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Garland Publishing, Inc.
New York and London
1996

5 Men Among the Ruins

Robert H. Vorlicky

Near the conclusion of David Mamet's male-cast *Glengarry Glen Ross,* Richard Roma, a sleazy, cutthroat salesman, stands amid his employer's burgled real estate office. The surrounding destruction heightens Roma's lament that "it's not a world of men . . . it's not a world of men" (1984, 105). Just a day earlier, Roma had mesmerized a lead, a potential buyer named James Lingk, with the fantasy that in his desired world of men, a (white) man embodies his own absolute morality: he not only trusts himself, which enables him to overcome any fear of loss, but he also knows that he can "act each day without fear" (49). This, for Roma, is the way of the world, the way the world is intended to be. But Roma's fantasy of man's moral rightness—man's fearlessness—is nearly dashed when he considers his own position within the destroyed office: it is a scene of chaotic disruption that suggests, paradoxically, an imminent dismantling of the myth-driven world that "naturally" empowers (all) men within American patriarchy. It is a scene whose real and symbolic meanings even Roma cannot ignore.

In a bold stroke of self-confidence, however, Roma reasserts his own "difference" from other men as the key to his personal survival (50). He distinguishes his subject position from all others (who, to him, are women, unmasculine men, and men of color). Like the phoenix, Roma is determined to rise from the rubble that signals the demise of other less shrewd businessmen. He, after all, never loses faith in his ability—in his power—to exploit anyone at any time. This is his right, he assumes, within the capitalist system his actions help to perpetuate. This is his right, Roma demonstrates, as a male in American culture. Roma's lust for material success is matched by his belief in the rewards extended to a male for having done well at his job—a success that is determined by the American masculine ethos and perpetuated through familiar male mythologies. Such a belief feeds Roma's

ambitious behavior, which is at once touching in its apparent concern for his fellow man's losses while deceptive in its underlying selfish greed.

I have intentionally stressed Roma's maleness to foreground the issue of gender in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In general, critics ignore the central, explicit role of gender (as distinguished from sexuality) not only in this play, but in Mamet's work before *Oleanna* (1992).[1] For this reason, it can be misleading to universalize the characters' experiences in *Glengarry*. Frank Rich (1984) and Christopher Bigsby (1985), for instance, collapse the characters' gender-coded identities into representations of a non-gender-specific human condition, for the sake of more sociophilosophical, non-gender-related readings. Mamet himself acknowledges the importance of distinguishing the basis upon which his characters' position arises in male-centered plays like *Glengarry* (or *American Buffalo* and *Edmond*): their anguish is a result of the failure of the American dream, Mamet concludes, for "the people it has sustained—the white males—are going nuts" (qtd. in Leahey). And it is the male protagonists' "condition rather than a dramatic action," Mamet adds, that serves as *Glengarry*'s distinguishing dramaturgical feature (qtd. in Savran, 1988, 135).

Mamet consciously favors the world of men via the male-cast play when he writes for the theater. When his men are in women's company, they nonetheless remain acutely aware of their dominance over the Other, a positionality that recalls the binarism of Simone de Beauvoir's gender system of Self/Other (xvi–xvii). At all times, Mamet's male characters see the world through men's eyes, with a vision that assures them that they exist in a culture that promotes the values of the masculine ethos as well as privileges them over women by virtue of their masculine gender. It is a vision that finds its expression in social dialogue, a quality of talk throughout the male-cast canon that favors as its topics employment, consumerism, families, women, and men's active identification with the cultural ideal of male virility. These subject matters surface in the initial dialogue in the vast majority of the nearly one thousand published American male-cast plays.

Mamet's language is also the language of men who activate, in H.P. Grice's term, the "Cooperative Principle"; that is, when one makes a "conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [one is] engaged" (45). Yet, while the men communicate cooperatively by engaging in talk exchanges, they do so without self-disclosure, without overstepping the cultural codings that dictate acceptable male interaction. These cultural codings, in turn, inform the semiotic of the play's "discourse coherence," which, as defined by Keir Elam, is the "strategic order" or the sequence of

topic selections that occurs in stage dialogue (182–84). The dialogue, then, reflects both the linguistic-literary codes and the cultural codes operating within the dramatic system, including whiteness and the American masculine ethos. Most realist male-cast plays rely upon this cooperative level of social dialogue for their initial dramatic structure, but very few preserve it for the duration of their characters' interaction. Upholding the latter quality, *Glengarry* is a quintessential male-cast play of this type.

Mamet's characters consciously choose to remain on the level of social dialogue. "Their language, gestures, desires, and values are social products," Jeanette Malkin suggests, "not expressions of individual will" (160). They prefer foremost to sustain cooperative communication without becoming emotionally or psychologically vulnerable to the other men. Unlike the dialogue in other office plays, where the hierarchy of authority often promotes characters' self-disclosures, Mamet's dialogue resists any such private access to the individual. What results in *Glengarry* is a cryptic, inarticulate coding system that deliberately fluctuates between clarity of meaning and ambiguity while it propels the men's conversation forward. This social dialogue is narrowly confined to the topic of the men's employment. As Julius Novick remarks, Mamet's play depends solely upon the "imperatives of business." It "derives a special purity, a special power, from the fact that it is about nothing but the necessity to sell—which means, in this play, to bend other people to your will and take what you want, or need, from them." In general, the characters forgo an involved discussion on the remaining topics that usually surface during social dialogue, choosing instead to promote a coded language of business, of capitalism, that is defined semiotically—as a system related to other systems, including extratheatrical, cultural systems.

The structure of *Glengarry* is shaped according to two dominant features: a coded language of business, with a hierarchical relationship firmly established between speaker and listener; and a dominant, though diversely realized, thematic of business. This latter feature refers to the various meanings of *business*: from the business of one's public employment to one's personal business (that is, the details of one's private life). The coded language of business and the thematic of business are technically linked to one another via the characters' dialogue, an association realized in the practical sales maxim that serves as the play's opening epigram: "Always be closing" (13).[2]

As crafted by Mamet, the social dialogue in *Glengarry* is dramatic talk that is "always closing," as it were, not only because of its limited selection of topics (its nearly exclusive, closed focus on one's job) but in its conversational dynamic between participants as well. Mamet restricts the social dialogue in order to illustrate the linguistic constraints that influence

how a men's closed conversational relationship is constructed, and how that relationship easily becomes the power struggle between speaker and listener as each attempts to secure the position of authority. Because of their topic selections, Mamet's male characters are locked into culturally coded roles as speaker and listener—that is, the men activate a socially sanctioned, predetermined relationship to one another simply because they are discussing, in a nonpersonal manner, a topic determined in accord with the masculine ethos. The balance of power resides with the participant who most adamantly adheres to the principles of the ethos.

In each of the three scenes of conversational dyads that comprise the first act, the answer to the question "Who really holds the power?"—the speaker or the listener—is determined by the individual who adheres unwaveringly to the restrictions advocated by the masculine ethos. Those who wield the conversational power in act 1 are Williamson, who is predominantly the listener in the first scene (much of his interaction with Levene is metalinguistic, as the two talk about talk in their efforts to understand one another), and the verbose, goal-oriented Moss and Roma. Each man is staunchly committed to dialogue that reinforces the masculine ethos and its attendant mythologies. Consequently, they bulldoze their conversational partners into submission, whether through calculated silences or evasive remarks, as in Williamson's case, or energetic talk, as in Moss's and Roma's cases, completely denying the value of a topic other than that which is employment related. While the men adhere to a kind of dramatic cooperative principle in their talk, Williamson, Moss, and Roma discourage their respective conversational partners from engaging in self-disclosing, personal dialogue. Whether as listener or speaker, each maintains a closed conversational relationship with the other man as he backs up the authority of his own restricted position with the culture's coded authority of appropriate masculine behavior and verbal interaction. As William Demastes remarks, "These men are trapped in their worlds, and their words are trapped in their culture" (91).

In numerous interviews, Mamet harshly criticizes American capitalism—the "world," the "culture" of men's lives: "The American Dream has gone bad. . . . This capitalistic dream of wealth turns people against each other. . . . The dream has nowhere to go so it has to start turning in on itself" (qtd. in Leahey). White men, according to Mamet, are coming to realize that the cultural mythologies that traditionally have sustained them are, in fact, in jeopardy. Why? Because "the white race . . . [has] no tragedy." For Mamet, the white man's condition is that he has no "spirit"—no identity outside his culturally coded power of domination. Certainly one sign of man's "spiritlessness" is his impoverished, crippled relationship to language—and to feeling. Herein lies the desperate state of Mamet's males in *Glengarry*, despite the author's recent insistence that the play is a "gang comedy" (1988, 92).

Prominently located on Mamet's matrix, white (straight) men usually reject any options (and their attending responsibilities) that might conflict with the masculine ethos. Nonetheless, they inhabit a realist dramatic world shaped not by fate, but by free choice. For this reason, "the only redemption for the individual is not to change with the institution," Mamet states, for him "not to become part of the institution" (qtd. in Freedman). Whether on- or offstage, however, Mamet rarely comments on social movements, including feminism, as having the power to affect men's lives in a constructive way, creating a more balanced cultural power between the sexes. Despite his awareness of its severe limitations in terms of the quality of human interaction, Mamet is still obsessed with the power, the camaraderie, the potential strength in the exclusivity of male bonding (1989a, 85–91). Prior to *Oleanna* and subsequently *The Cryptogram* (1994), women's issues were not a central social reality in any of Mamet's plays; his characters and their worlds exist independent from any larger cultural context in which gender roles are challenged and changed. Yet, as Novick points out in respect to *Glengarry,* "Has any professed feminist ever given us so unsparing a picture of the masculine ethos at its most barren, destructive, anguished, futile?" *Glengarry Glen Ross,* asserts Demastes, "very clearly focuses on the business ethic, but it is a much broader topic that Mamet is addressing—the decaying of America as a result of this ethic, not just in business, but throughout" (87).

The ethics of Mamet's business world, and its intended metaphoric and actual associations to American patriarchy, are directly linked to the culture's masculine ethos. As dramatized by Mamet, this gendered ethos appears unethical: it promotes corruption, exploitation, prejudice, and violence. One could say that Mamet's men communicate through a coded language whose end is also unethical, not only in its subordination of the Other, but in its calculated resistance to personal, frank communication among men. Mamet's men "no longer have access to words," surmises Bigsby, "that will articulate their feelings" (123). In the mouths of Mamet's characters, this unethical (use of) language is committed to the business of deliberate obscuring of the truth; it encourages illusion, not the actual, as it fosters frustrated isolation rather than meaningful connections among those who speak it. In *Glengarry,* therefore, "It is less the plot development than Mamet's language," as Demastes concludes, "that succeeds in capturing the essence of his themes" (91). It is the pervasive, unrelenting power of the American

masculine ethos and male mythologies manifest in Mamet's language that reveal the play's cultural and dramaturgical dynamism.

The plot of Mamet's play is relatively inconsequential compared with the dynamics of the characters' verbal interaction, most strikingly captured in their social dialogue. The men's involvement with one another reveals what each man thinks of himself, as he talks about or relates to business. In Mamet's male world, one's identity is determined by the way he engages in business (as in Lingk's circumstance), or by his success or failure at his job (as in the case of the real estate personnel and the detective). Significantly, as Carla McDonough proposes, "If a job is what defines a man, then failure in business is what defines the non-man, the woman" (202). A man measures his self-worth (and has it measured by others) against the gendered cultural standards associated with economic power. In such a system, it is not uncommon for a man to experience the roles of both victim and victimizer.

This cultural context for self-definition is actually a system of set codes, one spelled out in the opening speech of *Glengarry,* when Levene tells Williamson, "I don't want to tell you your *job.* All that I'm saying, things get *set,* I know they do, you get a certain *mind-set*" (15). Levene's language (and eventually every other character's language) reveals paradigmatic codes that characterize the men's social dialogue: "job," "set," and "mind-set" anticipate other codes to follow—"board," "policy," and "lead." Such codes are "known to both transmitter and destination—which assigns a certain content (or meaning) to a certain signal. In linguistic communication the code allows speaker and addressee to form and recognize syntactically correct sequences of phonemes and to assign a semantic content to them" (Elam, 35). What is crucial to note in Mamet's dialogue is that the characters rely upon these codes, which are both dramatic and cultural (Elam, 52), as each resonates with meanings that are gender based and gender biased. Mamet's characters are represented as having freely chosen to maintain this level of interaction (distinguishing these men from those in *American Buffalo,* for instance, where Don and Teach consciously transcend the conversational limits imposed by social dialogue). In the closed patriarchal microcosm of *Glengarry,* therefore, the coherence in the men's dialogue is firmly entrenched, reflective of a mind-set that adheres solely to the principles of the masculine ethos and its attendant mythologies. Although the men communicate cooperatively, they remain inflexible in their efforts to restrict the discourse coherence, and consequently the thematics, of their talk.

Introducing initial codes in the first two scenes that will characterize the men's dialogue for two acts, Levene and Williamson, followed by Moss

and Aaronow, establish another critical feature of Mamet's social dialogue: metalinguistics. Each pair talks a great deal about talk. Explicitly, they indicate the discourse coherence of their conversation through their topic selection; implicitly, they struggle to establish the power relationship between speaker and listener, identifying who occupies the position of authority. The men's moment-to-moment metalinguistic dialogue reinforces the play's construction as a closed language system, one in which specific meanings are obscured in favor of ambiguous, nonspecific references. No one is ever certain that he is heard or understood. Their talk about talk—and its concomitant relationship to the process of receiving and comprehending information—does not, however, diffuse the power of codes in the men's dialogue. In fact, the linguistic-cultural codes in the men's social dialogue, those that are informed by the masculine ethos, provide the only irrefutable foundation for communication between the men. The codes essentially ground the men in their interaction with one another. For example, when Williamson asserts that he's "given a *policy. My* job is to *do that.* What I'm *told*" (19), Levene knows with certainty that the policy about which his boss speaks is the same one that structures both their professional and personal relationships to one another. For this reason, they favor familiar and predictable socially engendered roles that feed off cultural clichés and stereotypes of maleness. From this more comprehensive perspective, therefore, one can identify the social construct of the Beauvoirian Self/Other, the "policy" of gender, that polices the men's dramatic language (of subject/object) and behavior in Mamet's America.

Moss and Aaronow, like Levene and Williamson, generate much dialogue between them in scene 2 that challenges the meaning of what is being spoken. Following Levene's failure to persuade Williamson to sell him the leads, or prime real estate customers, Moss presents an idea to Aaronow on how the two might steal those same leads and sell them to Jerry Graff, a competitor (who, in turn, may reward the men with jobs). The two men do not directly discuss a specific plan; rather, they allude to the idea of a robbery, then question through metalinguistic exchanges their potential relationship to its possible execution. For example, after being asked by Aaronow if he has discussed this possible robbery with Graff, Moss replies:

> Moss: No. What do you mean? Have I talked to him about *this*? *(Pause.)*
>
> Aaronow: Yes. I mean are you actually *talking* about this, or are we just . . .
>
> Moss: No, we're just . . .

Aaronow: We're just *"talking"* about it.

Moss: We're just *speaking* about it. *(Pause.)* As an *idea*. . . .

Aaronow: So all this, um, you didn't, actually, you didn't actually go talk to Graff.

Moss: Not actually, no. *(Pause.)* (39–40)

The talk between Moss and Aaronow is dotted throughout with these metalinguistic interactions. They are unable (or unwilling) to use language to convey specific meanings. Rather, they choose to maintain a social dialogue that is vague and ambiguous, or as Moss might estimate, a language that is pleasingly "simple" (35). To "keep it simple" (46) is also for Moss and Aaronow to keep their sights on a basic cultural power—economic potency—that they can (re)gain, if only for a while, if a robbery is successful. Their fantasy to possess this power—and thereby to experience the anticipated ancillary patriarchal powers that come from a psychological boost of having achieved a cultural goal—is strong enough to push aside any individual realities that might challenge its realization.

The language and thematic of business continue to dominate the characters' dialogue and determine its discourse coherence throughout act 1, scene 2. Most strikingly, however, the men relish the thought of being disloyal to their current employers in hopes of securing jobs with their competitor. Moss even goes so far as to suggest that someone should "hurt" their bosses (37). This evocation of the power of violence to effect change—and its attraction as an actual undertaking—is a typical position men assume among themselves after they discuss their perceived lack of power. From Martin Flavin's *Amaco* to Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story,* Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Story,* and OyamO's *Let Me Live,* male characters repeatedly resort to violence as a final solution to their immediate professional or private conflicts. Moss's plan that Aaronow and he should rob their employer's office, therefore, lines up behind a long-standing tradition in American male-cast drama in its appeal to men to engage the power of violence in order to get the job done. And, of course, that violence does occur in the dramatic time that separates acts 1 and 2 in Mamet's play; it also occurs outside the spectator's vision, outside his or her immediate experience of the drama. By presenting the effects of the violence rather than staging the violence itself, however, *Glengarry* further distinguishes itself from most male-cast plays in which violence is a prominent, enacted feature.

Throughout Moss's rigorous defense of the plan to rob the real estate office, Aaronow remains an ambivalent, inconsistent listener. From moment to moment the idea either appeals to him or seems the illegal act

that it is. Tempted by avarice, this decentered man becomes a postmodern everyman in Mamet's contemporary morality play; he appears to be the central, pivotal character around whom the play's construction and (cultural) ideology develop. As the everyman figure, Aaronow initially wields a great deal of power—especially in the spectator's identification with him—in terms of the significance of the choices he makes. He is free in Mamet's democratic dramatic world to choose whatever he wants: he can either agree or disagree with Moss, the vocal defender of a kind of male power that is essentially based on economic reward through violence. Accordingly, in Moss and Aaronow's interaction, Mamet returns to the critical consideration that surfaces in nearly all male-cast plays—that is, who really holds the power. And what is sacrificed, if anything, when one participant dominates the other(s) through restricted, ambiguous talk? This becomes Aaronow's dilemma as Moss increasingly dominates their conversation.

Aaronow's predicament links two complementary strands that are characteristic of the male-cast canon. The first strand identifies several terms by which a given male in a talk exchange becomes the more dominant participant, privileging that which he says (or, as the case may be, that which he refuses to say). The second strand focuses on the dramaturgical significance of male characters who willfully create and sustain fictions when speaking among men as a means of (personal) survival.

When a speaker and listener (or respondent) focus on the thematic of the masculine ethos during their mutually agreed upon social dialogue, the speaker establishes a closed dynamic with his listener that effectively secures the listener's compliance with that thematic. In this regard, a listener chooses during social dialogue to agree (or appear to agree) with the principles advanced within the thematic of the masculine ethos. In act 1, scene 2, Aaronow eventually chooses to entertain Moss's conversational position; Moss does not force him to do so. Their dynamic illustrates the extent to which social dialogue initially creates, in their words, "abstract" images between speaker and listener that are then realized, or made "concrete," simply through the articulation of their properties, or codings (46).

On the level of plot development, for example, Moss cites Aaronow as an accomplice to the robbery simply because Aaronow hears the plan; the abstract scheme is, according to Moss, concrete once it is articulated. Even though he challenges Moss's logic, Aaronow is unable to convincingly deny or refute it. One could say that between speaker and listener a kind of "truth" is voiced when the abstract is materialized in the language of social dialogue. And the listener is either "in or out" (46) of agreement with that truth. In this instance, Aaronow listens "in" agreement with the position Moss advocates.

Mamet utilizes this same solipsistic logic in establishing a dramatic logic that operates on the construction of his social dialogue. The power of language, as used by Mamet's men, creates the thematic of the masculine ethos that is so crucial to the characters' collective male identity, but it also has the capacity to make one's self-image "concrete" (46) in its compliance with that ethos. Yet, each man is "free," so to speak, to choose his relationship to the construction of that identity, which, as rendered in Mamet's dialogue, is most readily determined by the character's choice of dialogue: social or personal.

The second strand that surfaces in Aaronow's situation is the relationship between the play's closed speech dynamic and the conversational participants' tendency to create fictions as a method of survival. What links this strand with the previous one is its relationship to the creation of "truth." Certainly, Moss weaves a seductive fiction when he suggests that both Aaronow and he will somehow benefit if their attempted robbery is successful. What Moss overlooks and Aaronow fails to challenge, however, is the penalty that each will pay if caught for committing this crime. Both men construct a fiction that they will acquire lasting economic power, a wish that will be immediately gratified when they are hired for more lucrative positions by their current competitors. Yet, Moss and Aaronow manufacture the illusion of truth out of lies. Their social dialogue fosters this indulgence as their language moves in and out of the unlimited possibilities that surface in a closed speech that accommodates illusion over truth, fiction over reality. Simply because he listened to Moss's fiction—and finally succumbed to its allure as truth through its representation in language—Aaronow fails to self-identify.[3] Rather, like Roma in scene 3, he embraces the fantasy of male cultural power as his means of survival. But unlike his assertive co-worker, Aaronow is incapable of creating fictions on his own. He is a decentered, postmodern everyman who responds only to that which is thrust in front of him; he, himself, exerts no convincing effort to initiate alternative action or ideas. Aaronow's survival, therefore, is solely dependent upon piecing together others' lies. He relies upon coded cultural fictions not only for their indication of the choices he is to consider, but also for the establishment of his own sense of meaning as well—his own sense of himself. That self is finally, tragically false; Aaronow appears painfully conscious of the absence of personal depth in his life.

In act 1, scene 3, Roma demonstrates the skill, the "act" as Moss calls it (35), of the successful, persevering salesman—the one who, unlike Aaronow, is determined to survive according to the terms of the masculine ethos. Whereas Aaronow is everyman, Roma could be considered the representative, classical (white) everyman who appears in most American male-cast plays. He epitomizes the male characters (regardless of their race) who remain staunchly committed to the values advanced by the masculine ethos. Like the Coach in Jason Miller's *That Championship Season,* Alan in Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band,* Ora in Amiri Baraka's *The Toilet,* and Waters in Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play,* Roma unhesitatingly upholds the virtues of masculinist ideology, most readily recognizable in his buddy-buddy, cutthroat approach to business. As speaker, he also depends upon the power of language to create fictions that in turn create the illusion of empowering the listener. These efforts establish the fantasy of interpersonal connections between men that are vital to the continuance of patriarchal authority, to the culturally coded gender system of Self/Other.

Expressing what at first appears as a stream-of-consciousness monologue, Roma seduces the unsuspecting, but emotionally and psychologically vulnerable, Lingk with what in fact is a strategically calculated speech and performance, much like Jerry's mode of communication with Peter in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story.* In effect, Roma delivers a highly manipulative sales talk, which, according to Deborah Geis, is the essence of "monologue" (6); his solo talk is initially masked in pseudophilosophical musings intended to allure Lingk into the web of what could be called "Roma Reasoning." One comes to understand Roma's reasoning on the meaning of life through a series of rapid questions and answers (48), each designed to refocus the emphasis from the anonymous human condition to the more crucial status of the little guy, Lingk, who exists amid an overwhelming, faceless condition. Roma's speech is intended to empower Lingk; it is about conventional patriarchal dynamics of action, control, and power. He argues the position that any man can feel powerful simply by acting without fear. And this power of direct action is extended to Lingk by virtue of his gender privilege, a privilege about which Roma intends to remind his attentive customer. Furthermore, Roma implicitly reminds Lingk that a commitment to action is a demonstration of support for masculine ideals.

The logic in Roma's monologue moves from the universal to the specific, always with the clear objective to convince Lingk to buy land from him. Roma offers this reasoning as the key to Lingk's empowerment: man is afraid of "loss" and has traditionally turned to "greed" as a false sense of security; unwilling to believe himself to be "powerless," man must "trust" his own power to "do those things which seem correct to [him] *today*"; as a result of his independent thinking, therefore, man can experience himself as secure, "*acting each day* without fear" (48–49). Once Roma suggests the importance of action as an expression of one's personal power, he then

focuses his attention on motivating Lingk to take personal action on an "opportunity": "stocks, bonds, objects of art, real estate" (49)—each of which, according to Roma, can mean "what [Lingk] *want*[s] it to mean" (50).

Real estate, in particular, Roma suggests, might "mean *nothing*" to Lingk, or "it might not" (50). Roma skillfully maneuvers the power to define the meaning of things into the rhetorical control of his nearly silent listener. How Lingk names things, Roma implies, is direct evidence of Lingk's relationship (or lack thereof) not only to the culture's expectations of gendered power, but to his sense of himself as a Man. "[T]o talk is to *act,* talk is power," writes Malkin, and "*men* know how to talk" (156). Although men are "all different" from one another, according to Roma (50), each, as a man, has access to the power to define. Man, not God, has the power in Mamet's world to name things, to give definition. He indeed has free choice. Yet free choice is an illusion for many Mamet characters based on a certain notion of identity quite specific to American patriarchy. What passes as free choice is ideologically shaped. The dictates of the impersonal masculine ethos and its social conventions are repeatedly embraced by Mamet's men. Despite voicing his freedom from social constraint, therefore, a Mamet character often contradicts that freedom by reengaging stereotypical action: while he may say one (potentially liberating) remark, he will usually do what he has always done. In this way, Roma represents himself as one who is authorized to name things anew. However, he does nothing of the kind.

Certainly the gender privilege of naming is not lost on Mamet's salesman. Each man, Roma implies, has power over the Other to name the value of life's experiences and expenditures. In fact, it is a man's duty, Roma intimates, to take it upon himself to exercise that power. At no point does the salesman underestimate the importance of inflating his lead's ego with the rhetoric of masculine privilege. He speaks soulfully and hyperbolically to his listener. Bigsby's pointed assessment about Roma's verbal seduction of Lingk is, in fact, an accurate description of all Mamet's salesmen—as well as most American male characters—who sustain social dialogue: "What masquerades as intimacy is in fact the betrayal of intimacy, confidence, trust, the shared experience implied by language" (119). To this end, the final irony of their interaction occurs when the two men reconnect in act 2, as Roma realizes that he must rescue his fellow man from the real influence of the Other: he must do battle with Lingk's wife, one of *Glengarry*'s absent women, in order to win back his weakening, vacillating customer.

Act 2 is set in Williamson's ransacked real estate office. Despite its burgled setting, this act nonetheless manifests a common characteristic of many all-male institutional plays: a hierarchy of professional authority exists at any one time in the dramatic space. As in other office plays, bosses interact with employees, seasoned employees counsel younger employees, and employees court clients. Added to the setting, however, is Baylen, a police detective, whose appearance overrides the authority of both boss and workers. Baylen thrusts patriarchal law into the office space as his invested legal authority informs both the boundaries (that is, the constraints) and the freedoms that operate on the characters' immediate interaction. His physical presence or absence from a conversation profoundly influences what other men do and do not say to one another.

Amid this hierarchy of male authority, Mamet's men nonetheless exercise a range of verbal gymnastics within the dynamic of social dialogue. Act 2 is characterized by sustained reliance upon social dialogue, with two unique features of that dialogue— metatheatrical and metalinguistic—occurring midact. The characters' persistent engagement of social dialogue is an unusual quality in an office play, since most men in such settings eventually embrace personal dialogue as a response to the hierarchy of authority. What distinguishes *Glengarry* from most office plays, however, is the fact that the authority figures of Williamson and Baylen are mainly in an unseen room that adjoins the dramatic space in which the play's action develops.

When Moss leaves Baylen's interrogation room to join his colleagues in the main office space, the men's communication is anxious and resistant to personal interaction. Not one wants to speak truthfully. Each valiantly strives to protect himself from exposure, as each has something to hide from at least one of the remaining fellows: Levene knows he robbed the office; Moss knows he masterminded the robbery and secured Levene's help; Roma knows he wants a percentage of Levene's commissions; and Williamson knows that he left Lingk's contract on his desk. Confident in his private knowledge when among his co-workers, each man feels extremely powerful—particularly as he anticipates his ability to survive the immediate crisis in a personally satisfying manner. Both Levene and Moss believe that their robbery is a success; Roma trusts that he can bribe his boss when need be; and Williamson recognizes that by lying, he can generally get what information he needs from the others to guarantee his own authority. Each man presumes that he can exercise a power play over the other, that he can secure his domination over all others—if his secrets remain private. Very simply, each strives to keep the dialogue social and not personal.

Just as someone stole the leads from the office in order to become more powerful, so every character tries to "steal," to acquire, information from the other men. Characters aim to rob otherwise guarded knowledge from their co-workers, not only to secure more power over their colleagues,

but to reorder the chaos represented by the ransacked office. Language is the men's weapon of choice; social dialogue, their ammunition. Yet Mamet's men fail to recognize fully the pervasive impact of the most influential component of their social dialogue: the power of a masculine ethos that insists on the presence of hierarchical authority. All men cannot be all-powerful in a male-male context. In the absence of women, therefore, some men among men necessarily become "other," while some do not. Men who experience the loss of power automatically become objects. Here, within the realm of social dialogue, a man's identification as "other," as one who is differently masculine, occurs because he appears vulnerable, insubstantial, and ineffectual: in effect, he is relatively powerless in a world where male power is all.

One way in which "the Machine" Levene distinguishes himself from "other" men (and thereby hopes to secure power over them) is through metatheatrics. In a mock performative voice, Levene plays out before some of his office mates the conversation of his property sale to the Nyborgs. Through his performance he illustrates the good "*old* ways" of selling real estate (72). He demonstrates the language skills and techniques that his protégé, Roma, undoubtedly called upon during his hard sell to Lingk in act 1. Levene's business talk, his social dialogue, materializes through language, and not just action, the philosophy of "always be closing." Through aggressive association between the values of the masculine ethos and the Nyborg's presumed desire for ownership, Levene uses language to manipulate his leads. "Believe in your*self*" (67), Levene tells Bruce and Harriett, as he encourages them to grab his real estate offer as a real opportunity for personal empowerment. According to Levene, there is no reason for any Nyborg who lives in a prosperous land driven by traditional male values to believe that "this one has so-and-so, and I have nothing" (68). "What we have to do is *admit* to ourself that we see that opportunity," Levene coaxes, "and *take* it" (72).

Levene's enactment of the couple's purchase, which is based essentially in social dialogue, occurs simultaneously with Moss's hard-nosed social dialogue about the realities of business—the loss of jobs for those who fail to top Levene's apparent success. Mamet creates dramatic tension between the two speakers' distinct uses of this level of interaction: Levene's self-centered metatheatricality (which calls for role-playing) and Moss's attempts at a regular conversation that reject Levene's "fucking war stories" (67). On the narrative level, tension surfaces between Levene's mock-heroic story of successful selling and Moss's woes of failure at selling. On the level of conversational dynamics, Levene relies upon a variation of a stream-of-conscious monologue and playacting, while Moss encourages realized, interactive conversation (albeit prompted by his display of anger and anxiety).

It is ironic, however, that just as Levene assumes a character in his imaginary scenario with the Nyborgs, so Moss is possibly also role-playing in the "real" interaction with his colleagues. One cannot trust that Moss's angry words are justified; he is revealed later on, after all, to be the instigator of the robbery. Whether engaged in metatheatrical or actual social dialogue, therefore, Mamet's men play at talking. The only persistent connection among the men is their perpetual language usage—the fact that they continue to activate social dialogue with one another while in the same space. They move from coded languages decipherable to those within the (business) community (act 1) to self-absorbed diatribes constructed to obscure the truth (act 2).

Levene's inflated ego is deflated by Williamson's observation that a sale to the Nyborgs, who turn out to be perennial customers, may not materialize. Williamson's remark challenges Levene's skill and judgment as a salesman, as well as questions his capabilities, his credibility as a Man. But the Machine will not be derailed, as he equates his rejuvenated success with his male prowess: "A man's his job," he tells his younger boss, "and you're *fucked* at yours. . . . You don't have the *balls*" (75–76). Levene relies upon his track record as a salesman as the primary indicator of his manhood. He reminds Williamson that one's history changes one's fortunes of the future. To Levene, his identity, which was shaped by the "old ways" (72), the tried-and-true principles of the masculine ethos, has never really lost its potency, its ability to resurrect. "[T]hings can *change*," he tells his boss. "This is where you fuck *up* because this is something you don't *know*. You can't look down the *road*. And see what's *coming*. . . . It might be someone *new*. . . . And you can't look *back*. 'Cause you don't know *history*" (76). Levene's notion of change focuses only on the shift that can impact on a man's success at business—a shift that reveals the amount of power a man wields. It has nothing to do with a transformation in an individual's attitude or behavior toward self-improvement. Furthermore, while social privilege may certainly give immediate gratification to men as it marginalizes women and "other" males, it is, in fact, a cultural system that thrives on the bankruptcy of men's self-identification.

What Levene does not know is that Williamson represents a new generation of men not so unlike his own. While they may refuse to link success and survival with any historical, "factual" personal achievements, they rely upon the power of stable gender codings, the culture's historically grounded positioning of their social privileges as males. Williamson, like many men before him, believes that he has the right to activate any powers to which he has access. He considers this act his privilege as a man within American

society. Such efforts of his do not require the achievement of any desired end; rather, the end and the means are one and the same: his goal is the sheer execution of male power.

The key scene in act 2 occurs after Williamson leaves the conversation with his employees to return to the interrogation room. Alone in the outer office, Levene and Roma are interrupted unexpectedly by Lingk. Anticipating that any conversation with Lingk may spell trouble for the closure of their real estate deal, Roma instantly creates another metatheatrical scenario to divert attention. The speed and precision with which Roma directs his partner Levene into action clearly indicates that these guys are old pros at playacting their way out of personal confrontations: "You're a client. I just sold you five waterfront Glengarry Farms," Roma hastily instructs Levene. "I rub my head, throw me the cue Kenilworth'" (78). Roma and Levene know only too well how to read the signs of potential conflict within their business; Lingk, indeed, has come to talk to Roma about his backing out of the sale.

The social dialogue in this scene is complex. The three men converse on topics supported by the thematic of the masculine ethos and myths, while assuming a variety of speaking positions not necessarily representative of their own voices. Each man takes on a voice that is, in effect, outside of himself. In so doing, each assumes that he can get what he wants only by using a voice other than his own, one not inside himself. Roma and Levene speak from their metatheatrical positions as, respectively, wheeling-and-dealing salesman and wealthy, satisfied customer. Lingk, on the other hand, sporadically interrupts them through metalinguistic intrusions: "I've got to talk with you" (78, 81). Once the very nervous, self-conscious Lingk does talk, he only reports on his wife's legal efforts to back out of the deal. Much is then made between Lingk and Roma about when they will talk about her actions. Eventually, Lingk can assert his presence before the domineering Roma only by adopting his wife's voice, the authority of the absent woman. "It's not me, it's my wife," Lingk claims. "She wants her money back. . . . She told me 'right now.' . . . She told me I *have* to. . . . I can't negotiate" (89–91). The male-cast play often dramatizes the absent woman's power by presenting her transformation into, or her "becoming," the voice of a present male who struggles to assert his own personal voice. This is certainly one way in which "the gender confusion" of Mamet's men, "while not complicated by the physical presence of women," as McDonough points out, "is constantly evoked in language" (204).

The presence of Jinny's voice in Lingk's dialogue disrupts the fictional dialogue of the other men. It is the only authentic voice to be heard; the men, including Lingk (if using his own voice), wish only to obscure the truth. The absent woman's words, however, penetrate the social dialogue and, in effect, demand to be heard, redirecting the conversation away from Roma and Levene's fantastic performance. Yet while Jinny's opinions are spoken by her husband, another new, dynamic topic is added to the men's discourse coherence: the absent woman, herself. She inserts her presence into the men's dialogue, therefore, not only through a character's reiteration of her words but also through the characters' discussion of her role. In *Glengarry,* the topic of the absent woman diminishes the metatheatrical and metalinguistic dimension of the men's social dialogue. Roma knows that he must defeat the power of the absent woman if he is to win over Lingk. As Hersh Zeifman observes, Jinny is the "'missing link' whose values could destroy Roma's very existence" (132). Predictably, manly Roma instructs the now wavering Lingk: "That's just something she 'said.' We don't have to do that" (90). "Jim, anything you *want,* you *want* it, you *have* it. You understand? This is *me,*" the role-playing Roma confides, as he positions himself as someone from the *"outside"* who, through "talk" (91), can put Lingk in touch with the powers of the masculine ethos—those collective, mythic powers that can finally subordinate the power of the internalized absent woman.

Another provocative and complicated level of social dialogue also disrupts the communication when Aaronow returns to the main office after being interrogated by Baylen.[4] "No one should talk to a man that way. How are you *talking* to me" (87), the anxious, paranoid salesman pleads after his session with the police. With no knowledge of the situation he is walking into, Aaronow tries to establish actual conversation. He is desperate to create a dialogue that respects how he imagines men are supposed to talk, a dialogue in which each man, because he is a man, has access to power, to some integrity and courtesy through talk. Aaronow's efforts, however, serve only to comment on the failures of the metatheatrical dialogue between Roma and Lingk, which Williamson loosely calls *"business"* (88). Aaronow unknowingly mimics Lingk in the Roma-Levene-Lingk interaction as he inquires, "Is anybody listening to me . . . ?" (87). Aaronow, like Lingk, struggles to be heard among men as well as to be respected as a man among men. But he fails to engage the other men in either social dialogue or, what he most desires, personal dialogue. The salesman departs for the restaurant, frustrated and humiliated.

Aaronow, using his own voice, fails to capture the attention of his colleagues, and Lingk secures their concentration only when he speaks in the voice of the absent woman. In telling Roma that he cannot negotiate any deal, Lingk moves their dialogue back to a metalinguistic level. Lingk's

response to the demanding Roma—"I don't have the *power*" (92)—is an astounding admission for a (white) male character to make. He means that he does not have the power to negotiate the real estate deal, but he reveals a more engrossing, powerless state that many characters experience in the male-cast canon but are afraid to articulate. Male characters are repeatedly presented as not trusting one another and therefore refusing to be vulnerable and truthful in one another's company.

Men feel powerless to create such moments of truth because in doing so they lose the power to control the listener's response to their openness. Partially for these reasons, Lingk chooses to hide behind the words of his wife rather than to speak personally to Roma. Lingk consciously resists Roma's efforts to get closer to him through conversation. Although Lingk is clearly drawn to the male bonding that Roma seductively offers him, he is driven by the more familiar demands of the absent woman. But Roma's loyalty to Lingk as a trusted listener is specious at best. "I can't talk to you, *you* met my wife," Lingk asserts (92), as he consciously pits a man's Man, Roma, against the absent woman, Jinny. Lingk essentially steps outside the battle as he lets these two powerful figures battle over the definition of his manhood—as well as over the possession of his money.

True to male characters throughout the male-cast canon who want to break down other men's conversational barriers, Roma offers several times to take Lingk out for a drink. Lingk responds, "She told me not to talk to you" (93). Getting nowhere with the customer, who is now the full-blown Jinny surrogate, Roma tries to appeal to Lingk's ego through another self-empowering monologue that recalls his original sales pitch to Lingk in act 1. "Let's talk about *you,*" Roma contends, "Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife. You have certain things you do jointly . . . and there are *other* things. . . . This is your life." Once again, Roma appeals to the powers of the masculine ethos, male privilege, and male bonding and naming as a means by which Lingk can overcome the influence of the Other. Roma believes that by appealing to Lingk's sense of manhood, appearing to bond with him in this battle against the Other, he can sell real estate. In a blatant violation of human intimacy, Roma adopts a pseudotherapeutic voice to exploit Lingk's personal life. His motives for encouraging Lingk's personal dialogue are entirely self-serving. Like Levene, Roma has no scruples when it comes to "selling something they don't even *want*" (77). A salesman, after all, must "always be closing." Roma has almost succeeded in getting Lingk to go for that crucial drink when Williamson remarks that Lingk's check has already been cashed. This admission, to Lingk, means two things: he has failed to meet his wife's demands and Roma has lied to him

by saying that Lingk had time to cancel the deal and the check.

His loyalties torn between the omnipotent figures in his life, Jinny and Roma, Lingk makes a hasty exit from the real estate office. "Oh, Christ . . . Oh Christ. I know I've let you down," Lingk tells Roma. "I'm sorry. For . . . Forgive . . . for . . . I don't know anymore. *(Pause.)* Forgive me" (95). Lingk's final words recall the closing moments in Mamet's *Edmond* as well as Albee's *The Zoo Story* in their metaphysical evocations. Unlike Albee's Jerry, who finds some connection with Peter by the end of their tragic interaction, Lingk feels no lasting "link" with Roma. Lingk has no awareness of powers within himself that can give him direction, insight, and a sense of individualization. He repeatedly turns to those outside of himself to define himself, both externally and internally. In confessing to Roma that he has let him down, Lingk reveals his delusion that Roma actually cares personally for him; conversely, it reveals Roma's success at playacting. But Lingk is also admitting that he has failed to live up to the expectations of a "real" man within the male power structure. He has let down the male ethos, neither enacting nor professing his power over the Other. For all intents and purposes, Lingk is emasculated by Jinny (or so he thinks), prompting him to seek out Roma's camaraderie.

In the final scene of act 2, the men return to social dialogue as actual, realistic conversation. The code of their linguistic interaction, determined by the masculine ethos, is rendered in familiar terms and without role-playing. In no uncertain words, Roma and Levene chide Williamson for contradicting Roma's story to Lingk. "Whoever told you you could work with *men?*" (96), Roma bitterly challenges his boss. Williamson is guilty of breaking the vital code of businessmen's ethics—that of which the "old stuff" is made: "A man who's your 'partner' *depends* on you. . . . You have to go *with* him and *for* him . . . or you're a shit, you're *shit,* you can't exist alone" (98). The credo for any man, according to the salesmen, is to accept that he is in a partnership with other (straight) men, a relationship that may require him to lie about, to be silent about, but most certainly to agree about anything that will help maintain their power position in the "business" of living in America. This strategy has nothing to do with the solidification of self-disclosing, personal relationships. It is purely a survival tactic, based upon a bonding of male ideology, which ensures men's economic power.

But it is Roma who is most cruel as he angrily releases a litany of abusive epithets that clearly align Williamson with the "other," those marginalized in American society over whom the (white) straight male wields cultural power. For breaking the male code, Williamson is a "fucking shit," "asshole," and "idiot"—all of which warrant his being named a "stupid

fucking cunt," a "fairy," and a "fucking child" (96, 97). To align him with women, homosexuals, and children is, according to Roma, the worst humiliation for a (white) male. If a man is not working *for* men, then he must necessarily be working *against* them, siding with the Other.[5] Roma reminds Levene that their survival—as businessmen and implicitly as white men—is in jeopardy: "We are members of a dying breed. That's . . . that's . . . that's why we have to stick together" (105).

In the end, however, the "child" solves the mystery of the office robbery. During his tirade against Williamson, Levene reveals his knowledge of Williamson's trick on Roma—that Lingk's contract was not submitted. The boss notes that Levene could know this detail only by having been in his office the previous evening. Levene is exposed as the robber; he hangs himself with his own words. In Mamet's world of men, thieves and salesmen are one and the same. They are all perpetrators of the corrupted American frontier ethic of exploitation in the name of economic gain. And right up to the end, Levene hopes to bribe Williamson not to turn him in to the police. As with his previous efforts, Levene knows that he can succeed with Williamson only if the ante is high enough; his only recourse is to draw from his recent sale to the Nyborgs. This time, however, the boss humiliates his employee by pointing out that Levene is still a loser: the Nyborgs are "insane," their checks are worthless. Like the old system of which he used to be an integral part, Levene is broken down, corrupt, obsolete, and pathetic.

Several new faces on the old system, nonetheless, appear to be existing without diminished authority at the conclusion of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Collectively, as the recast voice of the masculine ethos in "a world of men" (105), they represent the first of two conflicting, though surviving, ideologies in the play. This male voice is manifested differently, however, in the dialogue and presence of three characters: Roma, Williamson, and Baylen. Their voices diverge in respect to their position on patriarchal law; they converge in their attitudes toward the masculine ethos.

Embodying a classic (white) everyman, Roma presumes that the patriarchal system should bend to his immediate needs. This, he believes, is his rightful privilege as a male. While he unabashedly lives outside the law (consider his final directive to Williamson that he expects to claim half of Levene's commissions [107]), Roma still commits himself to the masculine ethos and its myths of masculine power. The boss also lives inside masculine privilege but outside legal law. He, too, likes to play with power. But unlike Roma, Williamson has the entitlement of position to protect his authority. Both men survive in Mamet's impersonal world because each is committed to and skilled at manipulating the powers of the masculine ethos. Each

knows how to exploit other men in order not to become one of the "other" men.

As a police detective, Baylen represents the uncorrupted authority of patriarchal law. Unlike Roma and Williamson, Baylen lives inside the law and inside the masculine ethos. This combination assures him privilege, security, and power, his for keeping in the American system. His presence affirms that a secular order, one defined in patriarchal terms, exists to dispel chaos. Yet, only one other voice in the play completely embraces the legal law that Baylen courts—and it is not another male.

The voice of Jinny Lingk, the absent woman, is the second distinct ideology to survive in *Glengarry*. Although she has a different relationship to patriarchal law than Baylen, she relies upon that law to protect her rights: she contacts the district attorney's office for protection in her case against Roma. In this instance, Jinny lives inside the patriarchal law and it empowers her. However, Jinny obviously lives outside the male ethos. She does not have access to the same cultural privileges that men enjoy in the patriarchy. But this social imbalance of power does not weaken Jinny when confronted with the male ego. Through her husband's mouth, Jinny challenges the wisdom, the integrity, and the actual and the mythic value of the masculine ethos. She insists that her subject position be heard, or as David Worster notes, she "possesses the power to negotiate" (387). In denying Roma all that he wants, including conversation with Lingk, Jinny's voice disempowers the classic everyman. She effectively resists the power play of the masculine ethos by turning its own premises and authority against itself. By simply saying no to Roma through Lingk, she gives voice—and power—to all "others" whom Roma and fellow advocates of the masculine ethos have dominated and silenced.

As these two surviving, clashing voices move toward the center of Mamet's text, the spectator's last sight is Aaronow, sitting at his desk, alone in the destroyed real estate office. His final admission is filled with raw truth: "Oh, God, I hate this job" (108). His words signal the death of the salesman, capturing the defeated man's pathetic awareness that things in life should be better than they are. As Jack Barbera notes about Mamet's plays, "Notions of the American way—democracy and free enterprise—become corrupted when they enter the look-out-for-number-one rationalizations of crooks and unethical businessmen" (275). Aaronow struggles to understand the all-pervasive corruption in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a "moral play," according to Benedict Nightingale, "not a moralizing one" (1984, 5). The play "seeks to 'tell the truth' about the usually invisible violence men inflict on themselves and each other as they grab for gold."

In Mamet's dramatic worlds, characters are challenged to take moral responsibility for men's corruption. Aaronow seems to know that someone needs to create order out of the chaos. Matthew Roudané suggests the importance of Aaronow's "semblance of moral seriousness" (44). Mamet himself comments,

> Aaronow has some degree of conscience, some awareness; he's troubled. Corruption troubles him. The question he's troubled by is whether his inability to succeed in the society in which he's placed is a defect—that is, is he manly or sharp enough?—or if it's, in effect, a positive attribute, which is to say that his conscience prohibits him. So Aaronow is left between these two things and he's incapable of choosing. This dilemma is, I think, what many of us are facing in this country right now. (1986, 75)

Aaronow knows that in a "world of men" it simply is not enough for law enforcement to police the public's actions. Such authority, according to Aaronow, does not always know the proper way "to talk . . . to a working man" (88). But Aaronow has no idea how to use his gender privilege to his advantage; he has no sense as to how, when, or where to use this culturally coded power to help to understand it any better. On the other hand, he has no idea of the power that he can unleash through his freedom of choice: he can choose to live—to speak—as a differently masculine man outside the definitions of the masculine ethos.[6] Like Jinny Lingk, Aaronow is aware that life should be better for those who choose not to break the law. But unlike the absent woman, Aaronow cannot envision a new kind of power, which is flourishing within his grasp, if he only explores his profound discontent with the values of the masculine ethos. Such a vision would necessarily signal the dismantlement of the gender-coded system, and Aaronow fails to envision the potential powers of the "other." His lack of imagination appears to "always be closing" his mind and heart. He also has no voice of an absent woman to listen to; he has no idea of the powers of individualization that reside in her voice. As McDonough astutely argues, Mamet's men resist the "discovery of new identities that would release them from a stance which is antagonist to the female without as well as to the feminine within them" (205). Mamet's own experience complements McDonough's vision: "Men *generally* expect more of women than we do of ourselves. We feel, based on constant evidence, that women are better, stronger, more truthful, than men. You can call this sexism, or reverse sexism, or whatever you wish, but it is my experience" (1989b, 24).

Despite his inability to become a different kind of subject, Aaronow resists immersion in the institution, in the corrupted manifestations of the masculine ethos. The hapless salesman signals some hope for personal change simply in his passionate urge to understand what is going on around him and thereby to understand his deeper rage. In *Glengarry,* Mamet dramatizes the institutional oppression generated by social constructions of gender. He masterfully displays through Aaronow an American man's often contradictory struggle to realize and to claim his individuality among men. This struggle exists for all men who, consciously or unconsciously, yearn for the authenticity of self-identity. All male characters confront the overwhelming context of the American masculine ethos and its male mythologies on their journey to individualization and self-identity. Yes, *Glengarry* is an indictment of the horrors of capitalism and corrupt business. But men among themselves sustain these structures. The degree to which men are victims and victimizers, as dramatized by Mamet, is debatable. Less debatable is the poignancy of his morality play about the lives of the many men in whom human feeling is absent.

Notes

1. For recent exceptions to this critical trend see the analyses of *Glengarry* by Carla McDonough; David Worster; Hersh Zeifman. While providing an otherwise very useful analysis of *Glengarry* and *American Buffalo,* Jeanette Malkin, by shadowing the trend, neglects to make explicit the connection among the gender features of her own observations: The social ethos she cites operating in the plays is a masculine ethos; the debased verbal existence is men's verbal interaction; the world of business manipulation is a "male" world; and the distortion of friendship occurs in male friendship. Like many critics, Malkin chooses not to draw attention to the feature of gender that, perhaps, most significantly determines the plays' action and the characters' dialogue: *Glengarry* and *American Buffalo* focus only on men among themselves.

2. See Zeifman for a gendered reading of "Always be closing" (132). Although Zeifman rightly cites the significance of Jinny Lingk to the action in *Glengarry,* he underestimates the profound, practical influence that absent women in both *Glengarry* and *American Buffalo* have upon onstage dialogue and actions, as well as the presence of the feminine in some men's words and deeds. The absent woman, therefore, has more than "metaphorical import" (133) in Mamet's all-male setting. Analysis of discourse coherence is one method that reveals the absent woman's considerable impact on the plays' form and content.

3. Moss's response to Aaronow is, according to Anne Dean, "the ultimate betrayal of the trust implied in ordinary conversation; Aaronow is designated as a criminal simply because he 'listened'" (201).

4. This is comparable to the moment in act 2, previously discussed, when Moss, who desires actual conversation, interrupts Levene's performance.

5. This sexist, homophobic, ageist attitude is not unlike the racist, sexist, and homophobic stance of the bigoted Coach in Jason Miller's *That Championship Season.* Coach, the quintessential white extremist, warns his former team of white basketball players to beware of "niggers," "kikes," "Jews," "queers," "commies," and "bitches." "We are the country, boys, never forget that, never. . . . But no dissension.

We stick together" (18). See also Worster's recent, insightful comments on Roma's "pejoratives" (389); the critic's remarks were published after *Act Like a Man,* from which this essay is a revised reprint, had already gone to press.

6. For this reason, Worster's identification of Aaronow's silence as a "kind of power" (385–86) is arguable if the action (and the play) is positioned within the rigidly coded semiotic system of male-cast plays. At the very least, Worster's observation is paradoxical, finally, since the voiceless salesman (that is, one without authority) neither disrupts the gender-coded actions of his colleagues nor ruptures the semiotic of maleness that controls the construction of Mamet's dialogue. Aaronow's silence neither redirects nor imagines differently the communication dynamics between men. Rather, it is a coded feature of character behavior in male-cast plays based upon established speaker-listener dynamics, reflected here in Aaronow's previous "roles" in talk exchanges. His silence (which, in effect, is Mamet's silence), is a confirmation of Aaronow's relative powerlessness when he is among men. If his silence, as Worster suggests, is "action and power" (and to/for whom?), it goes unnoticed for good reasons: Aaronow exists in a heavily coded semiotic world of maleness where "other" male voices are, out of necessity, inactive (that is, silent) and powerless.

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