



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

### Opponent's Review

Andrej Olah, "Power Struggle in David Mamet's Plays," MA thesis

This thesis seeks to address the question of "power" in a selection of David Mamet's plays. The thesis is a largely circumstantial one; Mr Olah cites a lack of critical focus on the question of "power struggle" as the impetus for his thesis; the methodology appears to be one principally of a thematic overview, without any clear theoretical consideration of what in fact constitutes power (e.g. Foucault, Zizek, et. al.). Consequently, there is the lack of any clearly formulated thesis. Instead Mr Olah has responded to perceived deficiencies in the work of other critics whose focus has, according to Mr Olah, tended to be bound up with issues of gender and the myth of masculinity. Here again, questions of myth and gender remain under-theorised, the result being that Mr Olah's position appears rather general and at times simplistic, inclining him to blandly repeat such clichés as "Mamet's world is a man's world."

Mr Olah makes passing reference to the role of language in Mamet's work vis-à-vis power struggle, but this could better have been the occasion for a more focused consideration of discourse and the discursive character both of power and of gender. There is a certain credulity towards the terms cited by theatre critics (e.g. staging masculinity), which tends to restrict the scope of Mr Olah's treatment of his topic. This is compounded by his decision only to address the more canonical of Mamet's plays, thereby reinforcing an established critical orthodoxy, rather than testing its validity.

In general, the work of Mamet has been well researched. Mr Olah attempts to integrate different opinions and attempts to challenge them within the critical framework he sets down. He devotes significant attention to Mamet's texts.

However, the lack of a clearly defined theoretical framework, vis-à-vis the questions of gender and power (etc.) detract from Mr Olah's textual analysis, which thus appears more circumstantial and thematic than critical. In addition, Mr Olah's language and expression is at times awkward and grammatically incorrect.

My questions repeat my observations: how does power function beyond its thematisation in the text? What values are at work; what are "lost" values? How does misogyny operate? How is power articulated in the use, for example, of silence in Mamet's work?

These questions notwithstanding, I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "very good" / 2.

15.9.2009  
Louis Armand, PhD