

Academic Dystopia: Teaching Incompetency and Sex in Contemporary American Drama

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Received: December 2, 2014 Accepted: January 4, 2015 Online Published: May 31, 2015

doi:10.5539/ells.v5n2p10 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v5n2p10>

Abstract

This paper explores the negative patterns of dramatizing academic professors in two American plays: David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992) and R. A. Gurney's *Human Events* (2001). My research considers the adaptation of professors and the way they are represented through their actions, behaviors, and relationships with students, friends, and the surrounding community in the two aforementioned plays. It seems to me that sex, alcoholism and teaching incompetency might be the major attributes related to male and female professors in recent and contemporary American theater.

Keywords: Contemporary American Drama, Academic Dystopia: Teaching Incompetency and Sex

1. Introduction: Negative Models of Professors on Stage

Professors have been historically dramatized in a good number of American, British and European plays. This character appears in many recent plays including Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962), Simon Gray's *Butley* (1971), Willy Russell's *Educating Rita* (1980), Aria Irene Fornes's *Dr. Kheal* (1985), Andre Alexis's *Lambton Kent* (1999), Mark F. Jenkins's *All Powers are Necessary and Convenient* (2000), Hannie Rayson's *Life after George* (2002), and David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (2006). Although this paper is ultimately concerned with David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992) and R. A. Gurney's *Human Events* (2001), I focus occasionally and initially on Russell's *Educating Rita* as a British example and Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as being an earlier American one. These two examples might be helpful as we approach the targeted plays. What is very common between the two examples, with which I start, and the other two American plays in which I am genuinely interested in this research is that they all develop negative models of professors. Desire in most forms—sexual, political and economic— and its manifestations in alcoholism and teaching incompetency are key attributes of this character as it is dramatized in these plays. While these negative attributes of the professor character might vary from one play and character to another, the professors we see in these plays are ruled at least by one of these negative attributes which are ultimately responsible for the downfall of this academic character.

1.1 *Educating Rita*

Published in 1980, Russell's *Educating Rita* is a British play in which a female scholar character influences her professor's character positively. The entire action of Russell's play takes place in a professor's office, and happens between two characters—the professor and his female student. Rita, the female student, has an extraordinary passion for knowledge and education. Unlike Rita, Frank, the alcoholic professor, has no desire for teaching. In fact, Rita ends up to be the positive educator when Frank decides to stop drinking by the end of the play as a result of their interaction.

Russell's Frank is an example of the negative representation of the character of professor in British drama. Act 1 opens with introducing the alcoholic nature of this professor placing whisky bottles behind his bookcase. It is important for him to stop by the bar after he is done with his classes and faculty meetings. When his girlfriend calls and invites him for dinner, he insists, "I distinctly remember saying that I would be late...yes. Yes, I probably shall go to the pub afterwards, I shall need to go to the pub afterwards..." (p. 279). Frank also believes that he is a bad teacher. When he first meets with Rita, he tries not to help her out because she seems to be a serious student who wants to learn and achieve something in life. Frank describes himself as an "appalling" teacher. He refers to most of his students as "appalling" as well. He admits his poor level of teaching and he advises Rita to leave his class and never

come back to him:

Rita: When d' y' actually, y' know, start teaching me?

Frank: What can I teach you?

Rita: Everything

Frank: *Leans on the filing cabinet, drinks...*

I will make a bargain with you. Yes? I'll tell you everything I know—but if I do that you must promise never to come back here. I am actually an appalling teacher. Most of the time, you see, it does not actually matter—appalling teaching is quite in order for most of my appalling students. (p. 292)

In fact, Frank is sexually attracted to his female student. He makes serious advances toward Rita who rejects them with firm kindness. In the second scene of act one, we read:

Frank: What I would actually like is to take you by hand and run out of this room forever.

Rita: (*Going back to her chair*) Tch—be serious . . .

Frank: I am. Right now there's a thousand things I'd rather do than teach; most of them with you, young lady . . .

Rita: (*Smiling gently*) Tch. Oh sod off . . . you just like saying things like that. (p. 303)

On the other hand, Rita always takes a positive attitude toward her teacher. She believes that a teacher-student-relationship should never be sexual. When Frank says that Rita's husband may assume a sexual affair between both of them, Rita totally disagrees with Frank's assumption. "You are my teacher. I have told him [her husband]" (315). Rita makes a positive change in Frank's life. He stops drinking and starts to adopt new possibilities for teaching and living as a result of his interaction with Rita. All in all, Rita is an example of the positive image of the scholar character in drama while Frank is an example of the alcoholic, impotent professor. He believes that he is an appalling teacher and tries to sleep with his female student. Obviously, he is a negative representation of the professor character on stage.

1.2 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In American drama, Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is an example of "academic drama" because the two husbands in the play are professors. In Albee's play, after a party, Professor George and his wife Martha, the daughter of the university president where George works, invite a new professor named Nick and his wife, Honey, to their house. George and his wife keep drinking and fighting all the time, while Nick, the younger professor and his wife Honey are embarrassed continuously by George and Martha.

Similar to Russell's Frank, George is a negative representation of the alcoholic professor character. Sexuality also appears in this play. George and his wife are preoccupied with sexual affairs. George says,

Nick: it's just I don't like to...become involved...uh...in other people's affairs.

George: Well, you'll get over that...small college and all. Musical beds is the faculty sport around here.

Nick: Sir?

George: I said, musical beds is the faculty favorite sport....Never mind. (p. 34)

George is not the only negative image of the professor character in this play. Nick is also another negative image of the professor character. Martha, George's wife, kisses Nick twice. Then, she "slips her hand between his legs". Nick "seems uncertain, but does not move. He resists a little before he agrees to give her another kiss" (Albee 163-164). Nick reveals the real reason why he does not want to kiss Martha that he is afraid to be caught by George. Martha undervalues this reason saying,

Martha: George? Don't worry about him. Besides, who could object for a friendly little kiss? It is all in the faculty.

(*They both laugh, quietly . . . Nick a little nervous*)

We are close-knit family here . . . Daddy always says so . . . Daddy wants us to get to know each other . . . that's what he had the party for tonight. So c'mon . . . let's get to know each other a little bit.

Nick: it is not because I don't want to . . . believe me . . .

Martha: You are scientist, aren't you? C'mon . . . make a little experiment. Experiment on old Martha.

Nick: Not very old . . . (p. 165)

Nick ends up kissing Martha who considers his action a “nice change.” George watches his wife while kissing Nick but he does not react. Instead, he makes a compliment to his wife saying, “My dove . . . you look . . . radiant” (p. 166-167). Albee’s play suggests unfaithful marriage life among faculty. George and Nick both are negative images of the professor character. George is an alcoholic professor and Nick breaks the rules of hospitality when he agrees to kiss Martha. Again and again, Albee’s play offers negative samples of the professor character in American drama. The type of Albee’s negative professors can be described as “professors of Desires.” Matthew Fullerty (2008) is the first researcher who brings the term “The Professor of Desire” into existence saying:

The Professor of Desire is therefore a particular type of professor who manipulates and seduces but not always happily for himself or his object of desire. He seeks comfort in an openly self-amused way that belies a certain eerie underbelly, smiling and smiling and still a devil. He is a lecherous lecturer for whom consequences are frequently non-existent, or justified poetically in his downfall; hence he manipulates his power and thereby undermines his traditional pastoral role as a teacher. (p. 10)

Fullerty focuses on professors in novel and the ultimate results of his research do not seem to be radically different if we match them to any negative model of this character in drama. Therefore, Russell’s Frank in *Educating Rita*, and Albee’s George and Nick in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* dwell in a negative continuum of literary traditions in which professor are usually misrepresented.

Inasmuch as Albee’s and Russell’s professors are negatively presented, Mamet’s *Oleanna* and Gurney’s *Human Events* present professors who are sexually attracted to their students or colleagues. Mamet’s and Gurney’s professors have negative attributes which make them Professors of Desire. Beside their sexuality, these professors might be considered incompetent teachers. These two main attributes—sexuality and teaching incompetency—are the most common aspects of Mamet’s and Gurney’s professors. Mamet’s John is incompetent professor who breaks the university regular rules when he decides to grant Carol a free “A” even before the end of the semester. He admits that he used to think that he is stupid. His sexuality and desire are also responsible for his fall. Similarly, Gurney’s professors—Anita, Porter and Chris—are all negative portraits of the professor character on stage. Anita cannot be a good teacher unless she has sex. She sleeps with a graduate assistant who is seventeen years younger than she is. She unsuccessfully attempts Chris then sleeps with Porter. Chris breaks the hospitality rules by being sexually attracted to Porter’s wife Nancy. He uses people to achieve his ends, while Porter is a parody of Mamet’s Professor John.

2. *Oleanna*

In Mamet’s *Oleanna*, the forty-year-old professor, named John, receives three visits from a twenty-year-old female student named Carol. The student claims that she has met difficulties understanding key issues as he attended the graduate school in the past. Interrupted continuously by phone calls, the two characters’ conversation leads to several arguments. As Professor John is answering her questions, Carol begins to believe that he thinks she is stupid. Because John tries to solve his female student’s problems in a personal manner, he is accused of sexual harassment, and later rape. The play ends with a physical confrontation between the student and the professor.

The question arises: What kind of professor is John? Caryn James contemplates, “He is a bad teacher and an egotist, guilty of poor judgment. Yet by the end... a villain” (p. 22). James’ contemplations are not surprising since John himself does not seem to have the self-esteem professors usually enjoy. Throughout the play, John reveals many personal facts about himself as a person and as a teacher. In Act 1, Mamet’s professor tells Carol that he was raised to believe that he is stupid (Mamet, p. 15-16). As the conversation goes on, we discover more negative attributes about Professor John. As a student, John had a hard time understanding even the easiest classes: “The simplest problem was beyond [him]” (p. 16). Soon after this fact, John reveals another important secret about himself. He is an incompetent teacher. John says, “They said I was incompetent . . . I become, I feel ‘unworthy,’ and ‘unprepared’ . . .” (p. 17). Later in Act 1, John’s point of view about education reveals his teaching incompetency. Although he is teaching a class on higher education, John believes that education is ‘hazing.’ Furthermore, he believes that teaching is artificial. He also mentions his hatred of schools and teachers; “I came late to teaching. And I found it artificial . . . I told you. I hated school, I hated teachers . . . I knew I was going to fail. Because I was a fuck up. I was just not goddamned good. (p. 22)

John’s point of view about tests also reveals much about the artificial nature of his professorship. He believes that tests “are designed . . . for idiots. By idiots” (p. 23). The tests discussion leads John to talk about the test and the interview he had to do with the tenure committee. While talking about this tenure committee, John seems confident that this committee “will find an index” of his “badness” (p. 24). Later, John decides to give Carol an “A” grade even before the semester ends. Thus, he loses his teaching authority over Carol. He begs her to drop

the accusations in Acts 2 and 3. Toward the very end of the play, John beats his student and calls her a “bitch” and a “cunt”. All these facts about John’s character challenge his professorship. Therefore, academically speaking, Professor John’s character fails to have even the minimum requirements of good professorship. In his article, “Dramatizing AIDS,” (1993) Richard Hornby refers to the teaching incompetency of Professor John and his unsuitability for the tenure position: “Mamet’s professor is so inept that we can hardly have any sympathy for him. I could only feel that anyone lacking in intellectual skills or moral fiber never deserves tenure in the first place” (p. 194). But teaching incompetency is not the only negative attribute of John’s character. He is also accused of sexually harassing his female student.

Interestingly, John does not try to defend his action while the audience is expecting him to refute Carol’s accusations of being sexually harassed by her professor. When Carol makes her claim, John says, “Well, all right” and he moves to read the report passed to him by the tenure committee (p. 47). Later on, Carol tells John; “You think you can deny that these things happened” (p. 48). John again does not deny “these things” when he could have at least said that did not happen. Carol also describes the story she is narrating to the tenure committee as “pornographic” (p. 51). Toward the end of Act 3, Carol also brings sexuality into discussion again, “You think I am frightened, repressed, confused, I don’t know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality . . .” (p. 68). Later, she claims; “[John] tried to rape [her]. [She] was leaving the office; [he] ‘pressed’ [himself] into [her]. [He] pressed [his] body into [her]” (p. 78).

Carol’s accusations of John do not only surprise Mamet’s audience, but they also surprise many critics and scholars since the play was published. In his article, “Mamet’s *Oleanna* in Context: Performance, Personal, Pedagogy,” (2005) Lee Papa asserts that the violent end of the last act makes “a phallogocentric revenge fantasy” of Mamet’s play; “The increasing violation of Carol’s personal space by John—the comforting arm, the blocked exit, the beating—perhaps makes the play turn all-too-possibly into a phallogocentric revenge fantasy by the end: The male defends wife, home, and life against the forces mounted against him” (p. 222). Whether it is phallogocentric or not, Carol describes her struggle with her teacher as pornographic. Thus, sexuality and desire are aspects of Professor John’s character. Needless to say, Mamet’s professor is another example of the negative image of the professor on stage. Mamet’s Professor John is criticized severely by many critics who take John’s negative professorship very seriously that they criticize him as if he is a real professor who did harass his female student in reality. Other negative readings of Mamet’s play are more concerned with language and education.

In her article, “The Politics of Gender, Language and Hierarchy in Mamet’s *Oleanna*,” (1995) Christine MacLeod expresses her uncomfortable reaction to Mamet’s *Oleanna*. She compares John to herself and she feels bad about inferior, repressed students. She also feels embarrassed to see such an image of the professor on stage (p. 203). On the other hand, Richard Badenhause (1998) takes the negative professorship of Mamet’s Professor John to the extreme when he sees this theatrical negative professorship as signs of corruption in American education in his article, “The Modern Academy Raging in the Dark: Misreading Mamet’s Political Incorrectness in *Oleanna*.” He says, “*Oleanna* ultimately explores the peril of inferior teaching and the subsequent misreading that necessarily follow in a pedagogical environment that tacitly reinforces hierarchical differences amongst its participants” (p. 2). Furthermore, Martin P. Levitt (2001) also takes Mamet’s play as reality in his article, “The Offense of Elitism.” He takes a personal stand against the entire play when he says: “I dislike Mamet’s *Oleanna*, for example, because I cannot believe any male professor would be such schmuck” (p. 536). Apparently, MacLeod, Badenhause, and Levitt take Mamet’s play as absolute reality.

In all the aforementioned critical evaluations of Mamet’s play, critics treat Mamet’s professor as if he were a real professor who harassed his female student in reality while John is nothing but a fictional character that has nothing to do with reality. Mamet himself confirms my point of view when he comments, in his *Writing in Restaurants* (1986), on the role of theater as an expression of the dream life we are looking for. Mamet says, “we respond to a drama to that extent to which it corresponds with to our dream life” (p. 8-9). When Mamet says “our dream life,” he might mean a different kind of reality or anything outside reality and exclusive of reality itself. *Oleanna*, thus, is but a piece of literature and what happens in this play does not reflect the actual reality of education in America. I am not trying to suggest that Mamet’s professor makes a good example of dramatized professors. Mamet’s professor is still an example of the negative image of the professor character in recent American drama. Rather, I am making a clear distinction between the fictional professor character on stage and professors in reality.

Only Dale M. Bauer (1998) succeeds in evaluating the character of the professor in his article “Indecent Proposals: Teachers in the Movies,” when he makes a clear distinction between reality and fiction. In this article, he talks about the image of the professor in several movies including the movie version of Mamet’s *Oleanna*. He argues that professors, especially English professors, are usually depicted as “professors of desires.” He also

talks about sexuality as a dominant side of their personalities. But he argues, “Such filmic images deny the reality of teaching. The English teacher’s work usually takes place ‘off-stage’ rather than in the classroom, according to these films . . . the teacher is often portrayed as a role model, a model of managing sexuality” (p. 302). I wholeheartedly support Bauer’s point of view that the professor character on stage does not reflect reality for several reasons. First, I do believe that the world of literature does not necessarily reflect everyday life, although it might reflect partial reality. Second, sexuality and desire are very dominant themes in all genres and time periods. Sexual harassment in particular has been prevalent in “the news, as in the Tailhook and West Point scandals, or in Paula Jones’s accusations against President Clinton” (James, 1994, p. 22). Thus, sexuality, desire, and related issues have become a prominent phenomenon in recent times, which cannot be related only to the professor character in recent American Drama. It is not surprising; therefore, that sexuality appears in academic plays as well as academic novels. Although some partial reality might be present somewhere on stage, the image of the professor in recent American drama in particular does not necessarily reflect the total picture of education in the United States.

3. Human Events

Mamet’s play is not the only example that shows negative models of the professor character on recent American stage. Gurney’s *Human Events* is full of negative portraits of this character. These Professors are driven by their sexual impulses and political ambitions. Gurney adds more negative attributes to the professor character than those we have seen in Mamet’s *Oleanna*. These negative attributes vary from one character to another—Chris, Porter and Anita. But their sexuality is the greatest common factor by which they are defined. Throughout the play, Professor Anita is represented as a prostitute rather than a professor.

Anita’s lecherous morals promote intimate experiences with everyone, whether graduate students or colleagues. All what we know about Anita, besides her sexuality, is that she wants to keep her non-tenured position because she needs money. Although her character is not introduced to us in detail, Anita plays a crucial role in this play. From her first appearance on stage, we learn about her sexuality as she tells Seymour and Porter about her lover, Arnie Bernstein. Anita informs them that she will miss the guy because she believes that “he was more fun” than her “ex-husband.” We also know from this meeting that she talks about sex everywhere and to everybody; Anita says, “Arnie Bernstein and I were lovers” (p. 17).

Anita also reveals that Arnie is seventeen years younger. As the conversation goes on, Anita tells Porter, “My teaching is terrible if I don’t have sex” (by saying this, Anita might be a parody of Soule—a well-known American professor—who stated the same fact). Again, Porter tells her that she mentioned this fact to him earlier as well (p. 18). Because her lover is gone, Anita starts to think of Chris as an alternative who can fill both positions—a lover and a teacher for the class Arnie no longer teaches. Anita describes Chris as “a nice looking man” and urges Porter to “invite Chris to assume Arnie’s position.” Because he understands Anita’s real intention, Porter brings her attention to the fact that Chris might be committed, so she should not build up great expectations (p. 19).

Later in Act 1, we learn that Chris does not express any sexual interest in her. However, the fact that Anita is easily available for those who pursue her is not as important as the role she plays in Act 2, where she successfully seduces Professor Porter (p. 56). Anita stands in Porter’s way and prevents him from leaving. She wipes his “fevered brow” and they end up having sex. Thus, Anita’s role in this play is crucial in the sense that it contributes to shaping the negative portrait of Porter himself. Furthermore, Anita herself is a negative image of the professor character.

Porter’s character is also similar to Mamet’s John in many aspects. From the very beginning of Act 1, Porter, the participant narrator of the play, confesses important facts that we don’t understand until we read the entire play. Porter narrates the play in a flashback strategy, which makes it really hard for us to believe what he reveals about himself in the first dialogue we hear from him. He addresses the audience, saying, “I suddenly found myself seething with anger, committing rape, and attempting murder all within a single second semester” (p. 1). As we read the play, we start to understand the circumstances under which he committed these crimes. The first and most significant crime Porter committed against himself took place when he helped Chris get the teaching position in his department. This crime makes him seem altruistic. But the way to hell is paved with good intentions. From a traditional point of view, this crime represents what could be called the tragic flaw, since it is responsible for the fall of this character. However, I would not classify Porter in this category because of two major attributes of his character. Sexuality and teaching incompetency make Porter a negative character, rather than a tragic figure. Thus, an accurate term for describing Porter is a protagonist.

In Act 1, we slowly discover Porter’s character. It was not until toward the end of this act that we start to see

signs of Porter's sexual promiscuity. Just like Mamet's John, Porter goes through a disturbing negative experience with a female student. This happens when a female student comes to Porter asking if she can transfer from Chris's section into his section. Porter asks, "Am I that good?" But the student says it is not because Porter is good or Chris is bad; rather, it is because she is "in love" with Chris (p. 37). As Porter is talking to this student, she starts crying. Here, Porter's behavior is more or less a parody or an echo of Mamet's John. Porter "touches her arm," trying to make her feel better (p. 38). As we have seen in *Oleanna*, it was also toward the end of Act 1 that John puts his arm around Carol's shoulders. Yet, both Carol and Porter's female students speak in the same tone and react in similar ways to their professors' behavior.

Although we never know if Gurney's female student really reports Porter to the Dean of Women or if Porter's behavior is genuine sympathy or a sexual advance, her reaction and Porter's behavior bring Mamet's John and Carol to our mind. Carol and Porter's female students treat their professors' actions in a similar way. Both demand that their professors not touch them and end up screaming for help. Thereupon, due to these similarities between the two plays, we can firmly say that Gurney's Porter is to some extent a parody or adaptation of Mamet's John since *Oleanna* is published around nine years earlier than *Human Events*. However, Porter's sexuality is more obvious than John's hypothetical sexuality. As I explained earlier, we build the sexuality argument of John's characters on logical assumptions rather than final reality. In fact, Mamet's professor never sleeps with anyone, although he might have attempted to seduce Carol. On the other hand, Gurney's Porter sleeps with his colleague Anita. In so doing, his sexuality goes beyond the kind of sexuality we see in Mamet's play since Porter's sexuality is an ultimate fact (p. 57).

Later, we read in the stage direction that Porter "comes on, buttoning his shirt" and Anita is doing the same thing. Thus, sexuality in the case of Porter's character is not mere assumptions. It is a distinct event. However, sexuality is not the only negative attribute that makes me consider Porter a parody or an echo of Mamet's John. Porter is also an incompetent teacher, and this fact makes Porter and John alike. Throughout the play, Porter talks about his book, but he never finishes it. Chris comments on the Porter's recurring misspellings in the first draft he gave to Chris for feedback (p. 41), while Seymour describes it as a "bad book." Seymour adds, "the typos are fine but the thinking is terrible... I wish I could tell how to revise it, but there is nothing there..." (p. 42). In Act 2, Porter reveals to Seymour the main reason why he is an English professor. It is because he could not have other options. Yet, he does not like his job (p. 51).

Toward the very end of the play, Porter confirms his unsuitability for teaching to Seymour. Porter says, "I am not right for this place, Seymour. And not right for this profession. You sensed it yourself" (83). Besides his sexuality and incompetent teaching abilities, Porter shares a third attribute with Mamet's John. Both professors like to end their struggles physically. Mamet's professor ends up beating his student, Carol. Similarly, Gurney's Professor Porter throws a roundhouse punch at Chris, who reels into the crowd (p. 81). Therefore, Porter's character is an adaptation or at least an echo of Mamet's John. Both characters, Gurney's Porter and Mamet's John, are negative representations of the professor character on stage.

The third major professor character I would like to comment on is the antagonist of this play, Professor Chris. Professor Porter reveals to the audience, early on, that his "downfall" began when he met Chris (p. 2). Thus, readers expect his character to be a negative one. The negative attributes of Chris' character exceed those of Porter. At first glance, Chris does not seem such a bad professor. But a deep analysis of his character leads to the conclusion that he is the most negative character in Gurney's play and the worst represented. Beside the fact that Chris is responsible for Porter's downfall, there are other dark sides of Chris' character.

Generally speaking, Chris has many of the negative attributes we can find in a bad person. In Act 2, while Chris is giving his speech in the general faculty meeting, Seymour reveals that Chris is a thief. Seymour says, "Now I know who stole the copy of Bartlett's from Department Headquarters" (p. 62). Furthermore, Chris gossips about his colleagues with students, an attribute that goes against the admirable traits of a professor's character. Chris is also an easy grader and, thus, his students are happy with him. He teaches his students reduced loads and gives free grades. Thus, Chris is similar to Mamet's John, who decides to give a free "A" grade to his female student Carol.

While Porter tries to convince Seymour to hire Chris, Seymour mentions two key facts about this character. Seymour believes that Chris is not qualified enough for a teaching position (p. 13) and that he "doesn't understand the word No." Seymour explains another reason why he doesn't want to hire Chris, saying, "I know the type. He's another one of those English armatures who wander through the world, sneaking into Mecca, climbing Mount Everest, and leaving trails of debris behind him" (p. 17). All these assumptions make readers wonder what kind of professor Chris might be.

Seymour's notion that Chris doesn't understand the meaning of the word 'no' makes us also feel that Chris is politically ambitious. He uses whoever and however to achieve his goals. His political ambition becomes apparent when we learn about the secret meeting he held at his apartment for the non-tenured faculty. The fact that he becomes in charge of the English department and the Dean of Humanities in a very short period of time does also confirm Chris's political desire. Chris has two major sorts of desire: his political ambitions and his sexuality. As Seymour predicted earlier, Chris is too politically ambitious in that he wants what he doesn't deserve. Nothing is impossible for Chris, who does not understand the word 'no.' His obsession to get what he doesn't deserve is very obvious when he talks to Porter about taking the "visiting dignitaries" office to be his own. We read in the play;

Chris: There is a lovely, empty office on the fourth floor, overlooking the river.

Porter: That's reserved for visiting dignitaries . . .

Chris: Ah, but no such luminaries

Are scheduled for this semester. (p. 24)

Chris also manipulates people to achieve his own goals. Porter describes Chris as an "opportunist" and a person who "uses people" (p. 74). Chris asks Porter to provide examples, and Porter explains how Chris used him to achieve his personal goals. We also see in the play how rude Chris is with Porter. While Porter is talking to him in Act 1, Chris ignores him and talks to one of his students. Porter exclaims, "You never cut me in on any of this." Chris answers rudely enough, "Who are you? My father confessor?" (p. 47). Porter tries to remind Chris of the kind things he has done for him, but Porter's kindness does not have any impact on Chris. When Porter asks Chris to hold a meeting if he intends to change his class so everybody can vote on it, Chris tells him that his request is too late and asks him to "stop managing other people's lives and start" living in his own (p. 48). Thus, Chris wants whatever he does not deserve. He wants whatever he wants, all the while using whomever to achieve his goals.

Sexuality is also a very important aspect of Chris's character. Chris expects everybody to sleep with him. While talking to Porter about the Department secretary, Chris assumes "like most secretaries, she expects me (Chris) to take her to bed" (p. 24). Later in Act 1, his sexuality with his students is highly suggested. Chris's female student comes to Porter asking if she can transfer from Chris's section into his section. Porter asks, "Am I that good?" The student says her request is not because Porter is good or Chris is bad, but because she is "in love" with Chris (p. 37). Later she adds, "He (Chris) said he could deal with it if we stayed in the Bible, but since we were about to move into the *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, he'd find me somewhat distracting... So he suggested I switch to you [porter]" (p. 38). Although we never know if Chris had sex with this student or not, sexuality is highly suggested. In Act 2, these suggestions become reality when we hear Nancy confessing to her husband Porter what happened between her and Chris. Here we learn that one time Porter and the children were not home and Chris was staying at their place. While Nancy was taking a bath, Chris asks her if he could bring her a cup of tea into the bathroom because "He said he had always admired my body and wanted to see me naked" (p. 68). Nancy agreed. Then, Chris "asked if he could get into the tub with" her. "So he took off his clothes and got" into the bathtub with Nancy (p. 69). In so doing, Chris breaks the rules of hospitality when he betrays the man who helped him to get a job, the man who opened his home to him, and the man who allowed him to dwell with his children. Therefore, Chris is a completely negative image of the professor character. Among the plays under consideration, he is the worst represented character of the professor.

4. Conclusion

Mamet's John and Gurney's professors—Anita, Porter, and Chris—are all negative portraits of the professor character on stage. Anita cannot be a good teacher unless she has sex. She sleeps with a graduate assistant who is seventeen years younger than she is. She unsuccessfully attempts to seduce Chris, and then sleeps with Porter. Chris breaks the hospitality rules by being sexually attracted to Porter's wife Nancy. He uses people to achieve his ends. Porter is an adaptation or an echo of Mamet's Professor John. Thus, they all are negative examples of the professor character in recent American drama. Dramatized professors on the American stage were not always associated to teaching competency or sexuality. We have seen some other plays in recent times in which professors are portrayed to have both positive and negative attributes without being sexually attracted to their students or being incompetent teachers.

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