

Oleanna

Linguistics, English



Oleanna” by David Mamet The play “ Oleanna” by David Mamet is one shaped by the understanding that a conversation is potentially dangerous. Carol, a college student visits his professor John to ask him to assist in her falling grades. Although John is preoccupied with his upcoming tenure and finalising a purchase of a house with his lawyer and his wife, he decides to help her. The two engage in an extended conversation, which propels the plot of the play. This paper unveils misinterpretation between Carol and John in the Play Oleanna.

From the onset of the play, Carol and John do not seem to think before they speak. Their speech is a conditioned reflex accompanied by prejudgement of each other’s thoughts, which hinders communication. When Carol enters John’s office and presents his case, he gladly receives him as one of the needy students who have come for assistance. He abandons everything he was doing and sits to listen to the innocent college girl who wants to raise her grades. Several attempts by John to explain to Carol how she needs to study do not yield up anything because of the break up in communication. At one point, Carol misquotes John to have called her stupid. She twists words to have another meaning, which depicts her character.

In their conversation Carol and John use words like “ what,” “ I don’t understand,” “ I don’t know what you are saying.” Carol and John are seeking of each other’s conversation meaning that they do not seem to understand one another. At one point, Carol thinks that “ terms of art” have another meaning. On seeking for the meaning from John who had used it, he states that he does not know. With these unclear messages, you hear either Carol or John nodding in agreement or responding to what the other is saying. All

this is bound to misinterpretation. For instance, according to Mamet,

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...(Mamet 3)

This conversation is quite unclear and bound to misinterpretation. The conversation between Carol and John is full of queries a scenario that depicts misinterpretations.

After attempts to help Carol fails, Carol sobs deeply and John places his hand on her to comfort her. Carol throws his hand off her and she interprets this as a sexual harassment. Their conversation is interrupted by John's wife who needs him at home and Carol Promises to come to the office the second time. The following day Carol comes to John's office with bills that show that she has filed a case with the tenure committee that John sexually harassed her. Professor's noble efforts to help Carol had been turned into something offensive. John could not understand such a misinterpretation and decided to sort things out with Carol, which only makes things worse. What the professor had thought as an innocent girl has turned out to work for a certain unnamed group whose demands he cannot meet. His career is at stake together with his family.

Works Cited

Mamet, David. "Oleanna" USA, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group: 2012.
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