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**Mamet's Men:
Crisis of Masculinity in Modern Society as Represented in the Work of David Mamet**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Permission

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Ed: I feel...

Art: Yes?

Ed: I feel...

Squirrels

Danny: I love you.

Deborah: Does it frighten you to say that?

Danny: Yes.

Deborah: It's only words. I don't think you should be frightened by words.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago

Men – they occupy an irreplaceable position within David Mamet’s body of work, his plays having the tendency to be “predominantly male.”¹ The dramatic world of this contemporary Chicago-based author, screenwriter, and most importantly playwright not only focuses, in the first place, on men and “the myriad variations of homosocial male order,”² he often consciously and completely excludes women from his plays. For instance, there is not a single female character present on stage in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, in *Duck Variations*, in *Lakeboat*, *American Buffalo*, *A Life in the Theatre*, *The Cryptogram* and many others. Being “drawn to the male world of encoded violence,”³ Mamet simply does not find a place in his work for female characters unless they help to prove whatever point he is trying to make about men.

In spite of Mamet’s “overriding interest in men, their fears and desires, loyalties and rivalries,”⁴ he is not at all explicit about these. We frequently discover very little about his male characters merely on the basis of what they tell us or what they do, the reason for this being that for Mamet, “leaving out... is the whole trick.”⁵ Also, creating a prototypical masculine character, it would be illogical for the author to have the macho discuss at length his emotions because that is just not what men are supposed to do. Therefore, mirroring the

¹ C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 222.

² David Radavich, “Man among Men: David Mamet’s Homosocial Order,” *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. Peter F. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 69.

³ Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 65.

⁴ Carla J. McDonough, “Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet’s Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 196.

⁵ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama 1945-1990*, 210.

presumably real men of this world, and giving them a special twist, Mamet creates “deracinated characters, [...] barely able to articulate feelings or thoughts which seem to collapse of their insubstantiality.”⁶

By creating these typically masculine characters and often even placing them in “traditionally masculine worlds”⁷ such as on a boat or in a real estate agency, he may freely explore one of the American myths to which he is, along with Sam Shepard, to a great degree attracted – the myth of masculinity. What makes men who they are? How does one become a man, and what does it take to lose this title? What does it even mean to be a man? David Mamet does not give a straight answer, providing instead “images of alienation, moral dislocation and spiritual decay,”⁸ which affect people on the individual level and, by extension, comment on the processes occurring in the society. As Christopher Bigsby puts it: “His America [...] is cracking apart.”⁹

What role does theatre play, then, in this rather apocalyptic scenario? Bigsby believes that theatre is “a means of exploring the collapse of community” and also a mechanism of its recuperation,¹⁰ but in what way is drama capable of helping the society in these particular matters? Mamet himself may help us answering this question for he has once said:

Drama is about finding previously unsuspected meaning in chaos, about discovering the truth that had previously been obscured by lies, and about our persistence in accepting lies. In great drama we recognize that freedom may lie beyond and is achieved through the painful questioning of what was before supposed unquestionable.¹¹

⁶ Christopher Bigsby, “David Mamet,” *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 17.

⁷ McDonough, 196.

⁸ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 204.

⁹ Bigsby, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 65.

¹⁰ Bigsby, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 65.

¹¹ David Mamet, *Theatre*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010) 69.

In other words, drama may make obvious what would otherwise elude notice or would be unconsciously accepted. Masculinity is a perfect example of such concept for even though we take our perception thereof for granted, only a limited number of scholars or sociologists would be able to provide a satisfactory definition and means of application, or state social implications of the term. David Mamet questions widespread notions of masculinity, and asks audiences and readers to reconsider them in the light of the new evidence presented in his plays.

This thesis will deal precisely with the unstable notion of masculinity in the plays of David Mamet. In its core, it will be a work of literary analysis but it is my intention to put Mamet's notions of and attitudes towards this subject into a wider perspective, therefore making the thesis partially sociological. I will not be interested only in the way Mamet operates with his male characters, but also in the way men think and behave in the real world, attempting to find points of both divergence and convergence. In my literary analysis, I will mainly lean against the writings and argumentation of Christopher Bigsby and Arthur Holmberg. In the sociological parts of the thesis, I will make use of the research of R. W. Connell, Judith Butler and a range of other social scientists.

The immediately following second chapter of this thesis will deal with the conception of masculinity as such and its development from the mid-nineteenth century, as well as with the development of the scientific discussion about it in the twentieth century. I will consider characteristics which define men, as well as introduce the terms hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, linking these notions to Mamet's plays.

The third chapter will discuss the idea of homosociality, of male friendship and male bonding. I will consider whether the men in Mamet's drama are indeed capable of the "bond of unspoken friendship and respect."¹² Additionally, David Mamet is deeply interested in the

¹² David Mamet, "Duck Variations," *Plays: I* (London: Methuen, 1994) 11. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

relationship between friendship and business, the analysis of which will also be included in this chapter.

The fourth chapter will consider Mamet's handling of homosexuality in his work – that is his gradual change in attitude towards it from using it merely in slurs to his eventual acceptance thereof. In the preceding sociological part of this chapter, I will consider the relationship between the traditional understanding of masculinity and homosexuality.

In the fifth chapter, I will introduce the issue of femininity to the analysis of masculinity, latterly focusing on the effect of the rise of feminism on men as well as their response to it. Consequently, I will discuss the absence of women in Mamet's plays, their role therein as a threat to the world of men, and ponder about the reasons why the relationships between men and women, according to Mamet as well as many a sociologist, simply do not work.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I will sum up the notion of crisis of masculinity and the possible reasons thereof, as well as once again ask the question of what the role is of theatre in our understanding of masculinity in this climate of change. I will consider whether Mamet's plays, given his position on the issue, may be considered political, and whether he has even conceived them in such way.

Chapter 2 Masculinity in Theory

Bernie: *I told him, 'Mister, I am one tough sonofabitch, but I'll be goddamned if I don't feel like I'm gonna bust out crying.'*
And I almost did.
Reunion

George: *The duck is dying.*

Emil: *Out in the marsh.*

George: *Out in the marsh.*

Emil: *Oh no.*

George: *In a flock of feathers and blood. Full of bullets. Quiet, so as not to make a sound. Dying.*
Duck Variations

Ruth: *There are no men.*
The Woods

The concept of masculinity has always been difficult to specify exactly. From afar, it may be simple to determine features suitable to be included under this umbrella term, but from up close it is an almost unfeasible task to give a concise definition. On the one hand, masculinity is a social construct¹ and as such it may have as many shapes and forms as there are men; on the other hand, we all seem to share notions of typically masculine features. These may include not only a sense of courage, inner direction and autonomy, verging on isolationism and social alienation,² but also technological skills, group solidarity and even certain forms of aggression, wish for adventure, and “considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body.”³ Even though it is safe to say that no man is a perfect incarnation of all these social presumptions about masculinity, they continue to exist. According to Mike Donaldson, some social groups are more active than others in propagating them, one of these groups being playwrights. He calls them “weavers of the fabric of hegemony” or the “organizing intellectuals” thereof, arguing that these individuals regulate gender regimes, articulating experiences and perspectives, and reflecting on as well as interpreting gender relations.⁴

¹ Sharon R. Bird, “Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosexuality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Gender and Society* 10.2 (1996): 120.

² Evalyn Jacobson-Michaelson and Leigh M. Aaland, “Masculinity, Femininity, and Androgyny,” *Ethos* 4.2 (1976): 252.

³ Mike Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22.5 (1993): 644.

⁴ Donaldson, 646.

Social and scientific perceptions of masculinity with which these intellectuals work, however, are largely dependent on the period they belong to. Even though most Americans may take their current model of manhood as natural, it is neither natural nor inevitable.⁵ As the times change and the society shifts, the concepts, once taken for granted, are questioned and built upon. Before discussing Mamet himself, then, let us examine the development of the discourse around masculinity in order to be better acquainted with the background of his social dialogue.

2.1 Men in Time

Up to the mid-nineteenth century, being a man seems to have been relatively easy since masculinity and men's world were understood to be the social norm. Due to the fact that there was nothing endangering their status, there was no need for men to do anything to reinforce their masculine status. Additionally, as Michael S. Kimmel suggests, the taming of the American West combined with the rapid industrial and urban growth fueled men's optimism about their social possibilities.⁶ Unfortunately, by mid-century, the walls of the male establishment began to crack as social and economic changes, introduced by the roaring Industrial Revolution, transformed gender relations in marriage, in family, and in sexuality.⁷ The industrialization of America was more than rapid. Whereas in 1860, the country did not have any big business or national market worth mentioning, the years between 1870 and 1900 saw America's industrial output increase by approximately 500 percent, resulting in men having hardly any time to catch their breath, let alone perceive how the economic forces begin to disrupt their lives.⁸ Their relationship to work was radically altered as the independent

⁵ Arthur Holmberg, *David Mamet and American Macho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 2.

⁶ Michael S. Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," *Gender and Society* 1.3 (1987): 263.

⁷ Kimmel, 263.

⁸ Holmberg, 8.

artisans, small farmers and shopkeepers were everywhere disappearing, along with the labor-saving devices degrading them into the position of mere machine feeders.⁹

Kimmel adds that, alongside this social shift, the rise of feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States challenged the meanings which had so far constituted the traditional gender definitions.¹⁰ “The New Woman demanded the right to vote, the right to work, and access to higher education, [and thus] threatened to turn gender relations topsy-turvy.”¹¹ With women taking an active part in the growing industry, the older sexual divisions of labor were increasingly subverted, resulting in the decline of the number and proportion of the typically male skilled and unskilled jobs.¹² All of a sudden, it was not simply their gender or their occupation that made men who they were, so they were faced with the necessity to establish different means of expressing their masculinity. The issue was all the more pressing due to the fact that feminism “challenged the belief that the world revolves around the phallus, [and] forced men to examine what was once taken for granted: the meaning of manhood.”¹³ A new paradigm of masculinity slowly began to emerge.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as Arthur Holmberg emphasizes, the new paragon of masculinity was found in the iconic, and largely mythical, figure of the cowboy.¹⁴ The cowboy “reassured men that they were still men: tall, strong, dominant.”¹⁵ Strength was particularly important for, in response to Social Darwinism, there was a growing belief among men that “survival of the fittest meant survival of the toughest.”¹⁶ Thus, masculine pride came to focus on the body, masculine anxiety began to be expressed in the accentuation of the

⁹ Kimmel, 263.

¹⁰ Kimmel, 262.

¹¹ Holmberg, 37.

¹² Donaldson, 643.

¹³ Holmberg, 1.

¹⁴ Holmberg, 2.

¹⁵ Holmberg, 2.

¹⁶ Holmberg, 37.

physical, and in this way, men found their sorely sought antidote to their fears that American culture, due to the growing influence of women, was becoming ever more feminized.¹⁷

As Holmberg argues, the first half of the twentieth century, marked by the world wars, was characterized by women's growing emancipation. The Second World War in particular brought about a groundbreaking change in the social fabric. While men were busy fighting, women went to work. Upon their husbands' consequent arrival, the wives were supposed to return to their previous confined lives, but "many women were not happy seeing their world shrink into a Westinghouse kitchen, [and thus the assumptions] about gender relations and therefore about what makes a man began to crack."¹⁸ From the fifties onwards, the women's race for equality and influence was gaining speed.

In response to this disruption of traditional gender arrangements, Holmberg adds, men turned back "to their mythical icon of masculinity, the cowboy, to find their way out of the quandary."¹⁹ Once again put on a pedestal, the cowboy gave rise to a new wave of tough masculinity, turning nostalgically to and expressing a longing for "a traditional hero, a return to an 'authentic' paradigm of American masculinity."²⁰ The same movement towards the culture of tough men could be found also in academia in the form of Men's Studies. Even though these became acknowledged and taught only as late as in the seventies, they proved to have a vital function in re-masculinization of men, so needed due to their fear of being emasculated by the ever stronger women.

Up to this point, masculinity was thought to be a homogenous concept and all men in this respect essentially the same. In the eighties, however, R. W. Connell introduced the concepts of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, arguing not only that there are discrepancies within the male group regarding the level of individual masculinity, but also that "any male

¹⁷ Holmberg, 37.

¹⁸ Holmberg, 65.

¹⁹ Holmberg, 59.

²⁰ Holmberg, 65.

subject who does not conform to the hegemonic norm of masculinity is relatively peripheralized.”²¹ The issue of hegemonic masculinity will be dealt with in more depth later in this chapter.

In order to fit in the male social group, one has to be acquainted with the social practices our culture deems masculine so that one is capable of producing them if need be, the idea therefore being that one is not born a man but becomes a man.²² This performative quality of masculinity was first alluded to and analyzed in the early nineties by Judith Butler. Butler believed that, because gender is to be realized in and through concrete practices, men must perpetually prove their manhood, and their masculine identity thus depends on the iteration of the performance of masculinity.²³ She herself wrote on the subject: “As a social construct, gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or physic gender core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait.”²⁴ Thus, while not expressing an inner essence, these gender performances rather fabricate a theatrical effect.²⁵ Additionally, Butler states that by repeating his role frequently enough, the performer eventually forgets he is even performing, his role becoming spontaneous, a “fact of nature.”²⁶

David Mamet not only elaborates in his plays on the problems and anxieties facing a modern man, often drawing on Connell’s idea of stratification of masculinities, but he is also very much interested in the masculinity of the previous generations. He grew up in the fifties, the golden age of the Western, genre which looked longingly back in the American history in search for a tough masculine ideal. “Anger and violence, muscles and machismo – the masculinity that coalesced at the end of the nineteenth century resonates through Mamet.”²⁷

He feels that nowadays something has been lost in our society, “a sense of past, of

²¹ Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 8.

²² Holmberg, 82.

²³ Holmberg, 82-83.

²⁴ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Subordination,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 317.

²⁵ Holmberg, 83.

²⁶ Holmberg, 83.

²⁷ Holmberg, 10.

community, of connections broken.”²⁸ Afflicted with painful nostalgia, he gazes back into the times with a distinctively masculine feel to them, an environment “where one is understood, where one is not judged, where one is not expected to perform.”²⁹ As Christopher Bigsby puts it, he explores “the loss of that spiritual confidence which was once presumed to underpin individual identity and national enterprise alike.”³⁰

2.2 Manliness Now

The logical problem arising from attempting to draw any sort of general assumption about masculinity is that there is of course no simple homogeneity among men.³¹ David Mamet himself introduces us to a wide range of male characters. Some are violent, like Teach in *American Buffalo*, others peaceful and wishing to avoid all problems, like John in *The Shawl*; some are talkative, such as John in *Oleanna*, others quieter, like Nick in *The Woods*; some are young and full of ideals, like Danny in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, others old and disillusioned with life, like the pair of men in *Duck Variations*. All of them are men, yet no two of them are exactly the same.

There are three basic concepts of masculinity with which sociologists work nowadays. As presented by Matthew C. Gutmann in his essay, the first one stipulates that masculinity is anything men think and do.³² Unfortunately, the vagueness of this concept renders it utterly unusable for further analysis.

The second one, according to Gutmann, is much more substantial, having for its base Judith Butler’s theory of performativity of masculinity. It assesses that masculinity is anything

²⁸ Christopher Bigsby, ed., “David Mamet,” *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 18.

²⁹ Bigsby, “David Mamet,” *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 27.

³⁰ C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 196.

³¹ Doreen Massey, “Masculinity, Dualism and High Technology,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20.4 (1995): 495.

³² Matthew C. Gutmann, “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 386.

men do to be men.³³ To quote Butler: “Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.”³⁴ The actual learning of what exactly we are and are not to do begins at an early age. “Children observe others and model their behavior on what they see around them. [...] Certain acts bring rewards, others punishment, and children regulate themselves accordingly.”³⁵ Acting out masculinity is thus perceived as a collective activity. Additionally, in itself this concept implies that some men have to be – either inherently or by ascription – considered more masculine than others, and thus stand as an example for the less manly ones.³⁶

Gutmann’s final concept of masculinity emphasizes that it is anything for which women do not stand.³⁷ In other words, being masculine means being not-feminine,³⁸ the possibility of even being evaluated as feminine posing as one of men’s greatest fears.³⁹ Rather simplistic in its nature, this kind of gender polarization which defines masculine and feminine as binary oppositions, denies much of what men and women have in common.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it is the reason why men, including Mamet’s sort, do not generally express or talk about their emotions. Behaviors typically associated with women are deemed stigmatizing – whereas emotions signify weakness and are as such devalued, emotional detachment signifies strength and is endorsed.⁴¹

So far, I have been discussing various shared notions of masculinity – things men do, and ways of their behavior that make them men. The situation in real life, though, is never as perfect as it would seem from the above lines. The majority of men do at times talk about

³³ Gutmann, 386.

³⁴ Holmberg, 147.

³⁵ Holmberg, 134.

³⁶ Gutmann, 386.

³⁷ Gutmann, 386.

³⁸ Bird, 125.

³⁹ Christine M. Robinson and Sue E. Spivey, “The Politics of Masculinity and the Ex-Gay Movement,” *Gender and Society* 21.5 (2007): 661.

⁴⁰ Holmberg, 136.

⁴¹ Bird, 125.

their feelings, and not all of them are always aggressive or take part in sexual objectification of women when amongst their male friends. There is an apparent gap between the reality and the myth of manliness. To understand this issue better, it is therefore time to properly introduce the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

2.3 Hegemonic Mamet

First broadly introduced by R. W. Connell in the nineteen-eighties and constantly referenced and worked with ever since, the groundbreaking concept of hegemonic masculinity is generally understood as a pattern of practice that allows certain group of men's dominance over women and other men to continue.⁴² We may imagine it as a manner of male behavior which is as masculine as possible, a sort of a best case scenario for a manly man. Hegemonic masculinity relies for its maintenance and continuance on the assumption that there has always been one unitary and probably transhistorical gender state called masculinity.⁴³ However, not all men are the perfect representatives of this generic sort of macho. In fact, only a minority of them enact this type. Nevertheless, while not being *normal* in the statistical sense, hegemonic masculinity is certainly *normative*.⁴⁴ It embodies a goal point, a most honored way of being a man, and all men seem to feel obliged to position themselves in relation to it.

The basic idea of hegemonic masculinity itself was first conceived after a field study of social inequality in Australian high schools when researchers gained evidence of multiple hierarchies within the male community.⁴⁵ How exactly does this hegemonic base look like in the American environment? Erving Goffman sums the fantasy up as following: "There is only

⁴² Connell R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19.6 (2005): 832.

⁴³ Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 9.

⁴⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, 832.

⁴⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt, 830.

one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports.”⁴⁶

In spite of this neat and concise definition, though, we should not imagine hegemonic masculinity as a character type but rather as “configurations of practice generated in particular situations.”⁴⁷ The same as no two men are exactly alike the very concept of hegemonic masculinity is in constant flux. It cannot be understood as a settled character structure of any group of men but rather as a way men position themselves through discursive practices,⁴⁸ particularly against women and other men, whom they perceive to be less masculine (and whose masculinity is thus deemed subordinate to theirs). As Sharon R. Bird puts it, “hegemonic masculinity is consistently and continually recreated despite individual conceptualizations that contradict hegemonic meanings.”⁴⁹

In case of David Mamet, the ideal of hegemonic masculinity is closely associated with the ideal of cowboy, a trope with which he was growing up, influenced by the hypermasculine culture of the Western. The reasons of the appeal Westerns had on Mamet are given by Arthur Holmberg in his book on the playwright:

First, Westerns bodied forth a seductive image of American macho. By turning violence into visual poetry, Westerns defined tough masculinity in stories that grip the imagination. Second, their hard-hitting lingo provided a model for macho dialog. Third, many of the classic Westerns questioned American macho even as they celebrated it. And forth, the cowboy version of masculinity migrated to the cities and reappeared in gangster films, detective films, film noir, and cop action

⁴⁶ Holmberg, 2.

⁴⁷ Holmberg, 2.

⁴⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, 841.

⁴⁹ Bird, 130.

films [...] and all these genres have influenced Mamet, who in turn has practiced all of them.⁵⁰

Mamet's response to and relationship with his men is as complex and multifaceted as are the men themselves. In it, we may clearly hear the ambiguous echoes of the genre of Western. Mamet is sometimes affectionate and amused in regard to his male characters, celebrating the ideal of American macho; other times he is ironic and sad, questioning and mocking the very concept.⁵¹ He celebrates the strength, courage, and determination of the American macho, but also laments its lack of breeding, philosophical depth, and spiritual insight.⁵²

A good example of the embodiment of the hegemonic type of masculinity may be found in the character of Bernie from *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Teaching his young friend all about being a man, he is perceived by Danny as the perfect sample of the typical macho. As Bigsby puts it, Bernie "acts as a mentor to the apparently more naïve and sensitive Danny."⁵³ Danny puts his friend on a pedestal for it is Bernie who has fought in the Korean War and "has got some stories you are not going to believe."⁵⁴ In other words, Bernie is seen as a better man because he has taken part in the typically hypermasculine activity of waging war. In their relationship, we can observe Judith Butler's theory in practice. Whereas Danny is like a little boy, insecure about how to perform his masculinity, Bernie plays the part of an actor par excellence, who in return for his admiring attention gracefully agrees to teach him. Very similar relationship may be detected in *American Buffalo* between the characters of Don and Bob. In the beginning of the play, Don even explicitly tells Bob that "the only thing I'm trying to teach you something here."⁵⁵ In both plays, the young men want to be more like their

⁵⁰ Holmberg, 67-68.

⁵¹ Holmberg, 88-89.

⁵² Holmberg, 79.

⁵³ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 208.

⁵⁴ David Mamet, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1994) 63. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

⁵⁵ David Mamet, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1994) 150. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

models, more manly; and their mentors, from their superior position and appreciative of their interest, let them in, perhaps a bit condescendingly, on the secrets of performing masculinity.

In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* the two male friends indulge in another characteristically masculine activity – sexual objectification of women. At the end of the play, they lie on a beach, watching passer-by women, pointing out to and evaluating their various body parts. To give an example, we are told by Bernie to “look over there. The broad with the dumpy legs and the fat whatdayacallit. [...] Her legs are for shit, her stomach is dumpy, her tits don’t say anything for her, and her muscle tone is not good” (97). Simplistic and offensive as this scene is, it illustrates the contemporary deterioration of social codes of gentlemanly behavior. In simple terms, he who takes a firmer and more explicit stand on the issue of what he likes or does not like in a woman is often considered a bigger macho by the rest of the male group.

Let us now consider some of the more particular characteristics representative of hegemonic masculinity. What sorts of men belong in this elite group, and what instruments do they use to stay there and enforce their hegemony?

It comes as no surprise that only a handful of men, if any, embody this ideal of masculinity unceasingly circulated and admired in our society, “narrated by mass media, and celebrated by the state.”⁵⁶ This celebratory admiration is a bit confusing, for as Connell believes, hegemonic masculinity gradually came to be associated mostly with negative characteristics which depict men as unemotional and dispassionate, overly independent, aggressive, or even outright violent.⁵⁷ The perfect specimen of a man, emanating raw masculinity all around him, is understood to be a loner who never smiles and, when aggravated, does not hesitate to throw punches. With regard to David Mamet’s drama, we

⁵⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, 838.

⁵⁷ Connell and Messerschmidt, 840.

may add “drinking, life, [and] women”⁵⁸ – the alcohol especially because “It’s a man’s thing, drinking” (*Lakeboat*, 192).

As for the violence itself, hegemony is not predominantly characterized by it, yet it can indeed be supported by force if the need shall arise to police or subordinate other men as well as confirm one’s own masculine status. This subordination may involve a wide variety of activities ranging from simple teasing or verbal threats to violent assaults or even murders.⁵⁹

To return to *American Buffalo*, this sort of violent behavior is evident in the character of Teach. As long as everything is going according to the plan, Teach is able to control himself, but the moment he starts losing his grip on the situation, the very moment his position is threatened, he becomes violent. Thus, after acquiring the information that the third burglar, who was to help Don and him steal a precious coin, is lying in a hospital and that their whole master plan is therefore a thing of the past, he vents his aggression on the first man he sees as subordinate to himself – Bob. Grabbing the nearest object, he hits Bob on the side of his head. Consequently, when he himself gets punched by Don, having his ego hurt and his masculine position shaken to the core, he opts for the only solution he sees fit at the moment. Getting hold of a dead-pig sticker, he starts “trashing the junkshop” (253).

Similar pattern may be observed in another play - *Edmond*. After leaving his wife, the main character heads to a bar where he cannot but agree with a stranger who tells him that “a man’s got to get *out*... [...] A man’s got to get *away* from himself [...] because the pressure is too much.”⁶⁰ Edmond decides to listen to this man’s advices but on his way through the town, he is met with one disappointment after another. All of his attempts to have sex with erotic dancers and prostitutes end up in a failure, which has an immensely negative impact on him. It is apparent that, up to this point, the construction of his identity as a man has relied on

⁵⁸ David Mamet, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen, 1996) 190. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

⁵⁹ Connell and Messerschmidt, 844.

⁶⁰ David Mamet, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen, 1996) 249. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

having sex with women.⁶¹ As Carla J. McDonough argues, after this series of failures (not to mention the breakup of his marriage which leaves him feeling emasculated)⁶² the level of his self-assurance as a man decreases rapidly. His attempt to at least win some money gambling in a game of cards proves to be the last drop. He loses, feels cheated, demands to “see those cards” (*Edmond*, 262), but ends up being brutally beaten. At that point, he feels less of a man and needs to do something about it. He stands at the beginning of a downward spiral which takes him from an attempted assault on a woman on the subway, to beating a pimp almost to death, and culminates in him murdering his female lover in a hotel apartment. In case of both Edmond and Teach, being a man means that the minute they start to feel insecure or hurt, they become violent and by the means of their aggressiveness attempt to regain control of their lives. As McDonough put it, Mamet’s characters, such as these two, “are driven by a sense of powerlessness for which they seek to overcompensate.”⁶³

David Mamet, as it was previously mentioned, does not have a single firm position on the issue of his men or, by extension, on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, for instance, in the scene of the two main male characters watching a porn movie, he approaches the men – and Bernie in particular – with an odd mixture of compassion and mockery. Bernie, who we have already established is considered by his fellow to be a perfect representative of the manly man, is aghast by the well-endowment of the leading actor. Frustrated, he tells his friend: “I don’t wanna hear it, so don’t tell it to me. Nobody is hung like that. If that’s his joint I’m going to go home and blow my brains out” (86). In the scene, Mamet pokes fun of Bernie but at the same time he makes a critical statement about the society’s expectations of masculinity.

⁶¹ Carla J. McDonough, “Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet’s Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 199.

⁶² McDonough, 198.

⁶³ McDonough, 196.

At other times, he goes as far as to assault these false or arbitrary preconceptions of ours about masculinity, which is best evidenced in *American Buffalo*. Throughout the play, we are led to believe that the character of Fletch is the ultimate macho, the other men constantly referring to him with hopeful voices, having utter faith in his stealing skills. In a brilliant reverse, though, Fletch does not even show up to do his job. The explanation for his absence is provided a moment later by Bob who announces that “he’s in the hospital. Fletch. [...] He got mugged. [...] They broke his jaw” (236-237). The allegedly greatest man of them all, incapable of defending himself, was attacked and beaten on a street. When attempting to say something, Mamet usually likes to go straight to the point.

Even though hegemonic masculinity became associated mainly with negative features, accounts thereof also include some positive ones such as having a job and bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and becoming a father.⁶⁴ The only play in which Mamet deals with the issue of fatherhood in any mentionable depth is called *Reunion*. In this piece of drama, the center issue is actually that of an absent father. In the play, the male character meets with his daughter after a long time of separation caused by an early divorce with his wife. At the time, Bernie, the father, resented the loss of his freedom in the marriage, and the burden of having to provide for the family, so he left and after an unsuccessful second marriage ended up a drunkard for a long time. Due to the lack of contact, most of the ties with his daughter are broken now and, when they meet, they do not know what to say to one another. In the beginning, Bernie only bemoans the fact that “I wanted to come see you, you know. I couldn’t see you because of that court order.”⁶⁵ More than in fatherhood itself, Mamet is interested in how audiences perceive the level of masculinity in a man who is not even able to make sure that he has the right (or willingness) to see his own daughter.

⁶⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, 840.

⁶⁵ David Mamet, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen Publishing Limited, 1996) 9. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

As it was previously stated, hegemonic masculinity comprises the qualities defined as manly that establish a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of certain men and subordinate position of women and the rest of the “lesser” men.⁶⁶ Since men are to position themselves against women, sociologist Mimi Schippers states, subordinated masculinities are generally conflated with femininity.⁶⁷ Mamet acknowledges this relationship for instance by having various characters of his calling one another “sissy” (e.g. *American Buffalo*, 256). We may notice a similar kind of situation also in *Squirrels*. In this play, Art asks his friend a question associated with inner feelings: “How can I make you happy?” Understanding such a display of affection as feminine, and therefore rather inappropriate, Ed answers him: “You’re very overbearing. [...] And I don’t like it.”⁶⁸ Christopher Bigsby notices this phenomenon in the aforementioned *American Buffalo* as well when he claims that “the characters never quite allow themselves the openness necessary for genuine contact.”⁶⁹ A little bit of communication would certainly prove fruitful to them, but since it would also endanger their statuses as men, they do what is in their power to avoid opening themselves up to their friends. The whole point of all things feminine being inferior to those associated with men is perhaps best articulated by Teach in *American Buffalo*. When reporting on his card game with Ruthie, he angrily spits out: “She is *not* a good card player, Don. She is a mooch and she is a locksmith and she plays like a woman” (161). Clearly pejorative in its meaning, “playing like a woman” is not a desirable tactic for anyone.

The very idea of hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of gay men’s experience with violence and prejudice from straight men,⁷⁰ who were unable to acknowledge the mere

⁶⁶ Mimi Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony,” *Theory and Society* 36.1 (2007): 94.

⁶⁷ Schippers, 88.

⁶⁸ David Mamet, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1994) 141. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

⁶⁹ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 212.

⁷⁰ Connell and Messerschmidt, 831.

existence of any such thing as gay masculinity. This particular issue will be dealt with in more depth in the fourth chapter. For now, suffice to say that gay men embody that kind of subordinate masculinity which, when held up against the hegemonic type, serves as the inferior “other.”⁷¹ Both Mamet and many a sociologist also deal with another issue related to masculinity – the crisis thereof in modern society.

2.4 Men in Crisis

For decades now, sociologists headed by Connell have been observing that “sex differences are lessening, and that men are coming emotionally closer to women.”⁷² Arlene Stein went as far as claiming that “frankly, I don’t think men know how to be men anymore.”⁷³ All of us must have also noticed that men are different now than what we think they used to be before. In spite of the ideal of hegemonic masculinity still being firmly in place, it appears that, in general, regular men are increasingly distancing themselves from it. Whether that is a positive or a negative is up to each an every individual to decide.

Mamet’s plays are peopled with characters of men who frequently do not behave exactly as one would expect from a perfect macho. In spite of (or, perhaps, due to) the influence the cowboy ideal had on him, his characters are much more multi-layered than that. In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, for instance, Danny gets very emotional when breaking up with Deborah, telling her: “I don’t mind physical violence. I just can’t stand emotional violence. (*Pause.*) I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Deb. (*Pause.*) I forget who I’m talking to. I’m sorry. You’re very good for me, come here” (88). In spite of the occasion, such a rush of emotionality, such a pleading expression of one’s feelings, is by no means considered to be manly – a fact that a good apprentice of masculinity ought to have known already. Similarly, neither the father’s

⁷¹ Schippers, 87.

⁷² R. W. Connell, “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender,” *American Sociological Review* 57.6 (1992): 742.

⁷³ Arlene Stein, “Make Room for Daddy: Anxious Masculinity and Emergent Homophobias in Neopatriarchal Politics,” *Gender and Society* 19.5 (2005): 601.

admission that, upon discovering his daughter is about to visit him, he felt “scared” (*Reunion*, 19), nor one of the actors in *A Life in the Theatre* opening up to his friend and coworker about feeling “fulfilled”⁷⁴ is in any way a particularly convincing manifestation of the desired level of masculinity. Even the hypermasculine Teach from *American Buffalo* is not completely spared from emotions – he feels jealous of Bob’s very good friendship with Don, and also in the end, after all the rage and violence, he makes peace with the two, and together with Don takes the injured Bob to the hospital. It is arguable that no man is as emotionally detached from the world as the ideal of hegemonic masculinity would have us believe – and that is precisely the point. No man is perfect like that. Society’s preconceptions about masculinity are thus nothing but illusions and myths, largely dependent on the given time and place.

The ideal masculinity of Mamet’s men is not only questioned by their occasional outbursts of emotionality, though. Mamet also at times attacks other traits generally associated with the masculine status. For example, in *Duck Variations* George says to his friend: “[The duck has] got worries, too. He’s got fleas and lice and diseases of the body. [...] Sexual difficulties” (*Duck Variations*, 10). On the literal level, the man is talking about ducks, but it is very easy to see that the play is essentially an open comment on the contemporary human society – the same society in which virility, here under attack, is one of the founding stones of masculinity. In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* it is not the virility of the man which is under fire but his job occupation. When she hears that Deborah’s boyfriend works as “an Assistant Office Manager” Joan merely scoffs out: “That’s nice, a job with a little upward mobility” (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, 62). The historicity of the issue of work positions has already been discussed. What Mamet points our attention to by this line is the preposterousness of our presumption that the better and more profitable the occupation the more masculine a man will appear; that a true man ought not to be engaged in any sort of menial job.

⁷⁴ David Mamet, *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen, 1996) 52. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

Of course, Mamet himself knows very well that any such presumptions are mere social constructs, dependant on the tastes and beliefs of the particular decade. Still, his characters are often depicted as confused as to where they stand in this sort of patriarchy under revision.⁷⁵ Let us remember Teach from *American Buffalo* or Edmond from the eponymous play, for whom the concerns about their identities as men were essential. The failure of Mamet's characters to understand their selves is then, in a sense, caused mainly by their generating their own identities "through taking as real and substantial what in fact is only a myth degraded into fantasy"⁷⁶ – the myth of masculinity. They attempt to conform to and shape their personalities according to a concept that may have never been perfect or even real.

This sort of masculine confusion and failure to conform does not apply to all of his characters, though. In *Reunion*, for instance, Mamet has Bernie explain to his daughter the process of recuperating from a false masculinity:

I've spent the majority of my life, and when you come right down to it, being a hateful sonofabitch ... But you, married. [...] A fine guy for your husband. [...] The rest is not very important. It's for the weaklings. [...] It's for the sissies and the drinkers – which I was – who need it. (16)

Bernie essentially indicts the myths of masculinity for destroying his life, now redefining strength as the ability to admit vulnerability, accept responsibility, and achieve intimacy; courage now means for him the courage to accept his dependency on other people.⁷⁷ Thus, using Bernie, Mamet provides us with a way out of this impossible situation. All it takes for his characters to stop worrying is merely to redefine the social requirements to masculinity. If every man was to follow Bernie's example, there would not need to be any crisis.

That is to say, of course, if there even is one now. In the recent years, questions have been raised, asking: "If the condition of men and masculinity is so critical, [...] why is the world

⁷⁵ McDonough, 196.

⁷⁶ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 214.

⁷⁷ Holmberg, 179.

we live in still so patriarchal?”⁷⁸ Pamela Robertson claims on this subject that the whole notion of crisis is nothing but a discursive strategy circulated by men in order to firmly claim their rights.⁷⁹ This theory, alluring as it is, though, does not take into consideration Connell’s theory of stratification of men. Perhaps a better formulation is given by Michael Mangan, who suggested that due to the instability of gender identity, the terms of which are continually being redefined and re-negotiated, “crisis is a condition of masculinity itself.”⁸⁰ This assertion goes well hand in hand with Connell’s idea of the slipperiness of all categorizations, and of the boundaries of hegemony constantly shifting.⁸¹

The point that may have already partially come to the surface in this work, and that keeps emerging in David Mamet’s work as well, is that the underlying concept of masculinity itself is in its very essence flawed, its margins blurred, its meaning uncertain.⁸² Precisely because masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the bodies or personalities of individuals, there has always been, on the part of the sociologists, a great deal of essentializing and conceptual confusion.⁸³ Among men themselves, if they even choose to deal with the issue, there also appears to be a lot of confusion regarding the very concept of masculinity. Nowadays, we are on the one hand bombarded by media presenting to us men who cook, feed babies, do the shopping, and help with the housework as somehow being more complete; yet, on the other hand, these same men are usually deemed as strange and less manly by their peers, all of the activities listed above being still associated with women. What this conundrum boils down to is the simple advice: Whatever anyone says, do as you like. Do not be shackled by the rules and limitations of the society. Yet, only a handful of men are capable of such a daunting task – a statement which applies in particular to the dramatic world of David Mamet.

⁷⁸ Walsh, 7.

⁷⁹ Walsh, 7.

⁸⁰ Walsh, 9.

⁸¹ Singleton, 9.

⁸² Connell and Messerschmidt, 836.

⁸³ Connell and Messerschmidt, 836.

Chapter 3 Homosociality and the Friendless World of Business

Emil: Nothing that lives can live alone.
Duck Variations

Joan: And, in the end, what do you have? You have your friends.
Sexual Perversity in Chicago

Don: [T]here's business and there's friendship.
American Buffalo

Edmond: You know, I always thought that white people should be in prison. [...] To be with black people. [...] Because we're lonely.
Edmond

Turning from men and their masculinity on more or less individual level, the present chapter will focus on men functioning within larger groups. After all, men are generally attracted to and interested in other men, commonly seeking from them the fulfillment of their intellectual, social, and other needs.¹ Driven by their hunger for affiliation, and feeling the need for connectedness and closeness, men thus frequently desire presence of one another.² Their indulging in activities of various kinds is then generally subsumed under the term of “male bonding” – an expression pertaining to all of these occasions men need which explicitly and unconditionally exclude women.³ Additionally, while according to Judith Butler one is not born a man as much as he becomes one through perpetual performance of masculinity, it is important to add that “the dominant social mechanism for constructing masculinity is the peer group.”⁴ In simple terms, with the exception of one’s mother, it is generally other men who establish and control what an individual male thinks, says, or does. To use the words of psychiatrist Frank Pittman, “masculinity is a group activity.”⁵ In order to understand men as individuals, then, their interactions within the male group need to be scrutinized.

¹ Jean Lipman-Blumen, “Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions,” *Signs* 1.3 (1976): 16.

² Mike Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22.5 (1993): 647.

³ Matthew C. Gutmann, “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 393.

⁴ Arthur Holmberg, *David Mamet and American Macho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 133.

⁵ Quoted in Holmberg, 133.

After introducing the term “homosociality” and laying down the basic theory, this chapter will turn its focus to the manner in which David Mamet operates with a concept implicated in homosociality – friendship. Consequently, the clash between friendship and business – so frequent and fundamental in Mamet’s work – will be dealt with.

3.1 Homosociality in Theory

The term “homosociality” is, like any sort of systematic and comprehensive study of masculinity and related sociological concepts, of a relatively recent date. Defined by Jean Lipman-Blumen in 1976, and brought into the general consciousness by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in 1985, its definitions do not show exceeding variation. Whereas Lipman identifies homosociality as “the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex,”⁶ Sedgwick similarly states that the word “is occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex.”⁷ The point that both sociologists stress is that homosociality be distinguished from homosexuality. However, whereas Lipman only writes that homosociality does not involve “an explicitly erotic sexual interaction between members of the same sex,”⁸ Sedgwick goes further in this respect, claiming that it is “characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.”⁹ By this animosity towards homosexuality, so closely connected with the subordination of gay masculinity, homosociality may be therefore said to contribute to the perpetuation of Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity.

According to Sharon R. Bird, there are also other means homosociality helps hegemonic masculinity to thrive – these are sexual objectification of women, emotional detachment, and

⁶ Lipman-Blumen, 15.

⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 1.

⁸ Lipman-Blumen, 16.

⁹ Sedgwick, 1.

competitiveness.¹⁰ The first, and once already discussed, point presumes that “male individuality is conceptualized not only as different from female but as better than female.”¹¹ Therefore, when objectifying and critically judging women, men’s own physique seems to be most of the time completely beside the point, being considered untouchable or overall better and superior simply by the merit of its very maleness.

Regarding emotional detachment, Bird writes that “developing emotional types of relationships with each other is something men stereotypically do not do,”¹² mostly because emotionality is conflated with femininity and thus deemed undesirable. In spite of there being many exceptions, of course, the importance of peer group in the construction of gender has to be stressed once again. Writing about boys developing into men, Arthur Holmberg states:

Boys’ gender performances are scrutinized more rigorously than girls’, and when boys display gender-inappropriate behavior, they face more severe punishments. Projecting a strong masculine image becomes central to a boy’s self-esteem.¹³

All of the unexpressed emotions, however, do not simply disappear. They go underground and come out as anger – boys essentially learn which emotions to express and which repress, throwing temper tantrums instead of crying because, unlike the effeminate display of emotional vulnerability, anger is masculine.¹⁴ Following this logic, the only difference between boys and men is that men have much more practice with controlling their temper, and are thus under usual circumstances capable of hiding their anger. It would be a great error, though, to suggest that men are aggressive only because their peer group, or the whole society for that matter, prohibits them from fully expressing their emotions. A good deal of their aggression within the group has to do with Bird’s third point – competitiveness.

¹⁰ Sharon R. Bird, “Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Gender and Society* 10.2 (1996): 121.

¹¹ Bird, 121.

¹² Bird, 126.

¹³ Holmberg, 143.

¹⁴ Holmberg, 135.

Competitiveness is a character feature men internalize already in their early childhood. Boys “size themselves up against other boys; boyhood consists of a constant round of challenges – duels provoked and accepted.”¹⁵ Of course, not all boys like to compete with or fight against each other, and even those who do resort to competition and contention only occasionally. Nevertheless, the ability to fight (be it offensively or defensively) remains the standard boys use to gauge each other’s masculinity – and no matter what the game is, the purpose is always the same: to rank contestants.¹⁶

Not only do men take this notion of boyhood competitiveness to their adult age, the American environment is in itself particularly competitive. Be it the race to the West in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century or the race to the top in the twentieth, Americans have a long history of attempting to get ahead of their perceived competitors. After all, the very idea of American Dream, which has functioned as a driving force for countless Americans, is intimately connected to success, and “success is achieved through individual competition rather than [...] group bonding.”¹⁷

Competition not only supports an identity in the male homosocial group that depends not on likeness and cooperation but on separation and distinction, but by facilitating hierarchy in male relationships it also contributes to the perpetuation of male dominance.¹⁸ These hierarchies echo Connell’s stratification of the male spectrum. In this context as well, the hegemonic ideal, an alpha-male and a whole range of men subordinated to him, emerge. Discussing the shape of homosociality, Sedgwick states that it “is not that of brotherhood, but that of extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination.”¹⁹ In case this superior figure uses his position and strength to lord over others, he may be described as a “bully.” According to Holmberg, a bully deliberately looks for victims to hurt and thus

¹⁵ Holmberg, 151.

¹⁶ Holmberg, 151.

¹⁷ Donaldson, 654.

¹⁸ Bird, 122.

¹⁹ Sedgwick, 66.

demonstrate his power in order to make others scared of him, or to show how tough he is.²⁰ Socially intelligent, easily angered, and popular, bullies find their ostentatious demonstrations of power “a sure-fire entertainment that enhances [their] reputation and amuses the pack. [They] also increase group solidarity.”²¹ Having been taught not to succumb to excessive emotionality, therefore lacking compassion, and considering their actions to be a form of entertainment for the group, bullies may frequently not even realize the harm they are causing.

Within David Mamet’s body of work, there are no true bullies according to this definition. In spite of his characters stratification and often awful behavior to each other, none of them does so merely for the enjoyment of some other members of the group. Moreover, his approach to homosociality and friendship themselves is, as it is to masculinity, rather multifaceted and ambiguous.

3.2 Mamet’s Friends

As David Radavich points out: “The central body of David Mamet’s work concentrates on a single-minded quest for lasting, fulfilling male friendship.”²² This kind of sentiment is perhaps best articulated by Emil in *The Duck Variations* when he says to his companion: “A man needs a friend in his life. [...] Without a friend, life is not... [...] It’s lonely” (21-22). This line is also one of the rare instances when a man in Mamet’s play openly discusses his feelings, albeit rather indirectly. For obvious reasons, men usually do not talk about their emotions. There are exceptions, though – in *Speed-the-Plough* Fox tells his friend straightforwardly: “Bob: I need you.”²³ Nevertheless, in all Mamet, this is by far “the baldest

²⁰ Holmberg, 214.

²¹ Holmberg, 214.

²² David Radavich, “Man among Men: David Mamet’s Homosocial Order,” *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. Peter F. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 69.

²³ David Mamet, *Plays: 3* (London: Methuen, 1996) 182. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

statement of homosocial desire for intense male relationship.”²⁴ Even though these men may not talk about what they feel, Carla J. McDonough observes how Mamet celebrates the camaraderie of male activities, and creates “an environment where one is understood, where one is not judged, where one is not expected to perform.”²⁵ In spite of the fact that the situation among Mamet’s men may, after reading these lines, seem idyllic, the author is far from depicting male relationships in exclusively positive terms.

Even though Mamet’s men are indeed drawn together in his work, they appear to be unceasingly suspicious of one another.²⁶ Furthermore, observing their behavior, “a desire for dominance [...] battles with an equally strong desire for loyalty and acceptance, resulting in hard-won, intense, fundamentally unstable intimacy.”²⁷ It is not only a desire for dominance which may threaten the presumably solid foundations of their male relationships, though. As David Mamet makes obvious, this bond is much more fragile than it might seem.

First, let us take into consideration *American Buffalo*. On one level, it is a play about friendship and loyalty, but it also tackles the themes of fragility of companionship, betrayal and greed.²⁸ In the play, there are three characters: Don, the owner of Don’s Resale Shop; Bob, Don’s gopher to whom Don is a mentor and a friend; and Teach, Don’s friend and associate. The issue in the relationship of these three men is centered on what we might call jealousy. Don feels highly protective of his younger friend Bob, and Teach, extremely jealous of Bob’s position, desires to dispose of him and take his place. He even approaches Don, confronting him about his irrationally warm relationship with his employee, ironically making the following remark: “This loyalty. This is swell. It turns my heart the things that you do for the kid” (182). As the play progresses, Teach’s grudge against Bob grows exponentially, and

²⁴ Radavich, 77.

²⁵ Carla J. McDonough, “Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet’s Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 201.

²⁶ “David Mamet,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 75.

²⁷ Radavich, 70.

²⁸ Matthew Roudané, “Betrayal and Friendship: David Mamet’s ‘American Buffalo’,” *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 64.

his jealousy culminates in his physically attacking Bob and consequently trashing the whole shop. Teach says at one point in the play: “Friendship is marvelous” (231) – however it is precisely friendship, the only thing of genuine value they have left, which is just like the eponymous buffalo pushed almost to the brink of extinction.²⁹

In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, the reason of the main characters’ discord also has to do with jealousy – but this time, the culprit is a woman. The whole problem arises when Don and Deborah start a relationship, and he and his friend, Bernie, as a result begin to grow apart. As David Radavich explains the issue:

Dan’s sexual interest in Deborah threatens to shatter the male bond, forcing Bernie to counterattack with measures that one usually associates with heterosexual dating: outings to the movie house, evenings in Bernie’s apartment, and sojourns to the beach.³⁰

Apart from this, Bernie also makes sure that Dan knows having a sustained relationship with a woman is meaningless in comparison to having a good friend, telling him: “A lot of these broads, you know, you just don’t know. You know? I mean what with where they’ve been and all” (72). Still, despite all of Bernie’s attempts, the gap between the two friends, created by Dan’s relationship with Deborah, gradually comes to appear nearly unbridgeable. The two men almost stop seeing each other, and Bernie is left only with the hope that Dan and Deb will soon break up, and he will thus get his friend back. Explicitly mentioning this issue by talking to a couple of imaginary friends in the gym, he states: “[O]ne, two more weeks, he’ll do the right thing by the broad. And drop her like a fucking hot potato” (78).

There are, of course, more instances in Mamet’s work of lifelong friends growing apart from each other due to causes which may be considered silly. What they all demonstrate is the fragility and fickleness of male relationships. While it would seem that such subject matter is

²⁹ Roudané, 57.

³⁰ Radavich, 71.

in itself rich enough for a playwright, David Mamet introduces another theme in his work, commenting on the relationship between friendship and business.

3.3 Friends in Business

Mamet's interest in business and men is easily traceable back to his hometown of Chicago, known for its past convergence of "coonskin masculinity with wild and wooly capitalism."³¹ It was precisely in the turn-of-the-century Chicago that America saw its brand new type of businessman – the gangster, the logical conclusion of the junction of "frontier masculinity and vast sums of money up for grabs."³² Continuing the tradition of merging masculinity and business, and toying with the idea of ruthless workplace competition, Mamet frequently has friends turn into foes.

Mike Donaldson goes as far as to believe that having friends in business is sheer impossibility in the first place, that successful friendships can be achieved only outside of work. On behalf of successful businessmen, he remarks that:

[They] are likely to have difficulty establishing intimate and lasting friendships with other males because of low self-disclosure, homophobia, and cut-throat competition. The corporate world expects men to divulge little of their personal lives and to restrain personal feelings, especially affectionate ones.³³

Thus we come back to the notions of repressed emotionality and lifelong competitiveness – with the exception that, in the business environment, they seem to be multiplied. All of these phenomena are reflected in Mamet's *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

American Buffalo is not only a play about friendship, but also about business and the importance of keeping the two separate. Whenever there is money involved, there are no friends. Apart from his jealousy, yet another reason why Teach feels such animosity towards

³¹ Holmberg, 11.

³² Holmberg, 23.

³³ Donaldson, 654.

Bob is that he perceives him as a threat, endangering his entrepreneurial interests. He deems him unfit to take part in the robbery, and therefore urges Don not to forget to separate between friendship and business in order to get rid of him. On this subject, he tells him: “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” (162). He keeps reminding Don of this for so long Don’s affection towards Bob eventually starts to wane. When Bob arrives to the shop asking Don to give him fifty dollars in advance from his upcoming paycheck, Don becomes hesitant, reluctant to mix friendship and business. As Bigsby writes: “There is a real affection between Don and Bobby, albeit one betrayed when it conflicts with business.”³⁴ Even after Bob ensures him that he can trust him, Don replies: “It’s not a question of that. It’s not a question I go around trusting you, Bob” (188). On Bob’s logical inquiry what the question is, then, it is Teach who gives him the answer: “Procedure” (188). This sudden switch undoubtedly has to do with the American business climate. As Matthew Roudané argues on this point, economic life in America very much resembles a lottery, everybody having an equal chance but only one person being able to get to the top, and thus succeeding at the cost of the failures of others.³⁵ Due to the heated competition, bonds of affection are soon forgotten, and past friendships morph into present race to the top. David Mamet commented on his interest in this subject as well, saying that “the national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive and succeed. Instead of rising with the masses one should rise from the masses”³⁶ – and one should do whatever is in their power to achieve their goal, even if that meant going head-to-head with their friends, and doing something unethical.

³⁴ C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 212.

³⁵ Roudané, 59.

³⁶ Quoted in Roudané, 59.

American Buffalo thus deals with the American ethic of business, “about how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business.”³⁷ While Mamet recognizes the individual’s right to pursue private entrepreneurial interests, he concedes that these are often not in balance with our sense of moral duty.³⁸ In other words, while we may have strong moral codes in our everyday lives, these may be easily dissolved when it comes to business. Therefore, while people usually behave cordially to one another in business, the environment as such is unsuitable for creating or sustaining heartfelt friendships.

Glengarry Glen Ross, a play which mostly takes place in a real estate office, offers similar form of representation of the business world. Any sort of comfort the characters might take from each other, any semblance of support or friendship, is constantly being undercut by competition and business interests.³⁹ In a diabolic game of making the best sale, “the bosses pit one salesman against the other in a snake pit; only the closers get good leads. Friend turns into viper; viper turns into friend.”⁴⁰ For instance, the camaraderie developed early on between the characters of Roma, a salesman, and Lingk, a man intending to buy a house, is eventually undercut by the realization that everything with which Roma has confided to Lingk has been a mere lead-in to a sales pitch aimed at the unsuspecting buyer.⁴¹ Furthermore, Mamet shows there is no resemblance of true friendship also on the level of coworkers. In the play, the real estate office is robbed one day, and precious files containing information about the estate market are stolen. In the end, it is discovered that the culprit behind this break-in was one of the employees of the office – Levene. Whereas up to this point, Roma and Levene seemed to be on friendly terms with each other, the minute Levene is taken away by the police Roma approaches his boss, forcefully announcing to him: “I GET HIS ACTION. My

³⁷ David Mamet, “The Engine That Drives Playwright David Mamet,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1978, B1+. Quoted in Holmberg, 20.

³⁸ Roudané, 59.

³⁹ McDonough, 202.

⁴⁰ Holmberg, 166.

⁴¹ McDonough, 202.

stuff is *mine*, whatever *he* gets, I'm taking half."⁴² In the world of business, there is not any time to lose mourning for the fallen friends, let alone any willingness to try to help them.

The already difficult competition is all the more intense in that the position of the best salesman is connected to the notion of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the best salesman is also the best man. McDonough writes about the desired job position, which is offered to the winner of the sales contest, that it "is one which few of the characters are able to reach, much less to maintain, and thus the competition ensures failure for the majority to achieve an identity defined as masculine."⁴³ The men in this office are, simply put, provoked to give their best performance in this game for if they do not, they risk losing their masculine status.

3.4 Men in Trouble

From the above lines it is clear that the state of relationships between men is far from perfect. The problem is that they have learned to distrust one another, their urge to support each other has atrophied, and they expunge the direct reference to that which they desire the most, which is love and sense of belonging.⁴⁴ Mamet essentially depicts his men as "seeking to find loyalty and acceptance in a world disturbingly competitive, hostile, and transitory."⁴⁵ Still, his men yearn for a friend, and in the end it is usually a friend they have got left. In *American Buffalo*, for instance, after all the violence and rampage is gone, Teach calms down and all of the men "realize they have just experienced a cathartic, cleansing moment, and now recognize the true worth of their friendship. [...] The fragility of friendship acknowledged, [...] Teach, Don, and Bob reconnect with each other."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the stumbling apologies offered afterwards are enough to save the relationship between the three men. As

⁴² David Mamet, *Plays: 3* (London: Methuen, 1996) 66. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

⁴³ McDonough, 201.

⁴⁴ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 218.

⁴⁵ Radavich, 78.

⁴⁶ Roudané, 71.

Radavich claims: “Although most of Mamet’s work results in a united male ‘couple,’ the denouement cannot assure much equilibrium, given the professed heterosexual imperatives and inherent competitiveness of males as the playwright portrays them.”⁴⁷

Similarly in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, even though Dan eventually breaks up with Deborah and returns to his friend, we are left wondering how long their blissful camaraderie will last. It is unlikely that they would stay alone forever, just the two of them, so sooner or later another woman will inevitably once again position herself in between, causing catastrophic disharmony in their homosocial relationship due to the men’s “inability to weave male friendships into their relationships with women.”⁴⁸

In spite of Radavich’s claim that the men in Mamet’s later plays seem more comfortable with the terms of their bond, even he concludes that “pervading the major plays is a spirit of melancholy for something lost, a kind of lamentation for male friendship that seems ever-volatile and subject to unpredictable dissolution.”⁴⁹ Caught in a vortex of society shifting, it seems as if men have partially forgotten how to become and stay friends with other men. Unable to overcome their need to compete as well as to express what is bothering them, they are often times left amidst others feeling utterly alone.

⁴⁷ Radavich, 79.

⁴⁸ Radavich, 79.

⁴⁹ Radavich, 79.

Chapter 4 Homosexuality

Joe: What about liquors?
Stan: What about them?
Joe: Yeah.
Stan: For faggots. But booze...
Joe: Booze!
Lakeboat

Joey: Howie turned out to be a fag. [...] Isn't that something.
Bobby: I always liked him.
Joey: I did, too.
The Old Neighborhood

After debating the subject of homosociality, it is now time to discuss an issue closely related to it – homosexuality. This is not to say that homosocial desire is fully comparable to the homosexual one, however it may prove interesting, for instance, to start noticing to what degree it is possible for men to show affection for their male friends without being accused of or harassed for being gay. As David Van Leer put it in his 1989 essay: “[T]he similarity between (socially acceptable) homosocial desire and (socially condemned) homosexuality lies at the root of much homophobia.”¹ Even though it is arguable that the social climate on this issue is much less condemning of homosexuality now than it was in the late nineteen-eighties, we must not forget that, as it was already stated, the very idea of hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of gay men’s experience with violence and prejudice from straight men.² In other words, gays and gay masculinity play a vital part in the establishment and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity.

Precisely the relation between homosexuality and Connell’s notion of hierarchy of masculinities will be the main focal area of the theoretical part of this chapter. Consequently, David Mamet’s work will be brought into the picture, his operations within that theoretical milieu, and his gradual movement from possible homophobia in his early plays towards his later theatrical embrace of homosexuality.

¹ David Van Leer, “The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood,” *Critical Inquiry* 15.3 (1989): 588.

² R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* December 2005: 831.

4.1 Homosexual Masculinity

First and foremost, when dealing with homosexual masculinity it is crucial to point out “the uncontested assumption that homosexuality is inherently unmasculine,”³ and therefore that “gay men embody what Connell refers to as subordinated masculinities.”⁴ In Connell’s own words: “To many people, homosexuality is a negation of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate.”⁵ The conflation of gay masculinity with effeminacy, however simplistic and incorrect, is of particular importance due to the fact that “femininity is always and already inferior and undesirable when compared to masculinity.”⁶ Nevertheless, not only is this sort of conflation, however widespread the social belief therein may seem nowadays, only of relatively modern pedigree, it also clashes against the contemporary – and yet completely contradictory – view of homosexuality which presents gay men in terms of almost heterosexual hegemonic masculinity.

As Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick states: “The virility of the homosexual orientation of male desire seemed as self-evident to the ancient Spartans, and perhaps to Whitman, as its effeminacy seems in contemporary popular culture.”⁷ Claiming this, Sedgwick draws focus not only to the fact that most social beliefs are artificially created and dependent on their time, but also to the basic contradictions of the presumptions the majority population has about homosexuals. She very much criticizes “the ‘natural’ effeminacy of male homosexuals, their ‘natural’ hypervirility, their ‘natural’ hatred of women, their ‘natural’ identification with women – this always-applicable reservoir of contradictory intuitions, to which our society is

³ Christine M. Robinson and Sue E. Spivey, “The Politics of Masculinity and the Ex-Gay Movement,” *Gender and Society* 21.5 (2007): 659.

⁴ Mimi Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony,” *Theory and Society* 36.1 (2007): 87.

⁵ R. W. Connell, “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender,” *American Sociological Review* 57.6 (1992): 736.

⁶ Schippers, 96.

⁷ Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 26-27.

heir.”⁸ Drawing more attention to this fundamental juxtaposition of perceptions of homosexuality, Sedgwick is supported by sociologist Arlene Stein who ponders on the fact that homosexual orientation actually very much resembles stereotypes of hegemonic male heterosexuality in that gay people are frequently seen as flaunting excess, failing to tame their sexual impulses, and their relationships perceived as having no strings attached and no guarantees of duration.⁹ In her reasoning, “homosexuality is threatening because it represents a model of masculinity that heterosexual men have been forced by feminists and by economic shifts to abandon.”¹⁰

The collision between the feminized masculinity and hypermasculinity is evidenced also within the gay community itself. Gay men, in general, “claim their status as ‘real men’ by defining their embodiment of a gay identity in relation to an inferior feminine form – as a ‘straight gay’ in relation to effeminate gays.”¹¹ To speak in more particular terms, in his essay on the hypermasculine so-called Bear subculture, Peter Hennen writes about “many gay men seeking to resist the stereotypical association of homosexuality with effeminacy.”¹² In his own words, “Bears are fully engaged with hegemonic masculinity, seeking an alternative answer,”¹³ and attempting to “minimize the difference between Bear and heterosexual masculinity.”¹⁴ It is interesting to notice that the same pattern of disparaging femininity, which we have already seen in the male heterosexual group, is reduplicated here as well, for “Bears define their masculinity not only against the feminine but more specifically against the

⁸Sedgwick, 215.

⁹ Arlene Stein, “Make Room for Daddy: Anxious Masculinity and Emergent Homophobias in Neopatriarchal Politics,” *Gender and Society* 19.5 (2005): 609.

¹⁰ Stein, 610.

¹¹ Schippers, 97.

¹² Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender and Society* 19.1 (2005): 25.

¹³ Hennen, 32.

¹⁴ Hennen, 34.

feminized, hairless, and gym-toned body of the dominant ideal of gay masculinity – ‘the twink’.¹⁵

In spite of all of these attempts to equalize hetero- and homosexual masculinity, the latter one still appears to be understood as “a form of subordinated masculinity.”¹⁶ Not only that – according to Mike Donaldson, “conformity to the demands of hegemonic masculinity pushes heterosexual men to homophobia.”¹⁷ Its name coined in the nineteen-sixties by psychologist George Weinberg, and referring to an irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals,¹⁸ homophobia is “a mechanism for regulating the behavior of the many by the specific oppression of a few.”¹⁹ It manages to regulate the behavior of the majority in the sense that, by repudiating what has to do with femininity, “it allows men anxious about their masculinity to affirm themselves.”²⁰ Thus, by subordinating those whom they perceive to be lesser men, the dominant males assert their status and power. The means of this subordination vary, of course, but in general include “criminalization of male-to-male sex, homophobic speech and culture, and a bitter history of intimidation and violence.”²¹

In case of the work of David Mamet, even though it is characteristic of its frequent use of gay slurs, he never goes further towards open violence. Moreover, it is equally notable that, over the course of time, his perception of and working with the concept of homosexuality has shifted.

4.2 Mamet’s Gays

David Mamet is predominantly focused on the issues directly associated with heterosexual masculinity, homosociality, and the clash of the sexes. In the whole body of his work only a

¹⁵ Hennen, 33.

¹⁶ Robinson, 655.

¹⁷ Mike Donaldson, “What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22.5 (1993): 648.

¹⁸ Stein, 603.

¹⁹ Sedgwick, 88.

²⁰ Stein, 602.

²¹ Connell, 745.

handful of gay characters can be found – e.g. Del in *The Cryptogram* or Claire in *Boston Marriage*. Mamet’s interests lie simply elsewhere than in depicting homosexual relationships on stage. As he writes in his book called *Theatre*:

I was, latterly, teaching a class on dramatic structure at a Great University, and to my shame allowed the class to be hijacked by a young fellow who insisted that no teaching on the subject that did not insist upon the right of two homosexuals to kiss on stage could have meaning. Shocked by the kid’s Jacobean vehemence, it did not occur to me to inform him that immemorial dramatic wisdom cautions against *anyone* kissing on stage. It’s not interesting, and can only signal the conclusion of the play.²²

This is, of course, not to say that the homosexual element would be completely missing from his plays. It is, in fact, very much present. Closely observing the rare appearance of this topic, we may even be able to perceive the way Mamet’s conception of homosexuality has changed over time.

Regarding the issue of homosexuality in Mamet’s early plays, written in the seventies, his characters show some indisputable signs of homophobia. Most of his characters are men, fighting to prove their masculinity to themselves and the others, and in order to demonstrate their power and dominance, they often make use of homophobic slander. In *American Buffalo*, immediately after Teach hits Bob to the head, he angrily yells at him that he does not believe their macho accomplice is lying in the hospital, screaming: “That don’t mean shit to me, you fruit” (244). In short, when Teach seeks to vent his frustration with himself or his fellows, he frequently resorts to homosexual slander, clearly believing that insults which homosexualize men negate their potency, thereby diminishing their status and value.²³ The use of this particular kind of language, of course, has to do with the fact that within the

²² David Mamet, *Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) 67.

²³ David Radavich, “Man among Men: David Mamet’s Homosocial Order,” *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. Peter F. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 72.

framework of these plays, homosexuality is understood as being intertwined with femininity. If we then consider that both femininity and homosexuality are generally understood as inferior to heterosexual machismo, as well as Teach's way with words and his need to ensure his dominance, it is easy to see the reason why he would berate Ruthie, a woman who beat him in a game of cards and with whom he is therefore incredibly incensed, by calling her "a Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt" (157). Apart from this sort of usage, homophobic language is also employed by Mamet's men in order to establish boundaries between what is considered appropriate and undesirable in a man. For instance, when Art does not like the story Ed narrates to him in *Squirrels*, he tells him to stop talking because what he says sounds "too faggy" (127).

Sexual Perversity in Chicago is also an interesting play from this early period. Apart from Joan talking about "the incidence of homosexuality" (79) – a rather poor choice of words on her part – and from Debbie pretending for a while to be a lesbian only in order not to be bothered by Danny, Mamet has another character tackle this issue. Bernie, the macho man, at one point in the play talks to his friend about having been inappropriately touched as a child by "one of those motherfuckers" (75) in a movie theatre. This sudden sharing outburst is evoked by Bernie going through a shopping mall and noticing that "[t]hey got a fucking fruit at the games counter. I can't believe this. In the midst of the toy department" (75). If we take Bernie's story seriously, it is disturbing that Mamet decided to have his character encounter this "guy in the movies" (77) as a child, thus conflating homosexuality with pedophilia. However, it may prove difficult to take what he says as hundred percent accurate. Simply put, the moment Bernie saw a presumably gay man working in a toy store, he went on to demonstrate his masculinity by uttering the most homophobic story of which he could think, conveniently using in his fabrication all of the elements he had right in front of his eyes. Sedgwick sees this kind of simple "'homosexual panic' as a central motivating force in the

maintenance of the capitalist patriarchy.”²⁴ The fact that Bernie’s story is perhaps too hard to believe is supported by Danny seeming not to be overly interested in it himself. He swiftly and detachedly changes the subject to whether Bernie has ever done “that stuff” as a kid, “like ‘messing’ around with other boys,” to which he answers: “Shit, we all used to fuck around” (76). Having clearly staggered in the performance of his masculinity, and thus in dire need of proving to his friend his heterosexual dominance, Bernie finds no other solution than to return to his gay encounter story, once again going back to that “faggot queer” (77).

As opposed to this blatant homophobia, the early eighties saw a gradual shift towards the acceptance of homosexuality in Mamet’s work. Even though it is true that we can still perceive a fair share of gay slander in the plays from this period – David Radavich for instance points out the fact that in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the homosexual, along with the female, become in the men’s talk equally debased (both sexually and professionally) versions of the male²⁵ – on the whole, the homosexual slander gradually recedes to the background.

In *Lakeboat* we are still made aware that, unlike the macho booze, liquors are only “for faggots” (191), but apart from this homophobic piece of wisdom, Mamet also makes use of the topic of homosexuality in a much kinder way. When Stan tells Fred: “Boy, did I get laid last night,” to which Fred jokingly retorts: “One of the guys on the boat?” Stan does not take offence. Instead, he immediately, and in a friendly manner, replies: “By a woman, Freddie, a woman. You remember them? Soft things with a hole in the middle” (208). Such witticisms would surely be unthinkable, and would stand out, in any of Mamet’s early plays.

The following exchange from *Edmond* may be understood as the swan song of the true and cruel homophobic slander in Mamet’s work:

Glenna (*pause*) Do you know who I hate?

Edmond Who is that?

²⁴ Radavich, 78.

²⁵ Radavich, 74-75.

Glenna Faggots.

Edmond Yes. I hate them, too. And you know *why*?

Glenna Why?

Edmond They suck cock. (*Pause.*) And that's the truest thing you'll ever hear.

Glenna I hate them 'cause they don't like women.

Edmond They *hate* women. (273-274)

Full of false stereotypes and contradictions, this dialogue seems even more absurd if we consider the later development of Edmond's situation. Soon after murdering Glenna, Edmond is sent to prison where he eventually finds inner serenity in a relationship with his inmate. As McDonough observes:

[Edmond] is able to resolve his crisis of self only in sexual relations with another man. If we view the masculine and the feminine, as Edmond seems to, as synonymous with domination and submission, then it is only through becoming feminized – something which Edmond had feared in previous scenes – that Edmond finds peace.²⁶

Even though this conclusion once again poses the problem mentioned earlier of feminizing gay masculinity, the important issue here is that, perhaps for the very first time in Mamet's work, homosexuality is depicted in the light which is not strictly depreciative.

Ever since the late eighties, for the most part, David Mamet has either not had his characters use gay slurs, or even when he has, it was not meant viciously. For instance, in *The Old Neighborhood*, two friends discuss the fact that an acquaintance of theirs "turned out to be a fag," but they soon add that they have "always liked him."²⁷ The language they use is not meant to harm; it is simply the everyday macho way they talk.

²⁶ Carla J. McDonough, "Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet's Drama," *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 200.

²⁷ David Mamet, *Plays: 4* (London: Methuen, 2002) 122. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

Similarly, his overall approach to the issue has changed dramatically from his early years. In *Speed-the-Plow*, the two main characters discuss a script to a new buddy comedy which is to take place in prison, and is to involve an attempted rape scene. The point is that their language is utterly free of any sort of gay-bashing insults or other expletives. At the same time, as one might have expected in the earlier plays, when talking to each other, the two men do not use gay slurs in order to achieve the dominant position in the pair. Simply put, they are not interested in slamming homosexuality due to the fact that they do not have any issue with it. Also, they do not find it necessary anymore to build their sense of masculinity and of self simply on subordinating other men merely on the basis of their sexual orientation. As David Radavich puts it: “*Speed-the-Plow* seems to move beyond the homophobia articulated in Mamet’s earlier plays. Here, the homosexual imagery is noticeably positive and comic, accepted without reservation.”²⁸

Finally, in *The Cryptogram* and *Boston Marriage*, Mamet even introduces his audiences to his first gay characters – Del and Claire, respectively. The crucial point is, however, that even though their sexual orientation is sooner or later revealed, it is done almost offhandedly, and is clearly never an issue in the plays. In simple terms, Mamet still writes similar kinds of characters with similar kinds of problems as he has always done. The difference is that, by this time, a small part of them just happens to be gay.

²⁸ Radavich, 76.

Chapter 5 Masculinity versus Femininity in the Society

Bernie: *The main thing about broads [...] Is two things. One: The Way to Get Laid is to Treat 'Em Like Shit and Two: Nothing... nothing makes you so attractive to the opposite sex as getting your rocks off on a regular basis.*
Sexual Perversity in Chicago

Fox: *You're a whore... Bob. [...] This broad just took you down.*
Speed-the-Plow

Carol: *You think I am a frightened, repressed, confused, I don't know, abandoned young thing of some doubtful sexuality, who wants, power and revenge.*
Oleanna

Anna: *Men live but to be deceived.*
Boston Marriage

In the discourse of most cultures, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, one gender is generally treated as “a marginalized subset rather than an equal alternative to the other.”¹ In the Western society in particular it for some reason happens that the stratification system, ranking groups and individuals in terms of their value to society, “systematically places males in more highly valued roles than females.”² This phenomenon has, naturally, been made use of by men in order to ensure their dominant position within the milieu of social patriarchy. In her book, Sedgwick quotes Heidi Hartmann’s definition of patriarchy which postulates it constitutes “relations between men [...] which, though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”³ This not only brings us back to the idea of Connell’s subordination and marginalization of masculinities, which are as a rule conflated with femininity, but it also alludes to the fact that, when talking about the clash of the sexes, we are essentially dealing with a large-scale power-struggle in which members of the opposite sexes are perceived nearly in terms of mortal enemies. Peaceful coexistence then often appears to be unachievable.

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 47.

² Jean Lipman-Blumen, “Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions,” *Signs* 1.3 (1976): 16.

³ Sedgwick, 3.

This chapter will initially examine the relationship between masculinity and femininity, latterly focusing on the changes and shifts in men's attitudes toward women caused by the rise of feminism predominantly throughout the twentieth century. Consequently, it will discuss David Mamet's handling of some of his few female characters, as well as his and his male characters' approach to the concept of femininity as such.

5.1 Men against Women

When discussing the relation of the concepts of masculinity and femininity, it is vital to realize that they have generally been described in terms of polar opposites.⁴ Gender itself is perceived as a socially constructed binary which defines men and women as two distinct classes of people, its discursive construction even assuming there are certain "behaviors, personality traits, and desires that neatly match up to one or the other category."⁵ James L. O'Neill calls this phenomenon "a determined and expected role for each gender [...] expressed through a variety of attitudes and behaviors."⁶ Not only does this line of reasoning lead us back to Judith Butler's idea of performativity of masculinity, of men policing their behavior and carefully choosing what to do in any given situation, it also suggests that the "relationship between men and women [is] complementary and hierarchical."⁷ The last statement is, of course, utterly erroneous because "both men and women can be aggressive, passive, sensitive, competitive, emotional, etc., depending on the situation,"⁸ and therefore any sort of such strict division is inevitably destined to be fallacious.

This proposition additionally seems to be rather outdated, particularly since, as R. W. Connell argues, "it is widely believed that sex differences are lessening and that men are

⁴ Evalyn Jacobson-Michaelson and Leigh M. Aaland, "Masculinity, Femininity, and Androgyny," *Ethos* 4.2 (1976): 251.

⁵ Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony," *Theory and Society* 36.1 (2007): 89-90.

⁶ James N. O'Neill, "Is Criticism of Generic Masculinity, Essentialism, and Positive-Healthy-Masculinity a Problem for the Psychology of Men?" *American Psychological Association* 11.2 (2010): 103.

⁷ Schippers, 91.

⁸ Jacobson-Michaelson, 264.

coming emotionally closer to women.”⁹ Yet this feminizing movement is not necessarily of any recent pedigree. Arthur Holmberg, for instance, quotes excerpts from various women’s magazines from the late nineteen-fifties, which discuss the generation of the time thinking that the “heroic dreams” of men had died in prefabricated suburbs, where their boss-wives dominate them through “adult toilet-training,” or that the perceived breakdown of gender roles had created a generation of “passive” young men who showed signs of having lost their “hunting instinct.”¹⁰ The very same patterning may as well be observed even approximately seventy years earlier in Henry James’s novel *The Bostonians*: “The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it’s feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering casting age.”¹¹ The point to be raised here is that from the male perspective, such changes have in the majority of cases been perceived as undesirable, the rising level of perceived femininity being considered as not only inappropriate for men but even injurious to the well-being of the patriarchy. Whether the shift towards heightened masculine emotionality has ever proved itself to be in any way either beneficial or detrimental to the entire society is therefore irrelevant, the central issue at hand being the persistent male perception of femininity as a potential threat.

One of the reasons of this perceived shift or breakdown seems to be the social upheaval caused by the rise of feminism precisely in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, which “prompted what we might call a crisis of masculinity because the meanings that had constituted traditional gender definitions were challenged.”¹² Here, it may be useful to recall what was mentioned in the second chapter, that is, the fact that masculinity itself is often defined contrastively to femininity, everything manly being essentially that for which

⁹ R. W. Connell, “A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender,” *American Sociological Review* 57.6 (1992): 746.

¹⁰ Arthur Holmberg, *David Mamet and American Macho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 63.

¹¹ Quoted in Michael S. Kimmel, “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century,” *Gender and Society* 1.3 (1987): 269.

¹² Kimmel, 262.

women do not stand. If the ideas of masculinity, then, are posed in defiance of femininity, and if the role of women in the society as well as the very notion of femininity have shifted due to the effects of feminism, causing vast changes in the social and gender structures, it may not be exceedingly difficult to understand “the confusion felt by men [...] who no longer know where they stand in a patriarchy under revision.”¹³

The key term to be mentioned in this revision is power, for the goal of the feminist movement effectually was to provide women with more power and thus ensure their greater independence within patriarchal society. Jean Lipman-Blumen in particular talks about the connection between the advent of the feminist movement and the demand to receive legal power which would give women access to educational, occupational, and financial resources.¹⁴ Additionally, she argues that, even though women had been for a long time taught to repress it, the feminist movement has also encouraged the development and expression of female sexuality as a form of power.¹⁵ Perhaps it is because this call for the growth of a significant form of female power seems to be genuinely feared by men, that they “commonly feel threatened by their attraction to women.”¹⁶ Owing to the fact that women are considered to be ever power-hungry, displaying signs of attraction to them may be considered a rather perilous demonstration of one’s own weakness. The New Woman, single, educated, and economically autonomous has simply challenged the existing distribution of power as well as evoked structural changes which transformed gender relations.¹⁷

Regarding men’s answers to all of these striking social movements, Michael S. Kimmel distinguishes in his essay called “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century” between three different types of response: antifeminist, masculinist, and profeminist.

¹³ Carla J. McDonough, “Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet’s Drama,” *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 196.

¹⁴ Lipman-Blumen, 18.

¹⁵ Lipman-Blumen, 25.

¹⁶ Matthew C. Gutmann, “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 396.

¹⁷ Kimmel, 265.

According to Kimmel, proponents of the antifeminist backlash in America argued that “if masculinity was in a state of crisis, it was women’s fault, and the solution to the crisis was the revival of the subordination of women – supposed natural order of things.”¹⁸ Yearning for the mythical separation of spheres which had served to keep women from explicitly challenging men in the public realm, the antifeminists linked social protest to biological confusion in order to be able to claim that “the feminist struggle against socially constructed definitions of gender was really a war against nature.”¹⁹

The masculinist response opposed the perceived feminization of American culture but instead of suggesting that women were the enemy, “they argued that women’s increased power was symptomatic of cultural changes that had reduced the importance and visibility of masculinity.”²⁰ Masculinist discourse was concerned about woman’s dominance in the private sphere, and sought to dislodge her in the home by creating “islands of unattained masculinity and purified pockets of virility in separate institutions that could socialize young men to the hardiness appropriate to their gender.”²¹

Finally, the profeminist men, Kimmel says, openly embraced feminist principles as a potential solution to the crisis of masculinity, believing that women’s increased public and political participation, symbolized by the extension of suffrage to women, autonomy in marriage, and sexual freedom, would undoubtedly prove to be a significant gain for all Americans.²²

“Today,” Kimmel wrote in 1987, “in the wake of transformations of work, the closing of the imperial frontier, and new gains for women, masculinity is again seen as an ‘endless trial’ and we again find these three responses.”²³ In this presupposition he was, on the one hand,

¹⁸ Kimmel, 266.

¹⁹ Kimmel, 268.

²⁰ Kimmel, 269.

²¹ Kimmel, 262.

²² Kimmel, 272.

²³ Kimmel, 277.

opposed or slightly corrected in 2005 by Arlene Stein, who seems to have put a predominant emphasis only on the masculinist response:

Because the old strategy of blaming women's growing independence for many of the social changes [...] is no longer politically tenable, neopatriarchal rhetoric does not attack women per se, does not call for the subordination of women, and does not explicitly support practices and arrangements that buttress gender inequality. Rather, it speaks of the importance of gender differentiation in the family, strong but compassionate fathers, and heterosexual-only marriage.²⁴

R. W. Connell only thirteen years prior to that, on the other hand, highlighted more or less the profeminist reaction: “Although most of the men express some support for feminism, they disapprove ‘Those Who Go Too Far’: ‘I can't stand the butch dykes [who think] that males are shits.’”²⁵ Going back to Connell’s argument that the contemporary society is becoming ever more feminized, then, it must be stressed that this by no means infers that femininity is at the same time becoming ever less undesirable. It still seems to be opposed to masculinity, and as such largely devalued. In this respect, David Mamet also has a lot of interesting ideas to share.

5.2 Mamet the Misogynist?

As it was already mentioned in the introductory chapter, David Mamet’s plays either exclude women completely, or concern themselves with the “seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the genders.”²⁶ In fact, as Carla J. McDonough puts it: “Mamet’s best plays are immune from any female contamination; the existence of women only filters on the stage through the preconceived ideas of the opposite sex.”²⁷ Such is the case of *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry*

²⁴ Arlene Stein, “Make Room for Daddy: Anxious Masculinity and Emergent Homophobias in Neopatriarchal Politics,” *Gender and Society* 19.5 (2005): 604.

²⁵ Connell, 747.

²⁶ Christopher Bigsby, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 2.

²⁷ McDonough, 203.

Glen Ross, *Duck Variation*, or other works. The reason for his not making use of that many female characters has been provided by the author himself, when he said in an interview: “I don’t know anything about women... I’m more around men; I listen to more men being candid than women being candid.”²⁸ Not only are there generally only a few women in his plays, David Radavich also argues that Mamet’s early work is in particular nearly dominated by a certain fear of the female, and of female sexuality, “as males jostle for position and affection among themselves apart from women.”²⁹

In fact, whenever women do appear on Mamet’s stage, they are more likely than not to function as “essential disturbers of the natural male world.”³⁰ One such example is to be found in the already discussed *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, in which an intruding new girlfriend positions herself between and almost ruins the relationship of two male friends. This is, however, not the only instance that could be mentioned, another one being *Speed-the-Plow*. This piece of drama opens with an almost idyllic picture of a pair of good old friends, Gould and Fox, talking to each other in good humor. Their jesting is interrupted, and their friendship consequently nearly wrecked, by Karen, a secretary working for one of them. As archetypal woman, Karen represents a severe threat to their male harmony, seemingly advocating the “moral high ground” that both of the men have abdicated in their pursuit of success in the world of men.³¹ Karen becomes intimate with Gould not because she would fancy him, as he believes, but only to have enough leverage to be able to influence him in his business decisions. Gould’s friend, albeit attempting to help him see through her deception, is unable to do anything. Near the end of the play, he cannot withhold his grudge against the pairing, particularly the woman, and yells at his friend: “You’ve proved yourself insane. [...] You’re throwing your life away. [...] It’s the secretary. She, what did she do to you...? [...]”

²⁸ David Radavich, “Man among Men: David Mamet’s Homosocial Order,” *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. Peter F. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 69.

²⁹ Radavich, 71.

³⁰ Radavich, 69.

³¹ Radavich, 76.

The broad wants power. [...] She lured *you* in” (174-176). Thus, in *Speed-the-Plow*, “the perception of women as sexual ‘weakeners’ or ‘corruptors’, threatening the tightly stretched and fragile fabric of male bonds, receives its most direct expression.”³²

Not only are women in Mamet often portrayed as disrupters of friendships, for instance in *Edmond* they are also put into the role of much worse culprits. Because it is against women the male identity positions itself, and because the definition of womanhood, on which patriarchal society is at least partially based, has drastically changed due to the influence of feminism, men have effectually lost themselves, and became confused about both women and their own selves.³³ In *Edmond*, the eponymous character attempts to “prove himself a man by seeking sexual domination over women,”³⁴ therefore venturing into the town in search of erotic dancers and prostitutes. The problem is that over the course of the play, as Carla J. McDonough believes, what is masculine and feminine, “what is valued or desired, what is devalued or feared becomes increasingly hard to pin down as the positions within this play shift.”³⁵ One of Edmond’s greatest desires appears to be to differentiate between masculinity and femininity in order to be able to establish his own identity. Unfortunately, such differentiation in the end proves to be unthinkably difficult to control or maintain. The gender distinctions and limitations, formerly taken for granted, do not seem to apply anymore – in a direct consequence of feminism altering the face of society men are portrayed as having lost their selves.³⁶ As he is told by a fortune-teller at one point: “The world seems to be crumbling around us. [...] And you are unsure what your place is” (246).

In spite of this potential confusion regarding their identity, there is one thing of which Mamet’s men are unshakably certain – that not only being a man is far better than being a woman, but more importantly that femininity, due to its subordinate position in the social

³² Radavich, 77.

³³ McDonough, 196.

³⁴ McDonough, 200.

³⁵ McDonough, 200.

³⁶ McDonough, 200.

hierarchy, is simply perfect to be used as an insult in all sorts of male homosocial environments. Many of these “womanizing deprecations”³⁷ can be found in almost any play by Mamet. To give at least some examples: the male characters in *Glengarry Glen Ross* call each other “secretary” (46) when angry with each other; in *American Buffalo* Teach tells Don: “I am not your wife” (250) when he feels powerful but, at the end of the play when he is ashamed of his previous rage and thus in a weakened state, he says about himself: “I look like a sissy” (256); and finally, when having an argument in *Speed-the-Plow*, Fox infuriatingly tells his friend Gould he is an “old woman” (175) and even a “chippy” (176). All of these instances highlight the fact that conflating other men’s masculinity with femininity may be conveniently used as a tool to strengthen one’s own position in the stratified world of hegemonic masculinity. Simply put, it is a very useful instrument of power.

The issue of power, as evidenced by Mamet’s *Oleanna*, occupies a particularly important place in the sphere of contact between the members of the two sexes. What interests Mamet in particular about the clash of the sexes at whose end stands unlimited access to power, Sacvan Bercovitch writes, “is not the rights and wrongs of this clash but the mechanisms of power.”³⁸ In the play a college student named Carol, having problems with one of her classes, visits John, her teacher, for a consultation. The student perhaps feeling subordinated or unappreciated and therefore desiring revenge, the meeting gets gravely out of hand. Carol falsely accuses John of sexual harassment, eventually even attempted rape, thus depriving him of his tenure, his job, and effectually also a house he planned to buy with his wife. The point is that while Carol pretends in the latter two acts of the three-act play to function as a speaker for her “group”, we are asked not to regard her as a true feminist, but instead look under her

³⁷ Radavich, 77.

³⁸ Sacvan Bercovitch, ed, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 74.

mask and see hunger for power and envy only disguised as political ideology.³⁹ In short, as Marc Silverstein writes, the play “transforms the feminist call for women to fashion their voice(s) into an aggressive urge to silence men.”⁴⁰ Carol’s behavior, of course, completely inverts the male hegemony, threatening to overturn one of the main pillars of the patriarchy, and as such, it is not surprising that the play may cause much anxiety in some of the male members of the audience. Anxiety or fear of their social position being in jeopardy may explain the sort of behavior which is attested to have transpired on numerous occasions at the end of the play. When Carol crosses the final line by telling John “Don’t call your wife baby,”⁴¹ she pushes him over the edge. At that point, she has not only managed to destroy him on the professional level, but is now attempting to invade his private life as well. This causes him to strike and brutally beat her. Startlingly enough, “the beating is often accompanied by applause, cheers, and quite audible exclamations of encouragement to the professor.”⁴²

After all of this has been said, it may not be overly surprising to discover that David Mamet’s work has been on numerous occasions accused of having misogynistic overtones.⁴³ According to Christopher Bigsby, some critics even went as far as to choose “to extrapolate his characters’ views to include their author’s.”⁴⁴ This approach, however, overlooks three very important points which have to be made when dealing with this issue. First, fusing the opinions of authors with those of their characters is never a safe way to draw conclusions about anything. In fact, as Carla J. McDonough points out, Mamet himself champions women in his collection of essays called *Some Freaks* “as basically smarter, more focused, and dependable than men, while men are described as ‘the puppydogs of the universe’ who have

³⁹ Marc Silverstein, “‘We’re Just Human’: ‘Oleanna’ and Cultural Crisis,” *South Atlantic Review* 60.2 (1995): 110.

⁴⁰ Silverstein, 111.

⁴¹ David Mamet, *Plays: 4* (London: Methuen, 2002) 52. All subsequent references to the play are cited in text.

⁴² Silverstein, 103.

⁴³ Silverstein, 103.

⁴⁴ Bigsby, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 2.

‘a lot to learn from women’.”⁴⁵ Second, in order to tap into currently relevant topics which needed to be discussed, Mamet may actually be perceived as demonstrating a lot of courage in his willingness to be so politically incorrect in spite of the fact that he may be deemed a misogynist for it. Regarding the issue of political correctness as such, let us consider John screaming at Carol during his attack in *Oleanna*: “You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life” (52)? As Mamet points out: “There may be politically correct spectacle, but there can be no politically correct drama.”⁴⁶ Finally, portraying women in antifeminist fashion merely as male nightmares responsible for all the wrongs of this world has never been Mamet’s goal for one of his main interests in this issue lie elsewhere.

5.3 The Unbridgeable Gap

As it was previously mentioned, “our culture insists on defining masculinity and femininity as binary oppositions,”⁴⁷ and the dramatic pieces by David Mamet indeed do reflect this contrast. Let us consider, for instance, the scene in *Lakeboat* in which Stan, one of the sailors, at first ponders: “What do they know of booze, the cunts?” only to later conclude: “They don’t understand it. It’s a man’s thing, drinking” (192). As Arthur Holmberg states, for these characters the primary article of faith is that men and women are polar opposites, the comedy of this particular scene stemming from “the blatant contradictions the men spit out to maintain their gender stereotypes.”⁴⁸ It seems that whenever Mamet addresses the relationship between the two sexes directly, Sacvan Bercovitch believes, it is merely to confess to a gap in

⁴⁵ McDonough 195.

⁴⁶ David Mamet, *Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) 69.

⁴⁷ Holmberg, 91.

⁴⁸ Holmberg, 159.

perception which is either unbridgeable or bridged only within the fictions that both men and women agree to give the force of reality.⁴⁹

In Mamet's plays, the essential difference between the sexes is highlighted even on the level of language, the playwright making use of what is commonly referred to as genderlects. In unison with Judith Butler's theory of performativity of masculinity, it has been noted by sociolinguists that "language is one of the major strategies we use to perform gender,"⁵⁰ the male genderlect thus posing as a major prop of masculinity. In other words, men use language as a display of their manhood, for example using significantly more hostile or taboo words than women.⁵¹ Additionally, male genderlect tends to be much more referential, to have a clearly defined end such as acquiring or providing information, and also to use affective language such as compliments much less frequently than female genderlect.⁵² According to sociologist Jennifer Coates, the staggering difference between the way members of the opposite sexes speak is, nevertheless, perhaps best evidenced in the kinds of stories they tell:

Male stories deal with laddish pranks or boast about accomplishments. They deal with external conflicts, fights with other men, and heroism. Life is portrayed as unending contest. By telling these stories, men perform masculinity and project an image of strength. In contrast, [...] women tell stories to reflect on relationships and explore emotions. Their stories often focus on embarrassments, worries, and fears. They express anxieties.⁵³

Men in general often, though by no means all the time, adhere to this binary distinction, moreover deeming the feminine mode of speaking undesirable for them. In the case of Mamet's men, this dichotomy usually appears to be, probably for the theatrical effect, to a great extent enhanced.

⁴⁹ Bercovitch, 68.

⁵⁰ Holmberg, 182.

⁵¹ Holmberg, 182-183.

⁵² Holmberg, 202.

⁵³ Holmberg, 190.

Oleanna is an immensely interesting play which works with and heavily relies on the concept of genderlects . The whole play is not only about the clash of the sexes but also about the war of genderlects. As Holmberg points out, “in each act the female genderlect struggles to be heard, and in each act the male genderlect drowns it out.”⁵⁴ The key question is who makes use of which one? The play opens with John talking on the phone with his wife, discussing their purchase of the house. His use of referential language, direct questions, short, simple sentences, and frequent scolding of his wife when she fails to provide him with satisfactory answers all point out to him practicing male genderlect.⁵⁵ Even after he finishes talking to his wife and starts dealing with Carol, he continues to use all of these male strategies, additionally refusing to follow up on topics introduced by her, constantly interrupting her, and responding to her only minimally.⁵⁶ Let us, for instance, consider this passage:

John You’re incredibly... you have no problem with the... Who’s kidding who?

Carol ...I...

John No. No. I’ll tell you why. I’ll tell... I think you’re *angry*, I...

Carol ...why would I...

John ...wait one moment. I...

Carol It *is* true. I have *problems*...

John ...every...

Carol ...I come from a different *social*...

John ...ev...

Carol a different economic...

John ...Look: (7)

⁵⁴ Holmberg, 204.

⁵⁵ Holmberg, 183.

⁵⁶ Holmberg, 187.

The break comes when Carol obviously becomes extremely frustrated so John, in order to soothe her, switches into female genderlect, remembering his own past difficulties as a student, and telling her: “I’m talking to you the way I wish someone had talked to me. I don’t know how to do it, other than to be *personal*” (14). However, he very soon switches back into the male genderlect sharing an anecdote comparing the copulation habits of the rich and the poor. In fact, he constantly switches between the two forms of language.

Surprisingly enough, Carol does the very same thing, and even though she comes as a supplicant, she is from the very beginning aggressive, manipulative, at times polite and at times rude, and constantly challenging John, thus unceasingly switching between the male and female genderlects.⁵⁷ As the play progresses, we see that while with each of her accusations Carol not only gains power over John but also starts using male genderlect, John himself, beaten down by the student and slowly losing his dominant position, is found ever more frequently to use the female one. In the final act, we thus hear John inquire Carol about her feelings only to hear her say: “The issue here is not what I ‘feel’” (42). By appropriating the male genderlect and thus refusing to perform the traditional femininity, Carol destabilizes gender roles and strikes at the foundations of the whole patriarchy. As Holmberg puts it: “*Oleanna* deals with the reality of female power, but it is not a realistic play. It is a nightmare.”⁵⁸

To return to the aforementioned void between the sexes, since it is portrayed as so vast so as to be virtually impossible to cross, the contemporary sexual and social alienation often leads to much bafflement. In his essays, Mamet points out that even though men are frequently concerned with what women think of them, they are most of the time confused about what women expect of them.⁵⁹ The key to this perplexion is, at least in case of his work, most probably to be found in the lack of communication between the characters, a

⁵⁷ Holmberg, 195-196.

⁵⁸ Holmberg, 207.

⁵⁹ McDonough, 195.

phenomenon rather symptomatic of Mamet's drama. Also, if we focus on the case of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, we may notice that "much of the play's humor derives from the characters' failure to understand themselves or other people."⁶⁰ Analyzing the relationship between Danny and women in general, Bigsby finally declares:

Safely mythicised as willing collaborators in their own seduction, [...] they lose their power to engage his confused and vulnerable emotions. Accordingly, when Danny finds himself involved with a real woman he is unable to function, incapable of adjusting to the complexity of relationship.⁶¹

Danny is, however, not the only character who is perplexed by the members of the opposite sex. Bernie also once directly says: "It's these young broads. They don't know what the fuck they want" (54). Furthermore, even in the feminine world, we find, the situation is exactly the same, Joan explaining to her friend Deborah: "Men. They're all after only one thing. But it's never the *same* thing" (54-55).

General confusion is, nevertheless, not the only attribute of male-female relationships in Mamet's drama. Bigsby believes that what is especially missing in them is a sense of trust, writing that it has always been one of Mamet's primal concerns, "a moral and social issue, [...] but also the basis of his dramatic strategy. Whenever anyone [...] says 'Trust me' in his work they are almost certainly practicing defect."⁶²

Wherever there is distrust, there may also be a feeling of threat, and it is precisely the association of women with threat which is in Mamet the basis of much of the paranoia common to many of his characters.⁶³ For instance, Teach's vulgarity and verbal violence in *American Buffalo* towards "fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie" (157), and "that cunt on her shoulder" (162), meaning Grace, may be mentioned. McDonough indicates that it

⁶⁰ C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 208.

⁶¹ Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*, 208.

⁶² Bigsby, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 27.

⁶³ McDonough, 203.

is in his belief that the two women have somehow disgraced him by winning over him in a game of cards, as well as in his belief that his masculinity and social standing are therefore endangered, that Teach finds motivation to try to prove himself through the robbery he plans with Don.⁶⁴ All of the slurs are essentially nothing but an outlet for his frustration which not only helps him find at least some reassurance regarding his dominant position as a man, but also functions as a lead-in to the – eventually anti-climactic – burglarious grand finale.

⁶⁴ McDonough, 204.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Roma: *It's a fucked-up world.*
Glengarry Glen Ross

Del: *Each of us is alone.*
The Cryptogram

Barker: *All people are connected.*
The Water Engine

Mr Happiness: *If you want to have a friend, be a friend.*
Mr Happiness

After having been acquainted with all the particulars of the past as well as contemporary sociological research pertaining the concept of masculinity, and with David Mamet's own approach to the issue, it is easy to see why the word "crisis" most frequently comes to mind. Even though it is clear now that the whole concept of hegemonic masculinity and the idea, which goes hand in hand with it, of a perfect man whom all other men inexhaustibly strive to become, are based on a myth, which would necessarily mean that any crisis thereof must be unreal as well, the issue here is not what sociologists objectively write about the situation. Instead, the only thing that matters is what men themselves feel – and at least Mamet's men have a very strong feeling that the contemporary state of masculinity indeed is in crisis. As it was established in the previous chapters, and as Christopher Bigsby rightly points out, men nowadays appear to be "no more assured about their own inner resources or their relationships with one another than they are about encounters across the gender divide."¹ Such crucial lack of assurance may then without much difficulty be considered one of the root causes of the perceived crisis. As Mamet has once said: "America is in a sorry state. We're at a very difficult time. Our culture has fallen apart and is going to have to die off before something takes its place."²

¹ Christopher Bigsby, "David Mamet," *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 4.

² Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 18.

The notion that the past was somehow better than is the present, that the times we live in only bring us confusion and suffering, is shared by a great number of Mamet's characters. To name a few, let us mention Anna in *Boston Marriage*, yearningly exclaiming: "Once the world was to me a magic place... I was a Little Girl, Oh, once" (33); or Karen in *Speed-the-Plow* at first confessing: "They aren't to come, the Dark Ages – they are now. We're living them" (159), and later even adding to it: "Everyone is frightened. [...] Everything is breaking down" (162). The question remaining to be answered is: Who is to blame?

As for the possible cause of this widespread social decline, many of Mamet's characters themselves reflect the opinions the playwright must have undoubtedly heard himself many times, and believe that the idea of the whole society falling apart is closely connected to women's changing social positions. As Carla J. McDonough suggests, though, in spite of his characters blaming the feminine for all of their problems, in spite of their struggle to negate the feminine and to glorify the masculine in all of their interactions, the real problem seems to be limited rather to the "debilitating concept of masculinity" itself.³ Mamet's characters thus ultimately appear to be suffering under an identity crisis which they cannot name, as they are supposed to represent the empowered few in a system which oppresses others, yet at the same time they find themselves to be oppressed as well.⁴

David Mamet's plays identify all of these issues troubling the contemporary society, but the question is whether we could say they are political in the sense that they attempt to affect people's behavior, and to achieve any change in their social attitudes. The playwright himself would strongly oppose the very idea of his work being in any sense political or even didactic. A firm believer in the saying that "a play must not be a lecture,"⁵ he writes in his book *Three Uses of the Knife*:

³ Carla J. McDonough, "Every Fear Hides a Wish: Unstable Masculinity in Mamet's Drama," *Theatre Journal* 44 (1995): 205.

⁴ McDonough, 205.

⁵ David Mamet, *Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010) 73.

Dramatists who aim to change the world assume a moral superiority to the audience and allow the audience to assume a moral superiority to those people in the play who don't accept the views of the hero. It's not the dramatist's job to bring about social change. [...] The purpose of art is not to change but to delight.⁶

Writing about the conjunction of Mamet's drama and politics, Christopher Bigsby states that even though Mamet may not choose to address it as his subject matter, there indeed is a certain air of politics in his work, his plays functioning as metaphors and their resonances expanding outwards from the particularities of their setting.⁷ He argues that the dramatist may be considered political if we meant by this term that his portraits of alienated individuals, profoundly uncommunal and frequently making use of a sort of language drained of human content, imply the necessity to confront what has been lost, without which any effort for recuperation may not be possible.⁸

Theatre is then the perfect place for such confrontation, its purpose being precisely "to address that need for community, for trust, that perceived sense of entropy which lies at the heart of his plays."⁹ Finally, David Mamet himself explains the purpose and the overall message of his plays as following:

In a morally bankrupt time we can help to change the habit of coercive and frightened action and substitute for it the habit of trust, of self-reliance, and co-operation. If we are true to our ideals we can help form an ideal society – not by *preaching* about it, but by *creating* it each night in front of the audience – by showing how it works.¹⁰

⁶ David Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 26.

⁷ Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 6.

⁸ Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 4.

⁹ Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 34.

¹⁰ Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, 34.

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Summary

This BA thesis, partly a work of sociological theory and partly of literary analysis, discusses the crisis of masculinity in the society, placing an emphasis on the American milieu. As a starting point it uses the dramatic pieces of the contemporary American playwright David Mamet. Mamet is in his works generally attracted to the world of men, and we can only find a handful of female characters in them. Additionally, he frequently places his men, who usually share the typically masculine characteristics and behavioral patterns, into traditionally male environments – for instance on a boat or into a ruthlessly competitive real estate agency. Thus he prepares his ground to be able to fully explore one of the most prominent American social myths – the myth of masculinity.

The second chapter focuses in its sociological opening part on the concept of masculinity as such. In the beginning, a historical overview of the development of human understanding of masculinity is introduced. It is apparent that it was only with the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of feminism around the turn of the century that the society saw the drastic change which, as we may understand it, led to the crisis of masculinity. Later, Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of masculinity is discussed, and Matthew C. Gutmann's triple division of masculinity, according to which either everything is manly which men think or do; or everything they do to be men; or everything that is simply not feminine. R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, with which David Mamet frequently operates, functions then as a sort of dividing line between the sociological and literary part of this chapter. On the characters of Bernie from his *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, Teach from *American Buffalo* and others, features typical for hegemonic masculinity are demonstrated – e.g. sexual objectification of women and their dominance by men, physical and sexual prowess, lack of emotionality, little communicativeness, and violent behavior. The chapter is

concluded by a passage, contemplating the very crisis of masculinity itself, be it real or merely imaginary, and its reflection in Mamet's work.

Whereas the second chapter places its focus on masculinity on the level of individuals, the third one broadens its scope to whole groups, and discusses the theme of homosociality – intentional seeking and preferring the company of people of the same sex. In the theoretical part of this chapter, the concept of homosociality is further developed. Its role in forming of masculinity is mentioned as well as its relationship with homosexuality, and finally also the varying ways it helps hegemonic masculinity to maintain its dominant position. Among these we may count for instance the formerly mentioned sexual objectification of women, or emotional detachment, or escalated competitiveness. Regarding David Mamet, his approach to the motif of friendship is first analyzed in the chapter. Friendship is depicted in his plays as exceedingly unstable and fragile, mostly owing to men's excessive competitiveness and to women. Consequently, the relationship between friendship and business is examined, more particularly their mutual exclusiveness caused once again by male competitiveness. In conclusion, it is pointed out that the homosocial world seems to be as unstable as that of masculinity.

The fourth chapter inspects a topic which is not only closely associated to both masculinity and homosociality but also indispensable if we want to effectively define both of these terms – the topic of homosexuality. Homosexual masculinity, according to Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity being a subordinate variant to other forms of masculinities, offers heterosexual men a platform against which they can position themselves, which they can condemn by conflating it with femininity, and thanks to which they can thus strengthen their own position in the patriarchal society. The theoretical part of this chapter then not only discusses in detail this conflation of homosexuality with femininity but it also uncovers possible causes and functioning of homophobia. Even though David Mamet does not really

concern himself with the issue of homosexuality per se, tracing the occasional remarks and hints to it in his work, it is possible to notice a clearly defined trajectory in his attitude. While his early plays show clear signs of homophobia, his position shifts over time toward the eventual peacefulness. In his later plays, homosexuality ceases to be used only in slurs and becomes an ordinary part of human life, almost not even worth mentioning, and Mamet himself starts to introduce his first gay characters.

The fifth chapter focuses on the relationship between masculinity and femininity, and on the clash between the sexes. The very definition of hegemonic masculinity postulates that femininity is understood as an inferior (and in relation to the male identity even undesirable) characteristic. This belief has to do with the presumption that both genders form a sort of binary opposition, and that all character features and behavioral patterns, etc. may be neatly divided into one or the other category. Not only is this presumption in its very essence wrong, but it is nowadays even believed that the gender differences are slowly lessening, and that the male population is becoming emotionally ever more feminized. The rise of feminism is widely considered to be one of the main causes of this crisis of masculinity. The theoretical part of this chapter is concluded by distinguishing between three types of men's reactions to this feminizing effect: the Antifeminist, Masculinist, and Profeminist one. Owing to his depiction of women, David Mamet is frequently labeled a misogynist. This is not surprising since most of his female characters either function as elements of disturbance in otherwise peaceful and friendly male friendships, or by their hunger for power destroy the male world equilibrium. Mamet's men also largely make use of feminizing words which, due to women's subordinate position in the society, function as deprecatory expressions or pejoratives. To understand Mamet's handling of his female characters as misogynistic would be, nevertheless, erroneous for the point of his interest lies predominantly in his depiction of the dissimilarity of the sexes, in their inability to find understanding for each other, and in the omnipresent

sense of distrust and threat. This unbridgeable gap between the sexes is reflected in Mamet's work also on the level of the language, more particularly in his use of the so-called genderlects.

In conclusion, it is apparent that men appear to be unable to find assurance not only in themselves but also in their relations with their male friends and with women. This overall confusion, incurred according to many of Mamet's characters by the rise of feminism, may therefore be considered one of the main causes of the apparent crisis of masculinity. Mamet's drama, albeit not political in the truest sense of the word, allows audiences to look under the mystical veil of sociology and helps them to better understand their selves, so as to grant them the ability to achieve the kinds of social changes for which they may not even know they yearn.

Key Words

- David Mamet
- *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*
- *American Buffalo*
- *Glengarry Glen Ross*
- Masculinity
- Crisis of Masculinity
- Judith Butler
- Performative Masculinity
- R. W. Connell
- Hegemonic Masculinity
- Homosociality
- Friendship and Business
- Homosexuality
- Homosexual Masculinity
- Femininity
- Clash of the Sexes
- Feminism
- Antifeminism
- Masculinism
- Profeminism
- Misogyny
- Genderlects
- Political Drama

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce, částečně teoreticko-společensky-vědní a částečně literárně-analytická, se zabývá krizí maskulinity v současné společnosti s důrazem na americké prostředí. Coby odrazový můstek využívá divadelní hry soudobého amerického dramatika Davida Mameta. Mamet je ve svých dílech všeobecně přitahován světem mužů, a ženských postav v nich lze nalézt pouze hrstku. Svě mužské postavy, povětšinou se honosící typicky maskulinními vlastnostmi a projevující se typicky maskulinním chováním, navíc často umisťuje do tradičně mužských prostředí – například na loď nebo do nelítostně soupeřivé realitní kanceláře. Tímto si vytváří půdu, aby tak mohl náležitě prozkoumat jeden z nejvýraznějších amerických společenských mýtů – mýtus o mužnosti.

Druhá kapitola práce se ve své počáteční společensko-vědní části zaměřuje na koncept maskulinity jako takový. Na úvod je představen jakýsi historický průřez vývoje lidského chápání maskulinity. Z dostupných pramenů vyplývá, že teprve s příchodem průmyslové revoluce a vzestupem feministického hnutí došlo ve společnosti k drastickým změnám, které bychom mohli chápat, že ve výsledku vyústily v krizi maskulinity. Dále je představena teorie performativní maskulinity Judith Butlerové a trojí dělení maskulinity Matthew C. Gutmanna, podle nějž je maskulinní buď vše, co si muži myslí a dělají; nebo vše, co muži dělají pro to, aby byli muži; a nebo zkrátka vše to, co není feminní. Jakýsi předěl mezi částí společensko-vědní a literárně-analytickou představuje teorie hegemonní maskulinity socioložky R. W. Connellové, s níž David Mamet do značné míry pracuje. Na příkladu postav Bernieho ze hry *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, Teache z díla *American Buffalo* a dalších jsou předvedeny vlastnosti typické pro hegemonní maskulinitu – např. sexuální objektivizace žen a mužská dominance nad nimi, fyzická a sexuální zdatnost, absence citovosti a malá komunikativnost nebo násilnickost. Kapitulu uzavírá pasáž, rozebírající samotnou (ať už skutečnou nebo jen domnělou) krizi maskulinity a její odraz v Mametově díle.

Zatímco druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na maskulinitu na rovině jednotlivců, kapitola třetí rozšiřuje svůj záběr na celé skupiny a zaobírá se tématem homosociality, čili záměrným vyhledáváním a upřednostňováním společnosti lidí stejného pohlaví. V teoretické části této kapitoly se pojem homosociality dále rozpracovává. Zmiňuje se například její role při formování maskulinity, vztah s homosexualitou a nejrůznější způsoby, jimiž napomáhá hegemonní maskulinitě udržovat si své dominantní postavení, mezi něž patří mimo jiné již dříve zmiňovaná sexuální objektivizace žen, emocionální odtaziťost a vyhrocená soutěživost. V souvislosti s Davidem Mametem kapitola nejprve rozebírá jeho přístup k motivu přátelství, které ve svých hrách vyobrazuje coby nadmíru nestálé a snadno poškoditelné – a to především vinou přehnané mužské soutěživosti a žen. Dále se kapitola zabývá vztahem mezi přátelstvím a obchodem, konkrétně jejich vzájemnou výlučností, způsobenou opět již dříve zmíněnou vyhrocenou soutěživostí. Závěrem je podotknuto, že svět přátelství a homosociality se tedy zdá být stejně nestálý, jako svět samotné maskulinity.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zaobírá tématem, které s maskulinitou a homosocialitou úzce souvisí, a které je pro účelnou definici obou termínů nepostradatelné – homosexualitou. Homosexuální maskulinita totiž mužům v rámci maskulinity hegemonní coby její podřadná složka nabízí platformu, proti níž se vyhranit, kterou spojením či poskvrněním femininitou odsoudit, a díky které si tak posílit vlastní dominantní postavení v patriarchální společnosti. Teoretická část této kapitoly dále nejen do detailu rozebírá sloučení homosexuální maskulinity s femininitou, ale odhaluje také možné příčiny a fungování homofobie. Ačkoliv se David Mamet tématem homosexuality výslovně nezabývá, můžeme na základě jeho občasných zmínek vypozaovat jasnou a určitou trajektorii. Zatímco totiž jeho rané hry vykazují zřetelné známky homofobie, postupem času se jeho přístup nepopíratelně umírňuje. V pozdějších hrách pak homosexualita přestává být užívána pouze v urážkách, začíná se brát jako obyčejná součást života, která

skoro ani nestojí za zmínku, a Mamet ve svých dramatech začíná představovat své první homosexuální postavy.

Kapitola pátá se soustřeďuje na vztah mezi maskulinitou a femininitou, potažmo na souboj pohlaví ve společnosti. Ze samé definice hegemonní maskulinity vyplývá, že je femininita chápána jako podřadná a v souvislosti s mužskou identitou dokonce nežádoucí. Tento fakt vychází mimo jiné z předpokladu, že jsou si obě pohlaví jakýmsi protipóly, a že lze veškeré charakterové vlastnosti, způsoby chování apod. úhledně rozřadit na jednu či druhou stranu. Tento předpoklad je nejenom od samého základu naprosto mylný, v současné době se má navíc za to, že se rozdíly mezi pohlavími začínají stírat, a že s každou generací mužů dochází k jejich výraznější emocionální feminizaci. Za jeden z důvodů této krize maskulinity je považován zrod a nárůst vlivu feminismu. Teoretická část této kapitoly se zaobírá nejen tímto konkrétním jevem, ale také trojí reakcí mužů na chápanou feminizaci společnosti – tj. profeministickou, maskulinistickou a profeministickou. Kvůli svému vyobrazení žen a femininity na divadle je Mamet často označován za misogynu. Není se čemu divit – jeho ženy ve většině případů buď působí jako rušivý element v přátelském vztahu dvou mužů a nebo svou touhou po moci ničí poklid celého mužského světa. Mametovi muži zároveň ve velké míře kromě přímých feminizujících urážek využívají i další podobné výrazy, které sami kvůli subordinovanému postavení žen ve společnosti míní a stejně tak i chápou coby pejorativa. Brát Mametovo pojetí žen jako misogynní by ovšem bylo mylné, protože ohnisko jeho zájmu leží především v zobrazení rozdílnosti obou pohlaví, v jejich všeobecné neschopnosti najít jeden pro druhého pochopení a v neposlední řadě také v odhalení a rozboru jejich všudy-přítomného pocitu nedůvěry a hrozby. Tato nepřeklenutelná propast mezi pohlavími se v Mametovi odráží i na úrovni jazyka v jeho užití tzv. genderlektů.

Závěrem tedy vyplývá, že se v současné době muži nezdají být o nic více jistí sami sebou nebo vztahem se svými mužskými přáteli, než vztahy se ženami. Toto celkové zmatení,

způsobené podle mnohých Mametových postav, ale nejen jich, vlivem feminismu, tak může být jedním z nejhlavnějších důvodů chápané krize maskulinity. Mametovo drama, ač ne politické v tom pravém slova smyslu, dává divákům nahlédnout pod roušku všech těchto společenských tajů a záměrně jim umožňuje poznat sebe samé, aby tak dokázali dosáhnout společenských změn, po nichž možná nevědomky nesmírně touží.

Klíčová slova

- David Mamet
- *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*
- *American Buffalo*
- *Glengarry Glen Ross*
- Maskulinita
- Krize maskulinity
- Judith Butlerová
- Performativní maskulinita
- R. W. Connellová
- Hegemonní maskulinita
- Homosocialita
- Přátelství a obchod
- Homosexualita
- Homosexuální maskulinita
- Femininita
- Souboj pohlaví
- Feminismus
- Protifeminismus
- Maskulinismus
- Profeminismus
- Misogynie
- Genderlekty
- Politické drama