

HELMER. But surely I can send you . . .
 NORA. Nothing, nothing.
 HELMER. Can't I help you if ever you need it?
 NORA. I said 'no.' I don't accept things from strangers.
 HELMER. Nora, can I never be anything more to you than a stranger?
 NORA [*takes her bag*]. Ah, Torvald, only by a miracle of miracles . . .
 HELMER. Name it, this miracle of miracles!
 NORA. Both you and I would have to change to the point where. . . Oh, Torvald, I don't believe in miracles any more.
 HELMER. But I *will* believe. Name it! Change to the point where . . . ?
 NORA. Where we could make a real marriage of our lives together. Goodbye!

[*She goes out through the hall door.*]

HELMER [*sinks down on a chair near the door, and covers his face with his hands*]. Nora! Nora! [*He rises and looks round.*] Empty! She's gone!
 [*With sudden hope.*] The miracle of miracles . . . ?

[*The heavy sound of a door being slammed is heard from below.*]

[1879]



Topics for Critical Thinking and Writing

1. Near the beginning of the play, how does Mrs. Linde's presence help to define Nora's character? How does Nora's response to Krogstad's entrance tell us something about Nora?
2. What does Dr. Rank contribute to the play? If he were eliminated, what would be lost?
3. Can it be argued that although at the end Nora goes out to achieve self-realization, her abandonment of her children—especially to Torvald's loathsome conventional morality—is a crime? (By the way, exactly why does Nora leave the children? She seems to imply, in some passages, that because she forged a signature she is unfit to bring them up. But do you agree with her?)
4. Michael Meyer, in his splendid biography *Henrik Ibsen*, says that the play is not so much about women's rights as about "the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is, and to strive to become that person." What evidence can you offer to support or refute this interpretation?
5. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* Bernard Shaw says that Ibsen, reacting against a common theatrical preference for strange situations, "saw that . . . the more familiar the situation, the more interesting the play. Shakespear had put ourselves on the stage but not our situations. Our uncles seldom murder our fathers and . . . marry our mothers. . . . Ibsen . . . gives us not only ourselves, but ourselves in our own situations. The things that happen to his stage figures are things that happen to us. One consequence is that his plays are much more important to us than Shakespear's. Another is that they are capable both of hurting us cruelly and of filling us with excited hopes of escape from idealistic tyrannies, and with visions of intenser life in the future." How much of this do you believe?

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DAVID MAMET



David Mamet was born in Chicago in 1947, and was educated at Goddard College. A screenwriter and director as well as a playwright, he has occasionally taught courses in film. In 1976 his play *American Buffalo* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best American play, and in 1984 *Glengarry Glen Ross* won the Pulitzer Prize. *Oleanna* was first produced in 1992. "All my plays," he has said, "attempt to bring out the poetry in the plain, everyday language people use."

Oleanna

The want of fresh air does not seem much to affect the happiness of children in a London alley: the greater part of them sing and play as though they were on a moor in Scotland. So the absence of a genial mental atmosphere is not commonly recognized by children who have never known it. Young people have a marvelous faculty of either dying or adapting themselves to circumstances. Even if they are unhappy—very unhappy—it is astonishing how easily they can be prevented from finding it out, or at any rate from attributing it to any other cause than their own sinfulness.

—Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*

"Oh, to be in Oleanna,
 That's where I would rather be.
 Than be bound in Norway
 And drag the chains of slavery."

—Folk Song

CHARACTERS

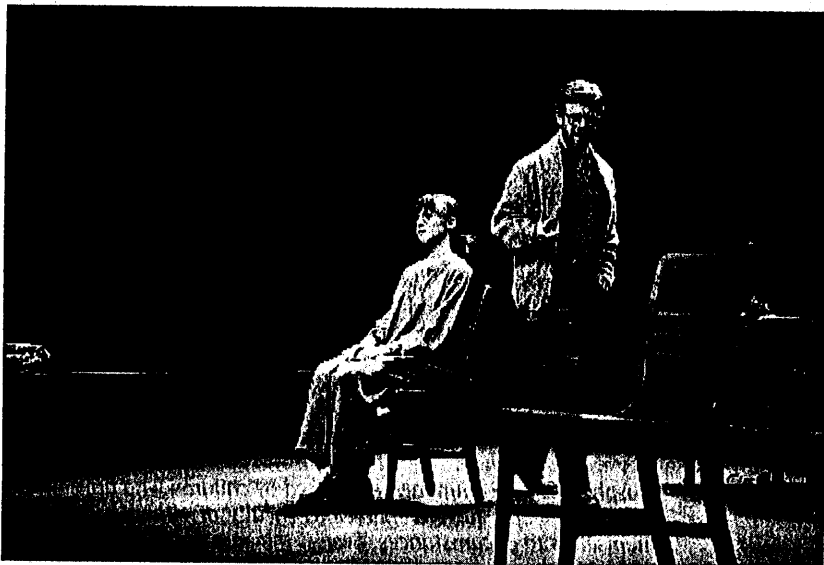
CAROL A woman of twenty

JOHN A man in his forties

The play takes place in John's office.

One

John is talking on the phone. Carol is seated across the desk from him.
 JOHN [*on phone*]. And what about the land. [*Pause*] The land. And what about the land? [*Pause*] What about it? [*Pause*] No. I don't understand. Well, yes, I'm I'm . . . no, I'm *sure* it's signif. . . I'm sure it's significant. [*Pause*] Because it's significant to mmmmmm . . . did you call Jerry? [*Pause*] Because . . . no, no, no, no, no. What did they say . . . ? Did you speak to the *real estate* . . . where *is* she . . . ? Well, well, all right. Where are her notes? Where are the notes we took with her. [*Pause*] I thought you were? No. No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that, I just thought that I saw you, when we were there . . . what . . . ? I thought I saw you with a *pencil*. WHY NOW? is what I'm say . . . well, that's why I say "call Jerry." Well, I can't right now, be . . . no, I *didn't* schedule any . . . Grace: I *didn't* . . . I'm well aware . . . Look: Look. Did you call Jerry? Will you call Jerry . . . ? Because I can't now. I'll be there, I'm sure I'll be there in fifteen, in twenty. I intend to. No, we aren't *going* to lose the, we aren't *going* to lose the house. Look: Look, I'm



Rebecca Pidgeon and W. H. Macy in *Oleanna*, 1992. (© Brigitte Lacombe)

not minimizing it. The "easement." Did she say "easement"? [Pause] What did she say; is it a "term of art," are we bound by it . . . I'm sorry . . . [Pause] are: yes. Bound by . . . Look: [He checks his watch.] before the other side goes home, all right? "a term of art." Because: that's right [Pause] The yard for the boy. Well, that's the whole . . . Look: I'm going to meet you there . . . [He checks his watch.] Is the realtor there? All right, tell her to show you the basement again. Look at the *this* because . . . Bec . . . I'm leaving in, I'm leaving in ten or fifteen . . . Yes. No, no, I'll meet you at the new . . . That's a good. If he thinks it's necc . . . you tell Jerry to meet . . . All right? We aren't going to lose the deposit. All right? I'm sure it's going to be . . . [Pause] I hope so. [Pause] I love you, too. [Pause] I love you, too. As soon as . . . I will.

[He bangs up.] [He bends over the desk and makes a note.] [He looks up.] [To Carol:] I'm sorry . . .

CAROL. [Pause] What is a "term of art"?

JOHN. [Pause] I'm sorry . . . ?

CAROL. [Pause] What is a "term of art"?

JOHN. Is that what you want to talk about?

CAROL. . . . to talk about . . . ?

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]

CAROL. . . . don't I think . . . ?

JOHN. Mmm?

CAROL. . . . did I . . . ?

JOHN. . . . what?

CAROL. Did . . . did I . . . did I say something wr . . .

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]

CAROL. You don't know what it means . . . ?

JOHN. I'm not sure that I know what it means. It's one of those things, perhaps you've had them, that, you look them up, or have someone explain them to you, and you say "aha," and, you immediately *forget* what . . .

CAROL. You don't do that.

JOHN. . . . I . . . ?

CAROL. You don't do . . .

JOHN. . . . I don't, what . . . ?

CAROL. . . . for . . .

JOHN. . . . I don't for . . .

CAROL. . . . no . . .

JOHN. . . . forget things? Everybody does that.

CAROL. No, they don't.

JOHN. They don't . . .

CAROL. No.

JOHN. [Pause] No. Everybody does that.

CAROL. Why would they do that . . . ?

JOHN. Because. I don't know. Because it doesn't interest them.

CAROL. No.

JOHN. I think so, though. [Pause] I'm sorry that I was distracted.

CAROL. You don't have to say that to me.

JOHN. You paid me the compliment, or the "obeisance"—all right—of coming in here . . . All right. Carol. I find that I am at a *standstill*. I find that I . . .

CAROL. . . . what . . .

JOHN. . . . one moment. In regard to your . . . to your . . .

CAROL. Oh, oh. You're buying a new house!

JOHN. No, let's get on with it.

CAROL. "Get on"? [Pause]

JOHN. I know how . . . believe me. I know how . . . potentially *bumiliating* these . . . I have no desire to . . . I have no desire other than to help you. But: [He picks up some papers on his desk.] I won't even say "but." I'll say that as I go back over the . . .

CAROL. I'm just, I'm just trying to . . .

JOHN. . . . no, it will not do.

CAROL. . . . what? What will . . . ?

JOHN. No. I see, I see what you, it . . . [He gestures to the papers.] but your work . . .

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* . . .

JOHN. . . . but . . .

CAROL. I don't . . . lots of the *language* . . .

JOHN. . . please . . .

CAROL. The *language*, the "things" that you say . . .

JOHN. I'm sorry. No. I don't think that that's true.

CAROL. It *is* true. I . . .

JOHN. I think . . .

CAROL. It *is* true.

JOHN. . . I . . .

CAROL. Why would I . . . ?

JOHN. I'll tell you why: you're an incredibly bright girl.

CAROL. . . I . . .

JOHN. You're an incredibly . . . you have no problem with the . . . Who's kidding who?

CAROL. . . I . . .

JOHN. No. No. I'll tell you why. I'll tell . . . I think you're *angry*, I . . .

CAROL. . . why would I . . .

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 . . .

JOHN. [Picks up paper.] Here: Please: Sit down. [Pause] Sit down. [Reads from her paper.] "I think that the ideas contained in this work express the author's feelings in a way that he intended, based on his results." What can that mean? Do you see? What . . .

CAROL. I, the best that I . . .

JOHN. I'm saying, that perhaps this course . . .

CAROL. No, no, no, you can't, you can't . . . I have to . . .

JOHN. . . how . . .

CAROL. . . I have to pass it . . .

JOHN. Carol, I:

CAROL. I *have* to pass this course, I . . .

JOHN. Well.

CAROL. . . don't you . . .

JOHN. Either the . . .

CAROL. . . I . . .

JOHN. . . either the, I . . . either the *criteria* for judging progress in the class are . . .

CAROL. No, no, no, no, I have to pass it.

JOHN. Now, look: I'm a human being, I . . .

CAROL. I did what you told me. I did, I did everything that, I read your *book*, you told me to buy your book and read it. Everything you *say* I . . . [She gestures to her notebook.] [The phone rings.] I do. . . Ev . . .

JOHN. . . look:

CAROL. . . everything I'm told . . .

JOHN. Look. Look. I'm not your *father*. [Pause]

CAROL. What?

JOHN. I'm.

CAROL. Did I say you were my father?

JOHN. . . no . . .

CAROL. Why did you say that . . . ?

JOHN. I . . .

CAROL. . . why . . . ?

JOHN. . . in class I . . . [He picks up the phone.] [Into phone:] Hello. I can't talk now. Jerry? Yes? I underst . . . I can't talk now. I know . . . I know . . . Jerry. I can't *talk* now. Yes, I. Call me back in . . . Thank you. [He hangs up.] [To Carol:] What do you want me to do? We are two people, all right? Both of whom have subscribed to . . .

CAROL. No, no . . .

JOHN. . . certain arbitrary . . .

CAROL. No. You have to help me.

JOHN. Certain institutional . . . you tell me what you want me to do. . . You tell me what you want me to . . .

CAROL. How can I go back and tell them the *grades* that I . . .

JOHN. . . what can I do . . . ?

CAROL. *Teach* me. *Teach* me.

JOHN. . . I'm trying to teach you.

CAROL. I read your book. I read it. I don't under . . .

JOHN. . . you don't understand it.

CAROL. No.

JOHN. Well, perhaps it's not well *written* . . .

CAROL. [simultaneously with "written"]. No. No. No. I want to *understand* it.

JOHN. What don't you understand? [Pause]

CAROL. *Any* of it. What you're trying to say. When you talk about . . .

JOHN. . . yes . . . ? [She consults her notes.]

CAROL. "Virtual warehousing of the young" . . .

JOHN. "Virtual warehousing of the young." If we artificially prolong adolescence . . .

CAROL. . . and about "The Curse of Modern Education."

JOHN. . . well . . .

CAROL. I don't . . .

JOHN. Look. It's just a *course*, it's just a *book*, it's just a . . .

CAROL. No. No. There are *people* out there. People who came *here*. To know something they didn't *know*. Who *came* here. To be *helped*. To be *helped*. So someone would *help* them. To *do* something. To *know* something. To get, what do they say? "To get on in the world." How can I do that if I don't, if I fail? But I don't *understand*. I don't *understand*. I don't understand what anything means . . . and I walk around. From morning 'til night: with this one thought in my head. I'm *stupid*.

JOHN. No one thinks you're stupid.

CAROL. No? What am I . . . ?

JOHN. I . . .

CAROL. . . what am I, then?

JOHN. I think you're angry. Many people are. 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 and I . . .

CAROL. . . . you think I'm nothing . . .

JOHN. . . . have an appointment with a *realtor*, and with my wife and . . .

CAROL. You think that I'm stupid.

JOHN. No. I certainly don't.

CAROL. You said it.

JOHN. No. I did not.

CAROL. You did.

JOHN. When?

CAROL. . . . you . . .

JOHN. No. I never did, or never would say that to a student, and . . .

CAROL. You said, "What can that mean?" [Pause] "What can that mean?" . . . [Pause]

JOHN. . . . and what did that mean to you . . . ?

CAROL. That meant I'm stupid. And I'll never learn. That's what that meant. And you're right.

JOHN. . . . I . . .

CAROL. But then. But then, what am I doing here . . . ?

JOHN. . . . if you thought that I . . .

CAROL. . . . when nobody wants me, and . . .

JOHN. . . . if you interpreted . . .

CAROL. Nobody *tells* me anything. And I *sit* there . . . in the *corner*. In the *back*. And everybody's talking about "this" all the time. And "concepts," and "precepts" and, and, and, and, and, and, WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? And I read your book. And they said, "Fine, go in that class." Because you talked about responsibility to the young. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS AND I'M FAILING . . .

JOHN. May . . .

CAROL. No, you're right. "Oh, hell." I failed. Flunk me out of it. It's garbage. Everything I do. "The ideas contained in this work express the author's feelings." That's right. That's right. I know I'm stupid. I know what I am. [Pause] I know what I am, Professor. You don't have to tell me. [Pause] It's pathetic. Isn't it?

JOHN. . . . Aha . . . [Pause] Sit down. Sit down. Please. [Pause] Please sit down.

CAROL. Why?

JOHN. I want to talk to you.

CAROL. Why?

JOHN. Just sit down. [Pause] Please. Sit down. Will you, please . . . ? [Pause. *She does so.*] Thank you.

CAROL. What?

JOHN. I want to tell you something.

CAROL. [Pause] What?

JOHN. Well, I know what you're talking about.

CAROL. No. You don't.

JOHN. I think I do. [Pause]

CAROL. How can you?

JOHN. I'll tell you a story about myself. [Pause] Do you mind? [Pause] I was raised to think myself stupid. That's what I want to tell you. [Pause]

CAROL. What do you mean?

JOHN. Just what I said. I was brought up, and my earliest, and most persistent memories are of being told that I was stupid. "You have such *intelligence*. Why must you behave so *stupidly*?" Or, "Can't you *understand*? Can't you *understand*?" And I could *not* understand. I could *not* understand.

CAROL. What?

JOHN. The simplest problem. Was beyond me. It was a mystery.

CAROL. What was a mystery?

JOHN. How people learn. How *I* could learn. Which is what I've been speaking of in class. And of *course* you can't hear it. Carol. Of *course* you can't. [Pause] I used to speak of "real people," and wonder what the *real* people did. The *real* people. Who were they? *They* were the people other than myself. The *good* people. The *capable* people. The people who could do the things, *I* could not do: learn, study, retain . . . all that *garbage*—which is what I have been talking of in class, and that's *exactly* what I have been talking of—If you are told . . . Listen to this. If the young child is told he cannot understand. Then he takes it as a *description* of himself. What am I? I am *that which can not understand*. And I saw you out there, when we were speaking of the concepts of . . .

CAROL. I can't understand any of them.

JOHN. Well, then, that's *my* fault. That's not your fault. And that is not verbiage. That's what I firmly hold to be the truth. And I am sorry, and I owe you an apology.

CAROL. Why?

JOHN. And I suppose that I have had some *things* on my mind. . . . We're buying a *house*, and . . .

CAROL. People said that you were stupid . . . ?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. When?

JOHN. I'll tell you when. Through my life. In my childhood; and, perhaps, they stopped. But I heard them continue.

CAROL. And what did they say?

JOHN. They said I was incompetent. Do you see? And when I'm tested the, the, the *feelings* of my youth about the *very subject of learning* come up. And I . . . I become, I feel "unworthy," and "unprepared." . . .

CAROL. . . . yes.

JOHN. . . . eh?

CAROL. . . . yes.

JOHN. And I feel that I must fail. [Pause]

CAROL. . . . but then you *do* fail. [Pause] You have to. [Pause] Don't you?

JOHN. *A pilot*. Flying a plane. The pilot is flying the plane. He thinks: Oh, my *God*, my mind's been drifting! Oh, my *God*! What kind of a cursed imbecile am I, that I, with this so precious cargo of *Life* in my charge, would allow my attention to wander. Why was I born? How deluded are those who put their trust in me, . . . et cetera, so on, and he crashes the plane.

CAROL. [Pause] He could just . . .

JOHN. That's right.

CAROL. He could say:

JOHN. My attention *wandered* for a moment . . .

CAROL. . . . uh huh . . .

JOHN. I had a *thought* I did not like . . . but now:

CAROL. . . . but now it's . . .

JOHN. That's what I'm telling you. It's time to put my attention . . . see: it is not: this is what I learned. It is Not Magic. Yes. Yes. *You*. You are going to be frightened. When faced with what may or may not be but which you are going to perceive as a test. You will become frightened. And you will say: "I am incapable of . . ." and everything *in* you will think these two things.

"I must. But I can't." And you will think: Why was I born to be the laughingstock of a world in which everyone is better than I? In which I am entitled to nothing. Where I can not learn.

[Pause]

CAROL. Is that . . . [Pause] Is that what I have . . . ?

JOHN. Well. I don't know if I'd put it that way. Listen: I'm talking to you as I'd talk to my son. Because that's what I'd like him to have that I never had. 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*, . . . but . . .

CAROL. Why would you want to be personal with me?

JOHN. Well, you see? That's what I'm saying. We can only interpret the behavior of others through the screen we . . . [The phone rings.] Through . . . [To phone:] Hello . . . ? [To Carol:] Through the screen we create. [To phone:] Hello. [To Carol:] Excuse me a moment. [To phone:] Hello? No, I can't talk nnn . . . I know I did. In a few . . . I'm . . . is he coming to the . . . yes. I talked to him. We'll meet you at the No, because I'm with a *student*. It's going to be fff . . . This is important, too. I'm with a *student*, Jerry's going to . . . Listen: the sooner I get off, the sooner I'll be down, all right. I love you. Listen, listen, I said "I love you," it's going to work out with the, because I feel that it is, I'll be right down. All right? Well, then it's going to take as long as it takes. [He hangs up.] [To Carol:] I'm sorry.

CAROL. What was that?

JOHN. There are some problems, as there usually are, about the final agreements for the new house.

CAROL. You're buying a new house.

JOHN. That's right.

CAROL. Because of your promotion.

JOHN. Well, I suppose that that's right.

CAROL. Why did you stay here with me?

JOHN. Stay here.

CAROL. Yes. When you should have gone.

JOHN. Because I like you.

CAROL. You like me.

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. Why?

JOHN. Why? Well? Perhaps we're similar. [Pause] Yes. [Pause]

CAROL. You said "everyone has problems."

JOHN. Everyone has problems.

CAROL. Do they?

JOHN. Certainly.

CAROL. You do?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. What are they?

JOHN. Well. [Pause] Well, you're perfectly right. [Pause] 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? Of course I have problems. As you saw.

CAROL. . . . with what?

JOHN. With my *wife* . . . with *work* . . .

CAROL. With work?

JOHN. Yes. And, and, perhaps my problems are, do you see? *Similar* to yours.

CAROL. Would you tell me?

JOHN. All right. [Pause] I came *late* to teaching. And I found it Artificial. The notion of "I know and you do not"; and I saw an *exploitaton* in the education process. I told you. I hated school, I hated teachers. I hated everyone who was in the position of a "boss" because I *knew*—I didn't *think*, mind you, I *knew* I was going to fail. Because I was a fuckup. I was just no god-damned good. When I . . . late in life . . . [Pause] When I *got out from under* . . . when I worked my way out of the need to fail. When I . . .

CAROL. How do you do that? [Pause]

JOHN. You have to look at what you are, and what you feel, and how you act. And, finally, you have to look at how you act. And say: If that's what I *did*, that must be how I think of myself.

CAROL. I don't understand.

JOHN. If I fail all the time, it must be that I think of myself as a failure. If I do not want to think of myself as a failure, perhaps I should begin by *succeeding* now and again. Look. The tests, you see, which you encounter, in school, in college, in life, were designed, in the most part, for idiots. *By* idiots. There is no need to fail at them. They are not a test of your worth. They are a test of your ability to retain and spout back misinformation. Of course you fail them. They're *nonsense*. And I . . .

CAROL. . . . no . . .

JOHN. Yes. They're *garbage*. They're a *joke*. Look at me. Look at me. The Tenure Committee. The Tenure Committee. Come to judge me. The Bad Tenure Committee.

The "Test." Do you see? They put me to the test. Why, they had people voting on me I wouldn't employ to wax my car. And yet, I go before the Great Tenure Committee, and I have an urge, to *vomit*, to, to, to puke my *badness* on the table, to show them: "I'm no good. Why would you pick *me*?"

CAROL. They granted you tenure.

JOHN. Oh no, they announced it, but they haven't *signed*. Do you see? "At any moment . . ."

CAROL. . . . mmm . . .

JOHN. "They might not *sign*" . . . I might not . . . the *house* might not go through . . . Eh? Eh? They'll find out my "dark secret." [Pause]

CAROL. . . . what is it . . . ?

JOHN. There *isn't* one. But *they* will find an index of my badness . . .

CAROL. Index?

JOHN. A " . . . pointer." A "Pointer." You see? Do you see? I *understand* you. I. Know. That. Feeling. Am I entitled to my job, and my nice *home*, and my *wife*, and my *family*, and so on. This is what I'm saying: That theory of education which, that *theory*:

CAROL. I . . . I . . . [Pause]

JOHN. What?

CAROL. I . . .

JOHN. What?

CAROL. I want to know about my grade. [Long pause]

JOHN. Of course you do.

CAROL. Is that bad?

JOHN. No.

CAROL. Is it bad that I asked you that?

JOHN. No.
 CAROL. Did I upset you?
 JOHN. No. And I apologize. Of course you want to know about your grade. And, of course, you can't concentrate on anyth . . . [*The telephone starts to ring.*] Wait a moment.
 CAROL. I should go.
 JOHN. I'll make you a deal.
 CAROL. No, you have to . . .
 JOHN. Let it ring. I'll make you a deal. You stay here. We'll start the whole course over. I'm going to say it was not you, it was I who was not paying attention. We'll start the whole course over. Your grade is an "A." Your final grade is an "A." [*The phone stops ringing.*]
 CAROL. But the class is only half over . . .
 JOHN [*simultaneously with "over"*]. Your grade for the whole term is an "A." If you will come back and meet with me. A few more times. Your grade's an "A." Forget about the paper. You didn't like it, you didn't like writing it. It's not important. What's important is that I awake your interest, if I can, and that I answer your questions. Let's start over. [*Pause*]
 CAROL. Over. With what?
 JOHN. Say this is the beginning.
 CAROL. The beginning.
 JOHN. Yes.
 CAROL. Of what?
 JOHN. Of the class.
 CAROL. But we can't start over.
 JOHN. I say we can. [*Pause*] I say we can.
 CAROL. But I don't believe it.
 JOHN. Yes, I know that. But it's true. What is The Class but you and me? [*Pause*]
 CAROL. There are rules.
 JOHN. Well. We'll break them.
 CAROL. How can we?
 JOHN. We won't tell anybody.
 CAROL. Is that all right?
 JOHN. I say that it's fine.
 CAROL. Why would you do this for me?
 JOHN. I like you. Is that so difficult for you to . . .
 CAROL. Um . . .
 JOHN. There's no one here but you and me. [*Pause*]
 CAROL. All right. I did not understand. When you referred . . .
 JOHN. All right, yes?
 CAROL. When you referred to hazing.
 JOHN. Hazing.
 CAROL. You wrote, in your book. About the comparative . . . the comparative . . . [*She checks her notes.*]
 JOHN. Are you checking your notes . . . ?
 CAROL. Yes.
 JOHN. Tell me in your own . . .
 CAROL. I want to make sure that I have it right.
 JOHN. No. Of course. You want to be exact.
 CAROL. I want to know everything that went on.
 JOHN. . . . that's good.
 CAROL. . . . so I . . .

JOHN. That's very good. But I was suggesting, many times, that that which we wish to retain is retained oftentimes, I think, *better* with less expenditure of effort.
 CAROL. [*Of notes*] Here it is: you wrote of *hazing*.
 JOHN. . . . that's correct. Now: I said "hazing." It means ritualized annoyance. We 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. Why do we do it? Does it educate? In no sense. Well, then, what is higher education? It is something-other-than-useful.
 CAROL. What is "something-other-than-useful"?
 JOHN. It has become a ritual, it has become an article of faith. That all must be subjected to, or to put it differently, that all are entitled to Higher Education. And my point . . .
 CAROL. You disagree with that?
 JOHN. Well, let's address that. What do you think?
 CAROL. I don't know.
 JOHN. What do you think, though? [*Pause*]
 CAROL. I don't know.
 JOHN. I spoke of it in class. Do you remember my example?
 CAROL. Justice.
 JOHN. Yes. Can you repeat it to me? [*She looks down at her notebook.*] your notes? I ask you as a favor to me, so that I can see if my idea was interesting.
 CAROL. You said "justice" . . .
 JOHN. Yes?
 CAROL. . . . that all are entitled . . . [*Pause*] I . . . I . . . I . . .
 JOHN. Yes. To a speedy trial. To a fair trial. But they needn't be given a trial *at all* unless they stand accused. Eh? Justice is their right, should they choose to avail themselves of it, they should have a fair trial. It does not follow, of necessity, a person's life is incomplete without a trial in it. Do you see? My point is a confusion between equity and *utility* arose. 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, completely independent of . . .
 CAROL. . . . that it is prejudice that we should go to school?
 JOHN. Exactly. [*Pause*]
 CAROL. How can you say that? How . . .
 JOHN. Good. Good. *Good*. That's right! Speak up! What is a prejudice? An unreasoned belief. We are all subject to it. None of us is not. When it is threatened, or opposed, we feel anger, and feel, do we not? As you do now. Do you not? Good.
 CAROL. . . . but how can you . . .
 JOHN. . . . let us examine. Good.
 CAROL. How . . .
 JOHN. Good. Good. When . . .
 CAROL. I'M SPEAKING . . . [*Pause*]
 JOHN. I'm sorry.
 CAROL. How can you . . .
 JOHN. . . . I beg your pardon.
 CAROL. That's all right.
 JOHN. I beg your pardon.
 CAROL. That's all right.
 JOHN. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

CAROL. That's all right.
 JOHN. You were saying?
 CAROL. I was saying . . . I was saying . . . [*She checks her notes.*] How can you say in a class. Say in a college class, that college education is prejudice?
 JOHN. I said that our predilection for it . . .
 CAROL. Predilection . . .
 JOHN. . . you know what that means.
 CAROL. Does it mean "liking"?
 JOHN. Yes.
 CAROL. But how can you say that? That College . . .
 JOHN. . . that's my *job*, don't you know.
 CAROL. What is?
 JOHN. To provoke you.
 CAROL. No.
 JOHN. Oh. Yes, though.
 CAROL. To provoke me?
 JOHN. That's right.
 CAROL. To make me mad?
 JOHN. That's right. To force you . . .
 CAROL. . . . to make me mad is your job?
 JOHN. To force you to . . . listen: [*Pause*] Ah. [*Pause*] When I was young somebody told me, are you ready, the rich copulate less often than the poor. But when they do, they take more of their clothes off. Years. Years, mind you, I would compare experiences of my own to this dictum, saying, aha, this fits the norm, or ah, this is a variation from it. What did it mean? Nothing. It was some jerk thing, some school kid told me that took up room inside my head. [*Pause*]
 Somebody told *you*, and you hold it as an article of faith, that higher education is an unassailable good. This notion is so dear to you that when I question it you become angry. Good, Good, I say. Are not those the very things which we should question? I say college education, since the war, has become so a matter of course, and such a fashionable necessity, for those either of or aspiring to the new vast middle class, that we *espouse* it, as a matter of right, and have ceased to ask, "What is it good for?" [*Pause*]
 What might be some reasons for pursuit of higher education?
One: A love of learning.
Two: The wish for mastery of a skill.
Three: For economic betterment.

[*Stops. Makes a note.*]

CAROL. I'm keeping you.
 JOHN. One moment. I have to make a note . . .
 CAROL. It's something that I said?
 JOHN. No, we're buying a house.
 CAROL. You're buying the new house.
 JOHN. To go with the tenure. That's right. Nice *house*, close to the *private school* . . . [*He continues making his note.*] . . . We were talking of economic betterment [*Carol writes in her notebook.*] . . . I was thinking of the School Tax. [*He continues writing.*] [*To himself:*] . . . *where is it written* that I have to send my child to public school. . . . Is it a law that I have to improve the City Schools at the expense of my own interest? And, is this

not simply *The White Man's Burden*? Good. And [*Looks up to Carol*] . . . does this interest you?

CAROL. No. I'm taking notes . . .
 JOHN. You don't have to take notes, you know, you can just listen.
 CAROL. I want to make sure I remember it. [*Pause*]
 JOHN. I'm not lecturing you, I'm just trying to tell you some things I think.
 CAROL. What do you think?
 JOHN. Should all kids go to college? *Why* . . .
 CAROL. [*Pause*] To learn.
 JOHN. But if he does not learn.
 CAROL. If the child does not learn?
 JOHN. Then why is he in college? Because he was told it was his "right"?
 CAROL. Some might find college instructive.
 JOHN. I would hope so.
 CAROL. But how do they feel? Being told they are wasting their time?
 JOHN. I don't think I'm telling them that.
 CAROL. You said that education was "prolonged and systematic hazing."
 JOHN. Yes. It can be so.
 CAROL. . . . if education is so *bad*, why do you do it?
 JOHN. I do it *because I love it*. [*Pause*] Let's . . . I suggest you look at the demographics, wage-earning capacity, college- and non-college-educated men and women, 1855 to 1980, and let's see if we can wring some worth from the statistics. Eh? And . . .
 CAROL. No.
 JOHN. What?
 CAROL. I can't understand them.
 JOHN. . . . you . . . ?
 CAROL. . . . the "charts." The *Concepts*, the . . .
 JOHN. "Charts" are simply . . .
 CAROL. When I leave here . . .
 JOHN. Charts, do you see . . .
 CAROL. No, I can't . . .
 JOHN. You can, though.
 CAROL. NO, NO—I DON'T UNDERSTAND. DO YOU SEE??? I DON'T UNDERSTAND . . .
 JOHN. What?
 CAROL. *Any* of it. *Any* of it. I'm *smiling* in class, I'm *smiling*, the whole time. What are you *talking* about? What is everyone *talking* about? I don't *understand*. I don't know what it *means*. I don't know what it means to *be* here . . . 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 . . . I . . .

[*He goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder.*]

NO! [*She walks away from him.*]

JOHN. Sshhhhh.
 CAROL. No, I don't under . . .
 JOHN. Sshhhhhh.
 CAROL. I don't know what you're *saying* . . .
 JOHN. Sshhhhhh. It's all right.
 CAROL. . . . I have no . . .

JOHN. Sshhhhh. Sshhhhh. Let it go a moment. [Pause] Sshhhhh . . . let it go. [Pause] Just let it go. [Pause] Just let it go. It's all right. [Pause] Sshhhhh. [Pause] I understand . . . [Pause] What do you feel?

CAROL. I feel bad.

JOHN. I know. It's all right.

CAROL. I . . . [Pause]

JOHN. What?

CAROL. I . . .

JOHN. What? Tell me.

CAROL. I don't understand you.

JOHN. I know. It's all right.

CAROL. I . . .

JOHN. What? [Pause] What? Tell me.

CAROL. I can't tell you.

JOHN. No, you must.

CAROL. I can't.

JOHN. No. Tell me. [Pause]

CAROL. I'm bad? [Pause] Oh, God. [Pause]

JOHN. It's all right.

CAROL. I'm . . .

JOHN. It's all right.

CAROL. I can't talk about this.

JOHN. It's all right. Tell me.

CAROL. Why do you want to know this?

JOHN. I don't want to know. I want to know whatever you . . .

CAROL. I always . . .

JOHN. . . . good . . .

CAROL. I always . . . all my life . . . I have never told anyone this . . .

JOHN. Yes. Go on. [Pause] Go on.

CAROL. All of my life . . . [The phone rings.] [Pause. John goes to the phone and picks it up.]

JOHN. [into phone.] I can't talk now. [Pause] What? [Pause] Hmm. [Pause] All right, I . . . I. Can't. Talk. Now. No, no, no, I Know I did, but. . . What? Hello. What? She *what?* She *can't*, she said the agreement is void? How, how is the agreement *void?* *That's Our House.*

I have the *paper*; when we come down, next week, with the payment, and the paper, that house is . . . wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait: Did Jerry . . . is Jerry there? [Pause] Is *she* there . . . ? Does she have a *lawyer* . . . ? How the *hell*, how the *Hell*. That is . . . it's a question, you said, of the *easement*. I don't underst . . . it's not the *whole agreement*. It's just the *easement*, why would she? Put, put, put, *Jerry* on. [Pause] Jer, *Jerry*: What the *Hell* . . . that's my *house*. That's . . . Well, I'm no, no, no, I'm not coming ddd . . . List, *Listen*, screw her. You *tell* her. You, listen: I want you to take *Grace*, you take Grace, and get out of that house. You *leave* her there. Her and her lawyer, and you *tell* them, we'll see them in court next . . . no. No. Leave her there, leave her to *stew* in it: You tell her, we're *getting* that house, and we are going to . . . No. I'm *not* coming down. I'll be damned if I'll sit in the same rrr . . . the next, you tell her the next time I *see* her is in court . . . I . . . [Pause] What? [Pause] What? I don't understand. [Pause] Well, what about the house? [Pause] There isn't any problem with the hhh . . . [Pause] No, no, no, that's all right. All ri . . . All right . . . [Pause] Of course. Tha . . . Thank you. No, I will. Right away, [He bangs up.] [Pause]

See me later
fake love
intentional?

CAROL. What is it? [Pause]

JOHN. It's a surprise party.

CAROL. It is.

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. A party for you.

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. Is it your birthday?

JOHN. No.

CAROL. What is it?

JOHN. The tenure announcement.

CAROL. The tenure announcement.

JOHN. They're throwing a party for us in our new house.

CAROL. Your new house.

JOHN. The house that we're buying.

CAROL. You have to go.

JOHN. It seems that I do.

CAROL. [Pause] They're proud of you.

JOHN. Well, there are those who would say it's a form of aggression.

CAROL. What is?

JOHN. A surprise.

Two

John and Carol seated across the desk from each other.

JOHN. You see, [Pause] I love to teach. And flatter myself I am *skilled* at it. And I love the, the aspect of *performance*. I think I must confess that.

When I found I loved to teach I swore that I would not become that cold, rigid automaton of an instructor which I had encountered as a child.

Now, I was not unconscious that it was given me to err upon the other side. And, so, I asked and *ask* myself if I engaged in heterodoxy, I will not say "gratuitously" for I do not care to posit orthodoxy as a given good—but, "to the detriment of, of my students." [Pause]

As I said. When the possibility of tenure opened, and, of course, I'd long pursued it, I was, of course *bappy*, and *covetous* of it.

I asked myself if I was wrong to covet it. And thought about it long, and, I hope, truthfully, and saw in myself several things in, I think, no particular order. [Pause]

That I *would* pursue it. That I *desired* it, that I was not pure of longing for security, and that that, perhaps, was not reprehensible in me. That I had duties *beyond* the school, and that my duty to my home, for instance, was, or should be, if it were not, of an equal weight. That tenure, and security, and yes, and *comfort*, were not, of themselves, to be scorned; and were even worthy of honorable pursuit. And that it was given me. Here, in this place, which I enjoy, and in which I find comfort, to assure myself of—as far as it rests in The Material—a continuation of that joy and comfort. In exchange for what? Teaching. Which I love.

What was the price of this security? To obtain *tenure*. Which tenure the committee is in the process of granting me. And on the basis of which I contracted to purchase a house. Now, as you don't have your own family, at this point, you may not know what that means. But to me it is important. A home. A Good Home. To raise my family. Now: The Tenure Committee

will meet. This is the process, and a *good* process. Under which the school has functioned for quite a long time. They will meet, and hear your complaint—which you have the right to make; and they will dismiss it. They will *dismiss* your complaint; and, in the intervening period, I will lose my house. I will not be able to close on my house. I will lose my *deposit*, and the home I'd picked out for my wife and son will go by the boards. Now: I see I have angered you. I understand your anger at teachers. I was angry with mine. I felt hurt and humiliated by them. Which is one of the reasons that I went into education.

CAROL. What do you want of me?

JOHN. [Pause] I was hurt. When I received the report. Of the tenure committee. I was shocked. And I was hurt. No, I don't mean to subject you to my weak sensibilities. All right. Finally, I didn't understand. Then I thought: is it not always at those points at which we reckon ourselves unassailable that we are most vulnerable and . . . [Pause] Yes. All right. You find me pedantic. Yes. I am. By nature, by *birth*, by profession, I don't know . . . I'm always looking for a *paradigm* for . . .

CAROL. I don't know what a paradigm is.

JOHN. It's a model.

CAROL. Then why can't you use that word? [Pause]

JOHN. If it is important to you. Yes, all right. I was looking for a model. To continue: I feel that one point . . .

CAROL. I . . .

JOHN. One second . . . upon which I am unassailable is my unflinching concern for my students' dignity. I asked you here to . . . in the spirit of *investigation*, to ask you . . . to ask . . . [Pause] What have I done to you? [Pause] And, and, I suppose, how I can make amends. Can we not settle this now? It's pointless, really, and I want to know.

CAROL. What you can do to force me to retract?

JOHN. That is not what I meant at all.

CAROL. To bribe me, to convince me . . .

JOHN. . . . No.

CAROL. To retract . . .

JOHN. That is not what I meant at all. I think that you know it is not.

CAROL. That is not what I know. I *wish* I . . .

JOHN. I do not want to . . . you wish what?

CAROL. No, you said what amends can you make. To force me to retract.

JOHN. That is not what I said.

CAROL. I have my notes.

JOHN. Look. Look. The Stoics say . . .

CAROL. The Stoics?

JOHN. The Stoical Philosophers say if you remove the phrase "I have been injured," you have removed the injury. Now: Think: I know that you're upset. Just tell me. Literally. Literally: what wrong have I done you?

CAROL. Whatever you have done to me—to the extent that you've done it to *me*, do you know, rather than to me as a *student*, and, so, to the student body, is contained in my report. To the tenure committee.

JOHN. Well, all right. [Pause] Let's see. [He reads.] I find that I am sexist. That I am *elitist*. I'm not sure I know what that means, other than it's a derogatory word, meaning "bad." That I . . . That I insist on wasting time, in nonprescribed, in self-aggrandizing and theatrical *diversions* from the prescribed *text* . . . that these have taken both sexist and pornographic forms . . . here

we find listed . . . [Pause] Here we find listed . . . instances " . . . closeted with a student" . . . "Told a rambling, sexually explicit story, in which the frequency and attitudes of fornication of the poor and rich are, it would seem, the central point . . . moved to *embrace* said student and . . . all part of a pattern . . ." [Pause]

[He reads.] That I used the phrase "The White Man's Burden" . . . that I told you how I'd asked you to my room because I quote like you. [Pause]

[He reads.] "He said he 'liked' me. That he 'liked being with me.' He'd let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office." [Pause] [To Carol:] It's *ludicrous*, Don't you know that? It's not *necessary*. It's going to *humiliate* you, and it's going to cost me my *house*, and . . .

CAROL. It's "*ludicrous* . . ."?

[John picks up the report and reads again.]

JOHN. "He told me he had problems with his wife; and that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me . . ."

CAROL. Do you deny it? Can you deny it . . . ? Do you see? [Pause] Don't you see? You don't see, do you?

JOHN. I don't see . . .

CAROL. You think, you think you can deny that these things happened; or, if they *did*, if they *did*, that they meant what you *said* they meant. Don't you see? You drag me in here, you drag us, to listen to you "go on;" and "go on" about this, or that, or we don't "express" ourselves very well. We don't say what we mean. Don't we? Don't we? We do say what we mean. And you say that "I don't understand you . . .": Then you . . . [Points.]

JOHN. "Consult the Report"?

CAROL. . . . that's right.

JOHN. You see. You see. Can't you . . . You see what I'm saying? Can't you tell me in your own words?

CAROL. Those are my own words. [Pause]

JOHN. [He reads.] "He told me that if I would stay alone with him in his office, he would change my grade to an A." [To Carol:] What have I done to you? Oh. My God, are you so hurt?

CAROL. What I "feel" is irrelevant. [Pause]

JOHN. Do you know that I tried to help you?

CAROL. What I know I have reported.

JOHN. I would like to help you now. I would. Before this escalates.

CAROL. [simultaneously with "escalates"]. You see. I don't think that I need your help. I don't think I need anything you have.

JOHN. I feel . . .

CAROL. I don't *care* what you feel. Do you see? DO YOU SEE? You can't *do* that anymore. You. Do. Not. Have. The. Power. Did you misuse it? *Someone* did. Are you part of that group? *Yes. Yes. You Are. You've done* these things. And to say, and to say, "Oh. Let me help you with your problem . . ."

JOHN. Yes. I understand. I understand. You're *hurt*. You're *angry*. Yes. I think your *anger* is *betraying* you. Down a path which helps no one.

CAROL. I don't *care* what you think.

JOHN. You don't? [Pause] But you talk of *rights*. Don't you see? I have rights too. Do you see? I have a *house* . . . part of the *real* world; and The Tenure Committee, Good Men and True . . .

CAROL. . . . Professor . . .

JOHN. . . . Please: *Also* part of that world: you understand? This is my *life*. I'm not a *bogeyman*. I don't "stand" for something, I . . .

CAROL. . . . Professor . . .

JOHN. . . . I . . .

CAROL. Professor. I came here as a *favor*. At your personal request. Perhaps I should not have done so. But I did. On my behalf, and on behalf of my group. And you speak of the tenure committee, one of whose members is a woman, as you know. And though you might call it Good Fun, or An Historical Phrase, or An Oversight, or, All of the Above, to refer to the committee as Good Men and True, it is a demeaning remark. It is a sexist remark, and to overlook it is to countenance continuation of that method of thought. It's a remark . . .

JOHN. OH COME ON. Come on. . . . Sufficient to deprive a family of . . .

CAROL. Sufficient? Sufficient? Sufficient? Yes. It is a *fact* . . . and that story, which I quote, is *vile* and *clastst*, and *manipulative* and *pornographic*. It . . .

JOHN. . . . it's pornographic . . . ?

CAROL. What gives you the *right*. Yes. To speak to a *woman* in your private . . . Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You feel yourself empowered . . . you say so yourself. To *strut*. To *posture*. To "perform." To "Call me in here . . ." Eh? You say that higher education is a joke. And treat it as such, you *treat* it as such. And *confess* to a taste to play the *Patriarch* in your class. To grant *this*. To deny *that*. To embrace your students.

JOHN. How can you assert. How can you stand there and . . .

CAROL. How can you *deny* it. You did it to me. *Here*. You *did*. . . . You *confess*. You love the Power. To *deviate*. To *invent*, to transgress . . . to *transgress* whatever norms have been established for us. And you think it's charming to "question" in yourself this taste to mock and destroy. But you should question it. Professor. And you pick those things which you feel *advance* you: publication, *tenure*, and the steps to get them you call "harmless rituals." And you perform those steps. Although you say it is hypocrisy. But to the aspirations of your students. Of *hardworking students*, who come here, who *slave* to come here—you have no idea what it cost me to come to this school—you *mock* us. You call education "hazing," and from your so-protected, so-elitist seat you hold our confusion as a *joke*, and our hopes and efforts with it. Then you sit there and say "what have I done?" And ask me to understand that *you* have aspirations too. But I tell you. I tell you. That you are vile. And that you are exploitative. And if you possess one ounce of that inner honesty you describe in your book, you can look in yourself and see those things that I see. And you can find revulsion equal to my own. Good day. [*She prepares to leave the room.*]

JOHN. Wait a second, will you, just one moment. [*Pause*] Nice day today.

CAROL. What?

JOHN. You said "Good day." I think that it is a nice day today.

CAROL. *Is* it?

JOHN. Yes, I think it is.

CAROL. And why is that important?

JOHN. Because it is the essence of all human communication. I say something conventional, you respond, and the information we exchange is not about the "weather," but that we both agree to converse. In effect, we agree that we are both human. [*Pause*]

I'm not a . . . "exploiter," and you're not a . . . "deranged," what? *Revolutionary* . . . that we may, that we may have . . . positions, and that we may have . . . desires, which are in *conflict*, but that we're just human. [*Pause*] That means that sometimes we're *imperfect*. [*Pause*] Often we're in conflict . . . [*Pause*] *Much* of what we do, you're right, in the name of "principles" is *self-serving* . . . much of what we do is *conventional*. [*Pause*] You're right. [*Pause*] You said you came in the class because you wanted to learn about *education*. I don't know that I can teach you about education. But I know that I can tell you what I *think* about education, and then *you* decide. And you don't have to fight with me. *I'm* not the subject. [*Pause*] And where I'm *wrong* . . . perhaps it's not your job to "fix" me. I don't want to fix *you*. I would like to tell you what I *think*, because that *is* my job, conventional as it is, and flawed as I may be. And then, if you can show me some better *form*, then we can proceed from there. But, just like "nice day, isn't it . . . ?" I don't think we can proceed until we accept that each of us is human. [*Pause*] And we still can have difficulties. We *will* have them . . . that's all right too. [*Pause*] Now:

CAROL. . . . wait . . .

JOHN. Yes. I want to hear it.

CAROL. . . . the . . .

JOHN. Yes. Tell me frankly.

CAROL. . . . my position . . .

JOHN. I want to hear it. In your own words. What you want. And what you feel.

CAROL. . . . I . . .

JOHN. . . . yes . . .

CAROL. My Group.

JOHN. Your "Group" . . . ? [*Pause*]

CAROL. The people I've been talking to . . .

JOHN. There's no shame in that. Everybody needs advisers. Everyone needs to expose themselves. To various points of view. It's not wrong. It's essential. Good. Good. Now: You and I . . . [*The phone rings.*]

You and I . . .

[*He bestitates for a moment, and then picks it up.*] [*Into phone*] Hello.

[*Pause*] Um . . . no, I know they do. [*Pause*] I know she does. Tell her that I . . . can I call you back? . . . Then tell her that I think it's going to be fine. [*Pause*] Tell her just, just hold on, I'll . . . can I get back to you? . . . Well . . . no, no, no, we're *taking* the house . . . we're . . . no, no, nn . . . no, she will nnn, it's not a *question* of refunding the *dep* . . . no . . . it's not a *question* of the deposit . . . will you call Jerry? *Babe, baby,* will you just call Jerry? Tell him, nnn . . . tell him they, well, they're to *keep* the deposit, because the deal, be . . . because the deal is going to go *through* . . . because I know . . . be . . . will you please? Just *trust* me. Be . . . well, I'm dealing with the complaint. Yes. Right *Now*. Which is why I . . . yes, no, no, it's really, I can't *talk* about it now. Call Jerry, and I can't talk now. Ff . . . fine. Gg . . . good-bye. [*Hangs up.*] [*Pause*] I'm sorry we were interrupted.

CAROL. No . . .

JOHN. I . . . I was saying:

CAROL. You said that we should agree to talk about my complaint.

JOHN. That's correct.

CAROL. But we *are* talking about it.

JOHN. Well, that's correct too. You see? This is the *gist* of education.

CAROL. No, no. I mean, we're talking about it at the Tenure Committee Hearing.
[Pause]

OHN. Yes, but I'm saying: we can talk about it *now*, as easily as . . .

CAROL. No. I think that we should stick to the process . . .

OHN. . . . wait a . . .

CAROL. . . . the "conventional" process. As you said. [She gets up.] And you're right, I'm sorry if I was, um, if I was "discourteous" to you. You're right.

OHN. Wait, wait a . . .

CAROL. I really should go.

OHN. Now, look, granted. I have an interest. In the status quo. All right? Everyone does. But what I'm saying is that the *committee* . . .

CAROL. Professor, you're right. Just don't impinge on me. We'll take our differences, and . . .

OHN. You're going to make a . . . look, look, look, you're going to . . .

CAROL. I shouldn't have come here. They told me . . .

OHN. One moment. No. No. There are *norms*, here, and there's no reason. Look: I'm trying to *save* you . . .

CAROL. No one *asked* you to . . . you're trying to *save me*? Do me the courtesy to . . .

OHN. I *am* doing you the courtesy. I'm talking *straight* to you. We can settle this *now*. And I want you to sit *down* and . . .

CAROL. You must excuse me . . . [She starts to leave the room.]

OHN. Sit down, it seems we each have a . . . Wait one moment. Wait one moment . . . just do me the courtesy to . . .

[He restrains her from leaving.]

CAROL. LET ME GO.

OHN. I have no desire to *bold* you, I just want to *talk* to you . . .

CAROL. LET ME GO. LET ME GO. WOULD SOMEBODY *HELP* ME? WOULD SOMEBODY *HELP* ME PLEASE . . . ?

Three

[At rise, Carol and John are seated.]

OHN. I have asked you here. [Pause] I have asked you here against, against my . . .

CAROL. I was most surprised you asked me.

OHN. . . . against my better *judgment*, against . . .

CAROL. I was most surprised . . .

OHN. . . . against the . . . yes. I'm sure.

CAROL. . . . If you would like me to leave, I'll leave. I'll go right now . . . [She rises.]

OHN. Let us begin *correctly*, may we? I feel . . .

CAROL. That is what I wished to do. That's why I came here, but now . . .

OHN. . . . I feel . . .

CAROL. But now perhaps you'd like me to leave . . .

OHN. I don't want you to leave. I asked you to come . . .

CAROL. I didn't have to come here.

OHN. No. [Pause] Thank you.

CAROL. All right. [Pause] [She sits down.]

OHN. Although I feel that it *profits*, it would *profit* you something, to . . .

CAROL. . . . what I . . .

JOHN. If you would hear me out, if you would hear me out.

CAROL. I came here to, the court officers told me not to come.

JOHN. . . . the "court" officers . . . ?

CAROL. I was shocked that you asked.

JOHN. . . . wait . . .

CAROL. Yes. But I did *not* come here to hear what it "profits" me.

JOHN. The "court" officers . . .

CAROL. . . . no, no, perhaps I should leave . . . [She gets up.]

JOHN. Wait.

CAROL. No. I shouldn't have . . .

JOHN. . . . wait. Wait. Wait a moment.

CAROL. Yes? What is it you want? [Pause] What is it you want?

JOHN. I'd like you to stay.

CAROL. You want me to stay.

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. You do.

JOHN. Yes. [Pause] Yes. I would like to have you hear me out. If you would.

[Pause] Would you please? If you would do that I would be in your debt.

[Pause] [She sits.] Thank You. [Pause]

CAROL. What is it you wish to tell me?

JOHN. All right. I cannot . . . [Pause] I cannot help but feel you are owed an apology. [Pause] [Of papers in his hands] I have read. [Pause] And reread these accusations.

CAROL. What "accusations"?

JOHN. The, the tenure comm . . . what other accusations . . . ?

CAROL. The tenure committee . . . ?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. Excuse me, but those are not accusations. They have been *proved*. They are facts.

JOHN. . . . I . . .

CAROL. No. Those are not "accusations."

JOHN. . . . those?

CAROL. . . . the committee [The phone starts to ring.] the committee has . . .

JOHN. . . . All right . . .

CAROL. . . . those are not accusations. The Tenure Committee.

JOHN. ALL RIGHT. ALL RIGHT. ALL RIGHT. [He picks up the phone.] Hello. Yes.

No. I'm here. Tell Mister . . . No, I can't talk to him now . . . I'm sure he has,

but I'm fff . . . I know . . . No, I have no time t . . . tell Mister . . . tell Mist . . .

tell Jerry that I'm *fine* and that I'll call him right aw . . . [Pause] My wife . . .

Yes. I'm sure she has. Yes, thank you. Yes, I'll call her too. I cannot talk to you now. [He hangs up.] [Pause] All right. It was good of you to come.

Thank you. I have studied. I have spent some time studying the indictment.

CAROL. You will have to explain that word to me.

JOHN. An "indictment" . . .

CAROL. Yes.

JOHN. Is a "bill of particulars." A . . .

CAROL. All right. Yes.

JOHN. In which is alleged . . .

CAROL. No. I cannot allow that. I cannot allow that. Nothing is alleged. Every-

thing is proved . . .

JOHN. Please, wait a sec . . .

CAROL. I cannot *come* to allow . . .

JOHN. If I may . . . If I may, from whatever you feel is "established," by . . .

CAROL. The issue here is not what I "feel." It is not my "feelings," but the feelings of women. And men. Your superiors, who've been "polled," do you see? To whom *evidence* has been presented, who have *ruled*, do you see? Who have weighed the testimony and the evidence, and have *ruled*, do you see? That you are *negligent*. That you are *guilty*, that you are found *wanting*, and in *error*; and are *not*, for the reasons so-told, to be given tenure. That you are to be disciplined. For facts. For *facts*. Not "alleged," what is the word? But *proved*. Do you see? *By your own actions*.

That is what the tenure committee has said. That is what my lawyer said. For what you did in class. For what you did *in this office*.

JOHN. They're going to discharge me.

CAROL. As full well they should. You don't understand? You're angry? What has *led* you to this place? Not your sex. Not your race. Not your class. YOUR OWN ACTIONS. And you're *angry*. You *ask* me here. What *do* you want? You want to "charm" me. You want to "convince" me. You want me to recant. I will *not* recant. Why should I . . . ? What I say is right. You tell me, you are going to tell me that you have a wife and child. You are going to say that you have a career and that you've worked for twenty years for this. Do you know what you've *worked* for? *Power*. For *power*. Do you understand? And you sit there, and you tell me *stories*. About your *house*, about all the private *schools*, and about *privilege*, and how you are entitled. To *buy*, to *spend*, to *mock*, to *summon*. All your stories. All your silly weak *guilt*, it's all about *privilege*; and you won't know it. Don't you see? You worked twenty years for the right to *insult* me. And you feel entitled to be *paid* for it. Your Home. Your Wife . . . Your sweet "deposit" on your house . . .

JOHN. Don't you have feelings?

CAROL. That's my point. You see? Don't you have feelings? Your final argument. What is it that has no feelings. *Animals*. I don't take your side, you question if I'm Human.

JOHN. Don't you have feelings?

CAROL. I have a responsibility. I . . .

JOHN. . . . to . . . ?

CAROL. To? This institution. To the *students*. To my group.

JOHN. . . . your "group." . . .

CAROL. Because I speak, yes, not for myself. But for the group; for those who suffer what I suffer. On behalf of whom, even if I, were, inclined, to what, forgive? Forget? What? Overlook your . . .

JOHN. . . . my behavior?

CAROL. . . . it would be wrong.

JOHN. Even if you were inclined to "forgive" me.

CAROL. It would be wrong.

JOHN. And what would transpire.

CAROL. Transpire?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. "Happen?"

JOHN. Yes.

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

JOHN. I never . . .

CAROL. Excuse me, one moment, will you?

[She reads from her notes.]

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

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

April seventeenth: "If you girls would come over here . . ." I saw you. I saw you, Professor. For two semesters sit there, stand there and exploit your, as you thought, "paternal prerogative," and what is that but rape. I swear to God. You asked me in here to explain something to me, as a child, that I did not understand. But I came to explain something to you. You Are Not God. You ask me why I came? I came here to instruct you.

[She produces his book.]

ROLE REVERSAL
from Act 1

And your book? You think you're going to show me some "light"? You "*maverick*." Outside of tradition. No, no, [She reads from the book's *liner notes*.] "of that fine tradition of *inquiry*. Of *Polite skepticism*" . . . and you say you believe in free intellectual discourse. YOU BELIEVE IN NOTHING. YOU BELIEVE IN NOTHING AT ALL.

JOHN. I believe in freedom of thought.

CAROL. Isn't that fine. *Do* you?

JOHN. Yes. I do.

CAROL. Then why do you question, for one moment, the committee's decision refusing your tenure? Why do you question your suspension? You believe in what *you call* freedom of thought. Then, fine. *You* believe in freedom-of-thought *and* a home, and, *and* prerogatives for your kid, *and* tenure. And I'm going to tell you. You believe *not* in "freedom of thought," but in an elitist, in, in a protected hierarchy which rewards you. And for whom you are the clown. And you mock and exploit the system which pays your rent. You're wrong. I'm not wrong. You're wrong. You think that I'm full of hatred. I know what you think I am.

JOHN. Do you?

CAROL. You think I'm a, of course I do. You think I am a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants power and revenge. [Pause] Don't you? [Pause]

JOHN. Yes. I do. [Pause]

CAROL. Isn't that better? And I feel that that is the first moment which you've treated me with respect. For you told me the truth. [Pause] I did not come here, as you are assured, to gloat. Why would I want to gloat? I've profited nothing from your, your, as you say, your "misfortune." I came here, as you did me the honor to *ask* me here, I came here to *tell* you something.

[Pause] That I think . . . that I think you've been wrong. That I think you've been terribly wrong. Do you hate me now? [Pause]

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. Why do you hate me? Because you think me wrong? No. Because I have, you think, *power* over you. Listen to me. Listen to me, Professor. [Pause] It is the power that you hate. So deeply that, that any atmosphere of free discussion is impossible. It's not "unlikely." It's *impossible*. Isn't it?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. *Isn't* it . . . ?

planning
this attack?
notes all semester

JOHN. Yes. I suppose.

CAROL. Now, the thing which you find so cruel is the selfsame process of selection I, and my group, go through *every day of our lives*. In admittance to school. In our tests, in our class rankings. . . . Is it unfair? I can't tell you. But, if it is fair. Or even if it is "unfortunate but necessary" for us, then, by God, so must it be for you. [Pause] You write of your "responsibility to the young." Treat us with respect, and that will *show* you your responsibility. You write that education is just hazing. [Pause] But we worked to get to this school. [Pause] And some of us. [Pause] Overcame prejudices. Economic, sexual, you cannot begin to imagine. And endured humiliations I *pray* that you and those you love never will encounter. [Pause] To gain admittance here. To pursue that same dream of security *you* pursue. We, who, who are, at any moment, in danger of being deprived of it. By . . .

JOHN. . . . by . . . ?

CAROL. By the administration. By the teachers. By *you*. By, say, one low grade, that keeps us out of graduate school; by one, say, one capricious or inventive answer on our parts, which, perhaps, you don't find amusing. Now *you know, do you see? What it is to be subject to that power.* [Pause]

JOHN. I don't understand. [Pause]

CAROL. My charges are not trivial. You see that in the haste, I think, with which they were accepted. A *joke* you have told, with a sexist tinge. The language you use, a verbal or physical caress, yes, yes, I know, you say that it is meaningless. I understand. I differ from you. To lay a hand on someone's shoulder.

JOHN. It was devoid of sexual content.

CAROL. I say it was not. I SAY IT WAS NOT: Don't you begin to *see* . . . ? Don't you begin to understand? IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO SAY.

JOHN. I take your point, and I see there is much good in what you refer to.

CAROL. . . . do you think so . . . ?

JOHN. . . . but, and this is not to say that I cannot change, in those things in which I am deficient . . . But, the . . .

CAROL. Do you hold yourself harmless from the charge of sexual exploitativeness . . . ? [Pause]

JOHN. Well, I . . . I . . . I . . . You know I, as I said. I . . . think I am not too old to *learn*, and I *can* learn, I . . .

CAROL. Do you hold yourself innocent of the charge of . . .

JOHN. . . . wait, wait, wait . . . All right, let's go back to . . .

CAROL. YOU FOOL. Who do you think I am? To come here and be taken in by a *smile*. You little yapping fool. You think I want "revenge." I don't want revenge. I WANT UNDERSTANDING.

JOHN. . . . do you?

CAROL. I do. [Pause]

JOHN. What's the use. It's over.

CAROL. Is it? What is?

JOHN. My job.

CAROL. Oh. Your job. That's what you want to talk about. [Pause] [*She starts to leave the room. She steps and turns back to him.*] All right. [Pause] What if it were possible that my Group withdraws its complaint. [Pause]

JOHN. What?

CAROL. That's right. [Pause]

JOHN. Why.

CAROL. Well, let's say as an act of friendship.

JOHN. An act of friendship.

CAROL. Yes. [Pause]

JOHN. In exchange for what.

CAROL. Yes. But I don't think, "exchange." Not "in exchange." For what do we derive from it? [Pause]

JOHN. "Derive."

CAROL. Yes.

JOHN. [Pause] Nothing. [Pause]

CAROL. That's right. We derive nothing. [Pause] Do you see that?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. That is a little word, Professor. "Yes." "I see that." But you will.

JOHN. And you might speak to the committee . . . ?

CAROL. To the committee?

JOHN. Yes.

CAROL. Well. Of course. That's on your mind. We might.

JOHN. "If" what?

CAROL. "Given" what. Perhaps. I think that that is more friendly.

JOHN. GIVEN WHAT?

CAROL. And, believe me. I understand your rage. It is not that I don't feel it. But I do not see that it is deserved, so I do not resent it. . . . All right. I have a list.

JOHN. . . . a list.

CAROL. Here is a list of books, which we . . . *Came prepared to negotiate.*

JOHN. . . . a list of books . . . ?

CAROL. That's right. Which we find questionable.

JOHN. What?

CAROL. Is this so bizarre . . . ?

JOHN. I can't believe . . .

CAROL. It's not necessary you believe it.

JOHN. Academic freedom . . .

CAROL. Someone chooses the books. If you can choose them, others can. What are you, "God"?

JOHN. . . . no, no, the "dangerous." . . .

CAROL. You have an agenda, we have an agenda. I am not interested in your feelings or your motivation, but your actions. If you would like me to speak to the Tenure Committee, here is my list. You are a Free Person, you decide. [Pause]

JOHN. Give me the list. [*She does so. He reads.*]

CAROL. I think you'll find . . .

JOHN. I'm capable of reading it. Thank you.

CAROL. We have a number of *texts* we need re . . .

JOHN. I see that.

CAROL. We're amenable to . . .

JOHN. Aha. Well, let me look over the . . . [*He reads.*]

CAROL. I think that . . .

JOHN. LOOK. I'm reading your demands. All right?! [*He reads.*] [Pause] You want to ban my book?

CAROL. We do not . . .

JOHN. [*of list.*] It says here . . .

CAROL. . . . We want it removed from inclusion as a representative example of the university. *reddefining words*

JOHN. Get out of here.

CAROL. If you put aside the issues of personalities.

JOHN. Get the fuck out of my office.

CAROL. No, I think I would reconsider.

JOHN. . . . you think you can.

CAROL. We can and we *will*. Do you want our support? That is the only quest . . .

JOHN. . . . to ban my *book* . . . ?

CAROL. . . . that is correct . . .

JOHN. . . . this . . . this is a *university* . . . we . . .

CAROL. . . . and we have a statement . . . which we need you to . . . [*She hands him a sheet of paper.*]

JOHN. No, no. It's out of the question. I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking of. I want to tell you something. I'm a teacher. I am a teacher. Eh? It's my *name* on the door, and I teach the class, and that's what I do. I've got a book with my name on it. And my son will *see* that *book* someday. And I have a respon . . . No, I'm sorry I have a *responsibility* . . . to *myself*, to my *son*, to my *profession*. . . . I haven't been *home* for two days, do you know that? Thinking this out.

CAROL. . . . you haven't?

JOHN. I've been, no. If it's of interest to you. I've been in a *hotel*. *Thinking*. [*The phone starts ringing.*] *Thinking* . . .

CAROL. . . . you haven't been home?

JOHN. . . . *thinking*, do you see.

CAROL. Oh.

JOHN. And, and, I owe you a debt, I see that now. [*Pause*] You're *dangerous*, you're *wrong* and it's my *job* . . . to say no to you. That's my job. You are absolutely right. You want to ban my book? Go to *hell*, and they can do whatever they want to me.

CAROL. . . . you haven't been home in two days . . .

JOHN. I think I told you that.

CAROL. . . . you'd better get that phone. [*Pause*] I think that you should pick up the phone. [*Pause*]

[*John picks up the phone.*]

JOHN [*on phone*]. Yes. [*Pause*] Yes. Wh . . . I. I. I had to be away. All ri . . . did they wor . . . did they worry ab . . . No. I'm all right, now, Jerry. I'm f . . . I got a little turned *around*, but I'm *sitting* here and . . . I've got it figured out. I'm fine. I'm fine don't worry about me. I got a little bit mixed up. But I am not sure that it's not a blessing. It cost me my job? Fine. Then the job was not worth having. Tell Grace that I'm coming home and everything is fff . . . [*Pause*] What? [*Pause*] *What?* [*Pause*] What do you *mean?* WHAT? Jerry . . . Jerry. They . . . Who, who, what can they do . . . ? [*Pause*] NO. [*Pause*] NO. They can't do th . . . What do you mean? [*Pause*] But how . . . [*Pause*] She's, she's, she's *here* with me. To . . . Jerry. I don't underst . . . [*Pause*] [*He bangs up.*]. [*To Carol:*] What does this mean?

CAROL. I thought you knew.

JOHN. What. [*Pause*] What does it mean. [*Pause*]

CAROL. You tried to rape me. [*Pause*] According to the law. [*Pause*]

JOHN. . . . what . . . ?

CAROL. You tried to rape me. I was leaving this office, you "pressed" yourself into me. You "pressed" your body into me.

JOHN. . . . I . . .

CAROL. My Group has told your lawyer that we may pursue criminal charges.

JOHN. . . . no . . .

CAROL. . . . under the statute. I am told. It was battery.

JOHN. . . . no . . .

CAROL. Yes. And attempted rape. That's right. [*Pause*]

JOHN. I think that you should go.

CAROL. Of course. I thought you knew.

JOHN. I have to talk to my lawyer.

CAROL. Yes. Perhaps you should.

[*The phone rings again.*] [*Pause*]

JOHN. [*Picks up phone. Into phone:*] Hello? I . . . Hello . . . ? I . . . Yes, he just called. No . . . I. I can't talk to you now, Baby. [*To Carol:*] Get out.

CAROL. . . . your wife . . . ?

JOHN. . . . who it is is no concern of yours. Get out. [*To phone:*] No, no, it's going to be all right. I. I can't talk now, Baby. [*To Carol:*] Get out of here.

CAROL. I'm going.

JOHN. Good.

CAROL [*exiting*]. . . . and don't call your wife "baby."

JOHN. What?

CAROL. Don't call your wife baby. You heard what I said.

[*Carol starts to leave the room. John grabs her and begins to beat her.*]

JOHN. You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life?

[*He knocks her to the floor.*]

After how I treated you . . . ? You should be . . . Rape you . . . ? Are you kidding me . . . ?

[*He picks up a chair, raises it above his head, and advances on her.*]

I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. You little cunt . . .

[*She cowers on the floor below him. Pause. He looks down at her. He lowers the chair. He moves to his desk, and arranges the papers on it. Pause. He looks over at her.*]

. . . well . . .

[*Pause. She looks at him.*]

CAROL. Yes. That's right.

[*She looks away from him, and lowers her head. To herself:*] . . . yes. That's right.

End

[1992]



Topics for Critical Thinking and Writing

1. Did you find that on the whole you were on the side of one character rather than the other, or did your sympathies change, and if they changed did they change once and for all? (Incidentally, Mamet in an interview said that both

characters are “altogether right” and both are “altogether wrong.” Does this statement help you?)

- Each of the three scenes begins with a stage direction informing the reader that the two characters are seated. In the first two scenes, they are “seated across the desk.” The third scene does not specify the desk. How would you begin the third scene? Explain your decision.
- Nothing is said of the costumes. How would you dress the two performers? Would you have them wear the same clothing in all three scenes, or different costumes in each scene? Why?
- Toward the end of the first scene, John tells Carol that it is his job (as a professor) to “provoke” her, that is, to stimulate students to question traditional values. Reread the play, paying close attention to all of the comments on education, especially to Carol’s comments in Scene Two—for instance, to her charge that by saying that education may be a form of “hazing” he mocks “hardworking students, who come here.” Summarize—if it is possible—John’s view of education, and Carol’s. In your opinion, how much validity is there to what either character says about education? Explain.
- Near the end of Scene One, we hear one side of a telephone conversation, which at first seems to suggest that John is in danger of losing the house he is about to buy. It turns out that this is a friendly ruse to get him to come to the house, where he will find a party in his honor. Why do you suppose Mamet included this bit?
- Although in much of Scene Three Carol is dominant, the play ends with her cowering on the floor, and saying—indeed repeating—“That’s right.” Mamet said, in an interview, “I think that people are generally more happy with a mystery than with an explanation.” Is the ending mysterious? If so, do you agree with Mamet’s generalization about mystery? Explain.
- What do you take to be the relevance of the quotation from Samuel Butler (page 825)? (By the way, we strongly recommend Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*, a witty, highly autobiographical and often moving novel published in 1903, a year after Butler’s death.)
- “Oleanna” is never mentioned in the play, but (as you know) the printed version includes as a sort of preface a quotation from a song, mentioning Oleanna, where it is contrasted with an oppressive Norwegian state. A student tells us of another stanza:

So if you’d like a happy life,
To Oleanna you must go,
The poorest man from the old country
Becomes a king in a year or so.

Judging from this stanza, Oleanna is a never-never land, a dream world. We have also heard that Oleanna was the name of a nineteenth-century Norwegian-American utopian community, and that as a youth Mamet once went camping on the site. In any case, what do you think of the title?

CHAPTER 20

Innocence and Experience

ESSAY



MAYA ANGELOU

Maya Angelou, born Margherita Johnson in 1928 in St. Louis, spent her early years in California and Arkansas. She has worked as a cook, a streetcar conductor, a television screenwriter, and an actress, and she has written poems and five autobiographical books. The following selection comes from her first autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970).

Graduation

The children in Stamps trembled visibly with anticipation. Some adults were excited too, but to be certain the whole young population had come down with graduation epidemic. Large classes were graduating from both the grammar school and the high school. Even those who were years removed from their own day of glorious release were anxious to help with preparations as a kind of dry run. The junior students who were moving into the vacating classes’ chairs were tradition-bound to show their talents for leadership and management. They strutted through the school and around the campus exerting pressure on the lower grades. Their authority was so new that occasionally if they pressed a little too hard it had to be overlooked. After all, next term was coming, and it never hurt a sixth grader to have a play sister in the eighth grade, or a tenth-year student to be able to call a twelfth grader Bubba. So all was endured in a spirit of shared understanding. But the graduating classes themselves were the nobility. Like travelers with exotic destinations on their minds, the graduates were remarkably forgetful. They came to school without their books, or tablets or even pencils. Volunteers fell over themselves to secure replacements for the missing equipment. When accepted, the willing workers might or might not be thanked, and it was of no importance to the pregraduation rites. Even teachers were respectful of the now quiet and aging seniors, and tended to speak to them, if not as equals, as beings only slightly lower than themselves. After tests were returned and grades given, the student body, which acted like an extended family, knew who did well, who excelled, and what piteous ones had failed.