with each other. Although the internal power arrangement of the quartet is temporarily overturned due to Danny and Debbie's budding relationship, eventually, the initial stasis is restored.

Also, Mamet's artistic conception of space follows the basic carnivalistic device of concentrating action on borders of liminality such as the "*threshold* (in doorways, entrance ways, in corridors, and so forth)" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 149). In both plays, the striking absence of intimacy from the characters' lives is accentuated by the lack of interior spaces such as drawing rooms, dining rooms, halls, studies, where biographical life unfolds. Conversely, the few interior spaces, for instance in *Chicago,* two scenes in Danny and Debbie's bedroom, one in Joan and Debbie's apartment, turn into "public squares" permeated with a profound carnivalization of passion. Interior spaces in *The Woods* are entirely absent as the whole action takes place on the *porch* of the summerhouse.

In agreement with the compositional arrangement intended to reflect the dynamism of a city, *Chicago* exhibits more external elements of carnivalization (*soliloquies*, *confessions*, *provocative plot situations)* than *The Woods,* where carnivalization recedes into deeper levels since the ironic and comic aspect dominant in *Chicago* is muffled down in *The Woods*. I would also add, parenthetically, that a reduced carnival laughter does not preclude the generic assimilation of carnival. As Bakhtin himself argues,

> **[w]hen the images of carnival and carnivalistic laughter are transposed into literature, they are transformed to a greater or lesser degree in keeping with specific artistic and literary tasks, but regardless of the degree or nature of the transformation, ambivalence and laughter remain in the carnivalized image. (*Problems* 164)**

Viewed in this light, in *The Woods,* internal elements of carnivalization can be identified as present and functional, mainly in the structure of images and in the discourse of the protagonists.

Bernie's parodying doubles are a *nameless off-stage* woman character and one of the on-stage woman protagonists, Joan. By adopting male role models in their acts and discourse, both women expose and challenge a fundamental law in patriarchy: the male prerogative to sexually subordinate women. The degradation of love, this distinguished kind of activity, to its mere corporeal level, is particularly powerfully presented by an anonymous woman who has had intercourse with Bernie in a rather canny way. Her anonymity reinforces not only the empty, impersonal, objectified nature of their entanglement but also debunks the denial of female subjectivity. In the opening "provocative plot situation," although it is Bernie, who swaggers Danny about his sexual experience with the nameless woman, identified by Bernie as a "Pro, semi-pro, Betty Coed from College, regular young broad, it's anybody's ballgame" (12), Bernie's braggadocio soon reverses itself revealing *his* being objectified and de-personalized by *her*. She picks him up in a bar, offers her sex only to receive sexual pleasures, and "in the middle of everything" (16), she even calls a friend to ask her for some help over the phone. The incident brings it home to Bernie that he is just as unimportant to her as she is to him. His being objectified comes full circle when she entirely ignores him as well as his money flung at her: "I peel a sawbuck off my wad, as I make the door [sic] I fling it at her. 'For cab fare,' I yell. She doesn't hear nothing" (17).

Having experienced being objectified, Bernie also faces the collapse of his belief about his own sexual performance. This realization is rendered in a series of well-arranged recurrent question-and-answer pairs inserted into his account. Danny keeps asking him (four times) whether the woman was a pro or not, but Bernie delays his response: "[w]ell, at this point we don't know" (12). The pairs of utterances recur like a refrain effectively enhancing the tension and the strict rhythm dominating the opening

scene. At last, Bernie's answer, arranged in staccato-like utterances, illuminates that the image of his being a "pro" is shattered:

BERNIE. A pro, Dan. . .

DANNY. Yes.

BERNIE. . . . is how you think about yourself.

You see my point?

DANNY. Yeah. (18)

As regards Joan, she subverts the *verbally abusive* level of sexuality in her encounter with Bernie in a singles' bar. Her role performance there shatters all behavior and responses anticipated and desired in relation to a woman approached by a man in a bar. Adopting an aggressive, cynical, and offensive attitude, Joan actually employs exactly the same means to shake off Bernie's attempts to pick her up as *he* uses to obtain her as his sexual property. For instance, having no intention of striking up a conversation with Bernie, Joan discourages him from sitting at her table and cynically adds: "Don't torture me, just let me hear it, okay?" (19). However, feeling deeply hurt by her outright refusal, Bernie ignores the rejection and erupts in anger: "[w]ell, is it a free country, or what?" (19). Paradoxically, his remark encapsulates the muted presence of enduring patriarchal oppression, patriarchy, "a most ingenious form of 'interior colonization'" (Millett 25). To make it clear that she is not an object for sale, she states: "[f]orgive me if I'm being too personal . . . but I do not find you sexually attractive (*Pause*)" (20). Feeling devastated by her offense, Bernie bursts out in a *diatribe*:

So just who the fuck do you think you are, God's gift to Women? [. . .] You don't want to get come on to, go enroll in a convent. You think I don't have better ways to spend my off hours than to listen to some nowhere cunt try put cute bits on me? (20)

Bernie and Joan's aborted dialogue replete with their latent violence uncovers their undialogical selves clamming up instantly in fear of establishing a relationship with the opposite sex. They both shield themselves against each other by lying about themselves. Bernie passes himself off for a meteorologist for TWA, while Joan claims that she has to hurry home to her little boy, who is sick.

Whether Joan's aversion and hostility to Bernie exemplifies her liberating action that indicates her escape from patriarchal oppression surfacing in a heterosexual relationship or she is motivated by some other reasons cannot be inferred from her dialogue with Bernie. However, from the carnivalistic monologues revealing some hidden aspects of Bernie's and Joan's respective characters, it is possible to establish some of their suppressed reasons for their vulnerability and deeply rooted fear of the opposite sex. The juxtaposition of their monologues in "paired scenes" stresses parallels in their past lives.

Both Bernie and Joan disbelieve in the possibility of a meaningful relationship between man and woman. For instance, talking to imaginary buddies in a gym hall, Bernie rehearses giving advice to Dan: "Dan, Dan, I can *advise*, I can *counsel*. I can speak to you out of my *experience* . . ." [. . .] But mark my words: one, two more weeks, he'll do the right thing by the broad. (*Pause*). And drop her like a fucking hot potato. (46)

Since he advises "out of *experience,*" he must have undergone some experience that may be likened to Dan's. Conversely, Joan also sounds rather skeptical: ". . . and, of course, there exists the very real possibility that the whole thing is nothing other than a mistake of *rather* large magnitude, and that it never *was* supposed to work out" (47). Typical of her skepticism, she concludes that the "whole thing" is "a dirty joke" (47).

Another pair of scenes invoking incidents from their past lives tentatively suggests Bernie's and Joan's subconscious sexual frustrations. Joan's inhibiting sexual experience from her childhood is conveyed through an inconsistent use of a possessive

pronoun. At her work, she reprimands some toddlers who apparently have played something that has been forbidden: "Come on. Come on. We're all going in the other room, and we're going to wash our hands. And then Miss Webber is going to call *our* parents" (41-42, [emphasis added]). As regards Bernie, he recalls his embarrassing sexual experience with an old guy, which may have had a damaging effect on him: "I mean you *learn* when you're young, right?" (43). Additionally, Bernie's monologic *diatribe* ridiculing women's aspiration to have equal rights uncovers a true "patriarch" who is losing the ground from under his feet as his male superiority is being threatened: "Equal Rights Amendment? Equal Rights Amendment? I'll give you the fucking Equal Rights Amendment. Nobody ever wrote me no fucking amendments. Special *interest* groups, *okay*. . . but who is kidding who here, huh?" (50).

As opposed to Bernie and Joan, Danny and Debbie still possess their coherent selves, which enables them to attempt to build a relationship. However, given Bernie's and Joan's grave distrust of the opposite sex, it is not surprising that in their roles as Danny's and Debbie's "carnivalistic contrasting pairs," the "mentors" exert a *primary* destructive effect on the flowering relationship of their "disciples." Additionally, Danny and Debbie are also considerably affected by the *secondary* circumstances of the society that devaluates and negates intimacy and love. It is precisely the degrading effect of the social, political, and cultural changes prevalent in the post-Vietnam era that Ryan underlies in his comment on *Chicago*: "the play communicates its author's fear that the unforeseen and unfortunate legacy of the radical movements which redefined American society during the late 1960s is an absence of belief in any values at all" (*Craftsman* 73).

In a sharp contrast to Bernie's and Joan's monologues underscoring their isolation and alienation from the world, Danny's and Debbie's soliloquies--one by each--prove that they are capable of dialogical relationships. They invoke scenes that are imbued with definitely positive human values such as love and loyalty. Debbie recalls a family scene from her childhood, which

evokes the image of her understanding and loving mother. Though Deb merely asked for some cookies, her mother for some reason misunderstood or misheard her, and thought that Debbie wanted a hug, so her mother gave her a hug, and Debbie said: “thank you, Mommy. I didn’t want a cookie after all’” (58). In his monologue to his imaginary co-workers, Danny defends his friend, Bernie: “I don’t like you badmouthing the guy, who happens to be a friend of mine” (53). Even though Debbie also attempts to shield herself with the mask of lesbianism against Danny’s advances at their first encounter, her true dialogical self will eventually surface. Her discourse appears to be “contaminated” by the discourse of women’s fight for autonomy in the area of sexuality, which was high on the agenda of women’s movement in the late 1960s.

DANNY. Is someone taking up a lot of your time these days?

DEBORAH. You mean a man?

DANNY. Yes, a man.

DEBORAH. I’m a Lesbian.

DANNY. As a physical preference, or from political beliefs? (23)

In spite of the fact that both *Chicago* and *The Woods* are clearly informed by certain issues that were high on the agenda of the feminist liberation movement in the 1960s, it would be a reductive approach to treat these plays as a backlash against feminism. What Mamet is really concerned with is presenting a carnivalized world where the estrangement of people is most tragic. Yet, I suppose that the culturally specific multiple implications of Danny’s question left unanswered at the end of this scene warrant a brief digression from the central line of the present analysis. On the one hand, Danny’s rhetoric question seems to accord closely with the materialist feminist notion of the socially constructed nature of gender identity. As formulated by Dolan, “[g]ender, dictated through enculturation is a socially imposed decision of the sexes, an arrangement of relationships that also prescribes sexuality” (*Feminist* 10-11). On the other hand,

Danny's question could also be conceived as an ironic reference to the apparently strange wedding of an inherently intimate sphere of human life, sex, with politics, which, crudely simplified, deals with public issues. The merger of the two domains results in *sexual politics*--"originally an American term" (Heller, "Biopolitics" 11)--a concept that Kate Millett introduced and theorized in her groundbreaking book of the same title, published in 1970. I believe that Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher[xxxi] offer valuable insights for the description of a specifically American phenomenon, "the politicization of the body," which they termed "biopolitics" (Heller, "Biopolitics" 3). Heller ascribes the showing of biopolitical tendencies to an idiosyncratic feature of American democracy, "the absence of the social question from the political agenda" (11). She convincingly argues that "[b]iopolitics seems to replace the politicization of the social question" since for instance, "the American President [Bill Clinton] has no power to implement even a very modest healthcare plan" (11). In my view, the introduction of the notion of sexual politics marks the first phase of the politicization of body and sexuality since just like "sexual politics," "political correctness," and "incorrectness"--emerging in the 1980s--are also "terms that refer exclusively to biopolitics" (Heller "Biopolitics" 11). In determining certain factors leading up to the emergence of biopolitics in the U.S. and its absence in Europe, one has to consider the obvious difference in the perception of what constitutes a "social question" in Europe and in the U.S., which, I believe, has its roots in dissimilar cultural and historical traditions that provide the context for establishing a democratic order. Traditionally, the absence of social questions in politics is considered a main asset of American democracy, while over Calais, biopolitics would be inconceivable.

Debbie's coherent self is able to temporarily resist the damaging impulses of the socio-political context. Shedding off the mask of Lesbianism concealing her real self, she is capable of relating herself to the other and showing tenderness as the following extract illustrates:

DANNY. How would you like to eat dinner with me tomorrow. If you're not doing anything. If

you're not too busy. If you're busy it's not important.

DEBORAH. I'd love to eat dinner with you tomorrow.

DANNY. You would, huh?

DEBORAH. Yes.

DANNY. Well, okay, that's nice. That's very nice. I'm going to look forward to that.

DEBORAH. I could come over here and cook.

DANNY. You could. (25)

However, owing to the combined influence of the primary and secondary destructive forces defined above, the affection noticeable at the beginning of Dan and Debbie's relationship gradually vanishes. Danny's bitter remark that "[e]verything is fine. Sex, talk, life, everything. Until you want to get 'closer,' to get 'better'" (56) bespeaks the pressure of negative societal forces.

With the last most memorable image, *Chicago* achieves its artistic symmetry, and also, reinforces a carnivalized world based on selfishness, cynicism, and negation of human values rather than on love, mutual respect, and understanding. Ogling attractive women on the beach, Bernie and Danny comment on the women's body parts. Reduced to mere "stomach muscles," "nice legs, flat belly," or "very acceptable old ass" (*Chicago* 67), women are totally devalued and objectified to their corporeal parts. Dan, the disciple has been successfully "brainwashed" by his mentor as to how women should be treated. In the final scene, they greet an imaginary woman walking by in front of them, but she does not respond. Danny indignantly explodes: "she did *look* deaf, didn't she. [. . .] Deaf *bitch*" (68). The appearance of the imaginary nameless woman disregarding Bernie and Danny's objectifying her echoes the opening scene with the anonymous

woman in it, and powerfully confirms the empty and impersonal nature of female-male relationships, termed by Mamet, I suppose, *sexual perversity*.

[2] Mirror Analogues

Judging merely from the final reconciliation between the young couple in *The Woods,* this play may seem to be a contrasting counterpart of *Chicago*. However, as *The Woods* also dramatizes the gradual demise of genuine love, a carnival sense of the world also profoundly saturates its deepest core.

By excluding the harmful social and cultural effects besetting individuals in a big city, and by placing the young couple's outing in the habitat of birds, frogs, fish, bears, and herons, Mamet accentuates the protagonists' confrontations with their own undialogical selves. A fundamental carnivalistic *contrast* lies in the fact that Nature, endowed with idyllic, romantic, and redemptive characteristics by both Ruth and Nick, transforms into a "carnivalistic locale" that catalyzes the couple's inner tensions and discloses some hidden aspects in their characterological makeup. Ironically, their relationship goes through a critical "turning point" precisely in the serenity of Nature, where both of them have longed to escape from the filth of the city. As Ruth claims,

I wanted to *come* here.

To get back to Nature. (106) [xxxii]

Nick emphasizes: "Down in the city everything is vicious. I need time to be up here. (*Pause*) Everything is filthy down there" (111-2). The carnivalistic locale brings out the protagonists' ambivalent feelings toward each other: love and hatred, care and selfishness, intimacy and physical violence. Definitely, there is a tendency of the objectification and dehumanization of love emerging in the play. Both protagonists attempt to *objectify* each other by using aggressive strategies to obtain the other's love. Ruth's method is of a more covert type: it degrades into

“buying” Nick’s love, while the manifestations of Nick’s love degenerate into violent sexuality. Ultimately, both of them try to rule and gain control over each other with their own manipulative methods.

The couple’s “confessional stories” through which they can communicate their basic need for love and understanding obliquely mirror their undialogical selves. Ruth projects her longing for genuine love in her moving story about her Granma, and her Granpa:

She loved him. They were married.

Nothing, even he was crippled--or she was--could separate them.

She was his. Forever.

They had made a vow. (61)

In a “paired confessional scene,” Nick relates one of his recurrent dreams imbued with his need for love and intimacy:

All my life I thought that I would *meet* a person. [. . .]

She would say, ‘Let us be lovers.’ (*Pause*)

She’d ask me.

“I know who you are.’ (*Pause*)

‘I know you.’

‘I know what you need.’ [. . .] (109)

However, they both insist on their own methods: Ruth resorts to tricks, while Nick to violence. Ruth talks incessantly, pushes him to go for a walk in the middle of the night, to tell stories about the times he has spent up there in the summer house, and forces him to wear a bracelet.

The extent to which the carnivalization of passion permeates Ruth’s character can be best illustrated through her manipulative strategies to present Nick with a bracelet.

What could serve as a sign of love degenerates into a rejected and even hated object, acquiring a deeply ambivalent carnivalistic coloring by the time she hands it to him. On the one hand, the object itself evokes tying Nick to her, on the other, Ruth's methods to "sell" Nick the idea of wearing a bracelet resemble highly sophisticated marketing techniques that are applied to promote new products. First a need for the product is carefully created in the "customer," so Ruth introduces the idea of wearing tokens of love:

RUTH. We could do that.

NICK. What, Ruth?

RUTH. Wear things.

NICK. What?

RUTH. We could wear anything. Rings, bracelet.

Long, slim necklaces.

We'd wear them on our wrists.

(*Pause*)

Wrapped around our wrists.

To show that we are lovers. (30)

Then, the example of her Granma, who would always wear a necklace she was given by her husband further justifies her idea. Yet, when she finally hands the bracelet to Nick, he does not even thank for it and refuses to put it on:

NICK. It's very nice. (*Pause. He continues to examine the bracelet*.) Is it gold?

(*Pause*)

RUTH. Read it.

NICK. "Nicholas. (P*ause*). I will always love you, Ruth."

(*A long pause*.)

RUTH. Put it on.

NICK. (*very softly*) No. (82)

In a climactic situation in Scene Three, after Ruth has refused to have sex with Nick, the bracelet becomes "equated" with Ruth herself signifying her ultimate objectification by Nick. He doubly offends her, with his words and with his gesture: while calling her "*nothing*," he throws the bracelet, which has been on the table, down to the floor (103).

Nick's methods to obtain Ruth seem to follow the basic patriarchal pattern of male dominance and female subordinance and the relating principle of treating woman as a sexual property. Accordingly, Nick forces her to have sex with him, which ends in abusing and battering her, and even nearly raping her. However, against our gendered expectations that men are always the aggressor, Ruth also beats him in her despair. After their final climactic scene replete with violence and casting slurs on each other, Nick an Ruth find consolation in their stories set in their illusionary worlds. Thus, the end reinforces the deeply carnivalized passions prevalent in the play since they decide to stay together out of their survivalist compromises, their selfish need to possess the other rather than out of genuine love.

[3] Sexuality as a Carnivalizing Agent

An even more alienating configuration of sexuality appears in the business plays. Emptied completely of its eminently human character, sexuality degenerates into a commodity that the women protagonists "exchange" for their self-serving interests in order to obtain or secure a rewarding existential position in a male-dominated world. The notion of woman as a commodity has been introduced by Luce Irigaray, who has transferred "Marx's analysis of the commodity as the basic form of capitalist wealth" to an "interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies" (qtd. in Moi 141). Ironically, the women protagonists in the business plays

capitalize precisely on this fundamental notion to shake the foundations of patriarchal society. The female characters view sexuality in purely business terms. Karen in *Speed* has sex with Gould, the head of a Hollywood studio, to secure her position in the film industry; in *House*, Dr. Ford perceives her brief sexual affair with Mike, the leading con man, as a mode of learning how a con man's psyche works; Carol in *Oleanna* gains power over her college professor relying solely on the rhetoric of sexual harassment.

From among these heroines, Karen appears to be a perfect embodiment of a male-constructed other since she pretends to be naïve, innocent, ignorant, and eager to be directed and instructed by men. Even her refrain-like repetitive utterance "it was naïve of me" (*Speed* 39) is used by her to define herself as well as to arouse interest, approval or sympathy in her male counterparts. Paradoxically, Gould's assuring words "[l]isten, there is nothing wrong with being naïve, with learning . . ." (39) mark a first stage in *her* empowerment, and simultaneously indicate the effectivity of her strategy, namely that she has succeeded in creating the image of a submissive, subservient, and dumb woman. Nevertheless, it is also her innocence that she still possesses in some residual form that prevents her from achieving her final aim to get a job at the studio. She honestly admits that she would not have slept with Gould if he had not fulfilled her request to greenlight the radiation film (contrary to the previous agreement between Gould and his friend Fox). Her confession implies that it is she who objectifies Gould as a sexual object, however, as this act contradicts the basic principle of male dominance and female subordinance in patriarchy, her downfall is inevitable.

The treatment of sexuality in *Oleanna* exemplifies an ultimate form of sexual alienation, namely, desexualization. Unlike Karen and Dr. Ford, who trade their sex to get into a position of authority, Carol successfully exploits the rhetoric of political correctness and sexual harassment hysteria pervading the Academia from the beginning of the 1990s, and attains her empowerment. It is sufficient for her to follow the script of a charge of sexual harassment and accuse the professor of verbal and sexual violation of the codes of political correctness. The

rhetoric of sexual harassment serves merely as the best means available for the female student to expose amoral and illegal practices of male power.[xxxiii]

Though *Oleanna* stirred a great deal of controversy and engendered hot debates in the American public at the time of its production, I suppose that by not taking sides in the question of sexual harassment, Mamet covertly criticizes a *desexualization* drive apparent in feminist struggles from the 1990s. Heller and Feher offer valuable insights into the workings and ideology of sexual harassment as perceived in the United States. If sexual harassment is understood as "a sublimated form of rape," as Feher and Heller propose, "the demand to put and end to it" is fully justified (*Biopolitics* 84). In their view, however, "the anti-harassment campaign" in the U.S. made "a catastrophic mistake in coupling the anti-harassment issue with an explicitly Victorian and violent drive for the desexualization of the world (clearly in a desperate reaction to the petered-out sexual revolution of the sixties)" (85). I suppose that Feher and Heller's concluding remarks concerning the undercurrents of sexual harassment adequately describe Mamet's implicit concern that we also face in the changing climate of gender expectations:

> **The blind fury of the desexualization drive conceals the crucial fact that our culture is indeed at the crossroads and major decisions are to be made. If women are going to achieve a state of complete (and not just economical) equality, a trend which seems to be unstoppable, if also their sexual self-expression becomes unstrained and socially accepted, we shall face a completely new constellation." (89)**

[4] Distanced Presence: “Monologic” Relationships in Families

The last two plays selected for investigation, *The Cryptogram* and *The Old Neighborhood* explore the domain of family life, “that fundamental American icon” (Bigsby, *Contemporary* 371). A carnival sense of the world profoundly saturating these dramatic works emerges due to the emotional cruelty and abuse of dysfunctional mother figures who lack their dialogical selves and cause psychological damage, primarily to their children.

While in *The Cryptogram*, the conflicts between the on-stage mother, Donny and her ten-year-old boy, John are enacted on stage, in *The Old Neighborhood*, the events that caused the clashes between the off-stage mother and her adult children live on in her children’s memories. In compliance with the thematic focus, *The Cryptogram’s* structure resembles that of a tragedy, whereas *The Old Neighborhood* follows the tradition of memory plays.

The thematic similarity in the plays is not coincidental since both are based on Mamet’s autobiographical memory. In *The Cryptogram,* the boy, who suffers from the emotional abuse of his mother and the absence of his father, is about the same age as Mamet was when his parents divorced in 1958. As regards *The Old Neighborhood*, Mamet himself admitted that “the old neighborhood of the title is in Chicago, where he grew up, though it never says so in the play, and that Bobby [the protagonist] is his stand-in” (Weber 12). The inconsiderate mother figures in these plays were patterned after Mamet’s mother, “who left her husband, a labor lawyer, for one his colleagues, and the two children lived with their mother and stepfather until young David had had enough and moved in with his father” (Weber 12). In a short autobiographical essay “The Rake” published in 1992, Mamet reveals a childhood spent in torment inflicted upon him and his sister by the cruelty of his stepfather and their mother. He remembers when his stepfather would grow angry, he brought “some object down on the glass top [of a round table], shattering it, thus giving us to know how we had forced him out of control”

(7). Thus the round table came to be associated in their minds with the notion of blood as "he would cut some portion of himself on the glass, or that he and his wife, our mother would cut their hands picking up the glass afterwards, and that we children were to understand, and did understand, that these wounds were our fault" (8).

In spite of the presence of obvious autobiographical details in these family plays, it would be fallacious to suggest that Mamet has created overtly autobiographical drama. What Schaub notes with reference to *The Cryptogram*, I believe, equally applies to *The Old Neighborhood,* though the latter one is perhaps even more overtly autobiographical: "Mamet's own memory inspired, but did not bind, his creativity" (329).

In *The Cryptogram,* the milieu of a disintegrating and dysfunctional family and a broken home is established in the opening scene. The spatial arrangement of the characters suggests a definite physical distance, and foreshadows spiritual distance between the characters. The underlying tensions thus rendered will further escalate in the rest of the play. John, a ten-year-old boy talks to Del, a friend of John's father late at night in the living room. Donny, the mother is offstage and only her voice and the noises she makes can be heard. Her appearance is marked by a crash as she breaks the teapot. This incident evokes a distanced mother figure who is but a disturbance to home life. Donny's frustration and anger felt about her husband leaving her will enhance the physical as well spiritual distance between the characters set in the opening scene. In her agitated state of mind, Donny is unable to "dialogize" understanding and love to her son. She is extremely irritated by her son's questions and sleeplessness that makes him re-appear in the living-room. She lies to John when he asks why his father is not at home yet, though the father and his son are planning to go on an outing to the woods:

JOHN. Will he be home soon?

Donny. Yes. He will.

JOHN. Where is he?

DONNY. I don't know. Yes, I do, yes. He's at the Office. And he'll be home soon.

JOHN. Why is he working late?

DONNY. I don't know. We'll find out when he comes home, John. Must we do this every night? (11)

Donny's inability to come to terms with her life surfaces most vividly in the closing scene. Breaking his promise to stay upstairs and go to sleep, John enters again the living room disturbing Del and his mother's talk. This event precipitates the final crisis, in which Donny lashes out at her son her rage she feels for her husband. We never learn what Del actually thinks about Donny and her son, but certainly it would diminish the emotional impact of this scene. Donny dumps all her loneliness and impotent anger on him.

DONNY. What? What? You promised. Did you promise?

JOHN. I . . .

DONNY. . . . It's not a small *thing*. You . . .

JOHN. I only . . .

DONNY. Yes. *What*? *What*? 'You Only . . ." You prom . . .

[. . .] I DON'T CARE. Do You Know What It Means To Give . . .

JOHN. . . .I . . .

DONNY. . . . to give your word? I DON'T CARE.

[. . .] I don't care. Go away. You lied. (96)

John has come down only to say that he cannot fall asleep as he hears voices that call him in the dark. Instead of understanding, protection and love, his mother peremptorily sends him back to his room, while Del hands him a knife to unwrap a blanket John has wanted to have to keep him warm. The play closes with a lasting image of great power:

John is going up to his room alone with the knife in his hands. Whether the distraught boy will use the knife against himself or not remains open in the play.

Nevertheless, given the relevance of autobiographical details in these family plays, one can suggest that John's suicidal energy was not aimed at himself since projected in the future some forty years later, Bobby Gould, the protagonist in *The Old Neighborhood* could be the same ten-year-old boy as John in *The Cryptogram*. Gentle and nostalgic in tone, but rich and dense in its subtext, *The Old Neighborhood* is a memory play. It comprises three tightly knit playlets, *The Diasappearance of the Jews*, *Jolly,* and *Deeny*, which are linked by Gould revisiting his hometown Chicago, after a long absence to try to face his past. In spite of the fact that the play revolves around Gould's urge to reconnect with his past--personal, familial, and ethnic--the women related to him by familial ties (mother, sister, wife), and his former love are definitely foregrounded in the playlets. In the second and third parts for instance, the perspective from which Gould's past is viewed shifts to his sister, Jolly and to his first love, Deeny, respectively.

In *The Disappearance of Jews*, shattered by a broken marriage and an impending divorce, Gould revisits an old school friend. They reminiscence about their childhood and adolescent escapades bicker about the names of the "broads" they used to know. Bobby's reluctance to speak about his wife suggests that their marriage is on the brink of collapse:

> **JOEY. How's Laurie?**
>
> **BOBBY. Fine.**
>
> **JOEY. Yeah, but how is she, though. . . ?**
>
> **BOBBY. She's fine. What did I say?**
>
> **JOEY. You said that she was fine. (*Pause*)**
>
> **BOBBY. All right. (*Pause*)**
>
> **JOEY. So? (*Pause*)**

BOBBY. So what? (11)

A moment later Gould admits that "I should never have married a shiksa" (12), which indicates some correspondence between his personal crisis and his torment felt over his disconnection with his Jewish roots. Being an off-stage character, his wife does not have a chance to speak for herself, yet obviously, his conflicting identities must have caused a rift in their marriage.

Paradoxically, presented in the multiple stereotypical roles of a woman, Jolly stands out as an untypical woman character in Mamet's oeuvre. She is the only one located in her domestic environment and successfully fulfilling the role cluster of a mother, a wife, and a sister. Moreover, the confrontation with her brother brings back the past of their family, and recalling her mother, she gradually comes to terms with her role also as a daughter.

By way of parenthesis, it should be noted that Jolly's figure was modeled on Mamet's sister, Lynn, a writer herself now. Reflecting on their childhood, she has noted that "suffice it to say we are not the victims of a happy childhood," adding that "there was a lot of violence, but the greatest violence was emotional" (qtd. in Weber 12). An incident recalled by Mamet about his mother in "The Rake" reveals that she was spiteful, mean, and cruel both to him and his sister. For instance, their mother would not let Lynn play the leading role in a play at school on its opening night as she did not eat her dinner. Though she told her mother that "she possessed no appetite whatsoever, and that was due, no doubt, not to the food, but to her nervousness and excitement at the prospect of opening night," her mother phoned the drama teacher that Lynn would not be going (9).

Jolly's grievances reveal that Bobby and herself were brought up in a loveless family. Seeing Bob, all the repressed misery and anguish felt about the divorce of her parents, and the subsequent torments burst out from her. She complains about a dysfunctional mother who never taught her to cook: "*She* never taught me . . . She never

taught me a *thing*" (67); she and her stepfather did not approve of her marriage with Carl: "'Your mother and I. 'Just don't Feel' that *Carl* is the Right Sort'" (68). Yet, for three generations, as Jolly rages in anger, WHOSE MARRIAGE WORKED--(*Pause*) WHOSE MARRIAGE WORKED? (69). Lacking an emphatic understanding, her mother also failed in her role as a grandmother. When she visited Jolly and her family, she asked what the children would need: "And I'd say 'Shoes. They need shoes.' [. . .] The end of her stay, she would give them, God bless her, 'vanity' sets. A desk. A desk to put on makeup . . . a 'vanity set'"? (69-70

The impact of the emotional abuse on Jolly is illuminated in a most harrowing scene depicting her dream she used to have in her childhood:

> **They're knocking on my door. All of them. "Let me in," and I know that they want to kill me. *Mother*: *Mother's* voice, from just beyond the door: "Julia, Let Me In." "I will not let them hurt you . . ." the sweetest voice. "You are my *child* . . ." and it goes on.[. . .] I open the door, this sweetest voice, and there is *Mom*, with this *expression* on her face . . . (*Pause*) And she wants to kill me. (*Pause*) (84)**

Painful and distressing as facing her past may be, she tries to heal all her wounds. Her effort to break with a past that haunts her blatantly proves that she is able to establish a dialogical relationship in all her relations. She is a loving mother and a good wife who cares about the wishes and desires of her children, and of her husband. She prides herself: "You see, Bob? Do you see? This is a *family*. (Pause) *And some day*, Bob. I'm going to be dead. Some day, *they* are going, they are going [sic] to be in the kitchen. And they're going to say. To their girls . . .'*My* mom . . .' (68). Also, Jolly is a considerate and compassionate sister who supports

her brother: “You gonna go back to her?” [. . .] ‘Cause I wanted to tell you. If you *do*. No one’s going to think you foolish. I swear to you” (75).

The dramatic structure of the last one-act play in the sequence is virtually a *soliloquy* delivered by Deeny, who was Gould’s first love. He hardly ever interrupts her talk. Deeny’s monologue seems to be meandering as she talks about things like frost and gardening, the molecules, tribal rituals, her success at her work, and the folly of passion. Yet, in some underlying way, all the subjects she touches upon underscore her ambivalent feelings, namely, her lack of faith and her need for belonging. Having divorced recently, she appears to be at a threshold that she has to pass. Yet, she is capable of coming to grips with her relationship with Gould: “I never knew what you wanted. (*Pause*) I thought I knew. (*Pause*) I thought that I knew. (*Pause*) *Finally* . . . (*Pause*) And I said. (*Pause*) They say there is going to be a frost” (99). Instead of giving way to despair, Deeny offers her help: “If there were something I could do for you, I’d do it” (100).

In coming to terms with his life-crisis, Gould can surely draw strength from Jolly’s and Deeny’s reassurance and their courage to face and overcome their difficulties. The final good-bye between Gould and Deeny evoking carnivalistic death that carries rebirth in itself promises a de-carnivalized world where the present opacity of inter-sexual communication may be illuminated through by the dialogue between the sexes. Thus the world will be set back to its normal rut with dialogical relationships and spirituality restored. As Bakhtin expresses:

> Only the other’s lips can be touched with our own, only on the other can we lay our hands, rise actively above the other and “overshadow” all of him totally, “overshadow” him in every constituent feature of his existence, “overshadow” his body and within his body--his soul. (“Author and Hero” 41-2)[xxxiv]

Endnotes

CONCLUSION

> CLOV. I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust. . . . I'm doing my best to create a little order.
>
> (Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*)

The comprehensive and multi-dimensional study of Mamet's female characters I have conducted in the present work corroborates my initial assumption that Mamet traces and diagnoses shifts in women's socially and culturally ascribed roles and status. Viewed in this light, the women characters' apparently eccentric acts and behavior—frequently attacked but hitherto unexamined by critics—can be conceived as configurations of their new gender roles that represent responses to new realities. Mamet's women tend to thwart and defy the patriarchal modes of female objectification and challenge the stereotypical roles assigned to them. Evidently, the new roles shatter the old frame of reference of womanhood and femininity.

These latent aspects in Mamet's plays could be convincingly revealed with the methodological arsenal and theoretical framework of Bakhtin's system of thought. I have argued that the female protagonists carnivalize the male-dominated world by assuming the role of the "parodying double" both in the public and the private realms of life. By emulating and usurping male acts and discourse, the women

protagonists challenge and lay bare corrupt practices in the phallocratic order and deflate long-established male-centered myths, disrupt roles and expectations conventionally sanctioned to them by patriarchy. Applying carnival categories and images, I have demonstrated the process whereby the heroines in the business plays expose deception, venality, hypocrisy, violence, and the transgression of rules and laws dominating the male world. By adopting these male "values," the protagonists, dr. Ford, Carol, and Karen, representing a new type of woman, challenge and subvert the initial hierarchical order in the plays and obtain power over their male counterparts. Furthermore, with the help of a newly introduced carnival image of "business space," I have explored the ambivalent impact of this carnival image on character responses as well as the degenerating effect it exerts on the Academia, manifest in the commodification of knowledge and the depersonilization of instructional methods.

Acting as their male counterparts' parodying double, the women characters in *Chicago*, *The Woods, Speed, House,* and *Oleanna* expose and disrupt a fundamental male-centered myth, the male prerogative to sexually subordinate women. Adopting male role models and discourse, the women characters (a nameless off-stage woman, Joan, Ruth, Karen, dr. Ford and Carol) debunk methods of male objectification. In the private realm of life, the women's disruptive acts lead to aborted relationships, while dr. Ford, Karen and Carol in the business plays capitalize precisely on the objectified "commodity" nature of sexuality and view it in purely business terms. Eventually, they exchange their sexual charms for existential rewards. Karen has sex

with the head of a Hollywood studio to secure her position in film industry; to Dr. Ford, her brief sexual affair with a con man is a mode of learning how a con man's psyche works; while Carol, relies on the rhetoric of sexual harassment to ensure her progress at the university. This process of the dehumanization of love and sexuality is symptomatic inflation of human values evolving in Mamet's drama.

In addition to the carnival images, I have employed a set of descriptive and analytical categories that are classified by Bakhtin as external and internal manifestations of carnivalization. These elements have a double function in the present work: first, they function as effective devices of the multi-aspect portrayal of the women characters; second, they are indicative of a profoundly carnivalized world permeating Mamet's drama, and as such, they signify distinct generic properties in his works. For instance, in *House* and *Chicago,* internal elements of carnivalization including carnivalistic locales and paired scenes are powerful means of foregrounding some hidden aspects of the characters: the extraordinary circumstances in the house of games spotlight Dr. Ford's compulsive gambler side, while the rapid succession of brief scenes located at venues typical of a big city reflects a similar sort of haste and shallowness in the human relationships portrayed. Also, the striking absence of intimacy from the characters' lives in *Chicago* and *The Woods* is accentuated by the lack of interior spaces. Similarly, spaces traditionally considered idyllic, romantic, and intimate, like Nature in *The Woods* and the living-room in *The Cryptogram* or the family house in *Jolly* transform into carnivalistic locales that catalyze the characters' tensions and

uncertainties.

Further elements of carnivalization discernible in the compositional design of Mamet's plays also attest to a "carnival sense of the world" emerging in them. In the compositional arrangement of fast-moving plays such as *House*, *Speed*, and *Chicago*, external manifestations abound: for instance, extraordinary and provocative plot situations, crises and turning points, and confessions. However, carnivalization recedes into deeper levels in *The Woods*, *The Cryptogram*, *The Old Neighborhood*, where the significance of internal elements such as carnivalistic locales, contrasting pairs, and paired scenes is bound to intensify. Since these devices dispense with lengthy outer and inner descriptions of characters, they are frequently applied modes of character portrayal in these plays.

The application of the Bakhtinian concepts of "ploy phony" and "dialogism" in the present work has been instrumental in revealing certain formal aspect of character portrayal. The polyphonic arrangement of characters as well as the dialogue between the characters—however discontinuous and elliptical— demonstrates the dialogic nature of Mamet's drama. As opposed to performance art's undialogized polyphonic structure characterized by multiple consciousness with no dialogue between the characters or their split selves, it is *dialogized polyphonic structure* that operates in Mamet's drama. Deploying a conversational analytical method and drawing on Bakhtin's insights on the internal dialogism of the word for the analysis of a dialogue stretch from *Oleanna*, I have identified tendencies in the two protagonists' mutually alienating communicative

strategies. The pattern evolving in the dialogue extract shows resemblance to a musical compositional design evoking harmony, peace and order, which markedly contrasts with the characters' strategies aimed at deceiving each other. Thus, functioning as a structural transaction, dialogized polyphony contributes to conveying hidden messages that evoke humanism and order, and also, confirms a unique sense of musicality inherent in Mamet's language—musicality that may bring some consonance to an otherwise dissonant world.

With the vehicle of the *Self-Other-Self* subjectivity formation model I have abstracted from Bakhtin's understanding of the relationship between author and hero in an aesthetic activity and Butler's conception on gender construction, I could describe and account for the women characters' *dysfunctional self* that hinders them in constructing their identity and in attaining self-completion. The proposed model has been instrumental in elucidating that the dialogical relationship between the self and other, which is vital for the meaningful construction of the self, ceases to operate or is objectified in a somewhat fragmented and distorted version, primarily in the family plays. Mamet diagnoses the *malaise* of recent American society: the lack of the dialogical self, which means that the self is unable to project himself/herself into and experience the other. For instance, owing to this lack, the female characters in *The Cryptogram* and *The Old Neighborhood* (with the exception of Jolly) fail to define themselves in the male-dominated realm, which leads to their estrangement from the world. I believe though that Mamet offers a remedy for the characters' isolation. By dramatizing the crucial

consequences of the dysfunctional self, he affirms the necessity of a dialogical relationship with the other, which can be a relief from isolation. Furthermore, the model of subjectivity formation evolving in Mamet's drama suggests that Mamet does not subscribe to a preexisting, fixed gender identity. In other words, he does not confine women to a passive, silent position—an observation that corroborates my initial claim that Mamet is not a misogynist playwright.

From the perspective of the central thematic concern in postmodern dramatic works, a critique of social and cultural stereotypes, inherited clichés, and stereotypical roles by exposing the performative nature of identities, Mamet affiliates with postmodernism since his drama thematizes the problematics of the transformation in women's gender identity. However, in view of some commonly recognizable formal features of new dramatic writing such as the banishment of conversational dialogue, reduction of plot, the demise of character, and unorthodox blending the elements of diverse styles, genres, and cultures, Mamet cannot be labeled postmodern. He resists employing faddish visible devices to reify and de-substantiate his characters in order to express the fragmentation of the self. What markedly distinguishes Mamet's drama from performance art and tendencies in realist-naturalist drama is the absence of a fictional narrator, who becomes embodied in performance art (cf. Chapter II [2]), while his function is conventionally displaced to the dramatic text or some extra-textual devices in the other dominant type of drama. This fact entails the enhanced significance of *dialogue*, which is stripped of virtually any extra-communicational, narrative aspects transferred to it, as it is basically, the only means of character-portrayal he employs. In other words, the fragmentation of the self is reflected in a hidden and subtle manner, in the characters' dislocated, discontinuous, and disjointed discourse.

I would suggest that Mamet's postmodernism can be located in his having adopted "a carnival sense of the world" manifest in the elements of carnivalization that evidently shape the plot and compositional design and function as powerful devices in character portrayal in his

drama. “Carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal” enabled Mamet “to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 166).

On the evidence of the investigation carried out in the present work, I challenge the reductive and unfavorable critical responses that Mamet’s female characters have received. Although women are presented without any redeeming beauty, respect or affection, and despite the fact that the female-male relationships are deprived of any romanticism, mysteriousness, and intimacy, it can be safely suggested that far from creating stereotypical representations of women, Mamet basically revises the male-conventional treatment of women characters.

Endnotes

Chapter I

[1] The concept “postmodern age” is used in the sense as Jean–Francois Lyotard introduces it in *The Postmodern Condition*: “the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (3).

[2] The original title of the Dostoevsky book published in 1929 was *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art*. For this study I have used the revised edition published in 1963.

[3] To cite a few examples: Almansi remarks for instance, “[t]his is an entropic world, as postmodernist critics are wont to say, which crumbles down as the remnants of traditional values are washed away, existential possibilities are crushed, and social institutions overthrown. There is a waste of all possible values” (195). Zeifman compares “the homosocial world of American business [. . .] in *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*” to a “topsy-turvy world in which all values are inverted” (125-6). Roudane claims that “Bernard and Danny’s conversations are carnivalesque dialogues filled with obscenities and dirty jokes [in *Chicago*]” (*A Critical* 167). Bigsby maintains that Mamet’s “characters look for some kind of meaning to random events and try to generate order out of a threatening chaos” (*Modern* 202).

[4] This argument is so pervasive in Mamet criticism that no list of the relevant texts would be complete. The most important works emphasizing the crisis of masculinity are Hersch Zeifman’s “Phallus in Wonderland: Machismo and Business in David Mamet’s *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glenn Ross*” (1992), the first chapter of Robert Vorlicky’s *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (1995), and Carla J. McDonough’s *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* (1997).

[5] The category of “business plays” is fairly loosely defined in critical comments. Deborah Geis includes *American Buffalo*, *The Water Engine*, and *Glengarry Glenn Ross* in her selection, while my classification here in the present work is somewhat broader. Though *Oleanna* is set in the context of higher education, I consider it a business play as education is regarded by both of its protagonists as a business transaction. This question, however, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

[6] The British playwright, Pinter has also had a considerable impact on American dramatists, in particular on Mamet himself.

[7] McDonough argues that even Williams, who is usually praised for the sensitivity of his female heroines, portrays heterosexual men as brutes (*Staging* 24).

Chapter II

[8] Cf. A collection of his essays: *A Whore's Profession* (1994); *Make-Believe Town: Essays and Remembrances* (1996); *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (1997); *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (2000).

[9] The "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizon*) is a term employed by Hans Robert Jauss in his aesthetics of reception. As Robert C. Holub points out, in Jauss' understanding this term "refers to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations that a hypothetical reader might bring to a given text ," which is "essential for both the interpretation and the evaluation of a literary work" (553). In listing the elements necessary for establishing the horizon of expectation, Holub mentions "the internal features of a genre," which suggests that a reader/critic readily accepts the generic traditions of genre.

[10] Bécsy notes that the Hungarian stage director and critic Sándor Hevesi also identified crisis as the main decisive factor of drama two years earlier than Archer. Hevesi states: "The criterion of drama is not human action but human crisis. [. . .] The scene of the crisis is the human soul" (qtd. in Bécsy 12).

[11] Enoch Brater, for instance labels Mamet, David Rabe, and Sam Shepard with the fairly broad term "New Realists." However inexpressive Brater's classification is--a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study--it highlights a noticeable departure from the absurdist tendencies evident in the plays of sixties-generation playwrights, including Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit, and Jack Gelber.

[12] Let it suffice to provide one example: through constantly counterpointing the Cio-Cio-San and Pinkerton story from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* with the relationship between a French diplomat in Beijing and a Chinese opera singer, in his play *M. Butterfly* (1988), Hwang deflates the male-constructed feminine ideal as well as Western beliefs of and misconceptions about Oriental women and men.

[13] Watt lists works such as Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, David Harvey's *Condition of Postmodernity*, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations.*

[14] Fredric Jameson's assertion regarding the "second feature" of postmodernism is "the effacement of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" ("Postmodernism" 112).

[15] As György Lukács articulates: "Drama is a literary work designated to create a direct and strong effect on an *assembled crowd* through happenings taking place between people" (qtd. in Bécsy 13).

[16] The content-based definition of drama has conflict and crisis as its key concepts (Bécsy 12).

[17] In his "theater of cruelty" Antonin Artaud proposes "to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer's subjects and conduct them *by means of their organisms* to an apprehension of the subtlest notions" (81). Martin Esslin's concept of drama is also illuminating: mimetic action, in the sense of re-enactment of "real" or fictional events, involving the actions and interactions of

human beings, real or simulated (e.g., puppets or carton characters) before an audience as though they were happening at that very moment (qtd. in Watt, *Postmodern* 4).

[18] Claiming that "dialogue or dialogism [is] present, in embryo, even in the early work [Bakhtin's]," Michael Holquist is the main proponent of the idea of coherence in Bakhtin's work, while Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson contend that the Bakhtinian corpus is discontinuous (qtd. in Shepard, "Introduction" xxi).

[19] Morson and Emerson's observation on the reception of Bakhtin's writing both in Russia and the West aptly illustrates the *operation* of liminality: "Although he [Bakhtin] was a severe critic of formalism and STRUCTURALISM [sic], Jakobsonians claimed him without qualification for their camp [. . .]; despite his withering comments on Marxism, Marxists have done the same [. . .]; postructuralists seeking to appropriate him have also tended to overlook those passages where Bakhtin seems to be most unsympathetic with such an ethos. The attempt to see him as an essentially religious thinker, as some Slavists and other have proposed, has some basis but has probably been exaggerated" ("Bakhtin M.M." 64).

[20] Marvin Carlson points out that Bakhtin ignores the "tradition of comedy," a dramatic form "that has been one of the cultural centers of parody, which Bakhtin advances as one of the most ancient forms of dialogism" (315).

[21] Cf. also Michael Carlson's "Theater and Dialogism" (315), and Ilkka Joki's *The Demotic* (59).

[22] Inspired by Pechey's claim that Bakhtin's ideas and concepts on the novel can also be valid tools for analyzing drama, in *Mamet, Bakhtin, and the Dramatic* (1993), Ilkka Joki tests the validity of Bakhtin's concepts in genres other than the novel, e.g. in Mamet's two adaptations of the novels *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the *Verdict* (70).

Chapter III

[23] As Marvin Carlson maintains, Bakhtin himself may have been aware that with Ibsen, Hauptmann, as well as Chekhov, "a different sort of dynamic is at work," as "[t]he reality they sought to depict was shifting, ambiguous, evanescent. Its developments were surprising and unpredictable [. . .] with no obvious voice of authority to resolve these confusions" (316).

[24] Cf. the conflicting identities of sexual orientation in Larry Kramer's *The Destiny of Me* (1992), and in David Henry Hwang's *M.Butterfly* (1988); ethnic, and racial identities at war in Ntozake Shange's *Spell#7* (1979), in Luis Valdez's *I Don't Have To* (1986), and Cherry Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1994).

Chapter IV

[25] Mamet cites Picasso and Stein in Roudané's "Interview" (76).

[26] Stallybrass and White list numerous works in cultural as well as literary studies where carnival has been applied as an analytical concept, though certainly their list is far from being exhaustive (Introduction 11-12).

[27] See Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (1985); Peter Griffith, "Bakhtin, Foucault, Beckett, Pinter" in Adrian Page, *The Death of the Playwright*? (1992); Robert Cunliffe, "Carnival and Drama" in David Sheperd (ed.), *Bakhtin,*

Carnival and Other Subjects: Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference, University of Manchester, July, 1991 (1993).

[28] *Syncrisis* is "the juxtaposition of various points of view on a specific object. The technique of juxtaposing various discourse-opinions on an object was accorded very great importance in the Socratic dialogue" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 110).

[29] It is generally held by Bakhtin scholars that carnival was merely a temporary suspension from all hierarchy and inequality in medieval times; for instance, Linda Hutcheon claims that the social and ecclesiastical authorities tolerated, even legalized the carnivalesque forms, but only for a time, and thereby set the norms ("Parody" 99). In this paradox of the carnival she locates "the underlying principle of all parodic discourse: the paradox of its authorized transgression of norms" (99). Terry Eagleton views carnival in terms of effectiveness: "[c]arnival [. . .] is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art" (qtd. in Stallybrass and White, 13).

Chapter VII

[30] The legitimacy of the transaction I suggest can also be supported by the fact that several commentators have already pointed out that Bakhtin's ideas on identity constitution are "couched in aesthetic terms" in "Author and Hero" (Thomson 212). For instance, Emerson and Morson note that "Bakhtin intends not only to describe aesthetic activity, but also to consider the total project of *selfhood*" (qtd. in Thomson 212, emphasis added).

Chapter VIII

[31] The Hungarian philosophers' names appear without accents in the sources I have used.

[32] The original arrangement of the lines is retained in the citations I take from *The Woods*.

[33] Mamet defines *Oleanna*'s theme as follows: its "central interaction is not about sexual harassment. It's about power" (qtd. in Ryan, *Power Play* 393).

[34] Bakhtin elucidates the meaning of *overshadowing* as follows: "'Overshadowing' [episkiasis, obumbratio]: the Russian word for "overshadowing' implies the power to shelter, protect, and bless or bestow blessings. The term derives from the Bible. cf. Luke 1:35: 'The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee'" ("Author and Hero" 238).

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[i] The concept "postmodern age" is used in the sense as Jean–Francois Lyotard introduces it in *The Postmodern Condition*: "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (3).

[ii] The original title of the Dostoevsky book published in 1929 was *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. For this study I have used the revised edition published in 1963.

[iii] To cite a few examples: Almansi remarks for instance, "[t]his is an entropic world, as postmodernist critics are wont to say, which crumbles down as the remnants of traditional values are washed away, existential possibilities are crushed, and social institutions overthrown. There is a waste of all possible values" (195). Zeifman compares "the homosocial world of American business [. . .] in *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*" to a "topsy-turvy world in which all values are inverted" (125-6). Roudane claims that "Bernard and Danny's conversations are carnivalesque dialogues filled with obscenities and dirty jokes [in *Chicago*]" (*A Critical* 167). Bigsby maintains that Mamet's "characters look for some kind of meaning to random events and try to generate order out of a threatening chaos" (*Modern* 202).

[iv] This argument is so pervasive in Mamet criticism that no list of the relevant texts would be complete. The most important works emphasizing the crisis of masculinity are Hersch Zeifman's "Phallus in Wonderland: Machismo and Business in David Mamet's *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glenn Ross*" (1992), the first chapter of Robert Vorlicky's *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (1995), and Carla J. McDonough's *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* (1997).

[v] The category of "business plays" is fairly loosely defined in critical comments. Deborah Geis includes *American Buffalo, The Water Engine,* and *Glengarry Glenn Ross* in her selection, while my classification here in the present work is somewhat broader. Though *Oleanna* is set in the context of higher education, I consider it a business play as education is regarded by both of its protagonists as a business transaction. This question, however, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

6 The British playwright, Pinter has also had a considerable impact on American dramatists, in particular on Mamet himself.

[vii] McDonough argues that even Williams, who is usually praised for the sensitivity of his female heroines, portrays heterosexual men as brutes (*Staging* 24).

[viii] Cf. A collection of his essays: *A Whore's Profession* (1994); *Make-Believe Town: Essays and Remembrances* (1996); *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (1997); *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (2000).

[ix] The "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizon*) is a term employed by Hans Robert Jauss in his aesthetics of reception. As Robert C. Holub points out, in Jauss' understanding this term "refers to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations that a hypothetical reader might bring to a given text ," which is "essential for both the interpretation and the evaluation of a literary work" (553). In listing the elements necessary for establishing the horizon of expectation, Holub mentions "the internal features of a genre," which suggests that a reader/critic readily accepts the generic traditions of genre.

[x] Bécsy notes that the Hungarian stage director and critic Sándor Hevesi also identified crisis as the main decisive factor of drama two years earlier than Archer. Hevesi states: "The criterion of drama is not human action but human crisis. [. . .] The scene of the crisis is the human soul" (qtd. in Bécsy 12).

[xi] Enoch Brater, for instance labels Mamet, David Rabe, and Sam Shepard with the fairly broad term "New Realists." However inexpressive Brater's classification is--a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study--it highlights a noticeable departure from the absurdist tendencies evident in the plays of sixties-generation playwrights, including Edward Albee, Arthur Kopit, and Jack Gelber.

[xii] Let it suffice to provide one example: through constantly counterpointing the Cio-Cio-San and Pinkerton story from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* with the relationship between a French diplomat in Beijing and a Chinese opera singer, in his play *M. Butterfly* (1988), Hwang deflates the male-constructed feminine ideal as well as Western beliefs of and misconceptions about Oriental women and men.

[xiii] Watt lists works such as Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or*, *the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, David Harvey's *Condition of Postmodernity,* Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*.

[xiv] Fredric Jameson's assertion regarding the "second feature" of postmodernism is "the effacement of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" ("Postmodernism" 112).

[xv] As György Lukács articulates: "Drama is a literary work designated to create a direct and strong effect on an *assembled crowd* through happenings taking place between people" (qtd. in Bécsy 13).

[xvi] The content-based definition of drama has conflict and crisis as its key concepts (Bécsy 12).

[xvii] In his "theater of cruelty" Antonin Artaud proposes "to treat the spectators like the snakecharmer's subjects and conduct them *by means of their organisms* to an apprehension of the subtlest notions" (81). Martin Esslin's concept of drama is also illuminating: mimetic action, in

the sense of re-enactment of "real" or fictional events, involving the actions and interactions of human beings, real or simulated (e.g., puppets or carton characters) before an audience as though they were happening at that very moment (qtd. in Watt, *Postmodern* 4).

[xviii] Claiming that "dialogue or dialogism [is] present, in embryo, even in the early work [Bakhtin's]," Michael Holquist is the main proponent of the idea of coherence in Bakhtin's work, while Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson contend that the Bakhtinian corpus is discontinuous (qtd. in Shepard, "Introduction" xxi).

[xix] Morson and Emerson's observation on the reception of Bakhtin's writing both in Russia and the West aptly illustrates the *operation* of liminality: "Although he [Bakhtin] was a severe critic of formalism and STRUCTURALISM [sic], Jakobsonians claimed him without qualification for their camp [. . .]; despite his withering comments on Marxism, Marxists have done the same [. . .]; postructuralists seeking to appropriate him have also tended to overlook those passages where Bakhtin seems to be most unsympathetic with such an ethos. The attempt to see him as an essentially religious thinker, as some Slavists and other have proposed, has some basis but has probably been exaggerated" ("Bakhtin M.M." 64).

[xx] Marvin Carlson points out that Bakhtin ignores the "tradition of comedy," a dramatic form "that has been one of the cultural centers of parody, which Bakhtin advances as one of the most ancient forms of dialogism" (315).

[xxi] Cf. also Michael Carlson's "Theater and Dialogism" (315), and Ilkka Joki's *The Demotic* (59).

[xxii] Inspired by Pechey's claim that Bakhtin's ideas and concepts on the novel can also be valid tools for analyzing drama, in *Mamet, Bakhtin, and the Dramatic* (1993), Ilkka Joki tests the validity of Bakhtin's concepts in genres other than the novel, e.g. in Mamet's two adaptations of the novels *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the *Verdict* (70).

[xxiii] As Marvin Carlson maintains, Bakhtin himself may have been aware that with Ibsen, Hauptmann, as well as Chekhov, "a different sort of dynamic is at work," as "[t]he reality they sought to depict was shifting, ambiguous, evanescent. Its developments were surprising and unpredictable [. . .] with no obvious voice of authority to resolve these confusions" (316).

[xxiv] Cf. the conflicting identities of sexual orientation in Larry Kramer's *The Destiny of Me* (1992), and in David Henry Hwang's *M.Butterfly* (1988); ethnic, and racial identities at war in Ntozake Shange's *Spell#7* (1979), in Luis Valdez's *I Don't Have To* (1986), and Cherry Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1994).

[xxv] Mamet cites Picasso and Stein in Roudané's "Interview" (76).

[xxvi] Stallybrass and White list numerous works in cultural as well as literary studies where carnival has been applied as an analytical concept, though certainly their list is far from being exhaustive (Introduction 11-12).

[xxvii] See Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (1985); Peter Griffith, "Bakhtin, Foucault, Beckett, Pinter" in Adrian Page, *The Death of the Playwright*? (1992); Robert Cunliffe, "Carnival and Drama" in David Sheperd (ed.), *Bakhtin, Carnival and Other Subjects: Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference, University of Manchester, July, 1991* (1993).

[xxviii] *Syncrisis* is “the juxtaposition of various points of view on a specific object. The technique of juxtaposing various discourse-opinions on an object was accorded very great importance in the Socratic dialogue” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 110).

[xxix] It is generally held by Bakhtin scholars that carnival was merely a temporary suspension from all hierarchy and inequality in medieval times; for instance, Linda Hutcheon claims that the social and ecclesiastical authorities tolerated, even legalized the carnivalesque forms, but only for a time, and thereby set the norms (“Parody” 99). In this paradox of the carnival she locates “the underlying principle of all parodic discourse: the paradox of its authorized transgression of norms” (99). Terry Eagleton views carnival in terms of effectiveness: “[c]arnival [. . .] is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art” (qtd. in Stallybrass and White, 13).

[xxx] The legitimacy of the transaction I suggest can also be supported by the fact that several commentators have already pointed out that Bakhtin’s ideas on identity constitution are “couched in aesthetic terms” in “Author and Hero” (Thomson 212). For instance, Emerson and Morson note that “Bakhtin intends not only to describe aesthetic activity, but also to consider the total project of *selfhood*” (qtd. in Thomson 212, emphasis added).

[xxxi] The Hungarian philosophers’ names appear without accents in the sources I have used.

[xxxii] The original arrangement of the lines is retained in the citations I take from *The Woods*.

[xxxiii] Mamet defines *Oleanna*’s theme as follows: its “central interaction is not about sexual harassment. It’s about power” (qtd. in Ryan, *Power Play* 393).

[xxxiv] Bakhtin elucidates the meaning of *overshadowing* as follows: “’Overshadowing’ [episkiasis, obumbratio]: the Russian word for ‘overshadowing’ implies the power to shelter, protect, and bless or bestow blessings. The term derives from the Bible. cf. Luke 1:35: ‘The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee’” (“Author and Hero” 238).