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Power Struggle in David Mamet's Plays

Boj o moc v hrách Davida Mameta

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Prehlasujem, že som túto diplomovú prácu vypracoval samostatne a výhradne s použitím citovaných prameňov, literatúry a ďalších odborných zdrojov.

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podpis

Súhlasím so zapožičaním diplomovej práce k študijným účelom.

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1. Introduction

David Mamet is one of the best known contemporary American playwrights. He is also an essayist, screenwriter and film director. He has written more than thirty plays to day, four books of essays and two novels. He received the Pulitzer Prize for his 1984 epoch defining play *Glengarry Glen Ross*. He has been incredibly prolific throughout his career. No fewer than seven of his plays of vastly differing kinds were staged in the early 1970s which triggered the interest of various critics. David Mamet became a household name in the next decade. First book length studies were published by Dennis Carroll and C.W.E. Bigsby, helping to establish his position in the literary canon. Earlier critics such as C.W.E Bigsby, Dennis Carroll, Anne Dean or Gay Brewer may differ on many points in their criticisms of Mamet's works but "these writers largely concur [...] that Mamet exposes the myths of masculinity,"¹ men's belief in their existence even while those myths shatter around them. Steven Price notes that until the mid- 1980s - when Mamet had already written a substantial number of plays: *Lakeboat*, *The Duck Variations*, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, *American Buffalo*, *A Life in the Theatre*, *The Water Engine*, *The Woods*, *Reunion*, *Squirrels* before 1977; *Edmond* in 1982, *Glengarry Glen Ross* in 1983 and *The Shawl* in 1985; and was beginning his screenwriting career in Hollywood – "both Mamet and the feature writers perceive him to be acutely influenced by feminism."² However, this perception came under strong pressure after the publication of *Oleanna* in 1992. Feminist theory perceived Mamet's writing rather differently. Similar reception was given to another play, *Speed-the-Plow*, written only few years. Here a female character becomes the problematic victim of a male plot against her. As Steven Price sees it, this could have been a confirmation of

a suspicion that many had long entertained: the men-only settings of Mamet's best known plays were in fact a more or less direct expression of the writer's own misogynistic tendencies, and the ubiquitous confidence games were part of a masculine discourse directed against women.³

Carla J. McDonough, is one of the fiercest critics of Mamet's male dominated world. In the essay "The Search for Masculine Space" from her book *Staging Masculinity – Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* she accuses Mamet of "defining and defending a

¹ Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays and Films of David Mamet – A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 2008) 5.

² Price, 3.

³ Price, 5.

masculine space, which he presents as threatened by changes in our society's concepts of gender and sex roles."⁴

Earlier critics concentrated on the myth of masculinity that Mamet's characters try to evoke in their all-male environments. Other critics, especially in connection with *Oleanna* came to concentrate on issues of gender and sexuality, portrayal of women by the playwright, even possible misogyny. However, the fact that Mamet's plays are based on or around power struggle has not been given enough attention in connection with other issues. The aim of my work is to present power struggle as the most important element in Mamet's most significant plays. As such, it has a crucial role to play in different perception of the myth of masculinity and the idea of male camaraderie as well as in perception of the undeniably unenviable position of women characters in Mamet's plays.

I will base my research on the backbone of Mamet's career: *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Oleanna* and *Speed-the-Plow*. Various relationships in Mamet's plays will be studied, their significance for the characters involved as well as their importance for the play itself. Language, which plays a crucial part in Mamet's plays, will be also analysed. It is a fundamental tool for communication between human beings, but it can become a weapon in an environment based on power of one and subservience of another. Portrayal of women characters will also be looked at, their position within the society governed by males, their treatment by other characters and their role in such an environment. I will attempt to analyze each of the aforementioned plays individually, concentrating on the issues talked about, bearing in mind their similarities and discrepancies with regard to other plays.

Mamet's world is a man's world. It is a comment upon contemporary American culture, the economic and spiritual decline of the society which is almost entirely populated by men. It is these men that rule or want to rule such a world. Every action undertaken by Mamet's characters is in order to manipulate and gain control over others. Men struggle to assert their masculine space in the jungle of the city, but masculinity remains their weapon and quest at the same time. The collapse of moral self, language and community is exactly what Mamet's characters are faced with. Steven Price summarizes the unenviable position of Mamet's characters in this setting: "Any belief that social change can be actively sought, any urge towards redemption, is erroneous, ironic or sentimental"⁵.

⁴ Carla J. McDonough, *Staging Masculinity – Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama*, (New York: McFarland and Company, 2006) 72.

⁵ Price, 4.

Mamet seems to be creating men-only worlds to which women contribute only very insubstantially. However, their absence on stage does not necessarily imply that they are not present. Mamet's world is male dominated because the characters are in constant struggle for power. Those present are dangerous and in danger at the same time. Their behaviour, their attitude towards everybody around them is based on wariness and fear of each other; the line between success and failure is very thin, the consequences fatal. The numerous conflicts are resolved with verbal attacks at best of times; however, even a banal exchange may suddenly escalate into an open conflict; a threat of physical violence is constantly hanging around the characters and their actions. Therefore, women's positions are very precarious. When and if they make an open confrontation, the outcomes are usually disastrous. Nevertheless, it is women that bring some order into this world of chaos, fear and exploitation. However much the male characters deny women – the “others” – their place in the “society”, their existence even, women (however marginal their actual roles) remain a ceaseless check to men's actions, a constant reminder that something is not right in such a society. Man's attitude in Mamet's plays towards the world around him is rather similar to James Brown's song *It's a Man's Man's Man's World*. However contradictory (unless read ironically) most of the lyrics are, the ending is very illustrative of Mamet's man in the world he has created for himself: “He's lost in the wilderness; he's lost in bitterness.”⁶ The world of masculine space is turned upside down. A passage from the chapter called “How Restless Men Are” in Ernst Bloch's book *Atheism in Christianity* is quite fitting for the males dominating Mamet's environment:

We in our turn have never emerged from ourselves, and we are where we are. But we are still dark in ourselves; and not only because of the nearness, the immediacy of the Here-and-now in which we, as all things, have our being. No – it is because we tear at each other, as no beasts do: secretly we are dangerous.⁷

How well functioning is Mamet's “masculine space” then? How happy and satisfied are the lives of the protagonists who occupy such an environment, protagonists who strive daily to overpower their opponents? Is such a space worth defending? Are the characters defending their space against the “others” or are they simply, moreover perpetually, battling for supremacy among themselves with disregard to anybody else? This is a world unfriendly to everybody, be it women or men. Most of the relationships seem to be based on the power of one and subservience of another. Everyone, it appears, exploits everyone else and if it looks otherwise this proves only illusory. Relationships are seen as attenuated, consumptive, competitive, and destructive. Those who are not strong enough to compete are trampled upon

⁶ James Brown, *It's a Man's Man's Man's World*, (New York: King, 1966)

⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. TJ Swann (London: Verso, 2009) 212.

and pushed to the very periphery. Mamet's characters acknowledge sense of loss, desire for order, however, they also acknowledge the equally powerful impulse to exploit these "weaknesses", and if they fail to do so, they become exploited themselves. For Bigsby, Mamet's plays "are not designed as delicate balancing acts but as an exploration of the mechanisms of control."⁸The cutthroat competition; praise and hail for those successful and nothing but scorn for those who fail. Such is the setting in Mamet's plays. What are the chances of survival if somebody is not strong enough to win, overpower, exploit and cheat? The consequences favour the former group; they very much shun the latter. Society is thus nothing but a series of temporary and self-serving alliances, a community held together only by the mutuality of need and ambition, greed and egotism, dissolving as soon as it ceases to serve its purpose. It is a world in which human relationships degrade into soulless transactions.

Mamet's plays as studies of power become a reminder of the power of interpretation – the fact that language defines the nature of the real; hence it also defines human relationships. Bigsby comments upon Mamet's use of language: "Characters meet across an apparently unbridgeable divide, a gulf at the level of language and, in part, created by language."⁹Although language is shared by the people occupying Mamet's world, it is not wholly transitive, thus any attempts at communication and understanding are constantly undermined. Language is thus treated as another control mechanism and only those who can utterly exploit its functions reach the summit before their foes.

It remains to be seen whether the life of these characters is a process of seeking supremacy over others – to succeed and succeed again with nothing else on their minds or whether the power that they search and deploy is no more than a sublimated desire to regain some consolation, harmony, peace; a search, however futile, for something that has been lost long ago, be it love or even real friendship; a desire to feel that they actually command their own lives.

⁸ C.W.E Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama. Volume Three, Beyond Broadway*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 276.

⁹ Bigsby, 275.

2. *American Buffalo* – Business as Usual

One of the earlier Mamet's plays, but as brutally direct in terms of its language and its subject as any later one is *American Buffalo*. After the success of the episodic plays such as *Lakeboat*, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Duck Variations* this was Mamet's first "full length" two act play. As Matthew Roudané observes,

American Buffalo is [the playwright's] breakthrough play. Mamet is at his best when exploring the relationship between the American ethic of business and the ways in which such a problematic ethos affects the individual.¹

According to Bigsby, Mamet seems to be "rejecting the unrestricted individualism of American myth and deploring the corruption of American business."² The comparison to American business ethics is more than apt. American business is a field where constant competition is prevalent. Every party involved strives for total control of the field, absolute trust of their customers, complete power over their rivals. What are the two main protagonists doing in *American Buffalo* if not copying this trajectory? Mamet's comment on the play is quite eloquent: "The petty thieves [...] were all trying to be excellent men, but the society hasn't offered them any context to be excellent in."³ The two main protagonists, Don and Teach, are only trying to imitate success, not failure. They are locked in a perpetual power struggle which decides who dictates the rules in their little private world – Don's junkshop. They are acutely aware that only those successful are recognized by the society. Only those reaching highest are congratulated. The fact that others are trampled upon at the same time is of no issue.

The world of *American Buffalo* is often compared to the American world of business. There is not a vast difference between the dealings of the most prominent executives and the imperfect trio from the junk shop. Gekko's message to the Teldar Paper Company consortium and its stakeholders in the *Wall Street* movie singles out the most important element in such a world:

The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms, greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind. And

¹ Matthew Roudané, "Betrayal and Friendship: David Mamet's *American Buffalo*", in *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 58.

² C.W.E. Bigsby, *David Mamet (Contemporary Writers)*, (London: Methuen, 1985) 63.

³ Henry Hewes and John Simon, *Buffalo on Broadway*, in *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) 25.

greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.⁴

Greed is the driving element for both Don and Teach. However, it is Don's and Teach's inability to perceive a bigger picture that does not allow them to carry out their intentions completely. Don is not satisfied with the sole ownership of the shop; he wants to control the behaviour of his customers also. Teach is trying to gain control over Don. Their only satisfaction is power and control. The world created by the playwright is defunct of a sense of morality, ethics, belonging. Those inhabiting such a world share no common views, ideals, goals. Relationships do not exist; they are used only as a function, an elevation to a next level. The society has become increasingly alienated. As Bigsby notes, the characters "tell stories, perform roles and stage dramas as they seek to win the women, close the deal, or simply deny the banality of their existence."⁵The world around them collapses. Marriages are in decay or broken, families do not exist any more; values disintegrate and are substituted by objects, by money and by power.

Writing of the cultural contradictions of capitalism, Daniel Bell observed that society increasingly becomes a web of consciousness, a form of imagination to be realized as a social construction. But with what rules, and with what moral conceptions? More than ever, without nature or *techne* what can bind men to one another?⁶

All the characters live on their own, the only sign of something resembling a family, albeit a dysfunctional one, is Don's junk shop and its occupants. Don wants to be perceived as Bob's father figure but Teach, with his demands for power over both Don and Bob disturbs any existing, or forming equilibrium between the two. Price contends that

Donny tries to establish his masculinity and preserve his position at the top of the hierarchy by choosing, in Bobby, a feminised character for a protégé; Teach exploits Don's anxiety about this status throughout the play.⁷

Don understands Teach's intentions only too late. Teach proves to be a very tough opponent in their power struggle, it is Bob who pays the price of Teach's anger and Don's fear. As Mamet remarks, those at the bottom are "subject to the unreasoned, unloving and frightened

⁴ *Wall Street*, prod. Twentieth Century Fox, dir. Oliver Stone, 1987, 126 min.

⁵ Bigsby, 66.

⁶ Bigsby, 65.

⁷ Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays and Films of David Mamet – A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 2008) 22.

whims of those in power over them.”⁸ Bigsby argues about the consequences of American individualism and over-confidence applied incompetently:

Personal incapacity and incorrigible venality have replaced a perhaps always dubious national dream of existential truth and personal endeavour. [...] The loss of moral coherence and the collapse of ultimate sanctions suggest a sense of crisis and apocalypse. [...] There is apparently no point of reference by which to establish a sense of moral equilibrium.⁹

Characters create their own worlds, to which they then submit the surrounding reality. Therefore, morals are missing, but in such worlds, the code is always shifting and is based on actual personalities and their moods and traits. In such a society however, the only certainties, as Bigsby points out, are “money, power, and a self that is confidently asserted but empty of meaning and direction.”¹⁰ The ethical basis have been eroded both in private and public worlds. Again, it falls on individuals themselves to set the standards of their morals and their adhering to them, subsequently adjust the level according to actual circumstances. The characters in *American Buffalo* attempt to do just that. As Teach reflects: “It’s hard to make up rules about this stuff.”¹¹ The result of their approach is a scary reminder for the humanity not to abandon some code for moral values. Teach and Don are bound to fail because they are unable to find a common ground. However, were they to see eye to eye in their attempt at the robbery and control of the proceedings, the consequences may have been even worse. Their ultimate failure may just prove to be the society’s salvation.

Their failure begins with the incompetency at planning a robbery. Don’s motive for the robbery seems to be financial. The sold piece may be worth more than it had been sold for (ninety dollars). However, the exact or near exact value is never revealed, very likely because, none of the three assumed perpetrators knows its true identity or what it is worth. Although Bob spends plenty of time looking for it in a coin collector’s price book, they are unable to establish which coin it actually may be. Apart from their inability to find the indicating price for the coin, they are more than ready to put the book aside. The book is setting certain rules, some code that is to be followed and adhered to but they are ready to abandon it. None of them is interested in the rules, or the indicated (real) price. There is a stronger and much likelier motive for Don. According to Bigsby, he “is mainly concerned with exacting revenge for the imagined slight. Beyond anything else, he feels demeaned by the fact that someone

⁸ David Mamet, *A Whore’s Profession: Notes and Essays*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1994) 131.

⁹ Bigsby, 70.

¹⁰ Bigsby, 71.

¹¹ David Mamet, *American Buffalo*, in *Mamet Plays: One – Duck Variations, Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Squirrels, American Buffalo, The Water Engine, Mr Happiness*, (London: Methuen, 1994) 196.

may have taken advantage of him.”¹²He owns a shop, he is considered a businessman who is used to dictate his own financial terms, whether he is buying or selling. Whether the shop is full of priceless memorabilia or of unwanted junk is not an issue for him. The shop is his domain, his private world where his rules are supposed to be followed. Don is thinking of revenge. The sanctity of his ownership has been disturbed by a stranger, who moreover, took advantage of him. He does not think about the consequences of the actions he is planning to undertake, he never considers the robbery to be unlawful.

Don treats Bob in similar fashion whatever some signs may implicate. Whether it is viewed as father – son, or teacher – pupil, leader – follower relationship, the truth is that Don has substantial power over Bob which Don does not alter and knows at the same time that Bob is not in a position to alter it either. David Radavich sees Don’s supremacy over Bob from the very beginning: “At the outset of Buffalo, Don chastises Bob for incompetence, exerting his dominance in a pattern that clearly establishes Mamet’s concern with the man ‘above’ and the man ‘below’.”¹³ Bob is a former drug addict, very much dependent on Don for food, money and shelter. Don, consciously, or not, is ready to exploit Bob’s subservience. Bob is his first choice in the presumed coin collection robbery. This is no long lasting friendship; Bob is an acquaintance, who may temporarily be of some assistance. Nobody pays any heed to the past, the future is not pondered over either. To Don, business is simply: “People taking care of themselves” (154) and as Bigsby remarks, “friendship [is] a central value until it conflicts with other values.”¹⁴Don’s and Bob’s can hardly be called a true friendship. Furthermore, Teach is there to halt any possible attempt at deepening the relationship.

Teach is a small time crook, who hangs around Don’s shop. In Don’s eyes he is a force to be reckoned with and this understanding is certainly mutual. The two clashing adversaries fight for the power over each other, they fight for control of Bob, of the surroundings – the shop, of the robbery plan. Teach, even though a thief also sees himself as a businessman, thus further validating deceit, fabrications and occasional violence. He attempts to draw a line between friendship and “business”: “Friendship is friendship, and a wonderful thing, and I am all for it. [...] But let’s just keep it *separate* huh, let’s just keep the two apart, and maybe we can deal with each other like human beings.” (162) Bigsby has a similar opinion about Teach’s stance on friendship as he has about Don’s: “He regards friendship as little more than a momentary

¹² Bigsby, 72.

¹³ David Radavich, “Man among Men: David Mamet’ Homosocial Order”, in *David Mamet – Bloom’s Modern Critical Views*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004) 72.

¹⁴ Bigsby, 76.

coincidence of interests.”¹⁵ Among many other things, he is a constant challenge to Don on his own turf, which undermines Don’s position even more. The planned robbery actually never takes place, the reasons are many – the whole thing is inappropriately planned; Bob is supposed to carry out research which he never does – his “disloyalty” to Don is perceived personally by Teach (who never questions his loyalty) who believed to be in control of the proceedings and for whom this is a pretext to smash Don’s shop; there is lack of real conviction for the robbery itself; there is lack of any serious considerations; surroundings are not properly checked – Don’s question to Teach “How are you getting in the house?” (199) is answered by “We’ll see when we get there.” (199); no escape route is studied; a back-up plan never crosses their minds, they are more interested in establishing who receives what and how much. Nevertheless, this what-if-reality, this little distraction, the step-out of the daily, the usual and the mundane prepares the stage for Don and Teach to battle out their struggle for power over the life of the other(s), to stamp one’s perception of a proper way to proceed, even though it is not clearly discernible which direction that may be:

Don	I’m paying you to do a thing, Teach, I expect to know where you are when.
Teach	Donny. You aren’t paying me to do a thing. We are doing something together. [...]
Don	I don’t like it.
Teach	Then <i>don’t</i> like it then. (211)

Through this absurd clash Mamet manages to draw a resemblance to “the relationship between the businessman and the lumpenproletariat.”¹⁶

As the playwright has remarked

There’s really no difference between the *lumpenproletariat* and stockbrokers or corporate lawyers who are the lackey of business [...and] at a certain point vicious behaviour becomes laudable.¹⁷

Suddenly it is violence that breeds success; moreover such violence is praised. Teach is brimming with violence and anger. His very first line spoken to no one in particular is an apt example of who are Don and Bob dealing with: “Fuckin’ Ruthie, fuckin’ Ruthie, fuckin’ Ruthie, fuckin’ Ruthie, fuckin’ Ruthie, fuckin’ Ruthie.” (157) However, his misogynistic rage introduces the

¹⁵ Bigsby, 73.

¹⁶ Bigsby, 73.

¹⁷ Brian Case, “Hard and Fast”, in *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) 100.

character who, although never appears bodily on stage, manages in the end to disrupt and stop the trio's spiral into chaos. Teach's grievance about his mistreatment by the people he plays cards with ends with him saying: "The only way to teach these people is to kill them." (158) Teach considers Ruthie "not a good card player [...]. She is a mooch and she is a locksmith and she plays like a woman." (161) There is no room for women in Teach's world of pain and anger. But Teach complains perpetually about anything, be it "Fucking *day* ..." or "Fucking *weather*" (167) or "A bunch of fucking thieves" or "fuckin' toys in the backyard." (166) Teach's description of the state he finds himself in is disturbingly contradictory: "I am calm. I'm just upset." (216) His attitude towards others and life in general is reflected in Bigsby's comment on dealings in business:

Aggression becomes the accredited form of action and booty, trophies of the chase or of the raid, come to be prized as evidence of preeminent force, [...] the obtaining of goods by other methods than seizing comes to be accounted unworthy of man. [...] It is in fact business which sanctions greed, frees the exploiter from guilt and argues for the abolition of restraint.¹⁸

Mamet's *American Buffalo* may not be exactly at such an advanced stage just yet, but Don's and Teach's behaviour suggests that is just where it is heading. Don abhors his customers and finds their behaviour repulsive, because they come into his shop and look at the things he is selling; they browse and choose to buy or not to buy. He is disgusted with one of them: "He comes in here like I'm his fucking doorman." (179) Simplicity of transactions, buying and selling goods just does not satisfy. Bigsby believes that "the essence of [Don's and Teach's] lives is the need to come out on top, to take advantage of others. [...] Mamet's characters translate free enterprise as total licence and morality as the exercise of an anarchic will."¹⁹ Teach surmises this distorted notion in his comment on free enterprise:

The freedom [...] Of the *Individual* [...] To Embark on any Fucking Course that he sees fit.[...] In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. Am I so out of line on this? [...] The country's *founded* on this [...] Without this we're just savage shitheads in the wilderness. [...] Sitting around some vicious campfire. (221)

This jumble of liberal language: "freedom", "individual", "honest" and Teach's interpretations of his surroundings: "any fucking course", "profit", "savage shitheads", "vicious campfire" portrays Teach's perception that private property of others can be breached and reached by any means, therefore, in essence, there is nothing wrong with his stealing other's belongings in order to establish and advance his position. Moreover, it points

¹⁸ Bigsby, 75-77.

¹⁹ Bigsby, 74.

to a contradiction between Teach's restricted knowledge about the world around him and his overconfident assertions about it. Similarly, when he prepares a revolver for the robbery, in defence of his actions he says: "All the preparations in the world does not mean *shit*, the path of some crazed lunatic sees you as an invasion of his personal domain." (234) Steven Price argues that "unlike the other characters, Teach is exclusively driven by self-interest."²⁰ He manages to self-justify his actions, however crude and violent they may be. But, Teach's irony goes one step further. As Bigsby observes,

American revolutionary principles [...] themselves managed to combine religious piety, political freedom and an untrammelled free enterprise. [...] The history of American expansionism, the growth of private fortunes and congruence of wealth and power – the process, indeed, whereby the language and principles of Lockean liberalism were successfully accommodated to the reality of inequity, injustice and a socially sanctioned violence.²¹

Teach's remarks are not dissimilar to justifications spoken (daily) by prominent people, politicians or businessmen. The choice of language may be very different, but the message remains quite the same. Even the nickel itself carries a picture of a buffalo which may remind the audience of the settlers' physical move westwards for possession of land and their convenient "dispossession" of Indians in the process, and its subsequent justifications. This accumulation of property by, as Bigsby labels it, "force and fraud"²² has not changed much in Mamet's play; it has more or less only evolved with the times and has now acquired a status (however dubious it may seem) of universal law. Teach's only giveaway is his misuse of language he has accrued in different walks of his life. For Steven Price

Mamet's characters are soldered into language [...] and no alternate speech idiom or option is offered to a language that is almost unintelligible [and] overburdened by incoherence and contributes materially to a moral debasement in which human contact or compassion is an impossibility.²³

Language used by the powerful and the prominent is to conceal rather than reveal truth. Whereas Teach, however inadvertently, is at times quite blunt about his actions, exposing the true meaning behind the words spoken; the reality of his incapacities comes to light. The language of public service, business and crime become interchangeable.

²⁰ Price, 20.

²¹ Bigsby, 74-75.

²² Bigsby, 78.

²³ Price, 23-24.

Mamet's characters love talking for talking's sake. Don and Teach are another good example of "just talking" and actually saying something relevant. When they just talk, their dialogue goes along these lines:

Teach Don ... I talk straight to you 'cause I respect you. It's kickass or kissass, Don, and I'd be lying if I told you any different.

Don And what makes you such an authority on life all of a sudden?

Teach My life, Jim. And the way I've lived it. *Pause.*

Don Now what does that mean, Teach?

Teach What does that mean?

Don Yes.

Teach What does that *mean*?

Don Yes.

Teach Nothing. Not a thing. (222)

There are however instances when Teach shows his prowess and exploits their little "chat" and steers it towards his own goal:

Teach You want to tell me what this thing is?

Don (*pause*) The thing?

Teach Yeah. *Pause.* What is it?

Don Nothing.

Teach No? What is it, jewellery?

Don No. It's nothing.

Teach Oh.

Don You know?

Teach Yeah. *Pause.* Yeah. No. I don't know. *Pause.* Who am I, a *policeman* ... I'm making conversation, huh?

Don Yeah.

Teach Huh? *Pause.* 'Cause you know I'm just asking for talk.

Don Yeah. I know. Yeah, okay.

Teach And I can live without this.

Don (*reaches for phone*) Yeah, I know. Hold on, I'll tell you.

Teach Tell me if you *want* to, Don.

Don I want to, Teach.

Teach Yeah?

Don Yeah. (173-174)

Language is not only used as a defence mechanism for one's self-justifying perception of reality. As Bigsby writes, it is also, and more importantly, used as a weapon "to denigrate, to insinuate, to abuse, to denounce."²⁴ Teach is a skilful master of this "profession". His vocabulary is incessantly shifting. He comes to Don's shop to "efface [him]self" (228), defending his absurd behaviour with more contradictions: "Man is a creature of habits. Man does not change his habits overnight ... And if he does, he has a very good reason." (227) On one of many occasions Teach mentions Bob's past which Don does not approve of. The following conversation shows the two struggling for power, however minute the signs may be:

Teach [...] don't confuse business with pleasure.

Don But I don't want that talk, only, Teach. *Pause*. You understand?

Teach I more than understand, and I apologize. *Pause*. I'm sorry.

Don That's the only thing.

Teach All right. But I tell you. I'm glad I said it.

Don Why?

Teach 'Cause it's best for these things to be out in the open.

Don But I don't want it in the open.

Teach Which is why I apologized. *Pause*. (183)

When Teach is challenged he becomes furious, his vocabulary changes completely and he becomes obscene: "you shithead ... I'll kick your fucking head in ... You twerp." (251) If the abusive and threatening language he uses is not sufficient, he becomes violent, unleashing his anger, frustration, and revenge (aimed mostly at his direct adversary – Don) by either beating Don's presumed friend Bob or overpowering Don himself and ultimately wrecking his shop, just as Levene fulfilled his revenge on Williamson's office.

The only certainty remaining in the world of *American Buffalo* is oneself for oneself. The pursuit of one's self-interests is all that is left to do, all that the main characters are able and

²⁴ Bigsby, 80.

willing to do. When control slips away, as in the case of Don's "undersold" coin all the mechanisms are put in place in order to re-acquire it back. The robbery is one of the presumed tools for its restoration. But just as the robbery never takes place, it proves similarly difficult to enhance their lives. Still, compassion is regarded in their eyes as a sign of weakness and weakness is despised in their reality of toughness. Thus, they cling to every line that is thrown their way in the world overfilled with disintegration, they only recognize absence and anxiety, fear fought with violence. Bigsby comments on the actions and reactions they undertake:

Each character rightly regards the other as a threat. Lamenting the decline of trust, they plan a robbery; regretting the decay of friendship, they plot against and decry one another; alarmed at the collapse of social order, they arm themselves and accept no morality beyond the satisfaction of their own desires. [...] *American Buffalo* offers an apocalyptic vision of a self-destructing culture.²⁵

It is interesting to see in Mamet's plays how much the rules are bent before one of the characters snaps and actually breaks them. Bigsby observes that "in *American Buffalo* there are no longer any values that survive the moment; hence there is no responsibility to be denied and no redemption to be claimed."²⁶

Don comes into the relationship armed with the knowledge of what he has lost and what he wants to recapture. Teach has no idea of what it is that Don is after, but it is his persuasive powers that enable him to seek out the information from Don piece by piece. He finds out it is a coin, he finds out the buyer's name, his phone number is revealed to him, the power of information is subsiding from Don and Teach is gaining over him. Don's control of the situation is diminishing rapidly. Teach has masterfully invaded Don's private space – the shop. He has rid himself of the supposed competition – Bob and he has established his power over Don to such an extent that it is Teach now who dictates the proceedings in the shop. Bob is not allowed into this world anymore:

Teach [...] *A knocking is heard at the door.* (Get down.) (Douse the light.)

Don (Lemme see who it is...)

Teach Don't answer it.

Bob (*from behind the door*) Donny?

Teach (Great.)

Don (It's Bobby)

²⁵ Bigsby, 78-79.

²⁶ Bigsby, 83.

Teach (I know.)
Bob Donny? *Pause.*
Teach (Don't let him in.) [...]
Bob I got to talk to you.
Don *looks at* Teach. [...] (235)

Suddenly, decisions made in the shop rest with Teach. When Teach's interrogation of Bob reaches its climax Don is unable to protect him from Teach's vicious attack. Teach, in his powerful position, reaffirms Don's "loyalty" and cooperation: "(Don't back down on this, Don. Don't back down on me here.)" (245) Don has become a mere puppet and he only manages a weak apology to Bob in which he hides behind a plural: "We didn't want to hit you ..." (245) Don has answered the question of loyalty and friendship with complete betrayal. It is down to an outsider, Teach's enemy, Ruthie, who never appears on the stage, to rebalance the positions of Don and Teach. It is Ruthie's phone call that disturbs Teach's growing power and reminds the trio of some order in the world. Ruthie brings some sense into Don's reasoning and enables him to sway the power away from Teach. Don seems to have genuinely realized his mistreatment of Bob and he is as "sorry" (257) as Bob was at the beginning of the play. However, Teach cannot stomach Bob's truths, nor Bob's fabrications, therefore he destroys Don's shop:

Teach picks up the dead-pig sticker and starts trashing the junkshop.

The Whole Entire World.
There Is No Law.
There Is No Right And Wrong.
The World Is Lies.
There Is No Friendship.
Every Fucking Thing. (253-254)

Even after destroying the shop and its few shreds of humanity (its historical artefacts and symbols), the three characters cannot reconcile and lament the potential they may have developed had they attempted to. Bob may have felt some need for deep relationship but it was one of the avenues other two never dared to walk into. The few signals of friendship were straightaway exploited only as a beneficiary tool for their own selfish interests. Because others are perpetually perceived as rivals and constant threats, nobody wants to be disadvantaged; nobody wants to show any signs of fear, weakness, and affection. The

possibility of violence is ever present, although Don's relationship to Bob may seem friendly, it is a relationship based on power and subservience, and it is ultimately the power relationship both Don and Teach struggle for. It is actually fear, rather than friendship that reconciles Don and Bob and brings them back together. Had Ruthie, the woman not called, the outcome would have been different, bloodier and savage. Mamet's male characters seem to be longing for man to man friendships, for some ideal form of camaraderie with no place for a woman in such a homosocial environment. However, given the opportunity to form something referred to as friendship, they shy away. They dare not reveal their feelings, quite the contrary; they opt to exploit the feelings in the person opposite them, the person whom they view not as a friend but as an opponent. *American Buffalo* is the first of many significant plays in which the playwright created a male world based on or around the power struggle. It is a savage and ruthless environment in which only the strongest and the most powerful survive. A mixture of pleas, threats, profanities and violence, where anything feminine is considered weak and bound to be overpowered. Nevertheless, it is Mamet's women, however physically absent they may be, that keep a constant check on this world; it is the women that hold the violent spiral of this male world from entering a complete and obscure wilderness.

3. *Glengarry Glen Ross* – Winning Means Everything

Leslie Kane notes just a few of the description that *Glengarry Glen Ross* has accumulated by the critics over the years. It has been described as

“a savage microcosm of the urban jungle”; “death in the capitalist food chain”; “one of the most exciting verbal concoctions of the modern theatre”; and a dramatization of “the Tocquevillian connection between the public self- the hurly-burly of those caught within a business-as-sacrament world – and the private self – the anguished characters’ inner reality.” [The play] lives above all through its language, in which inspired elisions and explosive invectives are peppered with “perfectly timed verbal feints and body blows.”¹

The play is exposing mendacity and moral bankruptcy in the market place; conditions that are penetrating the whole society. Furthermore, it lacks moral centre represented on stage. As David Kennedy Sauer points out, “none of the characters offer the audience any kind of *raisonneur* or trustworthy central intelligence.”² The competitive environment, the economic system forces one worker to compete against and defeat another. As the playwright commented upon the play before its opening in Chicago:

Look, this play is not about love. [...] This is a play about power. This is a play about guys, who when one guy is down [...] the guy who’s up then kicks the other guy in the balls to make sure he stays down.³

There is no room for values and empathy in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The company is seeking control over its workforce; the salesmen are seeking control over their customers and over each other. Complete control is the only vision in such a power hungry environment. What are the consequences of this situation for those involved? Is there a possibility for a different solution to this vicious circle?

Glengarry Glen Ross characters, similar to those in *American Buffalo*, struggle to identify small gestures which could prove to be their salvage. Deep down they may be searching for values that they have lost but every attempt fails. They are wary of each other, they are cheated and betrayed, therefore they cheat and betray. In the dog eat dog environment they want to reach the summit before their competition does. Salesmen, “partly confidence

¹ Leslie Kane, *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 18.

² David Kennedy Sauer, “The Marxist’s Child Play of Mamet’s Tough Guys and Churchill’s Top Girls”, in *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 131.

³ Matthew C. Roudane, *Something Out of Nothing*, in *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004) 48.

tricksters, partly fabulators”⁴, spin their yarns and invent stories fitting their job description, and selling whatever needs to be sold. “Always be Closing ...”⁵ hovers over the play as a perverted golden rule. The salesmen are selling all the time, whether to their customers or their colleagues. If there are instances when they are not selling, then they talk avidly about it and as long as they are talking, they are in control. They know how to maintain good opinions. They come across as conscientious, compassionate listeners, ever ready to empathise, to show sympathy. Yet at the same time, imperceptibly, they are the ones reaching for the reins, feeding lines, feeding lies, overwhelming, forever being on a verge of making a deal. C.W.E Bigsby comments on the way salesmen treat win over their customers:

The essence of salesmanship [...] is to imply both that the customer is getting a bargain and that he or she is in a position to take advantage of the seller. The relationship is one in which the customer is offered the illusion of power; it takes as its premise the exploitative nature of human relationships.⁶

Furthermore, Mamet’s salesmen are in constant competition; they fight among themselves for the best “leads”, they are on the line to persuade potential customers to buy; one way or another they are incessantly checked by the company owners. The salesmen compete for prizes and a failure to succeed results in a job loss. Although the winner takes literally all that is on offer; the best tracts of land to sell, the Cadillac, the money and the possibility of gaining unchallengeable power in the office and out among the prime real estate customers, at the same time, however, even the most successful salesman only fulfils company’s goals. In David Worster’ view the company abuses “the salesmen, [therefore, they] in turn, become abusers themselves.”⁷ They become the victims of a system which turns them against each other. These relationships between salesmen and customers; salesmen themselves; the company and its salesmen; thus expose the intricate systems of power that exist between them and the potential for abuse and exploitation that it carries within. There are no relationships, there is no friendship, there is no mutual understanding; everybody struggles out there on his own to overpower everyone else that wanders his way.

The first part of the play introduces pairs of unsatisfied salesmen, who are under pressure to win over customers due to the fierceness of the competition system in the company. According to Bigsby, what appears to fascinate Mamet “is the pattern of power that emerges

⁴ C.W.E. Bigsby, *David Mamet (Contemporary Writers)*, (London: Methuen, 1985) 113.

⁵ David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Mamet Plays: 3 – Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie Du Chien, The Shawl, Speed-The-Plow*, (London: Methuen, 1996) 43.

⁶ Bigsby, 114.

⁷ David Worster, “How to Do Things With Salesmen – David Mamet’s Speech-Act Play”, in *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 73.

in such relationships – the extent to which the dominance and subservience are established independently of the lexical content of exchanges.”⁸This does not apply only to *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it happens throughout Mamet’s career in writing, but it is in this play that its force is most striking. The subject of a conversation could even be irrelevant, yet, it prepares the stage for a power battle between the two concerned parties. The meeting between Shelly Levene and John Williamson is its best example. Their conversation is strewn with generally incomprehensible jargon: “leads”, “the board”, “cold calling”, “six and ten”, “sheets”, “closing”, even the region of “Glengarry” does not paint the picture most accurately. Only later is the audience capable of deciphering these hints. Yet, they are not crucial for sensing the unease, the unanswered cry for power, which translates to a simple whimper for help; the status of one, the powerlessness of the other; the undertow that is pulling the audience into different direction than the one talked about. Contrary to what is being spoken, Bigsby remarks that “the power relationship emerges clearly enough, this being more important than the precise context of the relationship”⁹ in the first Levene-Williamson encounter. Levene’s flow of language shatters again and again on Williamson’s monosyllabic answers which clearly show his growing disinterest, irritation even, although it may not be clear from the intensity that springs out from Levene. Levene wants to maintain something that does not exist to start with. By coming into the conversation with all the confidence and bravado he paints a false picture that it is him who is in charge but his verbal authority over Williamson is missing from the very beginning. As Worster points out

an insistence upon speaking (and calling attention to one’s own speech) is a claim to verbal, sexual, and economic power in this play; an insistence (subtle or blatant) that others shut up and listen is a strategy to deprive one’s listeners of that same power.¹⁰

It is a paradox to certain extent that it is the quieter man of the two, in the play filled to the brim with verbosity that comes on top. It is Williamson who has the power over Levene, however hard Levene tries to change that notion. Williamson very likely has the means to improve Levene’s unenviable situation, it would not hurt him to go out of his way, Levene is not the only unsuccessful salesman. But Williamson’s motive is more sinister – he wants Levene to suffer his powerlessness. It is as Williamson explains himself to Levene towards the end of the play: “Because I don’t like you.”(64) Williamson is fully aware of his current position in the company and thus subsequently, his current status among the salesmen, which

⁸ Bigsby, 115.

⁹ Bigsby, 115.

¹⁰ Worster, 74.

is what matters most in the end, therefore he cannot take into account any pleas or threats; no former relationships that could be considered friendships or that Levene wishes to be considered as such. Current however is the crucial word in this world of salesmen, because they are not judged by their achievements from few weeks ago – status of their world shifts very rapidly. Levene is also aware of the company members' shifting status and when his reminiscences and nostalgia appeals do not work on Williamson he starts bombarding him with a slur of abuse and expletives which turn into intimidation. Even though Levene's threats do not escalate into an open physical attack – he attempts to prove his point (his presumed power) over Williamson by ransacking and destroying his office. Levene cannot hide away his unenviable position with however much bravado and self-assuredness he approaches Williamson in the first scene:

Levene	... I, if you'd <i>listen</i> to me. Please. I <i>closed</i> the cocksucker. His ' <i>ex</i> ', John, his <i>ex</i> , I didn't know he was married ... he, the <i>judge</i> invalidated the ...
Williamson	Shelly ...
Levene	... and what is that, John? What? Bad <i>luck</i> . [...] you want to see the court records? John? Eh? You want to go down ...
Williamson	... no ...
Levene	... do you want to go down- <i>town</i> ...?
Williamson	... no ...
Levene	... then ...
Williamson	... I only ...
Levene	... then what is this 'you <i>say</i> ' shit, what is that? (Pause.) What is that ...?
Williamson	All that I'm saying ...
Levene	What is this 'you <i>say</i> '? A deal kicks out ... I got to <i>eat. Shit</i> , Williamson ... <i>Shit You</i> , Moss ... Roma ... look at the sheets [...] Nineteen <i>eighty</i> , <i>eighty-one</i> ... <i>eighty-two</i> [...] Who's up there?
Williamson	Roma.
Levene	Under him?
Williamson	Moss.

Levene Bullshit. John. Bullshit. [...] It's *me*. It isn't *fucking* Moss. [...] you're going to miss me, John, I swear to you.

Williamson Murray ...

Levene ... you *talk* to Murray ...

Williamson I have. And my job is to marshall those leads ...

Levene Marshall the leads ... marshall the leads? What the fuck, what bus did *you* get off of, we're here to fucking *sell*. Fuck marshalling the leads. What the fuck talk is that? What the fuck talk is that? [...] You're giving it to me, and what I'm saying is it's *fucked*.

Williamson You're saying that I'm fucked.

Levene Yes. (*Pause*.) I am. I'm sorry to antagonize you. (6-8)

It is Levene's carefully planned attack that crumbles on Williamson's defence and any attempt at improvisation on Levene's side fails him even further. He does not realize that Williamson's exercise of power over him does not allow him to succeed at all. Praise does not work, so he takes his attack a level higher, but again, to no real avail. Thus they reach a point where it finally dawns on Williamson that Levene is unrepentant and he realizes that it is time to show Levene what their true positions in the company are.

Williamson Let me tell you something, Shelley. I do what I'm hired to do. [...] I'm given a *policy*. My job is to do *that*. What I'm *told*. That's it. You, wait a second, *anybody* falls below a certain mark I'm not *permitted* to give them the premium leads. [...] Murray said ...

Levene *Fuck* him. *Fuck* Murray. John? You know? You tell him I said so. What does *he* fucking know? [...]

Williamson Murray said ...

Levene John. John ...

Williamson Will you please wait a second. Shelley. Please. Murray told me: The hot leads ...

Levene .. ah, *fuck* this ... (6-8)

Yet, Levene has not surrendered his struggle. But Williamson delivers a final blow when he says to Levene that "Either way. You're out" (8) and this is a position that Williamson does not abandon whatever more abuse and threats Levene hurls at him. Williamson is out there to exploit his newly gained status in the company and when Levene offers him ten percent of all the deals that he would close, not only does Williamson take twenty percent instead, he

Levene Well, I want to tell you something, fella, wasn't long I could pick up the phone, call Murray and I'd have your job. [...] 'Mur, this new kid burns my ass.' 'Shelly, he's out.' You're gone before I'm back from lunch. [...]

Williamson I have to go ... (He gets up.)

Levene [...] Give me the one lead. [...]

Williamson I can't split them.

Levene Why?

Williamson Because I say so. (12-13)

Before they next meet Levene manages to gain some confidence because he closes what he believes is a legitimate deal. Only Williamson knows that this customer is a notoriously known couple who, unfortunately for Levene, never fulfil an agreement. Therefore, the real power in their relationship stays on Williamson's side, and Levene's illusion is further undermined when Williamson realizes that the last night's robbery must have been Levene's work. Each of Levene's attempts at crushing his opponent – he wants his actions to speak for him: the “successful” deal, the demolished office – is met by further and stronger resistance. Williamson seems to be one step ahead in this battle, Levene is a weak opponent and no amount of abuse he throws Williamson's way is going to change that.

Levene A man's his job and you're *fucked* at yours. [...] You can't run an office. [...] You don't know what it is, you don't have the *sense*, you don't have the *balls*. [...] (61)

Levene's best laid plans have fallen apart and all he has left is obscenities and insults. Williamson, on the other hand, stays cold and aloof absenting himself from Levene's breakdown completely:

Williamson I were you, I'd calm down, Shelley.

Levene *Would* you? *Would* you ...? Or you're gonna *what*, fire me?

Williamson It's not impossible. [...]

Levene You're so full of shit.

Williamson You robbed the office.

Levene (*laughs*) Sure!

Williamson [...] You got an alibi last night? [...] What did you do with the leads? [...]

Levene I don't know what you are saying.

- Williamson If you tell me where the leads are, I won't turn you in. If you *don't*, I am going to tell the cop you stole them, Mitch and Murray will see that you go to jail.
- Levene They wouldn't do that.
- Williamson [...] What did you do with the leads? [...] you have five seconds to tell me: or you are going to jail. [...]
- Levene I sold them to Jerry Graff. (61)

Levene's humiliation at the hands of Williamson is complete. David Worster sees the struggle between the speaker and the listener throughout the play: "If utterance is power, then controlling the utterance of another strips all power away from him. Forcing another person to speak when he wishes to remain silent"¹¹ thus becomes an ultimate weapon that Williamson has just exploited, Roma will successfully put to use on Lingk and Moss attempts with much less success on Aaronow.

We can clearly perceive the development of the power struggle between the two adversaries from the first instances to the final blow. They both labour and toil through different stages: neutral language, pleas, verbal attacks brimming over into verbal violence full of expletives, curses and swearing. These exploding into physical violence on one hand, and being gradually exploited on the other.

Most of these exchanges can be perceived through the pattern of speech and its rhythm, tone and volume alone. The context may be treated almost irrelevant in Williamson and Levene's case – Williamson does not do anything else for the most part but ignores Levene. This is especially perceivable when they slide into the jargon of salesmen used among themselves; the jargon they pull off for potential buyers also and which for them is a working tool. It is a tool – language tool, from which they are however, able to distance themselves. Although all their fabrications are done through the accommodated use of language, language for them remains only that – a powerful weapon. For Bigsby, the "apparent denial of the function of language [...] is a central concern of the play."¹² In the end, it is only a handful of phrases which touch upon one's sense of anxiety, nostalgia, fear, security, comfort, reassurance, trust. Courtesy of these then, the salesmen are allowed to ensnare any potential customer or adversary but remain unable to do anything else. Here, the allocation of power (however dubious at the beginning of the exchange) becomes clear once Williamson manages to utter more than a single word reply. Furthermore, he remains unscathed by Levene's boisterous

¹¹ Worster, 74.

¹² Bigsby, 119.

attempts to defeat that position, if anything, Levene's struggle for power elsewhere only adds more power to his opponent in the end. Even when Williamson is troubled and pressured from every salesman (especially Roma) about the leads that may have gone missing after the robbery, he manages to keep Levene in check, he does not allow him to take advantage. Williamson recognized Levene's anxieties, fear and insecurity; therefore, Levene is an easy prey for him. Even though Levene may be attempting to join Roma's successful bandwagon, the difference in the status of the two salesmen and their abilities that allow them such a status is vast and so is the significance of Williamson's silence when confronted by Roma and his contempt for Levene's explosion of bile. Williamson may fear Roma because of Roma's success rate but in his eyes Levene is not even worth bothering with anymore:

Levene You *are* a shithead, Williamson ... (*Pause.*)

Williamson Mmm.

Levene You can't think on your feet you should keep your mouth closed. (*Pause.*) You hear me? I'm *talking* to you. Do you hear me ...?

Williamson Yes. (*Pause.*) I hear you.

Levene You can't learn that in an office. [...] You can't *buy* that. You have to *live* it.

Williamson Mmm.

Levene [...] I'm *talking* to you, I'm trying to tell you something.

Williamson You are? [...] What are you trying to tell me? (58)

As Mamet put it himself when he talked of his plays such as *American Buffalo* or *Glengarry, Glen Ross*:

How can we get the American people to bend over. If we win ... we're successful and we give ourselves awards in advertising and we give ourselves awards in the motion picture academy ... And we give ourselves awards in a weekend at Palm Beach. And if we lose, we're on the unemployment lines and we're having food stamps and poverty comes in the door and love goes out the window. But what's the difference? I mean what are we trying to succeed in aid of?¹³

What then drives Mamet's salesmen? Do they empathise at all? Do they search for something they may have lost long ago? Perhaps, in their line of job, they do not have time to ask these questions and follow the answers. Their objective is clear – break the buyer; break your

¹³ Leslie Kane, ed., *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004) 48.

opponent; “always be closing”; yet, in the hunt for their objective they have lost their purpose. They do not want to know what lies beyond all their effort, what is achieved once the deal closes. If they asked these questions, their daily performance would be put in doubt (self-doubt even), their careers, their whole lives would be turned upside down. Moss and Levene did hint at these questions and how did they end up? Doubt has left them unwilling to stay in such a world, yet unable to leave it at the same time. Maybe Roma’s philosophical escapade aimed at his customer (in order to achieve a successful deal) is not just full of empty words. Maybe that is why Levene is struggling. But as in the case of (doubtful) Levene, if a glimpse of some deficiency coming to the surface is caught, due to the nature of their vocation - Moss’s observation that “the establishment keeps you enslaved” (17) is more than apt - they cannot delve any deeper. Therefore, similar to *American Buffalo* their actions are not allowed to take a different route and any sign of weakness implies just another loss. The vision of security turned into vision of wealth and that has turned into unquenchable greed and all the attributes that it brings – money, authority and power. The performers lost the last vestiges of humanity and went on to outperform everybody.

It is interesting however how thin the line is the salesmen walk and how powerless they are at the very beginning of an encounter with the opposition. According to David Worster

initially, the power of decision actually lies with the listener. In the making of a request, the hearer has power over the speaker – the speaker makes the request, and the hearer has the ability to agree or to refuse. This relative power relationship is the reverse of an order or a command, in which (if the speech-act is to be felicitous) the speaker has the authority over the hearer.¹⁴

This general notion is however undermined in the world of David Mamet, where inability of some strongly favours the abilities of others. Mamet’s salesmen are in position to make requests only, but they always speak, moreover they are allowed to speak as if they were in position to give orders and commands. It is quite interesting and somewhat ironic that at the very beginning it is merely polite requests the salesmen can use, therefore the power over proceedings really rests with the listener and only he can acknowledge the authority of the speaker. Worster ponders the issue further:

if a customer does recognize and obey salesman’s nonexistent authority, that recognition indicates a need on the part of the customer not so much for whatever the speaker is selling, but for an authority – someone to tell him what to do and how to act.¹⁵

¹⁴ Worster, 67.

¹⁵ Worster, 67.

This can be seen in Levene's replay of his successful sale to Roma. He boasts of the total control he held over his customers, more likely however (especially in Levene's case), it would be attributed to customers' inability to establish the difference between a command and a request and their subsequent inability to recognize the true authority. The salesmen on the other hand are well attuned to these nuances. Due to their exploitation and inability to perceive beyond however, they are unable to constitute and establish any (we cannot even consider the adjective long-lasting) relationships.

Thus, friendships do not exist, they are not formed and do not last, they are only conveniences, as in the case of a little impromptu drama Roma and Levene act out on a customer (Ling) who may have second thoughts.

Roma *sees something outside the window.* [...] Oh, Christ.

Levene [...] We'll go to lunch, the leads won't be up for ...

Roma You're a client. I just sold you five waterfront Glengarry Farms. I rub my head, throw me the cue 'Kenilworth'. (47)

Roma is able to recognize the danger with the little glimpse out of the window he is allowed. The following scene enables him to regain Ling's (customer's) trust. Roma's powerful act from last night did not have as much effect on Ling's wife, this little number from him and Levene should re-establish Roma's position as a highly successful and important salesman. A new situation arises where they both have to act spontaneously, with no prior planning or preparation, they are to rely on each other and count on each other's wits. Yet they manage to run the whole dialogue smoothly, authentically and believably, which can also suggest that such an occurrence is nothing unusual in the life of these salesmen. Levene's approach is without a glib, this must have been the real estate office as he used to know it. But Roma has moved with the times. This is just a temporary escape from truly different reality. Roma uses the spiel as yet another device through which he can ensnare a client, and for that one minute he and Levene cooperate all the fierce competition and misunderstandings are put aside in order to overpower the hesitating customer. But their relationship cannot be called friendship. Roma's true colours and the reality of the dealings in the office come through in the end when he (unaware that Levene is responsible for the robbery) demands from Williamson the

top two [leads] off the list. For *me*. My usual two. Anything you give *Levene* [...] I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is *mine*, whatever *he* gets, I'm talking half. You put me in with him. [...] Do you understand? My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours. (66)

Yet, it is just another indicator of Roma's ability to hold people around him in constant check. Roma is the one character who, thanks to his skills, is unstoppable. His power over Lingk is such that Lingk is embarrassed to demand his rights; he is worried about his second thoughts; he is worried to break the deal; he is worried to betray Roma's trust. He is just not allowed to perceive the circumstances on his own terms, even though it is his money and investments involved and in the end, it is a future that will have nothing to do with Roma. Yet, even when Roma is caught out on something blatant and obvious (something where he is clearly wrong), he either confuses the opposition further or changes the subject completely and does so persistently in order to give the customer, in this case Lingk, as little time as possible for some rational thinking.

Lingk They said we have three days.

Roma Three days.

Lingk To ... you know.

Roma No I don't know. *Tell* me.

Lingk To change our minds.

Roma Of *course* you have three days. [...] Three *business* days. They mean three *business* days.

Lingk Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

Roma I don't understand.

Lingk That's what they are. Three business ... if I wait till Monday, my time limit runs out.

Roma You don't count Saturday.

Lingk I'm not.

Roma No, I'm saying you don't include Saturday ... in your three days. It's not a *business* day.

Lingk But I'm not *counting* it. (*Pause.*) Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. So it would have elapsed.

Roma What would have elapsed?

Lingk If we wait till Mon ... (51-52)

It is Lingk at the beginning of the above exchange that is in a strong position to use (rightfully) the power of information he has for his own, lawful purposes, but we can perceive that he is constantly dragged through a quagmire of confusion which ultimately makes him give in. The unfinished word at the end of the sentence shows signs of exasperation but also,

viewed on Roma's terms, signs of Lingk's utter subservience and some kind of (however wrongly perceived by Lingk) realization that maybe he is offending and antagonizing Roma by his demands. Even after he finds out that the deal has been finalized and he did not manage to prevent that from occurring he feels that it was solely him who failed Roma in the proceedings. After all, however mistakenly perceived by Lingk, it is Roma he counts on to deliver him from his wife's "oppression."

Lingk Oh, Christ [...] Oh, Christ ... (*Pause.* To Roma.) I know I've let you down. I'm sorry. For ... Forgive ... for ... I don't know anymore. (*Pause.*) Forgive me. (58)

He lacks the knowledge or the skills to overpower his opponent. However much in the right he may be, it is Roma on whom the outcome of the situation rests. Even when checked with the amount of days left before the possibility to void the agreement expires, Roma stays unfazed; he takes a breather, retreats few steps and leads Lingk in completely different direction with a fabrication about Lingk's check not being cashed yet and takes him full circle back to the beginning over again.

Roma I'm *very* sorry, Jimmy. I apologize to you.

Lingk It's not me, it's my wife.

Roma (*pause*) What is?

Lingk I told you.

Roma Tell me again.

Lingk What's going on here?

Roma Tell me again. Your wife.

Lingk I told you.

Roma You tell me again. (54)

Thus, it is Roma who is able and allowed to accommodate facts, truths, half-truths and lies for his own ends when he delivers his facts to Lingk: "you can change your mind three working days from the time the deal is closed [...] which is not until the check is cashed."(52)

However, Roma is not as successful in the end as he may have wanted to be. It may have to do with all the commotion concerning the robbery - he may have become distracted from his charm weaving, but it may also be that Lingk, who mentions his wife's adamant position on few occasions, cannot yield to Roma's proposals because somebody else – Mrs. Lingk, somebody he may consider even more powerful than Roma, overruled the decision from last

night and there is nothing anyone, Lingk or Roma can do about it. It was only embarrassment that kept Lingk from mentioning the real circumstances. He did not want to allow the men from this macho environment to treat him as a failure; therefore he did not want to openly talk about his marriage. It is Lingk's wife that runs the dealings in the household as some of Lingk's lines clearly suggest: "She called the Consumer ..." (50), "It's not me, it's my wife", "She wants her money back" (54), "She told me 'right now'", "She won't listen", "She told me if not, I have to call the State's Attorney", "She told me I *have* to", "I can't negotiate"(55), "She told me not to talk to you" (56). Lingk's last night agreement is seen in a different light. It is a cry for help from his subservient position, or even as a rebellion against his wife; a rebellion which is quenched the next morning. However, in his weakness, he had not chosen the most ideal person to expect genuine understanding from, if that really is what he is seeking.

Their actual positions in the dealings become clearer when Lingk is cornered by Roma and asked what it actually means that he cannot negotiate. Lingk's answer paints the picture of the situation very distinctly:

Lingk I don't have the *power*. (*Pause.*) I said it.

Roma What power?

Lingk The power to negotiate [the deal]. (56)

Lingk's humiliation is complete. He believes that a retraction from a deal between the two men renders him as pathetic as he sees himself in connection with his wife. Suddenly, it is a character, who has not made a bodily appearance (just like Mitch and Murray – the feared company owners); furthermore, it is a female character and a character who does not utter a single line, her impositions are only carried to the salesman (just like Mitch and Murray's are expressed through Williamson); that has the power to decide the fate of not only her husband, but in this instance, also influence Roma's life. But Williamson makes it known at the beginning of Act Two (Roma tries to hide the fact) that the deal has been finalized and the check has gone through (however, neither Roma, nor Lingk knows that Williamson has forgotten to send the check to the bank, he is only trying to save face in confrontation with Roma), therefore the long distance power struggle between Roma and Mrs. Lingk remains in uncertainty, but the circumstances favour the woman. Not only does she challenge the salesmen's macho demeanour, she retains her power of the listener to challenge a request. She for once, as David Worster observes "defies the code of machismo and the derogatory

preconceptions of women articulated by the salesman.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is not a win-win situation for Lingk family; it represents more a question of everyday survival for them between the heavy forces that strike against them and the adaptation that one has to undergo, the weapons one has to deploy in order to survive. On the other hand, this is not a total loss for Roma, one that would cause him to collapse. Certainly, he has lost some money and the opportunity to win the car, but his starting position and goals differ from his customers’. Unlike Levene, who had not closed a deal for some time, and the one he believes he closed, the one that gives him some hope of retained confidence is not going to go through, because “the conman got conned” by a couple who are “insane. They just like talking to salesmen.” (64) Roma remains on course even though he may have received a little dent in his campaign.

Roma (among many other Mamet’s prominent confidence men – conmen characters) has a full arsenal of different tactics and approaches which he has mastered over the span of his career. Whether it is casual talk, philosophical musings, top-of-the-world rant, anger, sweet talk, confusion, empathy, he knows his language inside out. But, language becomes a trap not only for the customers that are offered tracts of land in the Glengarry Glen Ross area but also for those selling the land. A good example is Moss’s proposal to Aaronow and their antecedent and subsequent conversation. Moss has realized Aaronow’s needs, he believes he can thus persuade him to take part in his idea. Moss has just realized the pattern that Roma has been using so successfully with his customers; the pattern that Levene cannot find when he tries to seize the power from Williamson. Worster sees Moss’s or Roma’s approach as very good salesmanship tactics. “A key component of salesmanship is the creation or identification of the customer’s needs, which the salesman can then offer to meet.”¹⁷ Aaronow is in dire need of somebody who could show him some understanding, some compassion. Moss has the skills to realize Aaronow’s anxieties. He works on Aaronow’s trust for a little while, agreeing with his half finished opinions (which remain so due to Aaronow’s uncertainties), dwelling on his ideas, supporting his grievances, in other words, befriending Aaronow so he can then exploit the gained trust and is able to deliver his idea of robbing the company of the best leads and either selling them on or following them but without the company. Moss exercises his deadly skills of manipulation on a weaker individual. Furthermore, their little talk is a very good example of salesmen only talking for talking’s sake. As has been mentioned already, talking gives them some sense of control, however illusional it may be. Therefore, when it comes to absorbing words and realizing their meaning they find it difficult to actually

¹⁶ Worster, 79.

¹⁷ Worster, 65.

understand each other. They are unable to recognize the difference between dismissible and irrelevant talk, which only establishes the speaker and the listener (the power relationship in the case of the salesmen) and a proper conversation, which conveys some meaning.

- Moss You're absolutely right, and I want to tell you something.
- Aaronow What?
- Moss I want to tell you what somebody should do.
- Aaronow What?
- Moss Someone should stand up and strike *back*. [...] Someone should rob the office.
- Aaronow Huh.
- Moss That's what I'm *saying*. We were, if we were that kind of guys, to knock it off, and *trash* the joint, it looks like robbery, [...]
- Aaronow Yes. I mean are you actually *talking* about this, or are we just ...
- Moss No, we're just ...
- Aaronow We're just '*talking*' about it.
- Moss We're just *speaking* about it. (Pause.) As an *idea*.
- Aaronow As an idea.
- Moss Yes.
- Aaronow We're not actually *talking* about it.
- Moss No.
- Aaronow Talking about it as a ...
- Moss *No*.
- Aaronow As a *robbery*.
- Moss As a 'robbery'?! No. (19-21)

The whole idea is not so repulsive to Aaronow after all, although Moss is clearly suggesting an act of thievery. But Aaronow cannot read very well between the lines and the domineering Moss just fills in the blanks for and without him. But it is Moss who becomes aware of the robbery acquiring a real shape and hesitates; (we subsequently find out that he also spoke to Levene about the idea) his world is also filled with anxiety and raging against it verbally is one thing, but taking action himself is a very different notion. Nonetheless, he pushes on and after 'talking' about it for a little longer it is clear that he wants Aaronow to do it. Aaronow

warns him that they could trace the robbery back to Moss, his alibis are certainly not tight proof and reminds one again of half botched plans of Don in *American Buffalo*. Moss's naivety, when it comes to drawing the actual details further proves the point that his goal was to win over Aaronow; to talk and persuade him which he has managed; otherwise he has not thought his idea through; he has not looked beyond.

Moss What will they know? That I stole the leads? I *didn't* steal the leads, I'm going to the *movies* tonight with a friend, and then I'm going to the Como Inn. [...] Let'em prove something. They can't prove anything that's not the case. (24)

Moss seems to be scared to do the deed himself, therefore he wants to convince Aaronow to do it for him and he is trying with all the means he has. One, however absurd it may sound, is that if questioned about the robbery he would name Aaronow as his accomplice, as an accessory. Aaronow, who is not allowed to think things through, is crushed under the weight of the development of the situation, therefore he cannot find the right answers; he capitulates and remains overpowered by Moss's trickery. Moss made Aaronow an accomplice just through the act of speech. Language has reformed reality for them. Aaronow's inability to stop Moss's authority has made this possible. Moss grinds through the stages of praises and pleas, promises and threats; in his growing desperation it is all he has left in order to achieve his goal. It is only because Aaronow's mind is so muddled, Moss is allowed to capitalize.

Aaronow Why are you doing this to me, Dave? Why are you talking this way to me? I don't understand. Why are you doing this at *all* ...?

Moss That's none of your fucking business [...] You *went* for it. [...]

Aaronow You need money? Is that the ...

Moss Hey, hey, let's just keep it simple, what I need is not the ... what do *you* need ...?

Aaronow [...] What is the, you said that we were going to *split* five ...

Moss I lied. (Pause.) Alright? My end is *my* business. [...] In or out. You tell me, you're out you take the consequences. [...]

Aaronow And why is that?

Moss Because you listened. (25-26)

Why the proposal itself, then? If it concerns financial issues, it concerns them only to certain extent. Moss's situation is not half as bad as Levene's, according to Williamson, Moss is second on the board and it is unlikely that both Aaronow and Levene would have successful

enough sales to overtake him. What else can be Moss proposing then in his oblique way? He has gained the power over Aaronow, but is he not, at the same time also trying to disrupt the power that holds the chain of the company together? Through Aaronow he is reaching out for the power of the company. But he wants to challenge the system that he has been an internal part of for some time. Therefore, even his attempt at the disruption of the company is somehow corrupted from within. Stealing the leads is understandable, but why does he (or they, if we realize that Levene was his accomplice) steal the phones also? The removal of phones actually reinstates the power of the company bosses. According to Steven Price

[it] is not possible to exercise delegated authority by telephone. The pyramidal structure of job-division and description and delegated powers cannot withstand the speed of the phone to by-pass all hierarchical arrangements, and to involve people in depth.¹⁸

Orders are thus handed down by word of mouth from the very top through Williamson to the salesmen, therefore, whatever Williamson “repeats” to the salesmen has an approval of the higher authority. The power struggle is working on every level of this structure. It originates within the company owners, then it is passed to the salesmen and trickles down to potential buyers who, ultimately led by the nose, are only bamboozled into illusion of power. Moss’s actions, his mishandling of the situation; his incomprehensible, glaring mistake has thus allowed the company to regain the exact power he wanted to rob them of. This failure proves Moss’s extemporaneousness when dealing with his ill-conceived plans which must also at least partially be attributed to the fact that Moss is just another cog in the wheel, but if nothing else, it underlines his position among the salesmen. He managed to overpower Aaronow and afterwards execute the plan with Levene.

A similar example of a salesman’s dexterity can be seen in Roma’s and Lingk’s conversation, which is almost entirely under Roma’s conduct and is an exercise of power for him over an unknown, met-for-the-first-time, potential customer that will swing his ratings over the top and deliver him the first prize – Cadillac car. Roma talks philosophy, talks about moral values, about one’s life and chances that one misses and other chances that must be seized, he is ticking the boxes with common ideas, ideals, opinions, truths. These are uttered with bad intentions but they do carry some useful advice also, very much in contrast with Roma’s actions. Robert H. Vorlicky points out exactly what a successful salesman’s rant obtains.

¹⁸ Steven Price, “Negative Creation – The Detective Story in *Glengarry Glen Ross*”, in *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 12.

Man is afraid of “loss” and has traditionally turned to “greed” as a false sense of security; unwilling to believe himself to be “powerless,” man must “trust” his own power to “do those things which seem correct to [him] today.”¹⁹

In Roma’s confidence and arrogance, it takes him several minutes into their one sided conversation before he actually introduces himself: “My name is Richard Roma, what’s yours?” (29) (Similarly robust and arrogant introduction is heard from him when he meets the detective investigating the robbery) But at this time, Roma already knows that he has managed to wriggle his way into his target’s wallet. Even after the robbery takes place, Roma is bursting with confidence with which he smites the detective in charge of the investigation as well as Williamson who is in charge of all the company’s paperwork. Once he realizes that the agreement he had with Lingk was not filed because Williamson forgot about it, his anger rises and he falls into an escapade of obscenities and vulgarisms that top whatever he has uttered before. Anne Rice comments upon Roma’s language being: “highly charged, vividly concentrated and bloody with verbal slaughter.”²⁰

Roma [...] I’m over the fucking top and you owe me a Cadillac.

Williamson I ...

Roma And I don’t want any fucking shit and I don’t give a shit, Lingk [(the deal he closed after his impressive performance in the bar last night)] puts me over the top, you filed it, that’s fine, any other shit kicks out *you* go back. You ... *you* reclose it, cause I *closed* it and you ... you owe me the car. [...] You know your business, I know mine. Your business is being an *asshole*, and I find out whose fucking *cousin* you are, I’m going to go to him and figure out a way to have your *ass* ... fuck you. [...] Six thousand dollars. And one Cadillac. That’s right. What are you going to do about it, asshole. You fucking *shit*. [...] You stupid fucking *cunt*. You *idiot*. [...] I’m going to have your *job*, shithead. [...] I don’t care *whose* nephew you are, who you know, whose dick you’re sucking on. You’re going *out* [...] You want to learn the first rule you’d know if you ever spent a day in life, you never open your mouth till you know what the shot is. [...] You fucking *child*. (32, 37, 58-59)

Expletives abound in Roma’s language. In the macho environment, the harsh words give Roma more self-assurance and establish his position in Williamson’s eyes more firmly. Moreover, he is implying that Williamson is not man enough in the last sentence, when the expletive is followed by the word “child.” He is making a division between the real men who

¹⁹ Robert H. Vorlicky, *Act Like a Man – Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1995) 41.

²⁰ Anne Rice, “The Discourse of Anxiety”, in *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publ., 2000) 47.

seen after Moss's threats towards Aaronow, that presumed sign of loyalty becomes a picture with different connotations. Robert H. Vorlicky sees Aaronow as the logically thinking everyman who "initially wields a great deal of power; [...] free [...] to choose whatever he wants: he can either agree or disagree."²¹ Aaronow is the only character who keeps his silence when asked to speak. How much is this his own will and how much is actually Moss's "investment"? Aaronow cannot stop thinking about his last conversation with Moss, therefore, he supposes that the only way to stay out of trouble is to keep quiet about everything. The effect that Moss's idea and subsequent entrapment had on him is enormous. He does not realize that by not coming forward he is not doing himself any favours in the long run. It is much more a sign of the power that Moss holds over him rather than a sign of loyalty. He confesses to Roma that he gets nervous when he talks to the police and Roma's advice (however ironic it may be, coming from one "spinner of yarns" to another) "The truth, George. Always tell the truth. It's the easiest thing to remember" (36) does not aid Aaronow's cause either. Similarly, Williamson's treatment of Levene after he finds out that he is the sought robber is no sign of camaraderie. He does not give him up to the police straightaway (all the time he knows that either way, it is going to happen), but that is only because he wants to further exploit his power over Levene. He threatens him with jail, with a mention to the company bosses, with job loss. Even though Williamson knows already the identity of the burglar, through the exercise of his power over Levene he takes on a job of a detective and is able to find out who the accomplice was and to whom the deals were sold. That piece of information he finds out himself has bigger importance than if it came from a policeman. Levene is made to believe that he may not be going to jail, that this "failure to steal successfully" has actually taught him something new: "Big deal. So I wasn't cut out to be a thief. I was born for a salesman." (62) It actually seems that even the notion of lawbreaking has been adjusted and "adapted" to their own purposes in their hunt for success. Steven Price comments on the real estate dealings: "The robbery tends to be seen either as peripheral, or metonymically, as merely an objectification of the crimes daily perpetrated in the name of business."²² This notion only supports their (illusion of) power. That is why Williamson feels that he is above the policeman – above the law; that is why Moss "masterminded" the robbery and secured its occurrence, why Aaronow was not too much surprised by its possibility and why Levene executed it. Pieces of (secret) information that they each possess make them feel powerful among the rest. Vorlicky's comment about the male world in Mamet is very

²¹ Vorlicky, 38.

²² Price, 3.

adequate: “Each man presumes that he can exercise a power play over the other, that he can secure domination over all others.”²³

Moss and Levene have failed in their attempt to disrupt the allocation of power. The life of the company goes on even after this minor disturbance. They took the matters into their own hands after they realized that language – their only weapon; salesmen’s mode of action has let them down. Little do they realize that it fails them just as they fail language through its constant abuse. For Worster “the language of the salesmen is emphatically self-referential, saturated with characteristics typical of ‘sales talk’, pervasively sexual, and indicative of real and imagined power relationships.”²⁴ Even expletives, especially the verb “fuck” serve only as reminders of arrogance, rising aggression and anger, with open violence surfacing at any given moment. But language is rudimentary in their line of business. When they are out chasing leads, language is the only tool they possess, it is the only and foremost means in achieving their goals – their ability or inability rests on their use of language. Whereas some, such as Roma use it to its full potential, some, such as Aaronow and Levene struggle for survival. Thus, if we do not take the company owners into account, it is Roma (and Williamson to certain extent) with whom the control of the proceedings in the office rests and the dents that some (Ling’s wife) manage to carve are seen only as a temporary hindrance. The only question remains how much Roma’s (abuse of) language can serve him before the power shifts in different direction again.

²³ Vorlicky, 45.

²⁴ Worster, 64.

4. *Oleanna* – Power in Woman’s Hands

Both elusive and allusive, the title *Oleanna* is a good introduction to the play’s linguistic strategies. Brenda Murphy disambiguates the title:

Oleanna was a nineteenth-century utopian community founded by the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull and his wife Anna: thus “*Oleanna*.” This agricultural community failed, because the land it had bought was rocky and infertile. [...] The application to the failed utopian dream of academia becomes evident as the play unfolds.¹

But to say that *Oleanna* is about education would be an understatement; *Glengarry Glen Ross* is not a play about the real estate business, either. At the time of its premiere in 1992, the play, according to Murphy, “was greatly influenced by a contemporaneous cultural event, the Senate Hearings on Clarence Thomas’s appointment to the Supreme Court, in which the issue of sexual harassment took centre stage.”² To a great extent, the play was thought to be about sexual harassment and political correctness. Murphy observes that *Oleanna* “was widely treated as a problem play about the ascendancy of political correctness in academia.”³ Followed by accusations of misogyny, there was no stoppage of different issues that the play kept raising. But as Mamet has insisted in his interview with Leslie Kane his is

a play structured as a tragedy [...] about power. [...] John and Carol] are two people with a lot to say to each other, with legitimate affection for each other. But protecting their positions becomes more important than pursuing their own best interests. And that leads them down the slippery slope to a point where, at the end of the play, they tear each other’s throat out.⁴

What is Carol really trying to achieve? For what reasons is she destroying John’s life? Are the political correctness and sexual harassment central to the play or are they just Carol’s weapons of choice in her pursuit of power? She has realized the possibility of control and once she achieves it, she will not let go. However, in doing so she unleashes a kind of power that was only hinted at in other plays. In comparison with the masculine world of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, full to the brim with expletives, humiliation and threats, *Oleanna* does not develop in overtly dissimilar lines, moreover, it manages to go one step further and take the protagonists over the edge of the cliff – its climax is violence perpetrated on stage, violence of an academically orientated man against a (physically defenceless) woman who once may have aspired for academia herself. It is the office and its equipment that ultimately bears the brunt

¹ Brenda Murphy, “*Oleanna: Language and Power*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 124.

² Murphy, 124.

³ Murphy, 125.

⁴ Geoffrey Norman and John Rezek, “*Working the Con*”, in *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) 125.

of the salesman's aggression in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In *Oleanna* however, it is the character Carol who receives the final blows on the stage, in front of the shocked audience. It is here that power shifts in one direction one minute, only to swing in the other the next. It is here that when the man – John, runs out of all the plausible arguments he stoops to the lowest and most powerful weapon that Mamet's men are in possession of – violence, the argument that is bound not to fail the perpetrator, even if the joy received from its success is rather short lived and consequences immeasurable for both parties concerned. This vicious act however, enables John to claim the final revenge for all the men that have one way or another clashed with women. All Teach's physical presence is obscured by the final phone call from Ruth and Joy in *American Buffalo*. The trio in the junk shop is thus reminded of the outside world and some order is reintroduced into their lives. Bernie's (sexual and power hungry) attempts are quashed by Joan in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. It is one Mrs. Link that actually manages to check Roma's untouchable berth in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

John holds the unassailable position of a university professor. His place appears to be cosy and secured by years of teaching; it is his own ideas that the students are taught. His achievements appear safe and he is just a short wait away from the proposed tenure and the house that it will enable him to buy – the two (the tenure and the house) that he spends half of the first act talking about into the phone whether to the real estate agent or to his wife. Leslie Kane points out that

although John's affirmation of home and family clearly underscores his prioritizing what he most values in life, his conflating and confusing the worthiness of "honourable pursuit" with "comfort" discloses that John now regularly worships himself in what Lerner aptly terms the "Glorification of materialism and the cult of individualism".⁵

It is questionable how good, how correct his model of teaching is, how misreading and misleading he is and therefore how (un)productive. His approach seems to be flawed – his clarity of expression may be doubted, his stance on human values doubtful. He is pompous and arrogant, trapped in privilege, egotism, tradition and heritage. His questioning of education contrasts with his interests in his son's best possible education. John is in pursuit of material goods that come with his status, he is overconfident, preoccupied with his own self-serving goals. Leslie Kane sees this as one of the factors in John's fall: "To the degree to which we judge ourselves more significant than another, and extol ourselves in the presence

⁵ Leslie Kane, *Weasels and Wisemen – Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999) 164.

of and at the expense, of someone else we are guilty of idol-worship: worship of self.”⁶ No thought of his is given to any plausible challenge coming from the students, especially a threat coming from a woman. Carol is just another wayward student, who he feels he ought to try and help, but there are more pressing matters at hand for John than Carol’s confused feelings. Yet, Carol has followed his example, she also sees him on that same pedestal, she looks up to him, he is her instructor, her teacher. She is aware that he holds power over her and over her education; he holds the key to her advancement. She has done everything that was required of her, still however, she does not understand. She is trying to explain her confusion to John: “I’m doing what I’m told. I bought your book, I read your [...] I’m doing what I’m told. It’s *difficult* for me.”⁷ She repeats this explanation on few occasions unable to realize that the approach she has chosen to education (partly through her own faults and partly due to John’s flaws) may not be the best formula for success. Steven Price compares different approach of the two protagonists towards education:

Carol has legitimate expectations that John will help her, and so follows a ‘power of’ model: she assumes that the lecturer can impart his superior knowledge, and that the student will understand so long as she follows his instructions. John, however, ostensibly follows a ‘power to’ model, which asks the students to think for themselves. In practice, of course, he does not do this.⁸

There is nothing wrong with John’s approach, however he does not do enough to support it. His grandiosity leaves Carol in deeper quagmire still, his verbiage seems as hazing as the system of education is according to him. He, as a teacher, must be aware that language, especially in a teacher-student relationship, is the form of communication. Carol’s inability to derive meaning from John’s speeches is actually his own inadequacy to convey them to her. Even though they both speak the same language, they fail to understand each other.

John’s attitude only further alienates Carol and gives her more ground for questioning. His patronizing – “you’re an incredibly bright girl” (6) does not help the matters at all, if anything, it only outlines more clearly his behaviour towards students. His assured attitude is supported by the whole hierarchical system, by the same fellowship which has been climbing the same ladder of the same structure for some time. There is no possibility that such status quo can be, would be challenged by anyone on the outside.

⁶ Kane, 154.

⁷ David Mamet, *Oleanna*, in *Mamet Plays: 4 – Cryptogram, Oleanna, The Old Neighbourhood*, (London: Methuen, 2002) 6.

⁸ Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays and Films of David Mamet – A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 2008) 119-120.

Mamet's favourite type of relationship, a teacher (mentor) – (pupil) student relationship can be traced throughout his writing, whether we look at *Squirrels*, and Art's and Ed's collaboration, which is allowed only on Art's (who is the older writer) terms; *A Life in Theatre*, where Robert is trying desperately to hang to glory days gone through his mentor-like relationship with John; Bernie's attempts at educating his "associate" Danny in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*; or Don's approach to the former drug addict Bob in *American Buffalo* among many. The connection between aforementioned portrayals and *Oleanna* is quite clear and the flaws and traits of the "teacher" characters are also visible. Their hypocritical attitude comes back to haunt them in every case. Art has not written anything in years and Ed turns to a Cleaning Woman in his search for collaborator; theatre is Robert's life, but it is his only life, and while John is out enjoying life, Robert is alone and lonely; Bernie's influence on Danny can be measured only negatively – because of him, Danny is unable to remain in a relationship with a woman; Don, lost in his battle for power with Teach, (inadvertently) gives Bob a lesson in betrayal and greed. In *Oleanna*, Mamet renders the teacher-student relationship. But, as in other cases, the teacher is unable to teach, because he has lost the acuity to detect the difference between right and wrong; there are no values to rely upon, there is no clear moral background.

The forever repeated expletives become weapons carrying threats in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Oleanna* that threat becomes very real. The lesser number of profanities and obscenities only signifies that the battle is fought on different grounds to real estate cutthroat office environment – a university, with its political correctness and cultural intelligence; where language should be judged on its content; quality over quantity. Both, John and Carol are educated, or striving towards education, they may not live at their wits ends as the salesmen do but they do know their language, its significance, its meaning and power. However, learning does not protect one from flaws. The biggest flaw there may be is the idea that the acquisition of knowledge becomes a licence to fancy oneself above others, above the rest. Neither John, nor Carol avoid this defect. Leslie Kane comments upon the communication between John and Carol:

Situating the dialectic in the university at the highest level of intellectual inquiry, where communication between teacher and student ideally takes the form of dialogue, Mamet explores the promise of what Buber terms "dialogic communication" – language as a link between human beings, the ideal of the I-Thou relationship – and the consequences of the breakdown of dialogue into

mono-logos, the I-It relationship, with its potential for propaganda and dehumanization.⁹

Whereas in “I-Thou relationship” there is some kind of mutual understanding and mutual awareness of some achievable goal, “I-It relationship” does not take into account anybody but the speaker. Thus, the listener as especially in *Glengarry Glen Ross* is “conned” into believing the ideas of the speaker indisputably. Kane makes a further comment on the relationship between the speaker and the listener:

[The] ideal I-Thou relation [...] draws individuals into closer unity. Nonetheless, although dialogue may be the “ideal” mode of address and relation, as this play of missed communication and miscommunication powerfully dramatizes, we typically fall short of the mark, given the simple truth that none of us ever hears exactly what someone else means to say.¹⁰

Carol and John, a student and a teacher trapped in the enclosed space of the office in search of a solution. Their relationship reveals in stages of the first act (and more clearly in the subsequent acts) that a mutual solution may not be found and that this is going to be as Kane observes

a competition to the death, a subtle minuet comprised of poses, precepts, positions, and principles in which student and teacher jostle for power to determine who is empowered to “set” the course (material), which, of course, as John points out, is the essence of (academic) freedom.¹¹

John is prepared to admit his disgust with the system. However real his disgust may be – and that is questionable because he is happy to reap the rewards that the same system gives him, he is only doing so in front of somebody, who for him does not pose a threat, besides he is only doing it as a self-preservation act, he is crying for a stamp of approval from all sides. John is according to Kane “a monster of iniquity, indecency, and impropriety who is power seeking, exploitative, and destructive.”¹² Maybe Carol has a point when she joins the Group on their quest against the system. John has played by the rules whether he likes them or not, he has done nothing overtly wrong. Success should be a reward for those who play by the rules. But he is in quest for control over his students and that is where he is checked by Carol. The ample evidence of their struggle is their struggle for the control of language. If, in the first act, Carol is left dumbfounded by John’s precepts and concepts, towards the end of their relationship it is John who becomes baffled by Carol’s language. Carol seeks to empower herself by disempowering John. It seems that they are both unable to understand the

⁹ Kane, 142.

¹⁰ Kane, 159.

¹¹ Kane, 150.

¹² Kane, 166.

difference between the need to have power over one's life and power for its own sake. Moreover it is Carol, who is quite prepared to destroy John's career, life and family. If John knew where the limits to his power were, Carol, in the same situation, is certainly unaware of them.

Carol has done everything she could have and yet in John's opinion she is failing the class. John's position in relation to Carol is nevertheless quite precarious. She is becoming desperate, she "ha[s] to pass it" (7) and any attempt of John's to talk her out of this particular class falls on deaf ears. Carol, angry at the situation she finds herself in, says to John: "I know I'm stupid. I know what I am. (Pause) I know what I am, Professor." (11) She realizes that she may not be cut out for that particular class, but she is unable to grasp why that is when she has tackled every assignment there was. She also comes to realize that John may be thinking on the same lines, and thus she is able, for the first time in their duologue, to gain some surer footing, to realize that John is not the all encompassing authority he may have seemed. John offers what seems a sincere gesture – a story from his own childhood (although it may be just another patronizing story he may have mentioned on many similar occasions) but that is declined through Carol's tendency to read everything literally:

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

Carol What was a mystery? (12)

Or in another instance when they speak about prejudice and education John says that it is his job to provoke his students into thinking, which Carol reads differently (although John, due to his lack of concentration, does not correct his thoughts in order for Carol to actually receive his messages as clearly as possible):

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? (22)

Or her readiness to find proof where none had been to start with. Once her allegations against John went through the committee she is adamant they stand and that “those are not accusations. They have been *proved*. They are facts. [...] Nothing is alleged. Everything is proved.” (40-41)

To certain extent she is right. John has been “tried” by the Committee and that has found him somewhat in error. But Carol confuses the Committee’s findings with proper and indisputable facts (she herself had been present and instigated the charges; therefore she should know what is closer to the truth). It seems to be more the university’s worry of a full scale scandal that influences their decision to find a simpler solution in a scapegoat.

Price asserts that “the real focus is on the ways that institutional conventions construct language and power relations that are open to abuse by either party”¹³, at the same time it is these conventions that limit language and power, thus at the same time limiting and defining the two protagonists, John and Carol. John’s language is according to Price “wilfully obscure, hers is rigid and totalitarian, but language always has power, always performs actions, and always has effects.”¹⁴ While Carol may feel

injured by the language of the others, she too causes injury not only to John’s public language but to his private speech when she instructs him not to call his wife ‘baby’, and it is John’s resulting feeling of complete impotence that occasions the violence.¹⁵

John is putting aside the teacher-student relationship and is probably being quite sincere with Carol about his life, about his perception of the education system. Carol, however does not appreciate him being so personal, she regards him still as her teacher, nothing less and nothing more. However, John’s personal issues come to light and Carol is able to gain valuable information for their future meetings. She may not have the potential to exploit John’s attitude yet but she will abuse it at later stages. Carol actually changes John’s mere words into actions – when he says that he wishes he could vomit in front of the Great Tenure Committee, so to prove them he is no good for the job (17) or when he rhetorically questions his entitlement to a job, a nice home, a wife and a family (17). Suddenly, he finds himself in a position he seriously considered he was suited for – with no job and no family, with no support on his side. A mute rebel allowed to express his “true” opinions.

¹³ Price, 113.

¹⁴ Price, 116.

¹⁵ Price, 116.

Is it possible to find the tipping point in their already very delicately poised relationship? Why does John really want to meet with Carol and “start over.”? (18) John’s offer does not carry any extramarital promises, however he confesses that he likes Carol (maybe because she truly reminds him of himself full of doubts and unanswered questions in his younger age). If that is so, John falls victim (as Mamet’s characters do) to the trait of showing one’s emotions, true feelings, understanding, emancipation, and friendship. Carol must have learned by now, that reciprocity is as dangerous as misapprehension of untrue feelings. It may however be that John realizes his inadequacy and the fact that the system (students included) had overlooked the fact for so long that it needed this particular student to point it out. What then are the measures he is considering to take? He will attempt to work on Carol’s perception of his teaching and the whole matter will not overgrow into a wide scale issue. He is able to deploy this line of thinking because of his position, because of his perception of the possible consequences if he failed (F graded) the dissatisfied student. He wants to preserve the status quo and he will use and abuse all the power (vested in him by the system) he possesses in order to achieve just that. But the audience is not able to ponder the point for long, because the ensuing conversation is the tipping point for Carol’s growing unease and John’s desperateness. However much he is trying to exercise his powers, his authority is slipping from him further and further. Carol, although unable to perceive it yet, is gaining over John and her meeting with The Group will enable her to fully appreciate her newly acquired importance.

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.*) (19)

Little further on in the conversation, John makes few more remarks that are completely out of line with what Carol was made to believe he was teaching his students. She is crying out for clear explanations, "NO, NO – I DON'T UNDERSTAND. DO YOU SEE??? I DON'T UNDERSTAND ... (25), but all she receives in return is just another muddle of ideas and opinions (such as John's suggestion that education is prolonged and hazing and many children would do better in life without further education, (19-25)) she had not faced before. She has had enough by now, and is trying to dictate the content of their conversation and steer it in a direction she can actually follow. The power shifts further from John and towards Carol. John's subsequent repeated apology is a sign that he is beginning to understand the precariousness of the situation he has allowed himself in. Carol does not exploit the development of the scenario and she does not press her point further (yet), because of her (and the audience's) unawareness of the shift in positions of power between her and John. John, on the other hand, has the ability to recognize a challenge, however, for his own bad and Carol's good, he has strayed so far, that he is unable to retreat.

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. (22)

John's patronizing gesture – he "*puts his arm around her shoulder*" (25) makes Carol flinch away from him, but brings a turnaround and she is actually ready to tell John her secret that

she is “bad” (26) she has not told anybody all her life. However, another phone call concerning John’s new house and a surprise party interrupts this intimate moment and the secret stays hidden forever. Thus we are left guessing at the content of Carol’s secret and its relevance to the subsequent developments in their relationship. The best we can do is to assume that she may have been abused in childhood, which would actually explain her preparedness to listen to the Group and bring John to his knees. But that does not explain her willingness to share the secret after their heated conversation. John’s recurrent shushing that followed his touch may have calmed Carol’s nerves and the trust and respect she had for the teacher was still present. If that is so, then the interrupting phone call must have caused another ripple in Carol’s readiness to believe and follow.

Carol comes back armed with the knowledge of power she now possesses over John and his career that enables her to see the first meeting retrospectively and treat the particular conversation with similar contempt she had received. She has found her vocabulary she may have lacked in Act 1. She has been empowered (with the same power that she correctly observes John loves so (p. 34)), maybe for the first time in her life, and she is cherishing the moment.

John [...] 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 ... (30-31)

All of a sudden, John’s touch of Carol’s shoulder is perceived as an “embrace”, John is “sexist” and “elitist”, he had asked Carol to his room, because he likes her. (32) John reads sentences from Carol’s accusation: “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.” (32) These are serious accusations, very, very loosely based on what John had actually suggested. But this is the newly acquired power put to practice. This is sheer exploitation of power. Its blatant, unrestricted and unhidden exercise. She becomes “vile” and “exploitative” (35). Now she is able to say what she means and John is unable to understand. She speaks in her own words, and she speaks her mind fearless of the consequences because it is her who is holding the reins. As Kane observes

it is now Carol's turn to play the tyrant, to abuse authority, to extort, and to rule by Draconian measures. Even before we know the specifics of her agenda, we understand that she will achieve tolerance, empathy, and respect for herself and the aspirations of her group at the price of intolerance of the Other, that is, by imposition of oppressive orders that diminish them both as human beings.¹⁶

Carol is enabled to rebel against John's unassailable authority on "hazing" (35) education; against his new house, against the sanctity of his family, against his tenure; against the system of education.

Carol Do you deny it? Can you deny it ...? [...] You think you can deny that these things happened; or, if they *did*, if they *did*, that they meant what you *said* they meant [...] 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 [...]

John Can't you tell me in your own words?

Carol Those are my own words. (*Pause.*) [...] 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 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? (32-33)

However, Carol inadvertently brings in the division of a group against a group. Even though, she has seized the moment, to certain extent, she is in debt to the group she became part of. John made her open her eyes, the group has made her see, but where does she herself fit in? She loses her confident footing when she is supposed to talk about the group she has joined. Her hesitation only proves that she is not her own creation, she is what she is in the second Act because of "the people [she has] been talking to ..." (36) However much power she has taken away from John, and however much power she holds over him right now, none of it would have been achieved and sustained, had it not been for her Group. She is still uncertain about her attitude, about her role, she does not know what to do and why despite all that power she has gained. She has been searching some concrete body of information, something she could rely and fall back on. But neither party is able to deliver such a promise. "The issue here is not what I 'feel.' It is not my 'feelings', but the feelings of women." (42) She does not want to talk about her personal feelings, she is representing others. "Because I speak, yes, not for myself. But for the group; for those who suffer what I suffer." (43) Finally, she is not

¹⁶ Kane, 175.

screaming for the help of the Group at the end of the second Act, twice she is shouting for “SOMEBODY” (38) to help her. Her attitude illustrates her position to the Group and to John. She is indebted to the Group for her rise, and she sympathises with their ideas to some extent. But it is John she concentrates upon and takes her frustration out on. She may have searched understanding and empathy with her situation at some point, yet, let down by John’s ignorance; she is no longer looking for sympathy, even though she may be hiding behind that pretext. She has tasted power in her first meeting with John, and she wants more of it. Ultimately, she wants John destroyed, quashed, finished. If that is to be achieved via the Group, be it, mutual agreements on the issues are a plus, as long as John’s power is disturbed. With such a strong backing, however uncomfortable she may feel (the Group is already acting as another committee to decide John’s fate) Carol is a favourite to override any argument that John attempts to throw her way. However legitimate they may be, Carol is not backing away. For her, and through her, for the Group, this is a question of all or nothing. No more regards are taken for (the well being of) John, they have become ruthless, they are on a rampage, they want to crush their opponent.

Carol’s power in the third Act is immense and she is aware of it. John is at the receiving end of her anger and his every attempt is quashed by Carol’s relentless exploit of her position. Their dialogue reads as if it was Carol’s monologue against everything that John has ever done:

I will not recant. Why should I [?...] Do you know what you’ve *worked* for? *Power*. For *power*. [...] You worked twenty years for the right to *insult* me. [...] I saw you, Professor. For two semesters sit there, stand there, and exploit our, as you thought, ‘paternal prerogative,’ and what is that but rape; I swear to God. [...] You’re wrong. I’m not wrong. You’re wrong. [...] Why do you hate me? Because you think me wrong? No. Because I have, you think, *power* over you. (44-45)

Power over John she certainly has. Contrary to her claims that she does not want to gloat her power, that it is not revenge she wants but “UNDERSTANDING” (47) she is exercising her power to the utmost. When John defends his decision to touch her shoulder in the first act as a personal gesture “devoid of sexual content” (46) Carol, secure now in her position retorts: “I say it was not. I SAY IT WAS NOT. Don’t you begin to see ...? IT’S NOT FOR YOU TO SAY.” (46) Not only is she in control of language now, she can bend it to her will, just as John could have done before. Little does John know that his restraining her from leaving his office in the second Act is now looked at in very different light. Carol is dictating her demands: “You tried to rape me. (*Pause*.) According to the law. (*Pause*.) [...] You tried to rape me. I was leaving this office, you ‘pressed’ yourself into me. You ‘pressed’ your body

into me.” (51) There is nowhere for John to escape, he is nowhere safe anymore, Carol is fully in charge. It is a chilling portrait of power exploit and its consequent effects on mind control. “Apparently, no amount of apology is sufficient: John has no power to ask Carol to consider subjects not on her agenda.”¹⁷ Mercy, forgiveness, compassion – certainly not on Carol’s agenda. Kane believes that

obtaining and retaining power is a basic tool for survival (or the illusion of it, signified by Teach’s gun), one that illumines [...] *Oleanna* as a tragedy of power. Neither of *Oleanna*’s protagonists, however, is very likeable, and both behave in ways that are dishonourable.¹⁸

The clash of Carol’s power she has gained over John and John’s physical power over Carol is inevitable once the issue of banning John’s book is breached.

Carol We want it removed [...]
John Get out of here.
Carol If you put aside the issues of personalities.
John Get the fuck out of my office.
Carol I would reconsider.
John ... you think you can. (49)

The final straw for John comes when Carol oversteps the family (the most private) threshold and recommends him (when she must very well know what effects her “suggestion” would have on John) not to call his wife “baby” (51) John views these acts as a personal vindication, which it is once his family becomes involved, furthermore, when delivered by Carol, but destroying John’s book, destroying a book carries even grievous implications. Carol abuses her power over John, but she is more or less only mirroring John’s earlier attitude towards his student(s) whereas the Group is seizing the opportunity for its own brutal ends. Suddenly, it is up to Carol’s Group to decide what is to be taught, what is to be read, what is to be thought. Again, they are taking choice away; only power to dictate has shifted hands. If, at the very beginning, Carol was ready to settle for a good grade, now she is so far gone, that the only victory she will take is John’s complete humiliation. John does not do himself any more favours once he is running out of arguments, he grows desperate and restless. When Carol “starts to leave the room” John “want[s her] to sit down [and he] restraints her from leaving” (38), although he claims he has no desire to hold her, it is exactly what he has just done.

¹⁷ Kane, 176.

¹⁸ Kane, 148.

“Consistently, John has employed terms that have sought to influence others’ perception: ‘Look’; ‘Listen’; ‘Tell’.”¹⁹ For the second time he has touched her, this time he went in the opposite direction, he forcibly prevented her from leaving. Not only does this restraining foreshadow John’s final act in the last scene - his violent explosion, it reminds the audience/the reader of the deep division between the male world and the world of others. However much the power between John and Carol shifts, however much the pendulum swings, that mute, restraining hand of John’s has a final word. It may be, and so it is argued elsewhere, that Carol walks away a winner of the dispute, due to John’s outburst, but how many Carols live to tell the tale? Which is ultimately the more powerful argument? That is why the salesmen use only verbal threats which they employ as reminders of argument winning weapons, because everybody in the male world is aware of the consequences if such tactics is actually used. That is also why men, however absurd it may be, are quite prepared to solve problems in physical way; moreover, they are ready to accept the winner as a winner of the argument. Thus Roma’s success in the real estate may owe as much to his language skill in the field as much to his physical prowess elsewhere.

Steven Price points towards quite interesting study:

Several years after the controversy surrounding the early productions of *Oleanna* had died down Stanton B. Garner and Richard C. Raymond separately conducted empirical experiments with their students. [...] Male and female respondents alike were almost unanimous in considering John the more sympathetic character, and in regarding Carol with sometimes unrestrained hatred.²⁰

Why does the audience applaud John’s violent act? It is not because the audience is patriarchal or even misogynistic. The reaction has however very much to do with the way the play is constructed. John may not be the likeable character but he does not do anything overtly wrong. Carol on the other hand challenges John from the very first encounter. She twists his words (many of which she misunderstands), she miscomprehends his actions and gradually destroys his career and life. She seems to be handing John the chair and the outcome is inevitable. John is much better constructed character throughout and although Carol is not entirely one-dimensional, (which may be rooted in the author’s skill or the lack thereof) the fact that she is not portrayed with similar precision again lessens her chances of audience’s appraisal. There are however grounds in Carol’s perception of the situation that may make some members of the audience feel uneasy. Carol poses a threat to John, through him she poses a threat to the institutions that John represents, thus she is actually threatening

¹⁹ Kane, 172.

²⁰ Price, 117.

the long established cultural values (these would have been created by patriarchal society with women only marginally represented – i.e. the still heavily defended literary canon). Furthermore, Carol comes from a working class background; therefore, middle class position (and its “higher, different status”) may be threatened also. Although university (higher education) seems to be the ideal platform to express differing, even dissenting opinions; a place where multiculturalism should be thriving and the differences in class, race and gender should be erased, John and Carol are rooted in misapprehension and misunderstanding which Carol manages to exploit but in the end has to pay a very high price for. Some readings of John’s character “apparently do not recognise that both Mamet and his audiences may see through him and draw the appropriate conclusions.”²¹In other words, John is not the average, decent, conscientious protagonist mistreated by the opposition. He is as much responsible for the situation that occurred as Carol, if not more. According to Price,

Badenhausen even suggests that failure to perceive a sympathetic side to Carol constitutes a misreading that unwittingly mimics John’s, while conversely Carol is a careful reader who gets better at that vocation as the play progresses.²²

Although Carol’s depiction does not suggest her to be a careful reader, her progress and development in the play is certainly visible, courtesy of the self confidence she has gained via the ‘favourable’ circumstances. Carol’s seemingly changed attitude between the first two acts is a huge factor behind her unpopularity. It does her no good; it only further alienates her from the partisan audience and gives them more ammo while applauding John’s final retribution. Is Carol’s changed attitude towards John inexplicable? Her sudden transformation remains puzzling to some critics, who feel that the opportunities of the two protagonists were not equally balanced. According to Steven Price

Mamet weights the dice against the woman. [...] In practice most people have sided with John, seeming to feel that his climactic explosion of violence against a defenceless woman is somehow justified.²³

How sudden is Carol’s transformation? Or, even if we allow that the suddenness occurs between Act I and Act II, how unexpected, how unfeasible is it? She seems to trust her mentor wholeheartedly, but when she walks in the office, she is already walking in with doubts on her mind. She questions the teacher, the education, the system, the authority. However confused she may be, deep down she feels that she may be let down by these institutions and she demands to know why. Still, she is prepared to settle for a good grade

²¹ Price, 119.

²² Price, 119.

²³ Price, 113.

enabling her to continue her studies. However, she gains much more than she may have ever dreamt of. Suddenly, John's aloofness, evasiveness and arrogance pave her way towards different kind of knowledge and she is allowed a peek through John's authoritative and patronizing mask: "I came late to teaching. And I found it Artificial. The notion of 'I know and you do not'; and I saw an *exploitation* in the education process." (16) The glimpse she catches enables her to splay the cracks open even further and pull his seemingly untouchable power away from him. Price compares John to another Mamet's character, Bobby Gould:

[We] see that like the producers, salesmen and wannabes that populate earlier Mamet plays, John has bought into the success myth: he is in thrall to the power of his profession, a classicist on a power trip much like Bobby Gould [in *Speed-the-Plow*], commanding this, ordaining that.²⁴

Carol is no producer, she is no salesman either, but she trades her grades and becomes a "wannabe". She may have walked into the office a lamb for slaughter the first time, but the second time around, the developments between the two acts enabled her to walk in a tigress burning bright. "She has learned the pugnacious style which goes hand in hand with the rhetoric of abuse, and finds support and meaning in 'the ideological rigidity' of the Group."²⁵ Now, she can perceive the world around her through the eyes of those opposite her and she is certainly not giving up now, she has become ready to fight for that feeling until the bitter end. Those applauding John's final act forget that it was his attitude that enabled Carol to become a power hungry person; moreover, they do not realize that it is actually John's prized position Carol took away and occupies now, a position which John had felt very comfortable with and that is the exact position he is still craving for when he lifts the chair above Carol's head. The reversal of the roles may also seem sudden because the audience hardly suspect the power relationship in the first act, although clear indicators are already in place – arrogant position of power on one hand versus the questioning of that principle on the other. John's total control of language in comparison with Carol's struggle with its understanding, which again changes in latter stages just as the power shifts Carol's way.

The dynamic of the play, more strongly than anywhere else, revolves around power relations, attack on the hierarchy and control of language (thus control of an opponent). MacLeod rightly sees that Carol's

group mirrors the Tenure Committee; John's arbitrary decision to 'say' that Carol has an 'A' grade is mirrored in her decision to 'say' that his behaviour was

²⁴ Kane, 160.

²⁵ Price, 115.

sexually oriented; and in the first act John appears to believe that his speech brings facts into being, which is precisely what Carol does when she later accuses him of rape.[...MacLeod] does not wish to reduce the play to a drama about ‘sexual politics’; instead, it is part of the writer’s overall critique of a capitalist system based on competitive individualism.²⁶

However much feminism and political correctness is read into the play, into Carol’s actions, the play is, as mentioned above, based on power relations. Oleanna is according to Kane “an incendiary, unnerving examination of power dynamic.”²⁷ Similarly, Price believes that the play “depoliticises the serious ideological underpinnings of feminist thought by reducing them to the question of power.”²⁸ By banning John’s book, the Group would gain control over the canon of authors at the university, by challenging John’s referring term for his wife “baby”, not only do they move from public to private realm, while perceiving the patriarch as the head of a family they are actually challenging family’s sanctity as such. But John does not do himself any favours, when he invites Carol to share a “common humanity”. He may be actually alienating her, because their understanding of “common” (culture) is tainted by the society and values John represents.

Kellie Bean argues that John’s humanism conceals what is actually a defence of his own privileged status. She enumerates the charges that John is hypocritical, patriarchal and violent, while noting that the play constructs Carol as a villain. Contradicting herself further she describes Carol’s final utterance as the playwright’s approval of what has happened to her: “David Mamet disguises a vicious misogynist fantasy in a weak argument against political correctness.”²⁹ Even Elaine Showalter accuses Mamet of creating “his female protagonist a dishonest, androgynous zealot, and his male protagonist a devoted husband and father who defends freedom of thought.”³⁰ John’s traits are very readily forgotten for the sake of the argument. Carla J. McDonough also sees Mamet’s writing as deeply misogynist:

Even when his male characters – and even Mamet himself – seek to remove women and the feminine to the margins, to offstage space, they are unable to maintain a separatist male space precisely because they are obsessed with a fear of femininity. At least linguistically if not always physically, a feminine presence is continually evoked by Mamet’s male characters as they attempt aggressively to

²⁶ Christine MacLeod, *The Politics of Gender, Language and Hierarchy in Mamet’s “Oleanna”*, in *Journal of American Studies* [London] Feb. 1995: 207-208.

²⁷ Kane, 141.

²⁸ Price, 116.

²⁹ Kellie Bean, “A Few Good Men – Collusion and Violence in Oleanna”, in *Gender and Genre – Essays on David Mamet* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 123.

³⁰ Elaine Showalter, *Acts of Violence: David Mamet and the Language of Men*, in *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 6 Nov. 1992: 16-17.

deny, attack, or degrade what they perceive as feminine qualities in themselves and others.³¹

Even though the above mentioned critics raised the issue of misogyny and unfair portrayal of the two characters we must not forget that this is, first and foremost a play about power relationship, this time, in the pedagogical context. For MacLeod however, “the gender differences [...] is not the crux of the matter.”³² Focusing on the questions of sexual harassment obscures the real nature of the dynamic, which revolves around the mechanisms of “power, hierarchy and the control of language,”³³ the manipulation of which Carol learnt to some extent from John. MacLeod continues:

Carol [...] uses gender as a tactical weapon. Her abuse of power is demonstrably *unfair*, mirroring the power that men have traditionally held over women but whose operations and assumptions only become truly visible when seen in an unfamiliar light.³⁴

It is more than clear, however much Carol may have exploited her newly gained position – it is only and just what most of the Mamet’s prominent male characters do all the time (maybe more subtly at times, but as rigorously nonetheless), that ultimately she is the victim (even if portrayed as a villain). John’s final act (however tasteless and however much in taste with some members of the audience) only further supports MacLeod’s reading. Carol has simply robbed John (courtesy of the Group and John’s lack of common humanity) of his power which he had enjoyed possessing and she twisted his own weapons against him. John could not stomach such a reversal of roles and struck back. It must become clear in the end that John’s violence resolves nothing. Showalter comments on the ending in similar fashion: “The disturbing questions about power, gender, and paranoia raised in this play cannot be resolved with an irrational act of violence.”³⁵

Leslie Kane is searching for traces of humanity in John’s and Carol’s failed attempts at communication:

Riveting our attention to the expressions of rage and need in relationships of varying degrees of intimacy, whether political or personal, *Oleanna* stages our efforts, however tentative, to acquire knowledge and protect what nourishes our humanity. [...] Their attempt at civilizing communication, halting first steps,

³¹ Carla J. McDonough, *Staging Masculinity – Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama*, (New York: McFarland and Company, 2006) 72.

³² MacLeod, 204.

³³ MacLeod, 202.

³⁴ MacLeod, 210-211.

³⁵ Showalter, 17.

affirms that words are links not merely between other words but between human beings.³⁶

Women are seen differently in Mamet's male dominated world. They are "the others"; more absent than present, yet they are threatening the male establishment; an establishment which cannot be tolerated. Not only that John's is an unjustifiable and horrendous act against a human being, against humanity itself, (one wonders what might have happened if Mrs. Lingk was in Roma's presence in the *Glengarry Glen Ross* final scenes) it does not re-establish John's authority, quite the contrary, it hands the moral victory to Carol, who although physically crushed, leaves the scene triumphant. The ambiguous and final "Yes. That's right" (52) coming from Carol after she is physically attacked may be read by John's supporters as her tolerating and understanding the brutal act as if that was what she deserved for her previous actions. But if John's dreadful act is an answer to the question of power, and Carol's closing words are read in that sense than the humanity really is doomed. Harold Pinter staged the play in Cambridge with a slightly different ending. After the fight Carol insists John read out her list of charges against him, which only further humiliates John (very possibly swings the audience's sympathies onto his side even more). This alternate ending only confirms the more weighted reading of the enigmatic "Yes. That's right." (52) A reading which may evoke different reactions from the audience to those mentioned earlier. Ira Nadel sees Pinter's staging in the same light. She confirms Carol as "a calm, revolutionary authority that seeks to challenge a male system."³⁷ Does the last statement not read more as a mockery of his desperation, as if Carol's line had a continuation in a form of something like "Now you have shown your true colours, now I have stripped you of everything"; maybe even a question mark aimed at academia, which in order to prove its educated point needs to deploy all the different tactics – John is an ideal character for tracing the power struggle development: from total control of the situation, through bargaining and pleading to threats and menaces culminating in his total loss of control and the consequent act of violence. John is authoritative, aloof, distracted, inattentive, as well as when he needs, he becomes personal, parental, humane, generous, only to turn violent, defeated (in this instance John stoops down low which culminates in his outrageous act of violence, moreover, an act of violence perpetrated on a defenceless woman); a confirmation that John has just dug his own grave and Carol's arguments stand; although powerless, she is the one leaving the scene filled with power. Her victory may be perceived Pyrrhic from humanistic point of view, but she has certainly succeeded in her personal battle.

³⁶ Kane, 183.

³⁷ Ira Nadel, *David Mamet – A Life in the Theatre*, (New York: Palgrave, 2008) 122-123.

5. *The Shawl* and *Speed-the-Plow* – Two Men against a Woman

5.1 *The Shawl*

The Shawl is one of Mamet's earlier plays where a woman makes an appearance alongside two men. The play was written in 1985, after the success of *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo*. There are many discernible shifts in theme and tone. The playwright may have tamed the aggressiveness of the masculine world into which the character of Miss A makes an entrance, nevertheless, the thirst for power and control over others has remained. The audience is brought into very close contact with the main protagonists through the séances that John, the fortune teller, stages for the benefit of his newly found lover, Charles, who is in a position of a spectator. John is one of the most accomplished of Mamet's tricksters. Most of his actions can be perceived as a metaphor for a powerful character versus a subservient one in Mamet's writing. The already mentioned female character, ambiguously referred to as Miss A (the first letter of the alphabet may be a beginning of a name, but it may also be a "first" of John's victims in the staged exercise of his skills, with others presumably to follow), a disappointed woman in her thirties, is desperately seeking help, empathy and understanding. Douglas Bruster comments on the relationship of John and Miss A: "Every charlatan must have a gull."¹ Viewed from this power and subservience perspective, even the simplest observation from John to Miss A at the beginning of their short acquaintance becomes open to more than just one interpretation. When the two protagonists talk about Miss A's childhood and her experiences, John remarks: "How in our lives we are influenced."² There can be no doubt that a human being is influenced by all the circumstances and surroundings from childhood but this general notion sounds different when uttered by one of Mamet's tricksters, moreover one, for whom an opportunity to exploit his skills has just opened. This simple line already foreshadows something deeply disturbing and sinister.

Mamet's characters are allowed to function as confidence tricksters, betraying the trust they build and are dependent upon. However, in order to destroy the value of trust, first they need to recognize and realize the fact that such a value actually exists. Therefore, they too are made aware of its existence; the difference is that they manage to deploy human values in their favour by totally blocking their awareness of any need for such values. Once again, the world

¹ Douglas Bruster, "David Mamet and Ben Jonson: City Comedy Past and Present", in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views – David Mamet*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004) 42.

² David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Mamet Plays: 3 – Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie Du Chien, The Shawl, Speed-The-Plow*, (London: Methuen, 1996) 89.

is divided into two groups. Both know that something is missing, but only one group is able to establish what it is and has been able to act accordingly. Where others are confused and stricken in their search for lost values (which they are no longer able to identify definitively), selfishness, complete control, success, greed and fear of failure are the driving forces behind the decisions of the prominent, power hungry characters in Mamet's world.

John is a typical example of such a division in the society. He exercises his power over his victim utterly. The problem that Miss A seems to have is only looked at from John's perspective, only talked about and seen through his eyes. The charade is staged only for his own benefit but also to impress Charles; the only question remains what is eventually at stake - sexual or financial gratification. Although it may seem that in the end they both, John and Miss A reach some kind of absolution and they may appear to be on the brink of offering it to each other, for John, this newly arisen situation presents only a slight hindrance before he returns to his real goal. This is an exercise of power on a highly vulnerable victim - a show to impress his lover. Steven Price compares two very different readings

For Philip C. Kolin, there is no doubt: *The Shawl* shows Mamet "exorcising his audience's need for magic (or illusion) while paradoxically demonstrating their dependence on it", and the final act is a series of object lessons in this regard, so that if we are still taken in by John's tricks we have "fallen into the trap of looking for a false explanation for the truth." [Whereas ...] Henry I. Schvey considers that "the play is really about a man's growth and capacity for self-knowledge in the midst of corruption," and believes the ending "confirms that the visionary experience has been real."³

Dennis Carroll leans more towards Schvey, furthermore, he contends that

after the third scene, John's allegiance shifts decisively from Charles towards Miss A., [...and by the end of the play] their relationship is built on trust and mutual need, indicated by rhythms in the dialogue.⁴

John may be allowed to "grow in the midst of corruption", as Schvey would have it, but John is corrupted himself from the very beginning. He knows very well, he is a fraud, from the very first until the last séance. There is no true revelation, only a well structured, powerfully prepared trick carried out on a highly vulnerable person. The ambiguity of the burning scarf is a combination of few factors – John's preparedness, his ability to perceive quickly and minutely and a bit of luck, which favours those brave enough to try it. There is no building relationship between John and Miss A, which we could call understanding. There is no mutual

³ Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays and Films of David Mamet – A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 2008) 72.

⁴ Dennis Carroll, *David Mamet*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 115.

trust. John had chosen a woman, who he can more easily overpower with his skill, because as he lets us know, this is the very first time he is trying something similar. John however, at one point confesses to Charles that he also wants to help Miss A along the way. Does he thus afford us a glimpse of a very different nature of his? A glimpse of that evanescent trait that he may be aware of but is trying to squash with his actions? His actions however speak much louder. John manages to push aside even this miniscule instance of “weakness”; a grain of Miss A’s hope. He actually uses the “helping her” (98) proclamation in the same sentence with “reward” (98), thus clearly and crudely stating his true intentions. Whatever the reward may be viewed as, he is not doing anything for Miss A. All his actions are only feeding his own greed. In the society based on exchange principal, John is trying to take it one step further and is attempting to gain everything for nothing. John tried to impress Charles. He was looking for relationship, but it was not to be. His slight hesitation at the end is a revelation that he himself may have felt and realized (reminded himself) what it means to lose, to suffer, but there is no show of mutual understanding or empathy to follow. John makes sure his “job” is done. He holds Miss A in control, his power over her is now unlimited, if she doubted him before, he has her absolute trust now.

John wants to see how far he can go in his quest, he is searching the limits and even when he stumbles upon them – when the picture Miss A presents him is not of her mother but only a cutting of a magazine and is incorrectly identified by John – he recovers from the incident, changes the subject quickly and is back to his tricks. Miss A may have gained an upper hand in the dealings with John in that instance, but similar to Mrs. Lingk in *Glengarry Glen Ross* she is either distressed, naive or too scared, therefore she opts not to pursue the power she may have obtained. She does not want to exploit her position unlike John and most of Mamet’s male characters.

It is the ephemeral questions that the “gull” characters try to find an answer for in Mamet’s plays, be it real understanding or genuine friendship. However, they are bound to fail because those who have already realized the questions are themselves afraid of the consequences of seeking the answers and the possibility of disappointment. Miss A wants to believe that somebody has answers to her questions and she would be able to gain it through the “medium” of John. John’s demeanour to Miss A seems to suggest that he is in possession of the knowledge, that piece of information that gives him power over the other party, but he is, for the reasons mentioned earlier, not willing to share. Therefore Miss A walks into John’s office already willing to become subservient. Whether John truly possesses such powers,

answers to Miss A's questions becomes evident when he explains his position, his skills and abilities to Charles. But what he brings into this brief encounter with Miss A and what Miss A as many victim-characters lack is the ability to con, convince, subdue, exploit and overpower.

John speaks of "a hidden order in the world" (91), of everything having its place and purpose in the world, processing similar questions as the two characters, Emil and George, in *Duck Variations* are faced with, but just as they are unable or afraid to face the answers, similarly John's questions are only answered by more queries. Furthermore, "the order" gains different contours when looked at from John's perspective. He may be aware of some order in the world, as may also Miss A be, but his goal is radically different, whatever order there may be he wants to reach and maintain it, he does not simply comment on its existence.

John is very similar in his goals to the salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, to Don and Teach in *American Buffalo* or to other prominent characters who are striving for power. He may have toned down on obscenities and vulgarisms (he may afford to abstain from anger and expletives, his opposition is weak), but the goal remains the same. He substitutes rough language for top quality skill and very high ability to outmanoeuvre the opposition. He is very confident in his powers and the exercise he undertakes only further confirms (t)his opinion. He is Roma of the future – having outplayed everybody in the real estate business he moves into a very different field in order to affirm his abilities. John's Prospero-like position is a pinnacle for Mamet's tricksters; a status that every conman strives for, but cannot achieve, due to lack of abilities (Don and Teach in *American Buffalo*) or fierceness of the opposition (Levene in *Glengarry Glen Ross*).

John's approach to his victim is as ruthless as Roma's, even though it may not be perceptible from the very beginning. John keeps Miss A constantly in check. He wants to make sure that she is to lose track of any developing idea. He takes her on a language rollercoaster ride and every second the direction is changed just so she does not have time to look at situations rationally, not even to "glimpse" things as they may actually be. The ideas he applies for the purpose are very general, he leaves it to Miss A to fall into his trap. Statements like "a suspicion warned you of catastrophe" (p.91) are only a bait for the gullible victim. His ability to interrupt and supply the "missing piece" of information himself (even though it takes him two, three attempts at times) actually establishes him in Miss A's eyes as a trustworthy spiritualist. Their relationship does not operate the way John presents it: "Not belief but truth. Truth." (92) It is very much the opposite of what he says and once he gains Miss A's trust he can exploit it to the utmost. John is just another type of confidence man, selling his goods for

nothing but the highest price – trust. One of many Mamet’s tricksters, this time however, a rather proficient and efficient one. He comes clear (to the audience) in Act Two, when he explains his actions to (/through) Charles. Charles asks the exact questions that the audience would be baffled with in the first act. John admits that all his “spiritualism” is based on general observations, keen eyes and ears: “A troubled woman. Comes in. With a problem? What is it? It’s money – illness – love ... That’s all it ever is. Money, illness or love.” (99) “I ‘suggested’ her. That’s all I did. Eh? And you can feel superior.”(114) The following passage is the right example of John’s “skills”:

John ...I tell that to everyone...Not that we’re ‘mystic’. But that we can see. Those very things which are before our eyes. Look at her. (Pause) She is unmarried. At her time in life. Why? She is bound. To what? An unresolved event. Her mother’s death? Her question, she would ask the ‘spirit world’, her mother left a fortune to her stepfather. Should she contest this will in the courts. Is this a question for the mystic? No. It hides a deeper one: this: how can I face my betrayal. How can I obtain revenge. Against the dead. Or: why did my mother not love me more? (102)

Charles may be a passive character in appearance but he plays his role in John’s downfall. He is the only weakness in John’s quest. John does not attempt to work his magic on Charles. He wants to consider and treat Charles an equal in whom he wants to inspire awe; with whom he wants to share his experience and that is a mistake that he pays a price for similar to what Miss A has been paying. Charles, however impressed he may be by John’s abilities, is after Miss A’s money and he makes his will quite clear to John. How does he win the developing argument between the two lovers? In the old male-fashion way. By threatening force, by violence, by sheer masculine power, which he is very much prepared to carry through. John does not want to lose his closest and most cherished audience, therefore he allows for Charles’s opinions and adamant suggestions.

Charles And you will do it or else I am leaving you. Do you understand? Pause. Do you understand me?

John Would you force me to make that choice?

Charles I’ve done it. Now the choice is yours. (105)

Suddenly, John’s position to Charles has taken a different shape. The perfect trickster cannot apply his magic, because he wanted to trust Charles and wanted to believe that the feelings will be reciprocal. John has led himself into a position which he had tried so hard to avoid. His confession to Charles is very straightforward in regards to him but also to his perception

of the world around him: “Live in the World. Will you, please? That’s what I’m trying to do. I’d wished that we would be something more to each other. It was not to be.” (115)

5.2 *Speed-the-Plow*

Another play where a woman and two male characters meet is *Speed-the-Plow*. Among other themes in this play from 1988 is the success, failure and ever present corruption in Hollywood. Each character is trying to overpower the others in their quest for success, money and fame. Bobby Gould is a Hollywood executive in charge of approving scripts for production. He is to decide between two projects. One is an art movie script about a change in people’s attitude towards values that can stop the apocalypse which is otherwise awaiting the world. The other one is a blockbuster written by the other male character called Fox featuring a star lured from another studio. Later in the play Karen describes Fox’s script as “the prison film. That’s just *degradation*, [...] despicable, [...] degrading the human spirit [...] this rage ... it’s killing people, meaningless ... the sex, the titillation, violence.” (163) Fox, Gould’s associate of many years holds a 24 hour option on the blockbuster film. There is no doubt which choice Gould is going to make. The world of (false) camaraderie between the two protagonists, Fox and Gould, is disrupted by a peripheral but an ambitious character – a woman. A temporary secretary Karen trades her sexual favours for the art movie bid. Gould believed that the sexual favours he received from Karen were out of love and respect she held for him. He was so confident of his charms that he bet Fox 500 dollars he would achieve just that – Karen’s body and mind. In the end, however, Gould, the arch manipulator, is conned by the temporary secretary. It is left to Fox to rescue the project by wringing out a confession from Karen that she did not, as Gould naively believes, act out of love for him, but that her motive was completely different. She wants the other script to be filmed, apparently at whatever costs. She says to Gould: “I’m serious. I’d do *anything* ...” (161) Only Fox’s ability to persuade and overpower will stop Karen from achieving her goal. Did Fox do it because of his friendship to Gould? Because Fox and Gould are mutually loyal to each other? How much does Fox care about the quality of the other script? Has he read it? No. Gould, the Head of Production has not read it either. Fox’s interests lie solely with his own script. In his business, Fox does not care about aestheticism, wealth is the biggest issue. A famous film star decided to star in a filming of Fox’s script and this is to be Fox’s one big chance, therefore his stakes in this particular movie are incredibly high. Two conmen were in the end one too many for Karen.

The three characters are unable to communicate properly; they may have mastered the language for their own cunning purposes but the language of value, of what is worthwhile fails them completely. Karen's language is even more clichéd. If she is not quoting directly from the book, she is unable to portray her ideas. Messages are not conveyed properly, the characters remain unable to understand each other clearly and the syndrome of unfinished ideas, sentences and words that slip one's mind is discernible throughout the play:

Fox [...] Bob, lemme tell you: experiences like this, *films* like this ...
 these are the films ...

Gould ... Yes ...

Fox *These* are the films, that whaddayacallit ... (*Lang pause.*) that
 make it all worthwhile. (147)

Gould, the decision maker is full of controversy and contradictory statements. His advice to Fox is to “*Fuck* money [...] But don't fuck ‘people’. [...] ‘Cause, people [...] are what it's All About. [...] And it's a People Business. [...] It's *full* of fucken' people.” (137) Fox knows his place in the company and Gould makes sure that he knows who is ultimately in control of the proceedings:

Fox Oh, you Beauty ... What's it like being Head of Production? I
 mean, is it more fun than miniature golf?

Gould You put as much energy in your job as you put into kissing my ass ...

Fox My job *is* kissing your ass.

Gould And don't you forget it. (144)

Gould does not want to believe Fox that people are polite to him only because of his powerful position; he wants to believe it is his personality that wins him respect. His evident need to be loved for himself, not for his influence actually makes him very vulnerable for those who may want to exploit his need. Karen realizes his weakness and flaw; therefore it is not difficult for her to manipulate him. Karen is the opposite of what she says to Gould. She is not “naive.” (151) She is using such a language to create a false image of herself. Karen knows very well who the Head of the Studio is and she also knows how desirable and influential the position is. Gould's lecture only confirms her knowledge:

Gould [...] in the job I have, somebody is always trying to ‘promote’ you: to use
something, some ‘hook’ to get you to do something in their own best interest. [...] ‘Cause this *desk* is a position to *advance*, y'understand? It's a *platform* to *aid*, to push someone along. (153)

Karen is at the bottom of the chain of command. She provides coffee, makes reservations at restaurants. Yet, the word temporary suggests that she is not staying at that position for long. There is no swift, incomprehensible transformation in her character, the book she is given to read seems only to affirm her values and beliefs. To achieve her goals she exploits those around her as well as Gould or Fox do. Karen is as shrewd in her actions as they are. Fox tells Gould that he is “still just some old whore” (140) and Gould’s reply to Fox is in the same fashion: “You’re an old whore, too.” (140) Later in the play Karen confesses to Gould: “I knew what the deal was. I know you wanted to sleep with me. [...] I shouldn’t act as though I was naive. I shouldn’t act as though I believed you.” (165) Karen sees through the superficial deceptions of Gould’s, she is enabled to read his character. She knows exactly his weakness, his need of “companionship” (165) because she contemplates people as not entirely good or entirely bad, only “frightened [and] lost.” (162) She can read Gould’s fear and dishonesty. Gould’s values and convictions are rooted in his belief in the establishment of Hollywood. Karen walks in and starts questioning these values, she brings in a possibility for an alternative. Fox labels her as not “so *ambitious* she would schtup [Gould] just to get ahead.” (148) It may be her seriousness, uncertainty, indecision or her apparent naivety that does not fit into the caste of power seeking individuals. Karen’s motives may not necessarily be bad, however, she, just like the other characters, exploits others’ weaknesses in her pursuit of control, power and influence. The script has been a catalyst for her actions; she managed to persuade Gould to abandon Fox’s certainty of a success script and for once try something different, rather than a typical Hollywood formula. However, in order to achieve this, she let Gould abuse her physically, blinding him with an illusion of power only to remove the real power away from him. She made Gould believe in her enthusiasm for the book to such extent that he reads extracts from it to Fox at least on five occasions before Fox explodes verbally and physically attacks Gould. His vicious outburst is aimed as much on Gould as it is on absent Karen:

Fox *Fuck you ... Fuck you ... (He hits Gould.) Fuck you. Get up. (He hits him again.) I’ll fucken’ kill you right here in this office. All this bullshit; you wimp, you coward ... now you got the job, and now you’re going to run over everything [...] you fucken’ sissy film – you squat to pee. You old woman ... all of my life I’ve been eating your shit and taking your leavings [...] A beautiful and an ambitious woman comes to town. Why? Why does anyone come here? [...] Everyone wants power. How do we get it? Work. How do they get it? Sex. The End. Nobody’s different. You aren’t, I’m not, why should she? The broad wants power.” (175)*

Fox's unrestrained show of emotions has some effect on Gould's decisions, eventually. Fox overpowers Karen into confession; the fact that the film would not attract much attention does not work in her favour either in her power struggle with Fox. Fox knows that Gould slept with her "on a bet" (181) and he rightly suspects that Karen's consent had nothing to do with her feelings for Gould. When she is asked repeatedly whether she would have slept with Gould had it not been for the opportunity to gain influence over him, her answer is a blunt "No." (181) Karen's realization that this is a world to which "[she doesn't] belong" (183) is reinforced by Fox's calculated threat: "You ever come on the lot again, I'm going to have you killed." (183) Howard Pearce sees Karen and Gould as reflecting

the ambivalence of the playwright, inclining, on the one hand, toward Philebus and Clark Kent while reflecting on the other, the attractiveness of Socrates and Superman. And they know, if not the truth, at least some questions about Art and Love, questions that turn and accuse Gould when he chooses a bad angel Fox, and abandons his good angel Karen.⁵

Karen is certainly a better "angel" of the two, but her covert ambitions and cunningness do not embellish her "goodness" very much. Both Gould and especially Fox may know something more about their true traits but they also know that this is a cutthroat business and it does not pay to show one's feelings and weaknesses. Gould has just learned a lesson:

Fox Well, Bob, you're human. [...] We wish people would like us, huh? To Share Our Burdens. But it's not to be. [...]

Gould I wanted to do Good ... But I became foolish. [...] She told me I was a good man.

Fox How would *she* know? You *are* a good man. Fuck *her*. [...] I know what you wanted, Bob. You wanted to do good. (183-184)

Despite these revelations there never was any real friendship between the two characters. They exploit each other in order to achieve their goals. Fox may have opened Gould's eyes to Karen's taking advantage of him, yet they are both blind to their exploitation of others and each other. Their relationship is at best a convenient and temporary association. Their attitude towards each other is echoed in Gould's depiction of their line of business being "*full of fucken' people.*"(137)

The two characters ask the question at the very end, unaware that they have just acted out and experienced the horrendous answer:

⁵ Howard Pearce, "Plato in Hollywood: David Mamet and the Power of Illusions", in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views – David Mamet*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004) 120.

Fox Well, so we learn a lesson. But we aren't here to 'pine', Bob, we aren't put here to *mope*. What are we here to do (*Pause.*) Bob? After everything is said and done. What are we put on earth to do?

Gould We're here to make a movie.

Fox Whose name goes above the title?

Gould Fox and Gould.

Fox Then how bad can life be? (184)

Neither of them answers the question. Either they are unable to realize their emptiness and their pretence at being human, possibly due to their adherence to the environment in which they work and exist; or they both know the real answer, but if they remain silent they can carry on living the more desirable lie which to them is more preferable than the answer.

6. Conclusion

Mamet's world is occupied and governed by men. It is a world constituted on the principle of power of one and subservience of another. Men try to dominate all around them verbally and physically. Leslie Kane sees Mamet's plays as "a sardonic, scabrous and rather brilliant study of a human piranha pool where the grimly Darwinian law is swallow or be swallowed, [...] a savage microcosm of the urban jungle."¹ There are no values left; there is only struggle for power and control. The characters are aware of the need for compassion, communication, friendship. However, this need is considered a sign of weakness and those unable to repress it are exploited. The powerful recognize these "weaknesses" and are thus allowed to pry on lives of others. They are confidence tricksters who thrive on others' failure; they betray a trust of others – a trust on which they themselves depend for their success. C.W.E Bigsby contends that

Mamet's world is peopled by individuals who are for the most part baffled and disturbed, aware of a need which they can hardly articulate or satisfy. The primary fact of their lives is a missing intimacy, a sense of coherence, meaning and communication. Loss is his central theme.²

The collapse of moral self, language and community is what Mamet's characters are faced with. It is a world of alienation, of naked competition between individual frontiersmen for whom survival is a prime necessity. However, Mamet's males crave success and opportunities that it brings. They cannot stomach failure; furthermore, the cutthroat society does not allow failure; outmanoeuvring the opposition is the only accepted value. Thus, the characters enter a vicious circle of power hungry individuals for whom bare survival may be the last step to salvation, but at the same time, is their first step to damnation. The search for values that were lost has long been abandoned. It has been substituted by the prevalent decay of individuals; of their vicious and brutal attitude towards other human beings; of their corrupted morals and ethics.

Women occupy the peripheral edge of Mamet's society. They are pushed to the fringes by the all powerful males. Women are physically not strong enough to compete with men. Even if they manage to make an appearance, they are reminded of a constant threat of violence that men are ready to employ at moment's notice. Violence gives men the edge over women. Men are charged with brutal force; they are a physical menace to those around them. Whatever the

¹ Leslie Kane, ed. *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 18.

² C.W.E. Bigsby, *David Mamet (Contemporary Writers)*, (London: Methuen, 1985) 22.

argument may be, whatever the circumstances, whichever way the evidence tilts and truth inclines, men, due to their physical strength carry the ultimate power to dictate any outcome of a struggle in a man – woman relationship. Vorlicky discusses men’s approach to problem solving:

Evocation of the power of violence to effect change – and its attraction as an undertaking – is a typical position men assume among themselves after they discuss their perceived lack of power. [...] Male characters repeatedly resort to violence as a final solution to their immediate professional or private conflicts. [...] Men engage the power of violence to get the job done.³

It is women however who pick up the pieces in such an imperfect setting. Women remain a constant check to men’s escalations of power and violence, be it Ruth and Grace in *American Buffalo* or Mrs. Link in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Their absence on stage does not necessarily mean that they are not present. Moreover, their role is quite significant. Mrs. Link saves herself and her husband from Roma’s clutches; Grace very possibly saves Bob’s life. Men are scared to let women into their lives, because women present difference to men’s thinking. There are no friendships that women may disturb and disrupt. A belief in (non-existent) friendships and camaraderie is the only form of escape that men cling to in the cruel reality that they have created. Women threaten men’s chaotic world of violence with actual order and reason. However, when women are bold enough to confront the male caste in person, they are overpowered verbally and physically, as is the case of Karen in *Speed-the-Plow*, when Fox threatens to have her killed next time he sees her. Carol’s fate in *Oleanna* culminates under even worse circumstances, when she is physically attacked by John. However, Mamet’s portrayal of a woman has not changed very much during his writing career. Women remain peripheral. Attempts at creating fully developed women characters usually end in stereotypical manner – in comparison with their male counterparts, they are unimaginative, unsubstantial, shallow and clichéd.

“Closing the deal, committing the crime, laying the girl,”⁴ these all imply some action where one is in possession of power and the other thus becomes subservient to him. The progression of power struggle between two characters can be traced from its very early stages. Language plays a central role throughout its development. Language is the powerful men’s weapon of choice; social dialogue, their ammunition. The struggle for power between the characters is discernible through the tone, volume and rhythm they employ. The intensities and silences in

³ Robert H. Vorlicky, *Act Like a Man – Challenging Masculinities in American Drama*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1995) 37.

⁴ Bigsby, 59.

their speeches generate and reveal their crucial anxieties. They are willing to speak all the time but they remain unable to speak; unable to convey and grasp messages. Vorlicky notices that

Mamet restricts the social dialogue in order to illustrate the linguistic constraints that influence how a men's closed conversational relationship is constructed, and how that relationship easily becomes the power struggle between speaker and listener as each attempts to secure the position of authority.⁵

Language grants Mamet's characters power. However, exploitation of language leaves the characters unable to communicate, to comprehend and understand each other. Vorlicky also sees the main problem that Mamet's characters are faced with in their dysfunctional relationship to language:

For Mamet, the white man's condition is that he has no "spirit" – no identity outside his culturally coded power of domination. Certainly one sign of man's "spiritlessness" is his impoverished, crippled relationship to language – and to feeling. Herein lies the desperate state of Mamet's males.⁶

Mamet's characters are unable to reach human contact through language. All a speaker wants is to "speak" and be listened to; he does not want to exchange information; the perception of the world remains one sided – with the speaker. Thus a listener is treated as such, solely as the non-speaker, but a listener only. Talking is, as Worster points out, "critical to the composition of identity and power that just to speak is not enough."⁷ The language is strewn with phrases such as "I speak", "Are you listening?", "What I am saying is...", "Let me tell you...", "What I'm telling you is..." These phrases do not change the meaning of sentences, and in a duologue environment they could be made redundant, but the purpose of their usage is crucial for a speaker. Worster sees these phrases serving "as a vain device for asserting a verbal authority."⁸ Moreover, they allow the speaker to continue to "talk", they cut a listener from speaking, and moreover they prevent him from taking his turn in the (already one-sided) conversation. Furthermore, there is another weapon that Mamet's males use in order to establish their position. They employ the macho language full to the brim with curses, expletives and threats. According to Worster, the continuous use of pejoratives, especially the

variations on the verb "to fuck" – far from a mere gratuitous and liberal proliferation of obscenity – is an important component of the defining metaphor of

⁵ Robert H. Vorlicky, 29.

⁶ Robert H. Vorlicky, 29-30.

⁷ David Worster, "How to Do Things With Salesmen – David Mamet's Speech-Act Play", in *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 64.

⁸ David Worster, 64.

[Mamet's men] as violent sexual males. The law of the jungle has become sexually mutated: Rape or be raped.⁹

Thus, a successful male becomes a brutal aggressor, placing others around him into a (rape) victim position, a position that everybody wants to avoid. Those unable to remain in power; those weaker ones; those of different gender; those of different sexual orientation are thus allowed to be violated. However, as Vorlicky points out

Mamet's men fail to recognize fully the pervasive impact of the most influential component of their social dialogue: the power of a masculine ethos that insists on the presence of hierarchical authority. All men cannot be all-powerful in a male-male context.¹⁰

Mamet's males have become lost in their struggle for power. The world they live in is truly unethical. It is a world of dysfunctional families, decaying communities and dismantled societies. Considering most of Mamet's plays, there is hardly any male character that we could empathise with. Surroundings and settings may vary somewhat from play to play, but the confidence tricksters remain. In Mamet's dog-eat-dog world, there is always somebody who wants to gain control and hang on to power. Actions are vicious and premeditated; every move is made in order to hurt and destroy the opposition. Characters feel no compassion towards each other, there is no friendship, there is no mutual feeling and there is no love. The homosocial caste only promotes prejudice, corruption, exploitation and violence. Mamet's males fight for power because they know nothing else. They wish to control their own lives through controlling others. To them, power is the substitute for everything else that is missing. Unable to recognize power's insufficiency as the right solution for the missing values they do not stray off their course and greedily struggle for more control still. They wrongly assume that this approach is to fill the existing gap. Nevertheless, they are aware that were they to show any sign of emotion, their "weakness" would be exploited, their position crushed by the opposition. According to Bigsby, Mamet is

lamenting the collapse of public form and private purpose, exposing a spiritually desiccated world in which the cadences of despair predominate, and the occasional consonance offered by relationship or the momentary lyricism buried deep inside the structure of language implies little more than an echo of what was once a state of grace.¹¹ He denounces the brutal facts of capitalism and the demeaning images deployed by its agents, attacks the corruption and venality of commerce [...], deplores the substitution of artificial for real values.¹²

⁹ David Worster, 71.

¹⁰ Robert H. Vorlicky, 45.

¹¹ Bigsby, 15.

¹² Bigsby, 49.

Genuine human contact no longer seems possible. What is missing from Mamet's characters' lives is any definable sense of values beyond the material; any clear conception of need unrelated to immediate urgencies. Mamet's characters are victims of a system that readily substitutes power for social and moral values. Exchanges based on trust and goodwill that bring intangible benefits to everyone are the hardest to retrieve when they are gone, and Mamet's world is almost bare of them. There is no genuine human contact and that is the breeding ground for alienation. The one brings about the other. Individuals approach others only in order to exploit them. Bigsby contends that Mamet's characters

deal with people as though they were commodities; their vocabulary is to do with having and using. [...] Relationships become no more than transactions, expressions of a power relationship.¹³

Mamet himself argues that "we need to be loved; we need to be secure; we need to help each other"¹⁴ but any attempt at showing one's feelings is straightaway abused and exploited. Mamet's world is occupied by characters who are endeavouring to gain power and remain in control whatever the circumstances. In such an environment, any attempts at restoring human values and moral systems are bound to fail. Bigsby remarks on the state of affairs in Mamet's world: "Something has been lost, something vital."¹⁵ It seems that that something may never be retreated. Between his characters and a clear understanding of what that might be lie an obscuring tangle of "public myths, fantasies and deceits"¹⁶ cobbled with a fear which blots out all sense of meaning and purpose. Power that means so much to the characters' achievements means nothing in the end for preservation of humanity. Mamet's characters fail to see the consequences to their actions. They do not turn back; they do not look beyond today. All they see is the next man, the next hurdle that represents their competition in their bid for total control. Such is Mamet's world, void of feelings and emotion. There is futility in their struggle they are unable to perceive. Their fear of rejection is stronger than their will to endeavour to retrieve some shred of human values.

This environment is full of stories, with a plethora of jokes and tales. It is brimming with nostalgia and reminiscences. But at the same time this is a very sad and angry place. It is almost barren of human contact; the attitude of its inhabitants has brought it to the very edge of irreparable damage. The joviality in male bonding that most of the plays are strewn with only further portrays the gap between appearances and reality. Mamet's males believe in the

¹³ Bigsby, 51.

¹⁴ Leslie Kane, ed., *David Mamet in Conversation*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004) 57.

¹⁵ Bigsby, 136.

¹⁶ Bigsby, 136.

myth of masculinity but that myth has been shattered long ago. They delude themselves about friendships and camaraderie, yet the only word that describes their associations is exploitation. They appear to be backslapping their colleagues and associates; however, they are also backstabbing each other at the same time.

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7. Súhrn (Summary)

Táto práca sa zaoberá bojom o moc v hrách Davida Mameta. Sleduje svet individualít, ktorých jediným cieľom je získanie a udržanie moci. Pozoruje výskyt a vývoj mocenských bojov a ich vplyv na jednotlivé postavy a ich konanie ale aj hry ako celky. Sleduje jazyk, nástroj ľudskej komunikácie, využívaný a zneužívaný k vlatným cieľom jednotlivých postáv. Zaoberá sa postavením žien v tomto búrlivom prostredí, plnom podrazov a klamov, pästí a násilia. Snaží sa polemizovať s existujúcou kritikou, ktorá sa na jednej strane zaoberá mýtom mužnosti, a na strane druhej, nelichotivým postavením a zobrazením žien v takto definovanom prostredí. Táto práca sa snaží nájsť spoločný menovateľ týchto (a nielen týchto) problematických oblastí, ktorým je zdá sa boj o moc, boj, ktorý Mametove postavy ustavične zvädzajú.

Mametov svet patrí mužom. Hry Davida Mameta sú kritikou americkej kultúry dneška, kritikou spoločnosti, ktorá chátra nielen ekonomicky ale aj duchovne. Muži stojaci v čele takejto spoločnosti sú hlavnou príčinou jej úpadku. Cez svoju mužnosť sa snažia vybudovať si postavenie v mestskej džungli, ktorá nikomu neodpúšťa. Tí, čo nachádzajú schopnosť obrany, sa zároveň snažia pretaviť ju vo svoj prospech, vo svoju zbraň v boji s ostatnými postavami. Pokles morálky a jazyka, rozpad spoločnosti sú len nepatrným zlomkom toho, čomu musia Mametove postavy denne čeliť. Steven Price opisuje túto bezútešnú situáciu: „Akákoľvek domnienka, že spoločenskú zmenu je možné aktívne vyhľadávať, akýkoľvek impulz k vykúpeniu z tejto situácie je klamný, ironický a sentimentálny.“¹ Muži sú obklopení mýtom mužnosti, žijú ním, dýchajú, nevedomujúc si, že to v skutočnosti je len mýtus, a čo viac, je to mýtus, ktorý sa roztriešťa a rozbíja všade navôkol nich. V skorších kritikách bol Mametov svet považovaný za svet mužských rituálov, kamarátstva a priateľstva, svet, v ktorom nebolo miesta pre ženské postavy. Situácia sa rapídne zmenila po uvedení hry *Oleanna*, ktorú feministicky orientovaní kritici použili ako príklad Mametovho záporného vnímania žien. Carla J. McDonough tvrdí, že Mamet svojimi hrami bráni mužský priestor - mužnosť, ktorá sa dostáva pod tlak v dôsledku zmien spoločenských, v dôsledku nového vnímania pojmov ako sexualita, alebo gender (biologické pohlavie).

Pravdou zostáva, že Mamet vo svojich hrách vytvára prostredie, ktoré je nevlúdne k ženským postavám. Je hnané mužskou túžbou po moci, opierajúce sa o mužskú fyzickú silu, podporované nadávkami a vulgárnosťami najhrubšieho zrna. Muži absolútne dominujú

¹ Steven Price, *The Plays, Screenplays and Films of David Mamet – A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, (New York: MacMillan, 2008) 4.

tomuto svetu, postavenému na ich nekompromisnom a neutíchajúcom boji o moc. Tí, čo sa v tomto svete pohybujú, sú v neustálom nebezpečenstve. Musia byť v stálom strehu. Mužské správanie k tým okolo nich je postavené na nepretržitej obozretnosti a strachu. Čiara medzi úspechom a neúspechom je neuveriteľne tenká. Početné spory sú v najlepšom prípade riešené šťavnatými slovnými výpadmi, veľmi často ale vyústia do otvorených fyzických konfliktov. Hrozba násilia sa vznáša nad všetkými postavami. Zjavná neprítomnosť žien v takomto prostredí nieje žiadnym prekvapením. Ich neobjavenie sa (na scéne) ale hneď nenaznačuje ich neexistovanie. Skôr naopak, ženy sú veľmi dôležitou súčasťou Mametovho sveta. Ženy vnášajú do tohto sveta chaosu, strachu a zneužívania zmysel a poriadok. Akokoľvek sa muži snažia vymazať ženy zo „svojho“ prostredia, práve ženy (akokoľvek marginálne sú vo väčšine prípadov ich úlohy na javisku) sú poslednou inštanciou kontroly mužských činov, pripomienkou, že v tomto svete ovládanom mužmi je niečo v neporiadku. Muži obrátili svet temer naruby. Erich Bloch píše, že

sme zo seba ešte nevystúpili, a preto sme, kde sme. V našom vnútri je ešte stále tma a temno, a nielen kvôli naliehavosti akéhosi „Teraz a Tu“, kde ako všetky ostatné zemské veci patríme. Je to skôr kvôli tomu, že jeden na druhého útočíme, tak ako žiadne divé beštie neútočia – sme potajme nebezpeční.²

Ako dobre funguje tento „mužný“ priestor? Sú jeho protagonisti, ktorí musia denne bojovať o prežitie spokojní? Skutočne si muži tento priestor chránia pred ženským pohlavím, alebo medzi sebou len bezhlavo bojujú o moc na jednej strane, a prežitie na strane druhej? Tento svet sa správa nepriateľsky ku každému, nezáleží na tom, či je to žena alebo muž. Všetky vzťahy sa zakladajú na moci jedného a podradenosti toho druhého. Každý, zdá sa, zneužíva toho druhého, a v prípadoch, keď sa to tak nejaví, nakoniec vypláva krutá pravda klamu na povrch. Vzťahy sú nanajvýš krehké, ničivé a zničujúce, konkurenčné a boriace sa. Tí, čo niesu schopní v tomto boji zotrvať, sú vytláčaní na spoločenskú perifériu.

Mametove postavy si sú vedomé akejsi straty, túžia po poriadku, no zároveň sú však veľmi ochotné tento poznatok, túto slabinu zneužiť vo svoj prospech. Skúsenosti im diktujú, že ak tak neurobia oni, učiní tak ich nepriateľ. Toto je bezohľadný a vražedný boj o moc. Úspech znamená všetko, moc a kontrolu nad životmi ostatných. Neúspech opovrhnutie a pohrdanie. Aké sú šance na prežitie ak niekto nieje dostatočne silný, dostatočne prefikovaný, chamtivý podvodník, dostatočne krvilačný? Spoločnosť nieje ničím iným než sledom dočasných sebeckých spojení, poháňaných túžbou a ambíciami hlavných postáv, ich chamtivosťou a nenásytosťou, spojení, ktoré po naplnení zámeru automaticky prestávajú existovať.

² Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. TJ Swann (London: Verso, 2009) 212.

Mametove mocenské hry sú založené na moci a na sile interpretácie – jazyk definuje skutočnosť, a tým zároveň definuje ľudské vzťahy. Bigsby sleduje nedorozumenia Mametových postáv spôsobené jazykom: „Postavy sa stretávajú na nepreklenuteľných rozmedziach. Sú to priepasti na stupni jazyka, z časti jazykom samým vytvárané.“³ Mametove postavy nezdierať jazyk ale zneužívajú ho vo svoj prospech. Ten potom už nedokáže naplniť svoju úlohu nástroja na dorozumievanie, naopak, dochádza k nezhodám v porozumení a k rozporom v komunikácii. Jazyk sa tak stáva len ďalšou zbraňou mužov v boji o moc. Otázkou ostáva, či tento boj je vlastne len bojom jednotlivcov o moc, dosiahnutie ktorej je ale vo svojej podstate pre nich bezpredmetné, alebo, či ich snaha je akousi náhradou túžby po úteche, harmónii a pokoji, túžby toho, čo vo svojej lačnosti po moci už dávno stratili. Či už lásky alebo skutočného priateľstva, či túžby po ovládaní svojho vlastného života. Je zaujímavé sledovať činy Mametových postáv v priereze jeho najznámejších hier: *Americký bizón*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Oleanna*, *The Shawl (Šál)* a *Speed-the-Plow (V pote tváre orať budeš)*.

Hra *Americký bizón* je často prirovnávaná k etike amerického obchodu. Toto prirovnanie nieje nepodstatné. Sféra obchodu je vo svojej podstate tiež konštantnou súťažou, konštantným bojom konkurencií. Všetci zúčastnení sa snažia získať prevahu nad svojimi oponentmi, kontrolu nad zákazníkmi. Don a Teach, dvaja hlavní predstavitelia *Amerického bizóna* majú podobné ciele ako najvyššie postavení šéfovia najdôležitejších obchodov. Aj oni sa len snažia napodobniť úspech a vyhnúť sa jeho opaku. Sú zomknutí v ustavičnom boji o moc v Donovom obchodíku s haraburdím. Tiež si uvedomujú aké možnosti získanie moci poskytuje. Lakomosť, o ktorej pozitívnych hodnotách polemizuje postava Gekka vo filme *Wall Street*, sa stáva hnacím motorom aj pre nich dvoch. Donovi nestačí jeho starinárstvo, chcel by diktovať správanie tých, čo do neho vstúpia. Teach sa na druhej strane snaží získať kontrolu práve nad spomínaným starinárstvom, a tým vlastne aj nad Donom samotným. Ich jedinou útechou a jediným cieľom je úplne ovládnutie svojho protivníka. Postavám chýba akýkoľvek zmysel pre morálku, etiku, náležitosť. Nezdierať žiadne spoločné ideály, ciele. Vzťahy neexistujú a nik sa ani nepokúša ich vytvárať, sú len zneužívané na ceste za ďalším víťazstvom. Spoločnosť sa rapídne približuje úplnému odcudzeniu. Okolité svet je v rozpade. Manželstvá chátrajú, rodiny neexistujú. Hodnoty sú rozdrvené a nahrádzané materiálnymi predmetmi, peniazmi, mocou.

Don chce aby ho okolie vnímalo ako Bobovho otca. Ale akúkoľvek existujúcu, či formujúcu sa rovnováhu nepretržite narúša svojimi pokusmi o ovládnutie oboch postáv Teach. Don si uvedomí Teachove nároky až príliš neskoro. Teach je prisilným protivníkom, a Bob je ten, kto zaplatí cenu Teachovho hnevu a Donovho strachu. Bigsby reaguje na dopad amerického individualizmu a prehnanej sebadôvery aplikovanej menej schopnými:

³ C.W.E Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama. Volume Three, Beyond Broadway*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 276.

Osobná nespôsobilosť a nenapraviteľná skorumpovanosť nahradili ten akosi pochybný národný sen existenčnej pravdy a osobného úsilia, snahy. [...] Strata morálnej súdržnosti a rozklad definitívnych sankcií naznačujú krízu a apokalypsu. [...] Očividne neexistuje žiadny záchytný bod, na ktorom by bolo možné ustanoviť zmysel morálnej rovnováhy.⁴

Etické základy sa vymazali jak v osobnom tak i v obecnom svete. Ťarchu morálky nesú jednotlivé postavy a tie sú neschopné určiť si akékoľvek pravidlá. Aj to je jeden z dôvodov, prečo sú Don a Teach vo svojom ťažení nakoniec neúspešní. Keďže nedokážu nájsť spoločnú reč, je viac než isté, že po úspechu nemôžu siahať. Don a Teach sa nedokážu dohodnúť na presnom a spoločnom pláne večernej lúpeže, nedokážu určiť ani len hodnotu mince, ktorú vraj Don určite predal pod cenou. Skutočnosť je taká, že Dona viac než samotná lúpež zaujíma osobná pomsta zákazníkovi, ktorý si dovolil, v Donových očiach, Dona ošdiť a napáliť. Teach na druhej strane v lúpeži hľadá len zámienku na ovládnutie Boba, Dona a obchodu. Donove správanie sa k Bobovi nieje nepodobné tomu Teachovmu. Don poskytuje Bobovi nocľah, peniaze a jedlo. Don možno drží nad Bobom ochrannú ruku, ale zároveň ňou diktuje podmienky. Bigsby tvrdí, že pre Dona je „priateľstvo základnou hodnotou, pokiaľ nevstúpi do konfliktu s hodnotami inými.“⁵ Podobne ale Teach nevidí priateľstvo ináč, než len „dočasnú zhodu záujmov.“⁶ Teach nepozná priateľa. Pre Ruthie má len oplzlé nadávky, o ľuďoch s ktorými hráva karty si myslí, že „jediná cesta ako ich naučiť, je ich zabiť.“⁷ Don pohŕda svojimi zákazníkmi a hľadá ako by pomstil „nevydarený“ kšeft, ale Teach je postava zlomyseľná a násilná, hrubá a grobianska. V jeho protichodných výrokoch sa miesi oklieštené poznanie sveta s prehnanou vierou vo svoje vlastné skúsenosti. Prípravu revolvera ku lúpeži bráni pred Donom slovami: „Všetky prípravy na svete znamenajú hovno, ak vlezieš do cesty nejakému pomätenému bláznovi, ktorý to pochopí ako zasahovanie do jeho súkromia.“ (234) Teach je pre Stevena Prica jediná postava, ktorá „je hnaná len a len vlastným záujmom.“⁸ Keď sa mu Donov zámer lúpeže, ktorý si Teach cez rôzne intrigy privlastní, nevydarí, odnesie si to Bob a Donove starinárstvo. Jedinou záchrannou brzdou Teachovho vyčíňania je Ruth, ktorej telefonát pretrhne niť hnevu, agresívnosti a násilia.

Ďalšou Mametovou hrou, ktorá odhaľuje lož a pretváрку prezlečenú za pravdu a priateľstvo je *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Hra vyznieva ako boj realitných agentov, donútených cynickým vedením firmy k neľútostnej súťaži. Ten, kto má na konci mesiaca najviac predajov, sa

⁴ C.W.E. Bigsby, *David Mamet (Contemporary Writers)*, (London: Methuen, 1985) 70.

⁵ Bigsby, 76.

⁶ Bigsby, 73.

⁷ David Mamet, *American Buffalo*, in *Mamet Plays: One – Duck Variations, Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Squirrels, American Buffalo, The Water Engine, Mr Happiness*, (London: Methuen, 1994) 158.

⁸ Steven Price, 20.

odvezie v Cadillacu, ten druhý dostane sadu kuchynských nožov, ten posledný, v poradí štvrtý, príde o prácu. V tejto krutej, bezohľadnej súťaži platí jediné pravidlo: svoju konkurenciu musíš akýmkoľvek spôsobom poraziť. Preto agenti celý čas predávajú, či už parcely a domy zákazníkom, alebo „príbehy“ svojim kolegom v práci. Pokiaľ predávajú, ostáva im pocit, že majú veci pod kontrolou. Ak náhodou nepredávajú, tak o predaji v kuse rozprávajú. V očiach Davida Worstera, „firma zneužíva svojich agentov, a tí potom zneužívajú všetkých vôkol seba.“⁹ Stávajú sa obeťami systému, ktorý ich núti medzi sebou bojovať. Vzťahy medzi firmou a agentmi, medzi agentmi a zákazníkmi, medzi agentmi samými sú založené na moci jedného a podradenosti druhého. Žiadne iné vzťahy neexistujú, aj keď sa jednotliví agenti potľapkávajú po ramenách a namýšľajú si opak. Každý sa snaží manipulovať tými druhými, ovládnuť ich. Všetci chcú len moc a vplyv.

Najlepším príkladom takéhoto správania je stretnutie obchodného agenta Shellyho Levena so svojim nadriadeným Johnom Williamsonom. Williamson prideliuje agentom rôzne oblasti na predaj, a Shelley, ktorému sa už dlhší čas nedarí, má pocit, že si za svoju lojálnosť firme zaslúži lepšie ponuky, než tie, ktoré dostáva. Levene vstupuje do dialógu s pripraveným útokom, ten sa ale opäť a opäť triešti na Williamsonovom mocnom postavení. Williamson má možnosť a schopnosť Levenovi pomôcť, nechce o tom ale ani len počuť. Nezaberajú prosby, výčitky, rafinovanosť ani hrozby. Levene sa snaží naznačiť, že on je tá mocnejšia postava, Williamson ale zostáva neoblomný. Levenov jazyk je raz skromný a pokorný, aby o chvíľu na to vybuchol v nadávkach a kliatbach. Levene nedokáže premôcť Williamsona, akokoľvek sa snaží. Veľmi si nepomôže, keď začne spomínať na „staré časy“, na ktoré vo firme nikto nemyslí, ani myslieť nemôže, lebo nostalgia je považovaná len za ďalšiu zo slabín, ktoré ostatní zneužívajú vo svoj prospech. Prosby kvôli dcére dopadnú podobne. Rodina sa vo firme nenosí, brat nezná brata. Jediné, čo na Williamsona skutočne platí, je dvojnásobný úplatok a dvadsať percent z predaja. Levene si nakoniec zvolí iný spôsob ako „pomstiť“ svoju neschopnosť pokoriť Williamsona. Vylúpi a rozmláti mu kanceláriu. Levene si ale nechce pripustiť, že toto je trestný čin, a že stopy (ktoré sám prezradí) vedú k nemu. V na chvíľu nadobudnutej sebadôvere sa ešte raz pokúša (márne) premôcť Williamsona:

Williamson Shelley, ak by som bol tebou, tak sa upokojím.

Levene *Upokojím? Upokojím ...? Lebo čo, ináč ma vyhodíš?*

Williamson Nieje to nemožné. [...]

⁹ David Worster, “How to Do Things With Salesmen – David Mamet’s Speech-Act Play”, in *David Mamet’s Glengarry Glen Ross – Text and Performance*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 73.

- Levene Si plný sračiek.
- Williamson Vykradol si kanceláriu.
- Levene (*Zasmeje sa*) Jasné.
- Williamson Máš minulej noci alibi? [...] Čo si urobil s ponukami? [...]
- Levene Neviem, o čom rozprávaš.
- Williamson Ak mi povieš, kde skončili tie ponuky, nenahlásim ťa. Ak nie, idem za tým polišom, a Mitch a Murray sa už postarajú o to, aby si skončil v base.
- Levene To by neurobili.
- Williamson [...] Čo si urobil s tými ponukami. Dávam ti päť sekúnd, ináč ideš do basy. [...]
- Levene Predal som ich Jerryemu Grafovi.¹⁰

Levenovo poníženie je dokonané. Ak rozprávať je pre týchto agentov všetko, prinútiť niekoho prehovoriť, keď si praje mlčať, je zlatom. Podobnú taktiku využíva Moss na Aaronowa, keď po ňom chce aby vylúpil kanceláriu. Ako už vieme, nakoniec sa tohto činu chopí Levene. Aaronow, hoci nieje v situácii, v ktorej by si mohol vyberať, odmietne, dokáže povedať nie. Predtým mu Moss ale jasne naznačí, že už len vedomie o tomto plánovanom čine z Aaronowa robí spoluvinníka. Aj preto Aaronow pri vypočúvaní zaryto mlčí. Moss a Aaronow nie sú kamaráti, Aaronow sa nezastáva Mossa, len sa bojí následkov, keby prehovoril. Moss sa naopak len snažil zneužiť Aaronowe nechvályhodné postavenie vo firme vo svoj prospech. Ich rozhovor je jeden z najlepších príkladov Mametových postáv a ich potreby rozprávať, len preto aby nestála reč:

- Moss Nieкто by sa mal postaviť firme a *vrátiť* jej úder. Nieкто by mal vykradnúť kanceláriu.
- Aaronow Hmm.
- Moss Presne to *vravím*. Ak by sme to mali urobiť, ak by sme boli tie typy, rozmlátili by sme ten *brloh*, aby to vyzeralo ako lúpež [...]
- Aaronow Áno. Ale, *rozprávaš* o tom, alebo len ...
- Moss Nie, len ...
- Aaronow My sa o tom len „*bavíme*.“

¹⁰ David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Mamet Plays: 3 – Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie Du Chien, The Shawl, Speed-The-Plow*, (London: Methuen, 1996) 61.

Moss Len sa o tom *rozprávame*. Ako o nápade.

Aaronow Ako o nápade.

Moss Áno.

Aaronow My o tom teda vlastne *nerozprávame*.

Moss Nie.

Aaronow Nerozprávame o tom ako o...

Moss *Nie*.

Aaronow Ako o *lúpeži*.

Moss Ako o „lúpeži“?! Nie. (19-21)

Všetci agenti používajú jazyk ako svoju najmocnejšiu zbraň. Pri presvedčaní potenciálnych zákazníkov o výhodách tej ktorej kúpy, v bojoch o postavenie vo firme s ostatnými agentmi. Keď však dôjde na vyjadrenie svojich postojov, potrieb, emócií, jazyk je vyčerpaný a zlyhá. Najmocnejší rečníci stíchnu, a radšej debatujú o ničom, len aby neukázali skutočnú tvár a nevpadli do pasce súpera. Najlepším rečníkom medzi agentmi je Richard Roma. Ten má jednoznačne našliapnuté na Cadillac, a keď presvedčí pána Lingka o výhodnej kúpe, už mu nič nestojí v ceste. Roma je suverén, ktorého úspech mu zaručuje obdiv a rešpekt ostatných agentov, či Williamsona, nad ktorým Roma jasne drží moc alebo Levena, ktorý Romu považuje za svojho kamaráta v tejto krutej džungli. To, že Roma vystupuje priateľsky, ešte neznamená, že túto hodnotu uznáva. Roma je sebedomý, plný sebadôvery, arogantný. Jeho moc ale nieje iba ilúziou. Jeho predajné výsledky mu zaručujú toto závidené postavenie. Roma si môže dovoliť svoju nadutosť a kamarátske vystupovanie. Ale priateľstvo, po ktorom Levene volá a túži neexistuje. Roma rozdáva slová povzbudeníavôkol seba na počkanie, ale Levenovu pomoc využije len k tomu, aby nestratil svojho zákazníka, ktorý si rozmyslel včerajší obchod. Tam ale Romov a Levenov „priateľský“ vzťah končí. Z ponúk, ktoré Williamson sľúbil Levenovi chce Roma dve percentá: „Moje veci sú moje, jeho veci sú naše.“ (66) Roma nepozná medze svojej nenažranosti. Jedinou osobou ktorá ho nakoniec zastaví, je Lingkova manželka, pani Lingková, ktorá sa síce na scéne neobjaví ani raz, ale prostredníctvom manžela, nad ktorým drží kontrolu, zastaví Romove ťaženie za Cadillacom. Do rozmlátenej kancelárie, kancelárie hnevu, podrazov a násilia vnesie kus racionálneho uvažovania. Skutočnú moc však aj naďalej drží Roma. Pani Lingková nemá prostriedky, a veľmi pravdepodobne ani silu, či chuť s Romom bojovať.

Do priameho boja s mužom, Johnom, sa púšťa postava Carol v ďalšej Mametovej hre, ktorá nesie názov *Oleanna*. V tejto hre ide jak o otázky sexuálneho obťažovania, tak o používanie politicky správnych výrazov v oblasti školstva a vzdelania. Lenže toto sú viac-menej len zbrane, ktoré hlavná ženská postava využije vo svojej snahe získať moc. John je vzdelaný akademik, ktorého ale oslepilo vybudované postavenie, a vo svojej zahľadenosti do seba a svojich úspechov zabúda na svoje povinnosti. Carol je zmätená študentka, ktoré nedosahuje najlepšie výsledky a preto prichádza k Johnovi s prosbou o lepšiu známku. Ich stretnutie je neustále prerušované Johnovými telefonátmi. Ten, v snahe zbaviť sa Carol, ponúka najlepšiu možnú známku a akési stretnutia „súkromného“ druhu, ktoré Carol pochopí po svojom. To, že Carol chápe väčšinu vecí po svojom je kameňom úrazu pre oboch aktérov. Ani John ani Carol nie sú schopní nájsť spoločnú reč. Najprv Carol nerozumie Johnovmu slovníku, a potom, čo Carol vznesie obvinenia voči Johnovi, John prestáva rozumieť Carol. Steven Price porovnáva rozdielny prístup Carol a Johna k vzdelaniu:

Carol má legitímne očakávania, že John jej pomôže, a preto inklinuje „k moci“ obrazu: predpokladá, že učiteľ má schopnosť vštípiť svoje nadriadené vedomosti, a že študent mu porozumie, pokiaľ nasleduje jeho pokyny. John ale zdanlivo nasleduje „moc k“ obrazu, ktorý po študentoch požaduje aby mysleli za seba. V skutočnosti tak ale John nečiní.¹¹

Carol dostane šancu zistiť ako chutí moc vďaka Johnovej arogancii a nepozornosti. Ten mimo iné podotkne, že je znechutený systémom vzdelania, a pripustí, že vzdelanie by nemalo byť pre každého. Carol sa vráti, posilnená týmito informáciami a podporou svojej „Skupiny“ a oberie Johna o moc a postupne aj kariéru. Akonáhle si John uvedomí tento prudký zvrät, snaží sa všetkými prostriedkami opätovne získať výhody svojho postavenia. Avšak na Carol nezapôsobia ani racionálna úvaha, dokonca ani prosby o odpustenie, ani žiadne hrozby. Carol využila Johnove zaváhania a jej zneužitie moci nepozná konca kraja. Z Johnovho dotyku Carolinho ramena sa stane objatie, z učiteľa je elitár a sexista. Carol prekrúca Johnove slová a činy len a len vo svoj prospech. Leslie Kane píše, že „teraz je na rade Carol aby sa zahrála na tyrana, aby zneužila svoju autoritu, aby vydierala, aby vládla rukou Drakóna.“¹² Ale Carol vďaka predovšetkým „Skupine“ za svoju moc nad Johnom. Ale ani John, ani jej „Skupina“ nie sú schopní zodpovedať Caroline otázky, nie sú schopní priniesť Carol porozumenie. Lenže práve John si odnesie Carolin hnev a frustráciu. Carolina „Skupina“ ju iba zneužíva pre svoje ciele – zmeny v zozname učebných materiálov. Keď však Carol požiadala vyškrtnutie Johnovej knihy z tohto zoznamu, Johnovi pretečie kalich trpezlivosti:

¹¹ Steven Price, 119-120.

¹² Leslie Kane, *Weasels and Wisemen – Ethics and Ethnicity in the Work of David Mamet*, (New York: Palgrave, 1999) 175.

Carol Chceme ju zrušiť [...]

John Vypadni.

Carol Ak sa prenesiete cez osobné výpady.

John Vypadni do Boha z mojej kancelárie.

Carol Rozmyslela by som si to.

John ... Myslíš, že môžeš.¹³

Carol zašla až príliš ďaleko, ale cestu späť nehľadá. John sa raz dotkol jej ramena, raz ju fyzicky prinútil sadnúť si a do tretice zdvihol stoličku a Carol ňou ovalil. John nechal prehovoriť svoju brutálnu stránku, svoju fyzickú silu. Carol má ale posledné slovo, a jej replika: „Áno. Presne tak.“ znie nanajvýš záhadne a pochopená môže byť dvojzmyselne. Možno kvôli a možno napriek Mametovmu zobrazeniu Carol sa vo väčšine prípadov hľadisko prikláňa na Johnovu stranu. Veľa kritikov vyčíta Mametovi túto nerovnováhu v znázorňovaní mužských a ženských postáv. John je úspešný akademik, šťastný manžel, otec rodiny. Carol je nie veľmi chytrá študentka, ktorá ho v okamihu oberie o všetko. Zabúda sa však na to, že Carol činí presne to, v čom sa väčšina Mametových postáv vyžíva. Carol spoznala slabiny svojho konkurenta, a vďaka svojmu úsiliu a zhode náhod ho úplne obrala o jeho moc. Človek sa nemôže stotožniť s Johnovým činom, ale Carolino „vít'azstvo“ je tiež špinavé a poškvrené.

Nemenej zložité úlohy majú ženské postavy v hrách *The Shawl* (Šál) a *Speed-the-Plow* (V pote tváre orať budeš). Slečna A v hre *Šál* hľadá porozumenie a útechu, no nachádza len chabú ilúziu skutočnej pravdy. Stane sa obeťou Mametovho podvodníka najväčšieho kalibru. John, samozvaný veštec chce zapôsobiť na svojho nového milenca Charlesa tým, že úplne obalamutí slečnu A. John neovplyva žiadnymi nadprirodzenými schopnosťami, jeho sila spočíva v tom, že dokáže ľudí vynikajúco odhadnúť. Jediný Johnov cieľ je Charlesova priazeň, ktorú chce získať tým, že doslova zničí slečnu A. Tá síce opúšťa Johna s pocitom zadosťučinenia, s pocitom, že jej dôvera bola naplnená, ak nie opätovaná, jej prosba vypočutá, nevedomuje si ale, že to všetko, čomu verí, je len ilúzia, ktorou ju nainfikoval podvodník John. John nepozná minulosť jej rodiny, ale vyhľadá ju v starých kronikách, nepozná tvár jej mamy, ale jeho domnienky sa dostatočne podobajú tomu, čomu slečna A chce veriť. John vysvetlí Charlesovi úplne presne ako funguje jeho mágia:

¹³ David Mamet, *Oleanna*, in *Mamet Plays: 4 – Cryptogram, Oleanna, The Old Neighbourhood*, (London: Methuen, 2002) 12.

John Pozri na ňu. Je nevydatá. V jej veku. Prečo? Lebo je zviazaná. Čím? Nejakou nerozlúštenou udalosťou. Smrťou matky? Otázku, ktorú by položila „svetu duchov“, jej matka zanechala majetok otčimovi. Mala by tú závet zobrat' pred súd? Je toto otázka pre vešťača? Nieje. Ale skrýva otázku hlbšiu: túto: ako sa vyrovnám so svojou zradou?¹⁴

Jediným kameňom úrazu sa pre Johna stane jeho dôvera v Charlesa. Charlesa nezaujíma postup, či následok Johnovej práce, Charles chce od slečny A získať peniaze. Nič viac, nič menej. John hľadal u Charlesa presne to, čo slečna A hľadá u neho – porozumenie a pochopenie. Žiaľ ani jeden, ani druhý vo svojej snahe neuspeli. John síce dokonale ovládne slečnu A, ale jeho city k Charlesovi nie sú opätované, naopak, aj on sa stáva obeťou podvodu a zrady.

Karen, v hre *V pote tváre orať budeš*, tiež stojí tvárou v tvár dvom mužom. Dvojicu mužov tvorí Gould, vedúci filmovej produkcie v Hollywoodskom štúdiu, a Fox, scenárista a Gouldov dlhoročný spolupracovník. Gould sa rozhoduje medzi scenárom s umeleckými ambíciami a Foxovým scenárom, ktorý je typickým a zaručeným kasovým trhákom. Je viac než jasné, ktorému filmu dá prednosť Gould. Až pokiaľ sa neobjaví Karen, dočasná sekretárka, ktorá sa snaží, cez svoje sexuálne služby získať vplyv a moc, a lobovať za umelecký projekt. Gould sa staví s Foxom o päťsto dolárov, že popletie Karen hlavu, neuvedomuje si ale, že naivita ktorou Karen presakuje je iba maskou. Karen je pripravená použiť všetky prostriedky k získaniu moci. Gould naivne verí, že Karen si zamilovala jeho osobnosť, neuvedomuje si, že rešpekt, ktorým ho ľudia zasypávajú je priamo zviazaný s jeho postavením v štúdiu. Karen dokázala prečítať Gouldove slabiny, a zneužila ich vo svoj prospech. Tak ako Gould, ani Fox nepozná iné hodnoty než tie Hollywoodske. Karen ale prichádza z vonkajšieho sveta, a otázky, ktoré kladie, nahľadávajú Gouldove a Foxove hodnoty. Na malú chvíľu dokáže Goulda presvedčiť, že možno je niečo viac ako len ten istý zaručený recept. Zrazu je Gould plný umeleckého projektu, a Fox je na druhej koľaji. Foxovi sa ale podarí Karen prinútiť k priznaniu, že s Gouldom nešla do postele z lásky, ale kvôli tomu, aby ovplyvnila jeho rozhodnutie. Karen sa podarilo okabátiť jedného muža, ale na Foxa už nestačila. Hlavný dôvod Foxovho pátrania po pravde je možná prehra jeho scenára, a tým aj strata lukratívnej ponuky. Jeho nezaujíma serióznosť, či neserióznosť druhého projektu, jemu ide o jeho lesk, o jeho slávu. Gould, jeho „kamarát“, veľmi rýchlo zabudol na lojalnosť, a nechal si úplne zamotať hlavu. Nebyť Foxa, a jeho osobných záujmov, Gould by bol daroval svoju moc nad projektmi do rúk Karen:

¹⁴ David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Mamet Plays: 3 – Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie Du Chien, The Shawl, Speed-The-Plow*, (London: Methuen, 1996) 102.

Fox Hej, Bob, veď si len lovek. [...] Chceme aby ns ľudia mali radi, o? Aby s nami znsali naše bremen. Ale nefunguje to. [...]

Gould Chcel som konať Dobro ... Ale poblznil som sa. [...] Povedala mi, e som dobr lovek.

Fox Ako to *ona* mohla vedieť? Ty si dobr lovek. Vyprdni sa na ňu. [...] Viem, o si chcel Bob. Chcel si konať dobro.¹⁵

Akokoľvek sa Fox snaží Goulda uiikať, ich vzťah nepripomna priateľstvo. Je založený na Gouldovej pozcii moci, ku ktorej mu chtiac-nechtiac Fox dopomha. Lene Foxovi k pretlaeniu svojho vlastnho projektu u Goulda nepomohlo ni, iba odhalenie Karen ako falošnej manipultorky. Fox sm ale nepredviedol ni in, len nasmeroval Goulda na cestu, ktor je prospešn jemu sammu. Snoval a konal len pre svoje vlastn blaho.

Svet Davida Mameta je založený na moci jednho a podriadenosti druhho. Je obvan mužmi. T sa snažia ovldnuť vsetkch navkol seba ůstne aj fyzicky. Postavy si uvedomuj potrebu scitu, porozumenia a priateľstva, ale zroveň si uvedomuj, e tto potreba je považovaná za slabinu, ktor protivnci automaticky zneužívaj vo svoj prospech, a preto sa ju za kad cenu snažia potlaiť. Mametove postavy stoja tvrou v tvr rozpadu rodiny a spoločnosti, morlky a jazyka. Vo svete odcudzenia a krvilanho zpasu sa nepota ni in ako porzka konkurencie. Postavy vstupuj do neprestajnho kolotoa zloby, násilia a klamstiev. enm zostva len perifrny priestor. S utlan mocnmi mužmi. Niesu dostatone fyzicky odoln aby s nimi mohli zvdzať neustle boje. Keď sa u objavia na scne, muži s automaticky pripraven pripomenť im ako bol hnev, agresia a násilie. Muži s pripraven kedykoľvek využit svoju fyzick silu. Akokoľvek sa vyvja argument, muži si svojou silou vybuduj posledn a rozhodn slovo. Hoci s ensk postavy utlan na okraj, ich ůloha je o to dleitejšia. Hoci sa neobjavia na javisku s to ony, kto sa stva poslednou inštanciou chaotickmu svetu mužov. Ony s konštantnou kontrolou mužskch inov. i je to Ruth v *Americkom biznovi*, alebo pani Lingkov v *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mužsk naivn viera v priateľstvo a kamartstvo plod len podrazy a násilie. ensk postavy vnsaj do tohto sveta zmysel a poriadok. Keď sa však odvžia na priamu konfrontciu, muži s ochotn použit vsetky prostriedky na udržanie svojej moci. i to je násilie, ktorm Fox hroz Karen v hre *V pote tvre orať budeš*, alebo priamy ůtok, ktor poujije John proti Carol v hre *Oleanna*. Vykreslenie enskch postv ale zostva v porovnan s tmi mužskmi stereotypick, nehmotn, bezobsažn, bez fantzie a predstavivosti.

¹⁵ David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Mamet Plays: 3 – Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie Du Chien, The Shawl, Speed-The-Plow*, (London: Methuen, 1996) 183-184.

Jazyk hrá obrovskú úlohu v boji o moc. Jeho váhu môžeme sledovať v rytmoch, intonácii a hlase jednotlivých postáv. V neprestávajúcej reči, ale aj v ohlušujúcom tichu. Úspešní sú úspešní hlavne preto, lebo sú schopní podriadiť si jazyk vo svoj prospech. Ten prekypuje nadávkami, oplzlosťami a kliadbami. To je ale zároveň najväčší dôvod, prečo sú Mametove postavy neschopné ľudskej komunikácie na vzájomnej úrovni. Jazyk je zbraňou, ale tým sa zároveň vyčerpáva jeho fundamentálna podstata prostriedku dorozumievania. Svet Mametových postáv je bez akejkoľvek morálky a etiky. Všetky činy smerujú len k udržaniu alebo k získaniu moci. Priateľstvo, vzájomné pocity, láska neexistujú. Mužská spoločnosť propaguje iba predsudky, zaujatosť, korupciu, aroganciu, zneužívanie a násilie. Mametovi muži bojujú o moc lebo nič iné ani nič lepšie nepoznajú. Snažia sa získať kontrolu nad svojimi životmi kontrolou životov tých druhých. Moc je pre nich náhradou za všetky nedostupné hodnoty ich sveta. Skutočný ľudský kontakt prakticky neexistuje. Akýkoľvek pokus o jeho naplnenie končí zneužitím tejto „slabiny.“ Strach z neúspechu je väčší ako túžba po stratených hodnotách. Mametovi muži ešte stále veria v neexistujúci mýtus mužnosti. Nahovávajú si kamarátstva a priateľstvá, ale jediné slovo, ktoré opisuje ich vzťahy je zneužívanie. Hoci sa potľapkávajú po ramenách, v ich rukách sa lesknú čepele nožov.