

In my thesis I focused on the matter of the relationship of Americans during the decades after World War II to their own identity, as well as to the myths of the West or consumer society. I wanted to compare these aspects on plays by Sam Shepard and David Mamet, two playwrights concerned with similar issues in 1960s and 1970s. In the theoretical part of the thesis I concentrated on the development of the American theater off Broadway. I described three significant theater groups of the era and the differences in their approach. I based the comparison of the plays on Richard Schechner's performance theory and J. L. Austin's theory of the so-called "performatives." Later I discussed the matters of rituals and myths in the postmodern society where I based my theory especially on Victor Turner's and Marie Maclean's work. The two main chapters are dealing with comparing two plays by each author with regard to the way Shepard and Mamet work with rituals and modern myths. Those are considered commonplace, insufficient, almost misleading in a modern society, and the plays' characters thus cannot cope with the society. They end up being on its outer edge and do not seem to be able to find the way back. As a result of the comparison of the plays based on the theoretical part I concluded that even though from the point of view of form the plays of the two authors differ, their interest lies in the individuals (in case of the two authors discussed here, men) who, after a time of enthusiasm after the War and tension of the 1960s cannot determine for themselves who they are. The main difference between the authors from this perspective is that while Shepard's characters are dreamers unable to function properly, Mamet's characters are cruel, but torn inside, and their tragedy is in their inability to admit their weakness and, conversely, in the impossibility of any remedy.

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