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Bachelor of Arts
Millsaps College
1990

Master of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1995

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2001

UMI Number: 3049556

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UNLV

Dissertation Approval
The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

OCT. 15, 2001

The Dissertation prepared by

JEFFREY OTTO STRASBURG

Entitled

"THE ONLY WAY TO TEACH THESE PEOPLE IS TO KILL THEM": PEDAGOGY AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION IN THE MAJOR PLAYS OF DAVID MAMET

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

PH.D.

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PR 1017-52/1-00

ABSTRACT

"The Only Way to Teach These People is to Kill Them": Pedagogy as Communicative Action in the Major Plays of David Mamet

by

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The mentor-student relationship is a recurring motif in the work of playwright David Mamet. Mamet's portrayal of this relationship demonstrates a conception of human interaction in ways that closely parallel Jürgen Habermas's theory of "communicative action." Habermas posits his theory as a decentered method of examining human subjects' attempts to establish intersubjective claims of validity with other subjects through the media of communication and argumentation. Within this concept, Habermas defines the "Ideal Speech Situation" (ISS), or rational discourse free of any relations of domination aimed at creating an intersubjective recognition of validity between two speaking subjects: Mamet's own conception of community parallel's Habermas's ideal. The playwright's characters disrupt possibilities for ideal communication in large part through the invocation of the role of mentor, a position understood as one of superiority within the lifeworld of Mamet's characters.

Mamet's social context also reflects Paulo Freire's "banking concept of education": Freire's theory provides a versatile heuristic in which to frame these "educational" relationships for Habermasian analysis. The following plays serve as primary material for this dissertation: Sexual Perversity in Chicago, American Buffalo, A Life in the Theatre, Glengarry Glen Ross, Speed-the-Plow, Oleanna, and The Cryptogram. In addition, secondary materials such as Mamet's minor plays, sceenplays, fiction writing and essays serve to contextualize the major works and illustrate the broad scope of this motif.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> When we deviate from first principles we communicate to the audience a lesson in cowardice. This lesson is of as great a magnitude as our subversion of the Constitution by involvement in Vietnam, in Ford's pardon of Nixon, in the persecution of the Rosenbergs, in the reinstatement of the death penalty. They are all lessons in cowardice, and each begets cowardice.
>
> Alternatively, the theater affords an opportunity uniquely suited for communicating and inspiring ethical behavior: the audience is given the possibility of seeing live people onstage carrying out an action based on first principles (these principles being the objectives of the play's protagonists) and carrying this action to its full conclusion. (WR 26)

This passage from David Mamet's essay "First Principles" provides a provocative addendum to his repeated paraphrasing of Stanislavsky's dictum that the "purpose of the theater, ... is to bring to light the life of the human soul ..." (WR 68). The notion that theater has the power to "communicate" and "inspire" point to an essential element of

Mamet's dramaturgy: that, despite the author's disdain for "didactic" theater, Mamet's plays can be characterized as both "pedagogical" and "communicative": analyzing them in such contexts provides meaningful insight into the playwright's vision of both his own relationship to his audience and the consistency with which Mamet chooses to portray relationships predicated on the model of the teacher and student.

Many scholars of Mamet's work may contend that such characterizations conflict with numerous statements the author has made concerning his own work and his vision of theater. But most scholars have noted the mentor-student motif in Mamet's work as one of many recurring concerns. Few have given this relationship the close scrutiny that it deserves, for it is the very foundation of the stories Mamet presents on the stage.

I have chosen the word "pedagogical" very carefully, for I do not contend that Mamet casts himself in the role of "teacher," which would conflict with his characterization of himself as an artist and storyteller. As the passage above illustrates, though, Mamet expects his audiences to "learn" from his plays. To clarify the distinction between Mamet's plays and those that present themselves as "instructive," or perhaps even "prescriptive," it is necessary to define "pedagogy" as it applies to Mamet's major plays. The late Brazilian educator/activist Paulo Freire provides the most useful definition for my purposes.

In his landmark study Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire carefully demarcates the differences between "education" as commonly understood in late capitalist societies and "pedagogy," which he sees as the path of liberation for those oppressed by capitalism's inherent conflict with the liberal ideas of individual freedom and equality. Freire claims that education, as an institution, derives its authority from the capitalist-worker model:

thus, he coins the phrase "banking concept of education" to describe the relationship between teacher and student within this ideological framework:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits...
>
> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence — but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher. (Pedagogy 53)

Freire's characterization of the power relationship that has been normalized in capitalist culture parallels the relationship of the capitalist/employer to his/her workers with that between teacher and student; the employer's ownership of capital is privileged and the workers' contribution of labor is diminished. His analysis is an apt model for the

relationship of "teachers" and "students" in Mamet's plays. Throughout the Mamet canon of plays, screen- and teleplays and fiction, an audience recognizes a constant exercise of power on the part of certain characters through the adoption of the role of teacher/mentor. Sexual Perversity in Chicago's Bernard Litko and American Buffalo's Teach spring to mind as characters who assume positions of authority by co-opting educational discourse. In a much less ruthless vein, A Life in the Theatre's Robert also positions himself as an authority by reproducing the discursive model of the "banking" educator. The success or failure of such efforts depends largely on the teacher's ability to adapt to the circumstances of his student: Bernie, while exposed as a fraud in the course of Sexual Perversity, ultimately succeeds in "molding" Dan into his vision of a "man." Teach and Robert, despite their employment of tactics similar to Bernie's, fail in their efforts to solidify their authority within their given social contexts.

In considering teaching and its eventual outcome as the through-line of each of Mamet's plays, we discover reflections of several of the author's theoretical positions on the nature of drama and its purpose within late 20th-century American culture. Frequently taking his cues from Stanislavsky as well as one of his own teachers, Sanford Meisner, Mamet has consistently asserted in both essays and interviews that the "action" of drama consists of the protagonist(s) attempts to achieve a goal s/he has set for him/herself, and how this goal influences the choices s/he makes, particularly in relationships with other characters. Teaching, with its implications of a specific relationship based on the presence/absence of knowledge, is useful, a manipulation of the linguistic medium in service of goal-directed action. Pascale Hubert-Leibler notes that "the character assuming the role of the teacher exercises the prerogatives of questioning, testing, and

punishing, while the student has to submit to his probing and accept his decisions. In other words, it becomes apparent that the teacher-student relationship is first and foremost a power relationship" (558). Hubert-Leibler's convincing assessment of teaching as an exercise of power allows her to pursue an explication of this central motif in Mamet's plays, based in definitions provided by Barthes and Foucault, but her interpretive heuristic largely ignores the fundamentally linguistic nature of these exercises. Mamet's teachers can and do attempt to exert power, but that power is mediated through language. Only a careful explication of the constitutive elements of the linguistic machinations of Mamet's mentors reveals fully and richly how these characters are able to assume positions of authority despite their status within the larger social system as "mediocrities, losers who generally occupy the lower echelons of American society" (Hubert-Leibler 561).

Freire notes that "careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" (Freire's emphasis, 52). The concept of a "narrating Subject" certainly applies to Mamet's teachers, as many of them construct a vision of "truth" for their students through the act of narration. For instance, Bernie's tales of sexual conquests with which he regales Dan serve to underscore his central attitude toward heterosexual relationships: that they exist at a level of base sexuality devoid of any emotional connections. The warrant underlying all of Bernie's assertions/narratives related to sexuality can be summed up in his proclamation "One: The Way to Get Laid is to Treat [women] Like Shit ... and Two: Nothing ... nothing makes you so attractive to the opposite sex as getting

your rocks off on a regular basis" (SP 22). In order to maintain his authority over Dan as a student, he must be able to establish the validity of his statement. For Bernie, as for many of Mamet's teachers, his narratives serve as the "reserve backing" for the truth claims he expects his student to accept as valid.

Phrases such as "reserve backing" and "validity claims" are shorthand for portions of an interpretive framework that provides revealing insights in regard to Mamet's teachers and in regard to Mamet as pedagogue: in short, Jürgen Habermas's conception of "communicative action" provides us a compelling heuristic. While Freire's analysis of structural assumptions underlying the mentor-student relationship in late capitalist culture provides a point of departure, Habermas's ideas allow the critic to further penetrate Mamet's dialogue, revealing cultural assumptions in the language of Mamet's characters and the network of interpretive patterns available to them as individuals, social entities, and beings interacting with an "objective" reality.

The notion of dialogue lies at the core of Habermas's magnus opus Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns (The Theory of Communicative Action), which provides the means to refine Freire's definition of pedagogy as a method for literary interpretation. For Freire pedagogy relies on "the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, [which is achieved] by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students"; similarly, Habermas proposes the model of communicative action as an idealized framework within which participants come to mutual understanding of a situation solely through the redemption of validity claims (53). This "idealized framework" provides the starting point for a project that separates Habermas from the poststructuralist norm of current Western philosophical/social thought: rather than settle

for a renunciation of the modernist program begun with the Enlightenment. Habermas, in the words of his translator Thomas McCarthy, attempts to engage in "an enlightened suspicion of enlightenment, a reasoned critique of Western rationalism, a careful reckoning of the profits and losses entailed by 'progress" (vii-viii). Such a critique requires a shift from the "philosophy of consciousness" rooted in "the Cartesian paradigm of the solitary thinker — solus ipse — as the proper, even unavoidable, framework for radical reflection on knowledge and morality" to "the paradigm of language — not to language as a syntactic or semantic system, but to language-in-use or speech" (McCarthy ix, xi). The critique of reason, thus, moves from a monological framework, an individual consciousness relating to the world around it, to a dialectical model: "If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication — and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement — then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality inherent in communicative action" (Habermas TCA I 39).

Habermas's "inherent rationality" depends on the concept of validity claims that speakers imply in attempting communication with one another. If a speaker and hearer are to come to an agreement through communication, both must foreground, in speech and reflection upon the dialogue, their relations to the external world of objects, the social world of normatively regulated interaction, and their own internal worlds. Corresponding to each of these "worlds" are the validity claims of truth, or an accurate reflection of the state of the external world, rightness, or compliance with acceptable norms of behavior, and truthfulness, or the sincerity of one's representation of his/her inner world. While

one world or type of validity claim will generally have prominence within a given utterance, all utterances which a speaker uses for the purpose of achieving intersubjective agreement must be validated by the hearer on all three levels. Habermas's model relies on the theory of "speech acts" as initially proposed by J.L. Austin, and expanded upon by John Searle.[1] Thus, this model for analyzing language as a means of coordinating action between participants in dialogue posits the correspondence between categories of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and expressive) with certain validity claims (truth, rightness, and truthfulness) which, in turn, correspond to the worlds of action within which speakers and hearers must act (objective, normative, and internal).[2] Habermas qualifies this model by noting that it represents the medium through which actors attempt to achieve intersubjectivity:

> ... the communicative model of action does not equate action with communication. Language is a medium of communication that serves understanding, whereas actors, in coming to an understanding with one another so as to coordinate their actions, pursue their particular aims. In this respect the teleological structure is fundamental to all concepts of action... In the case of communicative action the interpretive accomplishments on which cooperative processes of interpretations are based represent the mechanism for coordinating action; communicative action is not exhausted by the act of reaching understanding in an interpretive manner. If we take as our unit of analysis a simple speech act carried out by [a speaker], to which at least one participant in interaction can take up a "yes" or "no" position, we can clarify the conditions for the

> communicative coordination of action by stating what it means for a hearer to understand what is said. But communicative action designates a type of interaction that is coordinated through speech acts and does not coincide with them. (Habermas's emphasis. TCA I 101).

In offering his alternative to previous models of action theory, Habermas clearly delineates communicative action as an idealized framework through which real-life observations of human interaction can be measured (TCA I 328-31).[3] At the same time, though, this ideal posits an alternative role for the observer/interpreter of action in its everyday contexts. If an observer agrees that the communicative model offers the best possibilities for accurately interpreting social behavior, than s/he must also accept the role of "virtual participant" in the observed action:

> In order to understand an utterance in the paradigm case of a speech act oriented to reaching understanding, the interpreter has to be familiar with the conditions of its validity; he has to know under what conditions the validity claim linked with it is acceptable or would have to be acknowledged by the hearer. But where could the interpreter obtain this knowledge if not from the context of the observed communication or from comparable contexts? ... Thus the interpreter cannot become clear about the semantic content of an expression independently of the action contexts in which participants react to the expression with a "yes" or "no" or an abstention. And he does not understand these yes/no positions if he cannot make clear to himself the implicit reasons that move the participants to take the positions they do ... But if, in order to understand an expression,

> the interpreter must bring to mind the reasons with which a speaker would, if necessary and under suitable conditions, defend its validity, he is himself drawn into the process of assessing validity claims. For reasons are of such a nature that they cannot be described in the attitude of a third person ... One can understand reasons only to the extent that one understands why they are or are not sound. (Habermas TCA I 115-16; qtd. in McCarthy).

Habermas's ideas about the virtual participation of the observer in the communicative action observed make the heuristic particularly fruitful for drama. Though Habermas is not primarily a literary scholar, we can easily reframe his theory within a literary/theatrical context. As a student of theater practice, Lue M. Douthit attempts to apply the model of communicative action not only to a variety of texts, but also to the range of communicative relationship inherent in theatrical production: "On a literal level, there are at least four sets of actions occurring simultaneously: between characters, between actors, between actors and audience, between actor and character" (18). Approaching drama from a primarily literary standpoint, I'd like to suggest an alternative list of relationships the critic must consider and with which s/he must engage: author and audience (where the audience may either be readers or witnesses to a performance), text/performance and audience, and character to character. Given this list, one may conclude accurately that I view Habermasian theory, within a literary framework, as primarily a brand of reception theory. Habermas's own writings on literature suggest just such a stance. In his critique of Derrida's "leveling" of genre distinctions to a "universal context of texts," Habermas holds to the distinction between

everyday "normal" speech and "poetic" speech. Using the Prague Structuralists and Richard Ohman as points of reference, Habermas argues that literary language represents a uniquely derivative form of communicative action in that it serves primarily as a means of "world-disclosure." (Modernity 1197-98). This means that the illocutionary force of speech acts used in a fictional context is neutralized, and "Neutralizing their binding force releases the disempowered illocutionary acts from the pressure to decide proper to everyday communicative practice, removes them from the sphere of usual discourse, and thereby empowers them for the playful creation of new worlds — or, rather, for the pure demonstration of the world-disclosing force of innovative linguistic expression" (Modernity 1198). Thus, in a literary work, speech is represented as speech: the audience assumes the role of observer/virtual participant, and through observation of the context of action between characters engages in a critique of validity claims exchanged in dialogue. Through this participation, an audience can come to recognize the larger world contexts at work in a particular representation of interaction.

Habermas's theory, in short, both in its sociological and literary manifestations, provides an ideal foundation upon which to build a richly informative examination of Mamet's drama and, particularly, the mentor-student relationships contained within those works. If we accept the concept of the author's dialogue as "world-disclosive," we can begin to recognize the interconnectedness of Mamet's astute control of the linguistic medium and his concern with American social decay. The author's essays and interviews provide countless examples of how Mamet conceives of a play as a means of confronting his audience with a vision of contemporary life as lived out in social discourse. One of his most well-known statements on American Buffalo, for instance, illustrates the

author's recognition of that work's ability to reveal the ethical dilemmas underlying the characters' interaction with one another:

> The play is about the American ethic of business. .. About how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business. ... There's really no difference between the lumpenproletariat and stockbrokers or corporate lawyers who are the lackeys of business. ... Part of the American myth is that a difference exists, that at a certain point vicious behavior becomes laudable. (Gottlieb 4)

In this statement, Mamet points to the myths underlying the verbal interaction of Don, Teach, and Bobby; their interaction through the linguistic medium allows the audience to infer the larger social world within which these characters operate and the rules that govern their interaction. By describing the myths of America that reinforce speech and behavior within his plays, Mamet essentially posits a shared realm of interaction and interpretation similar to Habermas's concept of the "lifeworld."

> In its broadest sense, Habermas defines lifeworld as a formation of:
>
> ... more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This lifeworld background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic. In their interpretive accomplishments the members of a communication community demarcate the one objective world and their intersubjectively shared social world from the subjective worlds of individuals and (other) collectives. The world-concepts and the corresponding validity claims provide the formal scaffolding with which those acting communicatively order problematic

contexts of situations, that is, those requiring agreement, in their lifeworld, which is presupposed as unproblematic. (TCA I 70)

In arriving at this preliminary definition of lifeworld, Habermas depends on a complex expansion of Marx's dialectical concept of history. In Habermas's theory, Western society evolved not simply as a process of economic struggles and advances, but rather through the attainment of advancing levels of rationality potential. These levels of potential made possible the problematization of hitherto unproblematized beliefs and values. Habermas bases this argument on an extension of Max Weber's concept of secularization of religious belief, and he also relies on Piaget's theories of human development as a fitting parallel for his own concept of societal evolution. As ideas previously contained within the lifeworld came under scrutiny, Western society evolved into a complex array of communicatively structured spheres of action. With the gradual removal of accepted background beliefs, communicative action became more important as a means to reach consensus within a given social grouping.

While an increase in rationality potential made possible great strides in understanding and manipulating the natural world in the form of scientific and technological progress, that progress came at some considerable costs. Habermas begins his assessment of the price paid for Enlightenment by critiquing Weber's thesis of the loss of meaning and freedom associated with the increase in societal complexity brought about through rationalization (or, in Weber's terms, the "secularization of the sacred"). Habermas's thesis concerning the emergence of differentiated systems of social action is considerably different in that such development increasingly diminishes the lifeworld. But the subtitle of the second volume of The Theory of Communicative Action,

Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason, points to an agreement with Weber's premise that Western rationalization has included the institutionalization of goal-directed action and purposive rationality at the expense of moral and aesthetic reason. Essentially, these latter forms of reason have been subsumed under the former as an "ends justifying the means" form of rationalization that has progressively increased its hold on Western thought. Thus, the implementation of rationality potential has led to a loss of community based on (1) unproblematized interpretations based in the lifeworld, and (2) communicatively structured consensus. As a result of this process of institutionalizing purposive rationality, communicative practice has become corrupted: "steering media" such as money and power have replaced communicative practice in the establishment of the capitalist economic model and the political model of the modern state. When communicative action is undertaken, it more often than not reveals a colonization of the modern lifeworld by the imperatives of money and power, and communicative actors, in attempting to further their own interests, can assert concepts such as influence and/or value commitment in order to advance their goals:

> In exerting influence or mobilizing engagement, the coordination of action has to be brought about by means of the same resources familiar from first-order processes of consensus formation in language. The "security base" is a shared cultural background or inculcated value orientations and behavioral controls; the "intrinsic satisfiers" are grounds for justifications in which convictions or obligations are rooted. Influential persons or persons with moral authority at their disposal claim the competence of "initiates," of experts in matters of knowledge or of morality. For this

> reason they can make use of the mechanism of reaching understanding at a higher level: that which counts as backing in communicative action — the potential reasons with which ego could, if necessary, defend his validity claim against alter's criticisms — assumes the status of the "real value" in interaction steered via influence and moral authority, whereas the "security base" gets pushed into the cultural and socializing background.
> (Habermas's emphasis, TCA II 276)

In Habermas's conception, the actor who can communicatively achieve a position of influence or moral authority also can assert that his/her utterances are unproblematic because of his/her position. Here we see a parallel to Freire's concept of the banking educator who, through asserting the authority inscribed in the label "teacher" may assume a position of superiority over his/her students. And these parallel frameworks allow us more fully to understand the roles Mamet's teachers play within the worlds of his plays. Hubert-Leibler's characterization of teaching in Mamet's plays as an exercise of power provides a fruitful starting point; however, the presence of power within the world-disclosive force of dialogue between teachers and students requires further explication of how Mamet's teachers can manipulate speech to achieve dominance over others. Craig Stuart Walker notes that Oleanna, as well as Ionesco's The Lesson and Walker's The Prince of Naples all:

> [use] the teacher-student relationship to address tensions that seem to be assailing the culture as a whole, the pedagogical relationships standing as a model of the exchange of cultural principles among individuals and social groups. The deeper concerns involved here, then, have to do with

> anxieties surrounding the paths by which civilization perpetuates itself and with the perceived disruptions, dislocations, or distortions of cultural continuity. (150-51)

These "deeper concerns," however, are not limited in Mamet's oeuvre to the relationship of literal teacher and student, but emerge in the "meta-teaching" relationships between characters ranging across a vast spectrum, from Richard Roma to Bernie Litko to Robert, the older actor to Sir Robert Morton in The Winslow Boy. At the core of all these relationships is the desire to exert authority over another human being; but equally important to our judgment of these characters is the hollowness of the lessons they typically teach. These lessons, like Teach's conception of free enterprise, Bernie's ideas of sexual relationships, or Fox's and Karen's competing notions of what makes a "good" film, all point to a lifeworld colonized by the imperatives of money and power: in Mamet's dramatic environs, concepts such as exchange, profit, and exploitation remain largely unproblematic in the interrelationships of his characters. One of the most provocative interpretations of Mamet's teachers comes from actor Colin Stinton, a regular in Mamet's British productions, in his interview with Anne Dean:

> The Teach-like character — in both the sense of Teach in American Buffalo and in the instructor sense of the phrase — is one which recurs ... in Mamet's work. He is a man who pretends to know something of importance when, more often than not, he knows very little. What he does not know, he makes up ... this is usually a great deal ... Mamet's characters are all trying to assert who they are, continually trying to identify

> themselves and, in so doing, part of the theory behind the Teach-mentality is revealed. Their thoughts run along the following lines: if I can teach knowledge, therefore it must be true. If it can be passed along, therefore it must exist. I teach therefore I am! The imparting of knowledge, true or false, gives some sense of substantiality to their lives. By adopting the role of instructor, they give themselves status and importance which at least lasts as long as they "teach." (qtd. in Dean 106-07)

This "sense of substantiality" gains more resonance as we consider Mamet's characters in an intersubjective context. Through acts of teaching, Mamet's mentors not only convince themselves of their own self-worth, but also, through communicative practice, attempt to establish this relationship to self through creating agreement on the issue with at least one other character. More importantly, these attempts at communicative coercion point to the debased nature of intersubjectivity in the worlds of Mamet's plays; to again borrow from Habermas, Mamet's teachers and students reveal to the audience the pathological nature of contemporary human interaction caused by conflicting imperatives of social and systemic reproduction. The dislocations of cultural continuity to which Walker points parallels the Habermasian conception of disturbances in reproduction processes, or pathologies:

> The cultural reproduction of the lifeworld ensures that newly arising situations are connected up with existing conditions in the world in the semantic dimension: it secures a <u>continuity</u> of tradition and <u>coherence</u> of knowledge sufficient for daily practice. Continuity and coherence are measured by the <u>rationality</u> of the knowledge accepted as valid. This can

> be seen in disturbances of cultural reproduction that get manifested in a loss of meaning and lead to corresponding legitimation and orientation crises. In such cases, the actors' cultural stock of knowledge can no longer cover the need for mutual understanding that arises with new situations. The interpretive schemes accepted as valid fail, and the resource "meaning" becomes scarce. (Habermas's emphasis, TCA II 140)

Without a common "stock of knowledge" upon which to rely, Mamet's characters are quickly drawn to American "public myths" as sources of reserve backing for their actions. As Anne Dean notes:

> Mamet's characters speak a language that accurately reflects the cultural abyss into which their country has fallen: they have become emotionally dessicated in their struggle to survive in a society that no longer coheres. It is only through public myths and a life lived according to the dictates of the mass media that they are able to communicate. ... Mamet has commented upon that "essential part of the American consciousness, which is the ability to suspend an ethical sense and adopt instead a popular, accepted mythology and use that to assuage your conscience like everyone else is doing." If this is accepted, it becomes very easy to see how Mamet's characters constantly delude both themselves and those around them. It is easier for them to fall in with the myths manufactured in their society than to fight them. Some of the pressures of life are alleviated by such action — the myths, after all, offer a specious form of security — but such relief remains at best superficial. The rot at the core

remains unchecked. (32)

Dean's assessment of the cultural basis of Mamet's characters' speech reveals the presence of social pathologies created by conflicts between social integration and systemic imperatives. "Social integration" refers to processes aimed at creating a community of communicative actors engaged with each other on common epistemological and moral grounds; "systemic imperatives" "economize" human relationships into normatively neutralized exchanges, with each participant in discourse striving not so much for understanding but rather cultural and material profit (power and money) at the expense of genuine communion. Thus, while Mamet's characters crave connection with one another, the colonized lifeworld from which they struggle to draw their means to this end provides them with communicative patterns that insure the maintenance of system structures and, ultimately, actors who rely on these patterns.

I think that Mamet's major plays, in invoking the mentor-student paradigm, can best be understood as a "type" of "problem-posing education." The presentation of these relationships on the stage or the page provides the audience with an opportunity to engage critically with crises of cultural reproduction that plague contemporary America. These crises stem from pathologies in communicative structures which Mamet's characters unreflectively invoke as a means of obtaining their desires. Dennis Carroll has noted that "The characteristic attitude engendered in the audience is indeed one of moral dismay, and it has Brechtian, dialectical implications. Why, we ask, do men and women act this way, when they should have the capacity to act otherwise?" (19). These "dialectical implications"suggest the ideal relationship of author and audience in terms of communicative action: Mamet himself has noted in "A Tradition of the Theater as Art"

that:

> The skills of the theater must be learned in practice with, and in emulation of, those capable of employing them.
>
> This is what can and must be passed from one generation to the next. Technique — a knowledge of how to translate inchoate desire into clean action — into action capable of communicating itself to the audience.
>
> This technique, this care, this love of precision, of cleanliness, this love of the theater, is the best way, for it is love of the audience — of that which unites the actor and the house: a desire to share something which they know to be true. ("Writing" 20-1)

Mamet's description of the ideal theatrical relationship between author and audience, mediated by the play, parallels Freire's definition of "problem-posing education":

> "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness — intentionality — rejects communiqués and embodies communication. ... Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not in transferals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognizable act) intermediates the cognitive actors — teachers on one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction ... be resolved.... Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term

> emerges: teacher-students with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. ... Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher. (61)

As noted before, a critic may well point out that Mamet himself, as recently as his collection of essays Three Uses of the Knife, has scorned the notion of the dramatist/artist as "teacher": "... the purpose of art is not to change but to delight. I don't think its purpose is to enlighten us. I don't think it's to teach us" (26). Yet, in the same volume, Mamet lauds the communicative, community-building potential inherent in the drama:

> ... we have created the opportunity to face our nature, to face our deeds, to face our lies in The Drama. For the subject of the drama is The Lie.
>
> At the end of the drama THE TRUTH — which has been overlooked, disregarded, scorned and denied — prevails. And that is how we know the Drama is done.
>
> It is done when the hidden is revealed and we are made whole, for we remember — we remember when the world was upset. We remember the introduction of That New Thing that unbalanced a world we previously thought to be functioning well. We remember the increasingly vigorous efforts of the hero or heroine (who stand only for ourselves) to rediscover the truth and restore us (the audience) to rest. And, in the good drama, we

recall how each attempt (each act) seemed to offer a solution, and how raptly we explored it, and how disappointed we (the hero) were on finding we had been wrong, until:

> At the End of the Play, when we had, it seemed, exhausted all possible avenues of investigation, when we were without recourse or resource (or so it seemed), when we were all but powerless, all was made whole. It was made whole when the truth came out. (Knife 79-80)

A critic, upon reading the above passages, may well be tempted to accuse Mamet of contradiction, but, within a framework of Freire's and Habermas's theories of education and human interaction, we can reconcile these ideas that the writer presents "on the nature and purpose of drama": the journey towards "balance," towards the synthesis of thesis and antithesis, is one undertaken conjointly by the artist, the hero/heroine, and the audience. Ultimately, Mamet's drama challenges all involved to face "THE TRUTH." Or, to borrow from Robert Brustein's apt metaphor at the beginning of The Theatre of Revolt, Mamet is the:

> emaciated priest in disreputable garments stand[ing] before [a] ruined altar, level with the crowd, glancing into a distorted mirror. He cavorts grotesquely before it, inspecting his own image in several outlandish positions. The crowd mutters ominously and partially disperses. The priest turns the mirror on those who remain to reflect them sitting stupidly on rubble. They gaze at their images for a moment, painfully transfixed; then, horror-struck, they run away, hurling stones at the altar and angry imprecations at the priest. The priest, shaking with anger, futility, and

irony, turns the mirror on the void. He is alone in the void. (3-4)

Brustein's characterization (or perhaps allegorization) of the modern dramatist fits both Mamet's plays and his ideas of the theater in that, consistently, he has proven himself an artist courageous enough to place the "truth" on stage; as often as not, the reaction to the truth he sees has earned him "slings and arrows" from audiences and critics alike. Over time, though, this courage has earned him the respect and admiration of the theater-going public and the critical establishment. In discussing seven of Mamet's plays that have earned the position of "major" works within his mammoth and ever-growing canon, I hope to show that this author, in his repeated creation of mentors and students interacting together, takes the risk and opportunity to place himself level with his audience and show them the reflection captured in that distorted mirror, not to court outrage, but to challenge them with respect and love. In this sense, then, Mamet is a teacher in his own right; unlike many contemporary dramatists, though, he recognizes the potential of problem-posing pedagogy and trusts his audience to critically engage with his work at more complex levels than the simple answers offered by purposive rationality.

ENDNOTES

[1]Holman and Harmon define "Speech Act Theory" as:

> A recent development in the philosophy of language according to which we can divide utterances into the "constative" (that [sic] have to do with describing some state of affairs and can be judged as true or false) and the "performative" (that, in the act of being uttered, perform what they say and are not subject to judgment as to truth or falsity, as when one says "I promise" and performs the speech act of promising simultaneously). The theory also divides speech acts into the "locutionary" (the act of uttering), the "illocutionary" (the act of carrying our some performative function, such as warning), and the "perlocutionary" (the act of achieving some ulterior rhetorical purpose, such as persuading). (451)

Obviously, Habermas's introduction of the concept of validity claims represents a

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major shift in the differentiation between constatives and performatives; if each must meet these criteria, then Habermas reduces the distinction to a purely syntactic one. Habermas also includes the category "expressive" as a speech act which reveals the speaker's subjectivity, and repositions perlocutionary acts as those which parasitically borrow from ideal communicative action in the service of goal-directed action.

[2]In his essay "What is Universal Pragmatics?" Habermas outlines in detail this relationship between "Domains of Reality" (worlds), "Modes of Communication" (speech acts) and "Basic Attitudes" held by a speaker in employing a particular brand of speech act, "Validity Claims," and "General Functions of Speech" which defines the "act" of the utterance under consideration:

Domains of Reality	Modes of Communication; Basic Attitudes	Validity Claims	General Functions of Speech
"The" World of External Nature	Cognitive [Locutionary]; Objectivating Attitude	Truth	Representation of Facts
"Our" World of Society	Interactive [Illocutionary]; Conformative Attitude	Rightness	Establishment of Legitimate Interpersonal Relations
"My" World of Internal Nature	Expressive; Expressive Attitude	Truthfulness	Disclosure of Speaker's Subjectivity
Language	--------	Comprehensibility	--------

Habermas includes the fourth "Domain," "Language," because "Language itself also appears in speech, for speech is a medium in which the linguistic means that are employed instrumentally are also reflected" ("Pragmatics" 68).

[3]Habermas's contention of the "strongly idealized" characterization of communicative action is the basis for my divergence from Lue Morgan Douthit's use of Habermasian theory in her Drama as Communicative Action. Douthit's use of "communicative action" as a framework for analyzing plays ranging from Jonson's Bartholomew Fair to Mamet's Oleanna ignores this aspect of the definition; thus, her contention that "In theater practice, a production that transcends its elements [in a manner similar to the Hegelian dialectic] is an example of a kind of communicative action" uncritically accepts this idealization in a manner inconsistent with Habermas's development of his theory in Volume II of The Theory of Communicative Action (7).

Given that theater practice is imbedded in a historical context, it must be analyzed not in terms of transcendental ideals, but within the forms of real-life communicative practice which certainly derive from idealized communicative action, but also represent departures from that ideal in their particular historical/material manifestations.

CHAPTER 2

"THESE GUYS GOT NO CONTROL": SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO

When Sexual Perversity in Chicago made its way to New York's off-Broadway scene after a successful off-off Broadway run at the St. Clement's Theater, critics couldn't jockey for position quickly enough to praise the play itself, it's companion piece The Duck Variations, or the young playwright, whom the Village Voice Obie judges committee named "the best new American playwright of the year" (qtd in Wetzsteon 39). Mamet had "arrived," taking the New York theater scene by storm. While the embrace of the New York critical establishment provided a beneficial boost to a promising playwright, it also created the standard by which critics have approached both this play and subsequent work; as Douglas Bruster notes:

> ... more often than not Mamet has been lauded for situations, characters, and speech patterns that his champions are quick to label as quintessentially American. Praise of this kind, however, tends to institutionalize his work, removing the sting from Mamet's satire as it simultaneously promotes the cultural aspect of his dramatic world. (333)

Bruster's attempted shift of critical paradigm, from "American" to "urban" playwright, with Ben Jonson as Mamet's historical counterpart, emphasizes the

difficulties inherent in any pigeonholing of an artist of Mamet's breadth: Bruster's label also has its problems, especially given Mamet's work set outside of the urban realm, ranging from the early plays Lakeboat and The Woods, to the more recent novel The Village and the screenplay for The Edge. By invoking a Habermasian heuristic, a critic avoids the narrow definitions of the playwright as an "American" writer, a "recorder of language," or a "social critic": he/she recognizes that language, social setting, personality, and objective reality come together in Mamet's plays through interaction, replete with an insistence by the playwright that the audience participate in a virtual dialogue with the characters on stage, and, by extension, exert their critical faculties in order to examine the validity implied in these characters' speech acts. As the first of Mamet's major plays, Sexual Perversity in Chicago provides an early illustration of the playwright's efforts to interrogate the roles of mentor and student, their prescribed status within a given normative setting, and their position in the reproduction of a rationally differentiated system of human interaction. In Mamet's vision of such interaction, the subsystems of "economy" and "administration" continue to colonize the lifeworld within which these human actors must play their roles.

Mamet, in accordance with his dictum to "get into the scene late," immediately establishes Bernie as a character who assumes a position of authority in his relationship with the younger Dan. The opening dialogue reveals that Bernie uses language as a means of maintaining a position of authority established prior to action of the play:

DANNY: So how'd you do last night?

BERNIE: Are you kidding me?

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: Are you fucking kidding me?

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: Are you pulling my leg?

DANNY: So?

BERNIE: So tits out to here so.

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: Twenty, a couple years old.

DANNY: You gotta be fooling.

BERNIE: Nope.

DANNY: You devil. (SP 9)

Despite the seemingly innocuous character of Danny's opening question, the reader recognizes through the ensuing dialogue that Bernie reacts not as if to a simple question, but as if to a questioning -- a statement by Danny that questions the validity of Bernie's claim to sexual prowess. His responses in the form of rhetorical questions ("Are you kidding me?... Are you fucking kidding me?") illustrate Bernie's use of influence as a means of relieving the need for coordinating Dan's relegation to the role of student through "first-order processes of consensus formation in language": Bernie's speech acts represent his use of the already-established form of social relationship between the two men as a "reserve backing" for his claim to the mentoring role (Habermas TCA II 276). His retorts to Danny's perceived questioning creates an ego/alter relationship in which Bernie may continue to performatively assert his role of the sexual predator backed up by his established influence over Dan.[1] Danny's shift from questioning Bernie to labeling the older man a "devil" suggests the strategic success of Bernie's illocutionary aims --

he's (re)established intersubjective recognition of his role as mentor by (re)generalizing his role through the communicative coordination of consensus.

Bernie's ability to assume the role of ego in the conversation with Danny allows Mamet, in a performative attitude towards his audience, to construct the framework of the lifeworld of "sexual perversity" in which these characters operate. Bernie narrates his sexual escapades of the previous night in vivid detail: he seduces a woman at the pancake house of the Commonwealth Hotel, escorts her to her room, and engages in sex play replete with a World War II flak suit, sounds of warfare from both himself and a virtual participant who adds her sounds over the telephone, and a final climax of the woman's setting the hotel room on fire. In ideal terms, Bernie assumes the role of "responsible actor" with the ability to "give narrative presentations of events that take place in the context of [his] lifeworld" (Habermas, TCA II 136). Habermas notes that narration presents the actor with the ability to confirm his/her position as "both the <u>initiator</u> of his accountable actions and the <u>product</u> of the traditions in which he stands, of the solidary groups to which he belongs, of socialization and learning processes to which he is exposed" (TCA II 135). Thus, Bernie's story serves a number of functions within the context of communication with Danny: 1) it (re)establishes his authority for Danny within the lifeworld context which they both recognize intersubjectively; 2) it allows Bernie to "objectivate [his] belonging to the lifeworld to which... [he] does belong" and, consequently, to reinforce his own sense of personal identity within the social framework, and 3) it serves as a representation of the pathological nature of this lifeworld (Habermas, <u>TCA</u> II 136).

Bernie strengthens this self-identification and presentation through narrative interruption: his repetition of lines such as "Well, at this point we don't know" reasserts the constative nature of the narrative speech act, and serves as means of also

communicating to Dan that he "owns" the story in question.[2] Bernie asserts this "ownership" within the pedagogical framework by "quizzing" his pupil, presenting Danny opportunities to illustrate his learning:

BERNIE:... But then what shot does she up and pull?

DANNY: You remind her of her ex.

BERNIE: No.

DANNY: She's never done anything like this before in her life?

BERNIE: No.

DANNY: She just got into town, and do you know where a girl like her could make a little money?

BERNIE: No.

DANNY: So I'm not going to lie to you, what shot does she pull?

BERNIE: The shot she is pulling is the following two things: (a) she says "I think I want to take a shower."

DANNY: No.

BERNIE: Yes. And (b) she says "And then let's fuck."

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: What did I just tell you? (SP 13)

As in the initial dialogue, Bernie uses questioning (in the form of a mock-Socratic dialogue) to reiterate his possession of knowledge, a rhetorical strategy which again forces Danny into the role of student. The final question, again rhetorical, punctuates the implicit assertion of Bernie's mentoring technique: he's provided his student with the correct answer, illustrating his command of not only the narrative, but of prestige in their

relationship. Bernie's story reflects a colonized lifeworld context in which he retains the prestige of knowledge and, consequently, influence over those like Dan who must rely on the older man's willingness to share his capital with them. Through these dialogues, Bernie reinforces his position as the "banking educator" of sexual experience, and Mamet establishes a lifeworld colonized by the systemic imperative of exchange value and power.

The sheer exaggeration of Bernie's story highlights the pathological nature of the sphere of communicative action: while engaging Dan as student, Bernie's narration also engages the virtual participation of the audience in the communicative action in the text. Though in the position of "observer," an audience must consider the validity of Bernie's narrative, and arrive at a "yes/no" position regarding the validity of both the objective truth of the story and Bernie's expressive truthfulness in relating it. Given the extreme nature of the events Bernie relates, the audience likely takes a "no" position on both counts. Still, Dan, in accepting his subordinate position to Bernie, takes the opposite position, the "yes": while he often inserts questions that, on the surface, question the validity of Bernie's account ("You gotta be fooling."; "You're shitting me."), these serve as means to encourage Bernie's narration; ultimately, Dan calls into question only the broad normative validity of the narrative: "Nobody does it normally anymore" (SP 9, 12, 17). An observer recognizes that Dan uses speech acts which contain the illocutionary content of expressive doubt, but, in context, really reinforce his recognition of Bernie's superior position: statements such as "You're shitting me" allow Bernie the privilege of reiterating his point, and, by extension, laying further claim to objective truth and expressive truthfulness. Because the audience takes an opposite position on these questions of validity, they must consider the normative framework in which these two characters can engage in such a dialogue.

Mamet's general conception of the dramatic and its particular application within this play provides a valuable aid in considering the normative context of Dan and Bernie's conversation. As previously noted, in Three Uses of the Knife, Mamet writes that the communicative action between the play and the audience entails "creat[ing] the opportunity to face our nature, to face our deeds, to face our lies in The Drama. For the subject of drama is The Lie" (79). More specifically, Sexual Perversity in Chicago concerns the "Lie" of "traditional American masculinity myths":

> "Well, that's just, unfortunately, tales from my sex life... My sex life was ruined by the popular media. It took a lot of getting over... The myths around us, destroying our lives, such a great capacity to destroy our lives... That's what the play is about, how what we say influences the way we think. The words that the older [character] Bernie Litko says to Danny influences [sic] his behavior, you know, that women are broads, that they're there to exploit." (qtd. in Fraser 7)

Taking a performative attitude towards his audience, Mamet presents this "myth" that the audience might assume a similar attitude by taking a yes/no position on the question of the norms accepted by these two characters.[3] Thus, the "virtual" nature of the audience's participation in the dialogue becomes problematic as the author confronts his reader as ego to alter: a communicative relationship must ensue as Mamet continually presents his audience with a pattern of lifeworld interpretation with which they must agree or disagree. Rather than allowing his audience member the more comfortable position of identifying with a character or characters, Mamet forces him/her into a position, as noted by Carroll, similar to that of Brechtian alienation: the degree of exaggeration contained in Bernie's narrative undercuts identification and forces judgement, not only of the

character's truthfulness and the truth of the story, but also the social context which allows Bernie the status of authority.

Mamet further problematizes the lifeworld context of the play by juxtaposing Bernie's claim to experience with a scene of him playing the role of sexual predator. After a brief interlude, a snippet of conversation between Joan and Deb concerning their perception of men ("They're all after only one thing... But it's never the same thing."), the reader encounters Bernie, in a sexually aggressive mode, attempting to "pick up" Joan in a singles bar (SP 18). Irony abounds at several levels in the scene: not only does the reader recognize Bernie's strategic manipulation of both expressive and assertoric speech (lying about his name, career, and reason for being in the bar), but so does Joan. In uttering lines such as "Don't torture me, just let me hear it, okay?" and "We've done this one" (referring to Bernie's repetition of parts of his "act"), Joan, despite Bernie's persistence, assumes a "no" position from the start regarding Bernie's claims to truth and sincerity. As his act begins to fall apart (marked by a more informal discourse, such as the adjectival "fucking"), Bernie makes a quick shift to regain control: he assumes his role as teacher, moving the conversation from a performative engagement focused primarily on objective and expressive elements to a normative judgement of Joan and another fallback on his reserve of knowledge concerning expectations of adult behavior within the social world:

> So just who the fuck do you think you are, God's gift to Women? I mean where do you fucking get off with this shit? You don't want to get come on to, go enroll in a convent... I mean why don't you just clean your fucking act up, Missy. You're living in a city in 1976... You're a grown woman, behave like it for chrissakes. Huh? I mean, what the fuck do you

think society is, just a bunch of rules strung together for your personal pleasure? (SP 20-1).

Despite Joan's attempt to remove herself from the situation by asking him to leave, Bernie's normative "lesson" proves overpowering: Joan questions the validity of her own actions, her failure to assume a complementary role to Bernie's ("Sometimes I think I'm not a very nice person"); after Bernie continues his rant against her behavior, concluding by labeling her a "Cockteaser," she finally concedes by apologizing for rudeness (SP 21). Joan's shift from a sarcastic commentator on Bernie's attempt to "act responsibly" within the cultural framework of the play to an apologetic "schoolgirl" who has suffered sanction for failing to behave in accordance with expected norms "in a city in 1976" ironically reinforces Bernie's position as a figure of authority within the lifeworld Mamet represents in the text.

At this point in the play, the virtual dialogue between text/performance and audience may lead to conclusions similar to those of David Skeele, who claims "as the play's main corrupter, it is almost entirely through this character that the allegorical force suggested by the title manifests itself -- Bernie is Sexual Perversity" (515). Comparisons to the medieval morality play and later "homiletic tragedy" notwithstanding, an audience engaged with this interaction recognizes that this labeling of Bernie as an allegorical "tempter" proves reductive: this character, rather, reveals through his speech a complex matrix of self-creation and social integration mediated not simply through the myths of masculinity to which Mamet referred, but also through system-maintaining imperatives. These imperatives direct Bernie to adjust his action orientations towards legitimating his role by asserting both influence and value commitment in his social relationships. Bernie's "capital," his purported knowledge of how to maneuver the Chicago singles

scene, provides the foundation of his influence: his value commitment, which he must also establish through communicative action, is rationalized through his consistent behavior. But, as noted earlier, this prestige Bernie maintains through narratives of sexual conquests also points to his own role as product of systems integration. Thus, scenes such as his meeting with Joan in the singles bar engage the audience in questions of expressive and objective validity (to which they likely replies with a "no"); and that leads the audience to engagement with the normative framework Bernie represents in his speech acts, and to which the characters acting as alter to the mentor figure's ego take a "yes" position. Consequently, Mamet's representations of these interactions guides the audience into a position of interrogating the source of such "perverse" normativity. Such questions lead to recognition that Bernie is more than a tempter; he is a human actor whose social and systemic integration have resulted in his position as reproducer of both the pathology of "sexual perversity" and its larger paradigm, a societal system reflected in purposive-rational action orientations.

In temporarily disrupting the harmony of Bernie and Danny's teacher and student relationship, Deb's entry into both men's lives not only points to Mamet's incorporation of Pinteresque menace into an ironically balanced relationship, but also to an alternative pattern of communicative action. This pattern undercuts Bernie's prestige and briefly allows Dan the opportunity to engage in communicative practice initially less removed from an ideal speech situation. In preparation for Dan's meeting with Deb, Mamet provides his reader with another of Bernie's "lessons":

> 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. (SP 22)

Again, Bernie's speech relies on performatively asserting his superiority: Dan (and the audience) must judge Bernie's statements according to the position of influence he asserts. Yet the audience already knows that Bernie's first maxim (a quality highlighted by capitalization of the major words of the propositional content) does not necessarily hold true: while Dennis Carroll claims that Joan's final reaction to Bernie in the scene previously mentioned contains hints of sexual attraction, her speech acts lead to the conclusion that she's still not attracted, but rather regrets her actions because she recognizes and tacitly accepts the normative validity Bernie asserts as he "treats her like shit" (57). Additionally (and obviously), Bernie doesn't "get laid" because he chooses to assume the "moral" high ground in the situation. Thus, his assertion to Dan represents the enactment of a performative contradiction implicit in Bernie's teachings: even though he treats Joan badly, his position in regards to the norms of sexual conquest will not allow him to continue his performance of seduction, because, within the lifeworld context, "responsible behavior" demands acting on the achievement of intersubjective recognition manipulated through the mentor's claim to authority. Bernie's subscription to the morality of "sexual perversity," and the prestige he asserts in light of this context, actually prevents him from achieving the goal proposed as penultimate in "a city in 1976."[4]

Juxtaposed to Bernie's contradictory stance of normative rightness concerning his particular brand of masculinity and its ultimate failure throughout the play (Bernie never does succeed in actually consummating a sexual relationship), Dan and Deb's brief

relationship illustrates a pattern of expressive communication legitimated through the sincerity of the two actors. Danny's "pick up" of Deb contradicts his mentor's instruction thus far:

DANNY: Hi.

DEBORAH: Hello.

DANNY: I saw you at the Art Institute.

DEBORAH: Uh huh.

DANNY: I remembered your hair.

DEBORAH: Hair memory.

DANNY: You were in the Impressionists room. (Pause.) Monet...

(Pause.)

DEBORAH: Uh huh.

DANNY: You're very attractive. I like the way you look. (Pause.) You were drawing in charcoal. It was nice. (Pause.) Are you a student at the Art Institute?

DEBORAH: No, I work.

DANNY: Work, huh?... work. (Pause.) I'll bet you're real good at it. (Pause.) Is someone taking up a lot of your time these days? (SP 22-3)

In contrast to Bernie's strategy of insincerity, Danny relies on statements of objective truth backed up by expressive statements ("You were drawing in charcoal. It was nice."). Like her roommate Joan, Deborah's responses communicate a hesitation to engage with the man approaching her; while she possibly also senses a strategy on Danny's part, her speech acts simply reveal potential unwillingness to participate in the

communication Danny offers. Given the lifeworld context established through Joan's instruction, the audience typically relates Deb's hesitation to this "normal" pattern of interpretation. At the same time, though, Danny's speech acts take the audience by surprise in that they can not as easily dismiss them: while Deborah acts cautiously, nothing in her responses to Dan indicates a clear "no" position. Observing both Deb's response and Dan's stumbling for words, the audience finds no reason to doubt the objective validity of his statements; consequently, his expressive utterances, which comment directly on objective statements, have credibility. Furthermore, at no time does Danny engage in the verbal misrepresentation of himself which Bernie employs in his attempt at seducing Joan. Mamet, in focusing the first few scenes on the insincerity and paradoxical nature of Bernie's speech acts, provides his audience with a contrast by which they can comfortably judge Danny's speech acts as not only true, but also truthful. In doing so, he represents the separation of the normative world from the expressive, and further undercuts Bernie's holistic approach to self-presentation consistent with his interpretation of the social world. Mamet presents his audience with a modern milieu consistent with the conception of differentiated spheres of action, and one in which increased system complexity has marginalized the lifeworld to the status of subsystem.

This modern social environment, while grounded in the world of male discourse, reproduces itself within the communicative context of the parallel relationship to Bernie and Danny's: Joan and Deb's. Like their male counterparts, the women's relationship mirrors that of mentor to student; like Bernie, Joan's "expertise" proves questionable throughout the play. As with Danny's behavior in the library and its direct contradiction to Bernie's instruction, Deb acts in accordance with her own mentoring: Joan's assertion that men are "all after only one thing... But it's never the same thing" (SP 18). While Bernie attempts to keep Danny's perception of women conceptually simple (akin to

Stan's characterization of women as "Soft things with a hole in the middle" in Lakeboat). Joan complicates her initial clichèd statement, which communicates one "truth" about men, by asserting the indeterminacy of the "one thing" men seek. Joan, however, does succeed in communicating a single vision of men in terms of purposive-rational action: while the "one thing" may not always be sex, men are creatures characterized by goal-directed action. Thus, Deb's reticence in responding to Dan's offer of communication stems from her own store of interpretations provided by Joan: male attempts at communication conceal a strategic component masked by the speaker's "perverse" use of communicative practice. While Bernie's failed attempt to use communication backed by culturally accepted forms of social interaction as a means of achieving his own goals reinforces Joan's assertion, her advice places Deb in the position of initially judging Danny's validity claims according to a prevailing conception of male purposive rationality. Joan's teaching, like Bernie's, points to perversion of the patterns of communication and interpretation linked to the primacy of purposive rationality. In each case, the mentors provide their students with a system of a priori interpretations that undercut attempts at pure communication and consensus-formation.

For a brief period, Dan and Deb avoid their mentors' teachings and engage in a pattern of communicative practice that places formation of consensus concerning expressive validity at the fore. In both scenes where Dan and Deb engage in "pillow talk," the literal content of their conversations reflects each of their attempts to represent their inner worlds sincerely. After their first sexual encounter, the propositional content of their communication relies almost entirely on an exchange of expressive utterances:

DANNY: Well.

DEBORAH: Well.

DANNY: Yeah, well, hey ... uh ... (Pause.) I feel great. (Pause.) You?

DEBORAH: Uh huh.

DANNY: Yup. (Pause.) You, uh, you have to go to work (you work, right?) (DEB nods.) You have to go to work tomorrow?

DEBORAH: Yes. Well...

DANNY: You're going home?

DEBORAH: Do you want me to?

DANNY: Only if you want to. Do you want to?

DEBORAH: Do you want me to stay? I don't know if it's such a good idea that I stay here tonight.

DANNY: Why? (Pause.) I'd like you to stay. If you'd like to.

DEB nods.

DANNY: Well, then, all right, then. Huh? (Pause.) (SP 24-5)

This excerpt illustrates Dan's willingness to shed commitment to Bernie's values in favor of a relationship based on sincerity: throughout the passage, he willingly represents to Deborah his inner world ("I feel great"; "I'd like you to stay."). Deb, however, reserves her expressiveness a bit more — in comparison to Danny's complete utterances of expressive illocution and proposition, Deb minimizes her expressions of her inner-worldly state ("Uh huh"; "DEB nods."). As the scene progresses beyond sexual satisfaction and sleeping arrangements, Deborah opens up her inner world somewhat more by stating her feelings in complete grammatical utterances: when Dan asks her to dinner the following evening, she responds with "I'd love to eat dinner with you tomorrow" (SP 25). This shift in expression (especially when considered from the point of her lie to Dan about her sexual orientation in their initial meeting) seems to indicate a

growing willingness to dispense with Joan's generalization about men as singularly purposive-rational in their dealings with women, and to further trust Dan's expressions as sincere. Again, from the perspective of the audience, nothing in Dan's utterances encourages a rejection of his statements as untruthful, since the observer/participant in virtual dialogue possesses the knowledge of Bernie's teachings and recognizes Dan's actions as counter to the lessons of his mentor.

This new relationship, with its parallel representation of the possibility of communicative action based on consensus formation between equal partners in dialogue, does not, of course, go unnoticed by Dan and Deb's mentors. Both Bernie and Joan see in the relationship a threat to their influence over their protegees, and, consequently, a fissure in the beliefs through which they define themselves in relation to the opposite sex. Structurally, Joan confronts Deborah first about her new relationship, and the action orientation she adopts in dealing with the situation reveals another side to Joan's mentoring technique: rather than direct statements which performatively relate her observations about the male gender as objective facts, she relies on obviously perlocutionary statements meant to challenge the wisdom of Deb's independent decision to begin a relationship with Dan:

JOAN: So what's he like?

DEBORAH: Who?

JOAN: Whoever you haven't been home, I haven't seen you in two days that you've been seeing.

DEBORAH: Did you miss me?

JOAN: No. Your plants died. (Pause.) I'm kidding. What's his name.

DEBORAH: Danny.

JOAN: What's he do?

DEBORAH: He works in the Loop.

JOAN: How wonderful for him.

DEBORAH: He's an Assistant Office Manager.

JOAN: That's nice, a job with a little upward mobility.

DEBORAH: Don't be like that, Joan.

JOAN: I'm sorry. I don't know what got into me.

DEBORAH: How are things at school?

JOAN: Swell. Life in the Primary Grades is a real picnic. The other kindergarten teacher got raped Tuesday.

DEBORAH: How terrible.

JOAN: What?

DEBORAH: How terrible for her.

JOAN: Well, of course it was terrible for her. Good Christ, Deborah, you really amaze me sometimes, you know that? (SP 26-7)

Joan's characterization of Dan's employment conditions uses the most obvious form of perlocution, sarcasm: Deb's command "Don't be like that, Joan," allows the audience to recognize that Joan makes her statements in a less-than-sincere manner and that she intends for Deb to recognize the perlocutionary aims of her statements. At the same time, Joan also makes statements in this passage in which the subtext does not immediately strike Deborah (nor, perhaps, the audience). For instance, Joan's qualification of the "he" in her original question as "Whoever you haven't been home, I haven't see you in two days that you've been seeing" characterizes Deb's relationship

with Dan not in terms of itself, but rather as a disruption of the two women's companionship. Joan further masks her perlocutionary aims by claiming that her questioning, along with her claim that she has not missed Deb, constitutes "kidding," and follows this up with a question that would point towards genuine interest in her friend's new boyfriend: "What's his name." Her final series of perlocutionary statements involving the rape of a fellow teacher forefronts Joan's goal within the scene: she finds Deborah's response to the news of the rape unsatisfactory, and let's her friend know with the generalized "Deborah, you really amaze me sometimes...." From start to finish of this brief scene, Joan acts on the expectation that Deborah has involved herself in a relationship with a man. As such a relationship not only displaces Joan as Deb's primary source of social intercourse, but also undercuts her teachings, Joan directs her speech acts towards a re-establishment of her influence over her student. Her final exasperation with Deborah expresses her belief that Deb has "failed" in her role of student: despite Joan's earlier characterization of men as purely goal-driven, and her use of the rape story to further this claim, Deb does not accept the validity of her mentor's objectification of the entire male gender, nor does she see the rape story as further validation of this representation. Joan's final belittlement of her roommate asserts her superior position regarding the subject at hand.

Joan further reinforces her distrust of men in her first meeting with Danny, a chance encounter which she uses to let him know her position on his relationship with Deb. Despite Dan's attempts at politeness and even humor (i.e."Well, perhaps we could stand out here and tell each other funny stories until she got back."), Joan will not accept any characterization of Danny outside of the one she has formed of all men (Mamet SP 32). When Dan finally asks her why she is "being so hostile," Joan's response, "I don't like your attitude," points to a representation of her inner state not in keeping with the

brief conversation in which the two of them have just engaged, as Danny has said nothing beyond providing reasons for his presence and a couple of harmless jokes. (Mamet SP 32). In attempting to return to a mode consistent with standards of politeness in such a situation, Dan introduces himself. Joan's response, "I know who you are," not only informs Dan of the statement's literal propositional content, but also suggests that Joan "knows" him as the interruption in her and Deb's relationship and, furthermore, she "knows" him in terms of her objectification of male action orientations (Mamet SP 33). In this scene, the audience recognizes the drama of cross-purposes alluded to throughout Mamet's interviews and non-fiction: each of these character wishes to ascertain something from the other. Dan wants to know if Deborah has kept their date, and attempts to retrieve this knowledge from Joan in a manner consistent with normative standards of polite behavior. Joan, in Dan's eyes, is Deb's roommate and, thus, a potential source of information. Joan sees the opportunity to engage in conversation with Dan as a chance to expand her "hold" on Deb: the perlocutionary undertone of her final statements to Dan arise from her self-perception as Deb's mentor and protector and her assumption that Dan should recognize her as his adversary and superior. In her initial dealings with both Dan and Deb concerning their newly-formed relationship, then, Joan informs them that she does not approve, clearly implying that her approval of the relationship is necessary to its continuance.

In both of these scenes, the audience meets with a character who fails to recognize the possibility of a "legitimately ordered interpersonal relations[hip]" between a man and a woman (Habermas TCA II 142). Joan, as one of the play's teachers, reflects a crisis of reproduction (pathology) within the domain of social integration, and, thus, an interpenetration of subsystem maintenance imperatives into the lifeworld within which she operates. Thus, the possibility of a purely communicatively achieved relationship

between a man and a woman remains outside the realm of acceptable interpretations. Because Mamet, like his own "mentor" Pinter, represents his characters almost exclusively in terms of their present situation, Joan's unwillingness to accept Danny as anything other than a man "after one thing" points not to some traumatic past experience, but rather a crisis of social reproduction in which relations between members of the two genders are cast in terms of a lifeworld colonized by media of economic exchange and administrative authority.

Joan relies on such a pattern of interpretation because her colonized lifeworld leaves her adrift in terms of assigning rational meaning to sexual relationships. As a young woman in the midst of the High Sexual Revolution, Joan recognizes the freedom from restraints of traditional representations of masculinity and femininity, but also realizes the void this freedom creates. Thus, in narrating a story of a previous lover who "would prematurely ejaculate," Joan rationalizes this dysfunction to Deb by claiming "Because in some ways, of course, he was doing it to punish me. And he was doing a hell of a job of it" (SP 45). Joan attempts to relieve the tension of this situation by expressing sympathy for the man's plight and informing him "So why don't we just relax, and I'll be with you, and you be with me, and whenever you want to come is fine"; this results not in a more mutually satisfying sexual relationship (which one might expect after honestly confronting such a situation), but, rather, a continuation of the premature ejaculation and a change in her lover's attitude towards it: "... he did seem happier about it" (Mamet SP 45-6) Similarly, when encountering two of her young students playing "Doctor," she utters the paradox of "it's perfectly... natural. But ... there's a time and a place for everything" (Mamet SP 41). Joan can not reconcile the modern acceptance of sexuality as "natural" with societal norms that limit its expression and continue to reproduce gender-specific modes of action. Acceptance of the media-steered,

unproblematized interpretation of men as sexual consumers thus shields her from potential emotional trauma that could result from the unpredictability of communicative action freed of traditional moral restraints

The other teacher of the play, Bernie, reinforces this interpretation through his own performative stance towards women as objects of male possession, and, like Joan, adopts perlocutionary means to "win" Danny back and reinforce his position of dominance within their relationship. As most critics of this play have noted, the male characters tend towards fuller development than the female; thus, Bernie's role as teacher serves as the primary means of representing the lifeworld in which all of the characters interact.[5] Mamet carefully constructs Bernie as a character in touch with Chicago's perverse lifeworld in both dialogue with other characters and numerous scenes in which Bernie appears alone on stage. One such scene directly follows Dan and Deb's meeting:

> BERNARD's apartment. BERNARD is seated in front of the television at three in the morning.
>
> TV: When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are. If, on the other hand, you apply for a personal loan, all sorts of circumstantial evidence is required. I wonder if any mathematician has done serious research on the efficacity of prayer. For example: you're walking down the street thinking "God, if I don't get laid tonight, I don't know what all!" (A common form of prayer) And all of a sudden, WHAM! (Pause.) Perhaps you do get laid, or perhaps you get hit by a cab, or perhaps you meet the man or woman of you persuasion. But the prayer is uttered — yes it is — solely as a lamentation, and with no real belief in its causal properties.

> When you don't get laid, tomorrow's prayer has the extra added oomph of involuntary continence. But if you do get laid — think on that a moment, will you? If you do manage to moisten the old wick, how many people would stop, before, during or after, and give thanks to a just creator? (SP 23-4)

Skeele, through the framework of the homiletic tragedy, attributes this speech to Bernie himself, claiming that in this scene "[Bernie] lords over [Dan and Deb's] union like a preacher, delivering a veritable sermon on the necessity of '[giving] thanks to a just creator" every time one is able to 'moisten the old wick" (516). This argument misses two points important to understanding this scene in terms of Bernie's character development. First, an audience would not necessarily accept the speech's final rhetorical question as pointing to the "necessity" of offering thanks in the given situation; one could also argue that, given the context of earlier statements concerning the lack of belief underlying the initial act of prayer, that this question underscores that lack. Thus, "prayer" represents an illocutionary act constituted primarily of an expressive utterance, as opposed to a negotiation with or request from divinity; the validity of such statements relates not to the speaker's normative compliance but rather his expressive truthfulness.

Secondly, and more important to an audience's understanding of Bernie as a complex character, he does not literally utter these lines; rather, the text of the play attributes the speech to the television in front of Bernie. While the subject matter of the speech would lead a reader/audience member to believe that the statements might easily be attributed to Bernie, and that Mamet has created an expressionistic device meant to relate the inner world of this character, the choice of the television as medium for Bernie's thoughts directs an audience not only to their propositional and illocutionary

content, but also to their production. In effect, Mamet decenters these ideas from Bernie's consciousness and, in an absurdist-like experiment with the evocative power of objects/images, places these thoughts within a context of communicative construction. Juxtaposed with Dan and Deb's attempts at ideal communicative action, this scene portrays the media-steered foundation of Bernie's influence: mass media, while grounded in communicative practice, heightens the interpenetration of systemic maintenance imperatives into the lifeworld.[6] At the same time, the use of televised projection of Bernie's thoughts extends the rendering of lifeworld pathology: through the medium of television, and its contribution to the "myths of masculinity" present in the play, the audience can recognize these "televised" messages as representations of a crisis of social integration within the lifeworld: Bernie, in his value commitment, illustrates his sense of solidarity with the "community" formed through a shared lifeworld, and yet this sense of solidarity cannot negate the alienation represented by Bernie's isolation in this scene.

In order to win back their students, both Bernie and Joan must adopt strategic action orientations that rely on perlocutionary modes of speech. This requires each of them to mask the propositional content of their speech acts, which, in turn, requires them to increase the representation of "reserve backing" implied in these utterances. Thus, both teachers must increase the steering power of their communicative acts, removing them farther from the realm of ideal communication into a series of power plays which imply increasingly intense sanctions for their students' willingness to transgress the boundaries of gender interpretation and performance established by the mentors. Both Bernie and Joan must convince their respective protegees that they have strayed outside the realm of normatively accepted behavior, further rendering the heterosexual partnership, the supposed ideal of the early sexual revolution, as an unacceptable state within the colonized lifeworld of 1970's Chicago.

Since Joan's first attempt at perlocutionary strategy failed to re-establish her position of influence with Deb, she realizes that the sarcasm of her first response to Deb's new relationship will not work. In its place, she must rely on more subtle strategies to assert her influence. Thus, in scene 13, Joan attempts a new method of manipulating language: philosophical speculation. This strategy is reflected in her language, as Dean notes: "her streetwise banter [is] suddenly replaced by careful phrasing and elevated terminology -- and only once does a familiar obscenity intrude" (68). Joan, in a moment of uncharacteristic reflection, muses to Deb:

> It's a puzzle. Our efforts at coming to grips with ourselves ... in an attempt to become "more human" (which, in itself, is an interesting concept). It has to do with an increased ability to recognize clues ... and the control of energy in the form of lust ... and desire (And also in the form of hope) [...]
>
> But a finite puzzle. Whose true solution lies, perhaps, in transcending the rules themselves ... (Pause). ... and pounding of the fucking pieces into places where they DO NOT FIT AT ALL.
>
> (Pause).
>
> Those of us who have seen the hands of the Master Magician move a bit too slowly do have a rough time from time to time.
>
> (Pause).
>
> Some things persist. (Pause).
>
> "Loss" is always possible ... (SP 37-8)

Dean claims that "Joan tries to sound authoritative, impressive, and in command of what she avers" in this passage, but this attempt only succeeds in further characterizing Joan as "artificial — although in a more educated way" than her fellow characters (68). Joan does assume a level of discourse previously unseen in the play, but an examination of the content of her "musings" reveals a pattern of "authoritative" speech acts that, given her already expressed disapproval of Deb's relationship, reflect an attempt at perlocutionary manipulation of her roommate's action orientations towards her relationship with Dan. While such an interpretation follows my central heuristic, it also is consistent with Mamet's characters' motivations: "a play is designed, if correctly designed, as a series of incidents in which and through which the protagonist struggles toward his or her goal" (True 12). While Joan is not the protagonist of this play, she, like the other three characters, has a goal that makes her dramatically necessary to the structure of the play: win Deb back from her heterosexual happiness to a pattern of interpretation which renders all men goal-directed sexual predators. Dean's recognition of Joan's lack of authenticity in her "heightened, linguistically more sophisticated tone" is right, but in this speech, an audience recognizes as well that Joan's philosophical conundrum lacks authenticity as a simple rendition of her inner world.

By beginning her speech with the repeated "I don't know," Joan attempts to represent her statements as acts of expressive utterance; her choice of words, for the audience at least, undercut the validity of the implied claim to expressiveness and unmask her speech as perlocutionary. While her claim to puzzlement over "Our attempts at coming to grips with ourselves ... in an attempt to become 'more human" would seem to follow a pattern of expressiveness, when Joan qualifies this statement with the specific nature of her confusion as having "to do with an increased ability to recognize clues ... and the control of energy in the form of lust ... and desire (And also in the form of

hope)...." an audience recognizes that her emphasis on qualities of "lust" and "desire," as well as her speculation on recognition of "clues," point to an attempt at a communicative act underlying the actual words themselves. Joan equates "becom[ing] 'more human" with control of these emotional qualities; given her interpretation of men and the masculine, one can posit that Joan directs her "musings" at Deb with the strategic aim of creating doubt within her pupil. At the same time, Joan notes that "hope" may also play a part in this process, a statement enclosed in parentheses noting a "slight change of outlook on the part of the speaker — perhaps a momentary change to a more introspective regard" (SP 20). This reflection segues into her concession that the "solution" to this puzzle could "perhaps" lie in "pounding ... the fucking pieces into places where they DO NOT FIT AT ALL"; both of these points illustrate Joan's considering the possibility of the "rightness" of Deb's actions. This, however, proves temporary as she ends her philosophical ramblings with the one certainty on which she can count: "Loss' is always possible..." The ringing phone destroys any possibilities for Joan to continue, and Deb's exit suggests the failure of Joan's teaching: while Deb may not have paid any attention at all to her mentor's statements, the possibility also exists that the ringing phone provides an excuse for her to dismiss Joan's perlocutionary proposition — Deb has understood Joan's teaching, but, for the moment, continues to disregard her mentor's interpretive stance. To paraphrase Bernie, at this point an audience does not know the effect this communicative act has rendered, if any at all.

Like Joan, Bernie, in light of the competition presented by Dan's budding relationship, also adapts communicative strategies largely dependent on suggestion and (mis)leading as opposed to honest performative statements based on this man's understanding of his lifeworld context. Bernie's goal in adapting this strategy parallels Joan's, but he does not seem to realize or chooses to ignore that Dan has not dismissed

Bernie himself for Deb's company; shortly after Dan and Deb meet, Dan takes her to meet his "friend and associate" at a bar. While the text indicates that Deb does, by and large, forsake Joan's company for Dan's, this is not the case for the two men. Unlike Deb, Dan, from the start of the new relationship, attempts to include his mentor in the process of courtship; Bernie's stamp of approval seems much more important to Dan than Joan's is to Deb. Yet the scene of their meeting also illustrates for the audience the threat the relationship poses for Bernie as Dan's main figure of authority. As seen in the early encounter with Joan at the single's bar, Bernie's action orientation around women consists purely of performance; while he also performs for Dan (as witnessed in the opening scene), he adapts strategic patterns based on different goals with each gender. With women, Bernie, of course, wants to achieve sexual conquest, while with Dan, he wants to represent himself as a figure of authority on the subject. In meeting with Dan and Deb, Bernie must modify his normal performative stance so that it includes his action orientation towards women in such a way that maintains his position of authority over Dan. Thus, Bernie uses language typical of an attempted singles bar "pick up" not to win Deb over, but to illustrate for Dan his "methods" at work.

Bernie's performance fails on both accounts: Deborah gives no indication that she finds Bernie a "hell of a guy," as Dan describes him repeatedly, and Dan, for the first time in the play, openly questions the normative validity of Bernie's communicative acts. After some fairly cliched opening remarks and questions (i.e "Danny's been telling me a lot about you," or "So, okay, so what sign are you?"), Bernie inquires as to Deb's age (SP 28; 29). Danny interrupts immediately: "Bernie, you know you're not supposed to ask a woman her age" (SP 30). Bernie counters his student's objection by noting "Dan, Dan, these are modern times. What do you think this is, the past? Women are liberated. You got a right to be what age you are, and so do I, and so does Deborah" (SP 30). Irony

abounds here as Bernie sets himself up as the promoter of women's liberation, but more importantly for the relationship between Bernie and Dan, the student has brought the normative validity of the mentor's action orientation into question.

Mamet ends the scene with Bernie giving his blessing to the relationship: "You know, you're a lucky guy, Dan. And I think you know what I'm talking about. You are one lucky guy. Yes sir, you are one fortunate son of a bitch. And I think I know what I'm talking about" (SP 30-31). The rhythmic repetition present in this passage highlights two qualities of the propositional content of Bernie's speech acts: (1) his repeated labeling of Dan as "a lucky guy" heightens the sense of Bernie's own alienation as implied in the scene with the television — Dan has accomplished something which his mentor deeply desires; (2) Bernie's shift from "you know what I'm talking about" to "I know what I'm talking about" portrays Bernie's final attempt in this scene to assert his authority. Though half-hearted, Bernie will not forsake his position as mentor simply because Dan has accomplished a sexual conquest. Rather, he recognizes in Dan's questioning of his authority a need to further assert that his teaching leaves no room for emotional attachment: the "reserve backing" of Bernie's teaching reflects Mamet's belief that, for the most part "Human relationships have become attenuated to the point at which men and women view each other as little more than media-created stereotypes ..." (Dean 51).

Throughout the scene in the bar, Bernie continually attempts to steer the conversation towards his simplistic conception of how to relate to women; thus, a discussion of Deb's profession and her competence as a "commercial artist" turns quickly to an appraisal by Bernie of Deb's physical appearance:

BERNIE: Lot of money in that, I mean, that's a hell of a field for a girl.

DANNY: She's very good at it.

BERNIE: I don't doubt it for a second. I mean, look at her for chrissakes. You're a very attractive woman. Anybody ever tell you that? (SP 29)

By the end of the scene, Bernie recognizes he has lost the ability to steer the conversation, and, furthermore, that his influence with Dan may be on the wane. From this point on, Bernie shifts his utterances to Dan in such a way that he can remain the teacher without necessarily proclaiming himself so as he's done thus far in the play.

Bernie's lack of confidence in his role of teacher, and his adaption of action orientations towards his student become apparent in the next scene. As the two men work, "filing in the office," Bernie attempts a communicative act not dissimilar from Joan's philosophical ramblings in Deb's presence:

BERNIE: One thing, and I want to tell you that if everybody thought of this, Dan, we could do away with income tax (hand me one of those 12-12's, will ya?), there would be no more war (thanks), and you and I could dwell in Earthly Paradise today. (Pause.)

DANNY: What?

BERNIE: Just this:

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: That when she's on her back, her legs are in the air, she's coming like a choo-choo and she's screaming "don't stop"...

DANNY: Yeah?

BERNIE: I want you to remember...

DANNY: ... yeah? ...

BERNIE: That power ... (Pause.) ... that power means responsibility. (Pause.) Remember that.

DANNY: I will.

Pause.

BERNIE: Good. (SP 31)

While an audience certainly recognizes the humor of Bernie's relationship of sexual responsibility to the income tax and war, they can also recognize that the propositional content of his main point, the equation of power with responsibility, directly contradicts anything he's taught Dan thus far. Up to this point, the bulk of Bernie's lessons have concerned a lack of responsibility to anything except one's sexual prowess and reputation. Yet, this shift is only superficial: in urging on Danny the concept of responsibility within his relationship, Bernie's statement does not simply represent an utterance of normative rightness, but also masks a warning to his pupil: Danny wants to avoid "responsibility." Bernie's later narrative concerning King Farouk's sexual practices which involved rerouting trains and "whack[ing] [women] on the head with a ballpeen hammer" also brings up the notion of responsibility:

DANNY: How'd he get away with it?

BERNIE: You shitting me? The King had emissaries all over the country, they'd fix it up so it looked like the chick had got hit by a train.

Pause.

He'd take care of their families, though.

DANNY: The girl's families.

BERNIE: yeah. He'd send them a couple g's. A g or two in savings bonds. (SP 35)

Though Bernie's story of the 20th-century Egyptian king seems as far-fetched as his opening narrative, after a pause, he returns to the theme of power and responsibility: King Farouk had the resources available to him to "take care of [the women's] families." Though to an audience "A g or two in savings bonds" may hardly seem just compensation, Bernie's concern is with the act of compensation itself: a man such as Farouk (in Bernie's mind) had the power to literally "cover his tracks" and the resources to pay for his indulgences. Bernie's assertion that Farouk was "king of Egypt... A huge fucking country... An ancient land" highlights the king's access to steering media of power and money: the addition of qualitative characteristics to "Egypt" serves also to highlight Farouk's unique position (SP 33-34). An audience notes that Bernie's tale, while begun as a means of illustrating the point that some women "like you to get a trifle off the beaten track," ends by asserting King Farouk's social positioning. Bernie's shift in emphasis represents a recognition on his part of the opportunity to work further towards his goal of "reassimmalating" Dan — unlike a king of Egypt (or any figure of power — ultimately, Farouk is a fictitious convenience), Dan does not have access to steering media that would allow him to make reparations for indulging himself. Bernie illustrates both his cunning in realizing the potential for further perlocutionary undermining of Dan's relationship and his inability to see past the lifeworld interpretations available to him: once his lesson concludes, he shifts the conversation to Deb. Bernie's reference to Deb as "that girl" and his asking Dan if "she give[s] head" returns the conversation to its original broad theme: women as sexual objects (SP 36). Danny's unwillingness to respond only irritates his mentor, and even when he attempts to

return the conversation to Bernie's sexual experience, the older man's disappointment with his protégéé will not allow him to pick up the original dialogue — he sarcastically cuts Danny off and instructs him to return to work.

While both of the play's teachers feel the need to adjust their communicative/pedagogical practices to perceived threats in their relationships with their respective students, Mamet's structuring of scenes allows the audience to recognize what Bernie and Joan do not: Dan and Deb, despite their outward questioning and/or rejection of their mentor's teachings, still cling to these lessons as fallback positions at moments of vulnerability. In the second scene in which Dan and Deb are talking in bed, the conversation rapidly moves from sexual playfulness to guarded doubts concerning the sincerity of individual speech acts:

DANNY: So tell me.

DEBORAH: What?

DANNY: Everything. Tell me the truth about everything. Menstruation.

I know you're holding out on me.

DEBORAH: It would be hard on me if it got out.

DANNY: I swear.

DEBORAH: It's under our conscious control.

DANNY: I knew it!

DEBORAH: We just do it to drive you crazy with the mess.

DANNY: I just knew it ...

DEBORAH: Now you tell me some.

DANNY: Name it.

DEBORAH: What does it feel like to have a penis?

DANNY: Strange. Very strange and wonderful.

DEBORAH: Do you miss having tits?

DANNY: To be completely frank with you, that is the stupidest question I ever heard. What man in his right mind would want tits? ... I love making love with you.

DEBORAH: I love making love with you. (Pause.)

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. (Mamet SP 39-41)

Dennis Carroll notes:

Deb apparently reads Dan's confession that he is frightened as a sign that his declaration cannot be taken as a commitment; and so she lets them both off the hook by her remark that it's "only words," implying that it's not authentic. But the basic distrust that Deb has of words is very revealing. For her, most words in most situations are apparently some sort of mask, an armour [sic]. She cannot believe that Dan's words here can be the expression of genuine feeling. So this is the turning point in the relationship. Dan has lurched into a commitment. But Deb decertifies it, and Dan does not contradict her. And the scene ends. (58)

Extending Carroll's reading of this scene suggests the idea that the dialogue between the two lovers is an exchange of claims of sincerity. To return to the model of validity claims offered in language, the excerpt given above relates to the audience the level of sincerity both Dan and Deb will offer to one another. Despite his request for the "truth about everything," Dan willingly plays along with Deb's less than truthful explanation of menstruation. Yet, when it's his turn to answer a question, Dan does so in a manner that reveals his own attempt to maintain a level of sincerity. While "Very strange and wonderful" is a rather vague answer to Deb's question, and illustrates Dan's lack of descriptive power, it also shows that he is trying to present a sincere representation of his inner world; he still wants to act in disregard of his mentor's instruction. Deb, on the other hand, reveals that, despite her overt rejection of Joan in favor of Dan's company, she still clings to the lifeworld context her mentor has provided for her: men are not to be trusted. Thus, what opens as an attempt on Dan's part to further the intersubjective nature of Deb's and his communicative relationship fails as Deb manipulates the situation by making a game of Dan's request for information, prescribing the questions she will allow Dan to ask ("Ask me if I like the taste of come.") which serves as a set-up for a playful undercutting of his sexual orientation ("Faggot."), or rejecting his sincerity in his declaration of love (SP 40).

Carroll notes that in following scenes that illustrate the deterioration of the relationship "Power games ... now dominate"; yet clearly, as he implies in his characterization of this bedroom scene, these power games lie just below the surface of Dan and Deb's attempts at ideal communicative action (59). Just as many members of an audience would identify Deb's use of speech acts in this scene as a form of avoiding,

rather than attempting to create, valid intersubjective recognition of her inner world, they would also note that Dan's continuing tutelage under Bernie will provide him with the verbal weapons necessary to combat Deb's one-upmanship, completing the negation of communicative equality presented as a possibility in the consummation of their relationship. A complex web of "perversity" reveals itself as the audience realizes that Dan's attempted escape from lifeworld restrictions on "valid" interpretations conflicts with the combined instruction of both Bernie and Joan, which, despite surface differences, both have at their foundation the consistency of value commitment to generalizations of the opposite sex. Dan's attempts at contributing to a communicative partnership with Deb lacks the cultural sanction through which Bernie and Joan may assert their influence and justify their value commitment. The "Cultural traditions and forms of social life," and "Internal values [and] internal sanctions" related to those traditions, through which Bernie and Joan legitimize their action orientations, marginalizes a near-ideal speech situation in favor of easily attainable consensus steered by colonized media (Habermas TCA II 274). Bernie and Joan have systemic structures which serve as reserve backing for their teaching, whereas Dan and Deb's attempt to subvert these structures leaves them grasping in the dark for communicative patterns lacking the collateral of cultural sanction.

Bernie strengthens his position through his seeming recognition of this reserve backing, particularly within the mode of influence. As noted earlier, Bernie recognizes in the King Farouk story the potential to steer his and Dan's communication from general lessons of perverse sexuality to specific perlocutionary "instruction" regarding Dan's relationship with Deb. Specifically, Bernie recognizes a pattern of rhetoric that he can use to undermine Dan's wish for a relationship by suggesting that it is just another sexual conquest. In the King Farouk story, Bernie realized that he could imply a separation

between Dan and the King; he follows this implication up with questions regarding Deb's sexual performance. As he and Dan watch a pornographic movie in a later scene, Bernie again realizes the presence of reserve backing for his conception of Deb in the film:

> BERNIE: Don't tell me that's that guy's joint. Whatever you do don't tell me that. That's not his joint. Tell me it's not his joint, Dan.
>
> DANNY: It's his joint.
>
> BERNIE: I don't want to hear it.
>
> DANNY: That's what it is.
>
> BERNIE: I don't want to 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.
>
> DANNY: He probably used a stand-in. (Pause.)
>
> BERNIE: I can't stand this. I can't fucking stand this. Lookit that broad!
>
> DANNY: Which one?
>
> BERNIE: Which one? The one she looks a little bit like whatsername.
>
> DANNY: Like Deborah?
>
> BERNIE: Yeah.
>
> DANNY: Which one is that?
>
> BERNIE: That one.
>
> DANNY: You think she looks like Deborah?
>
> BERNIE: Yeah. You see what I mean?
>
> DANNY: No. You think she's pretty?
>
> BERNIE: Pretty? What the fuck are you talking about? (Pause.) You know this fucking house has changed. (Mamet SP 54-5)

As the pornographic film creates objects out of both the male and female actors on the screen, Bernie, in his initial outburst associating a male actor with the size of his penis, relies on this objectification to associate Deb with one of the women. Danny's inability to recognize any resemblance between the two women points to a difference in how the two men view the porno actress, and, consequently, Deborah. Danny asserts the quality of "prettiness" as the value by which the comparison should be made; his own conception of this abstract quality will not allow him to recognize any connection between the two women. Bernie, however, makes no distinction between the on-screen image and any other woman as he is limited to a stock of interpretations which allow him only to view women as sexual objects; one could argue that he would make such a connection between <u>any</u> of the movie's women and Deborah. Bernie uses the medium of the film to shore up his position as based in culturally sanctioned representations; his reaction to Dan's assertion of dissimilarity based on the quality of prettiness again takes the form of a rhetorical question. Bernie, at this point in the play, has mastered the methods of perlocution: his "Pretty? What the fuck are you talking about?" invalidates Dan's foundation for comparison through a rhetorical method that asserts his authority in the matter, and establishes the "proper" normative standard for making such a judgement.[7] Just as quickly as he brings it up, though, Bernie drops the subject, moving on to the state of the theater where they're watching the movie. Bernie makes sure that his rhetorical question is the final word on the matter; as Carroll asserts in the case of Deb and Dan's conversation about his claim to love her, Dan offers no rebuttal to Bernie's claim.[8]

While Dan's willingness to remain silent when both Deb and Bernie take a "no" position on the validity of claims he makes does not establish conclusively that he accepts

their statements as objectively true and/or normatively right. in scenes portraying the deterioration of his relationship with Deb. an audience recognizes that Bernie's lessons have taken hold. Mamet follows the scene in the theater with one of Dan and Deb engaged in "an all-night argument" (56). While earlier scenes portraying discussions between the couple provide examples of Dan asserting Bernie's lessons in a more or less playful manner (i.e. his answering Deb's question "Will you love me when I'm old" with "If you can manage to look eighteen. yes."). Dan. in this argument. unleashes the full fury of his mentor's instruction:

> DANNY: ... blah blah blah. blah blah blah. blah blah blah. Jesus. Some people go home with the Tribune. You go home with me. Everything's fine. Sex. talk. life. everything. Until you want to get "closer." to get "better." Do you know what the fuck you want?
>
> Push. You push me.
>
> Why can't you just see it for what it is?
>
> DEBORAH: What?
>
> DANNY: Us.
>
> DEBORAH: And what is it?
>
> DANNY: What it is. no more. no less.
>
> DEBORAH: And what is that?
>
> DANNY: Don't give me this. Don't give me that look. Missy.
>
> DEBORAH: Or you're going to what?
>
> DANNY: I don't mind physical violence. I just can't stand emotional violence. (Pause.) I'm sorry. I'm sorry Deb. (Pause.) I forgot who I'm

talking to. I'm sorry. You're very good for me. Come here. (Pause.) Come here.

DEBORAH: No. You come here for christ's fucking sake. You want comfort, come get comfort. What am I, your toaster?

DANNY: Cunt.

DEBORAH: That's very good. "Cunt," good. Get it out. Let it all out.

DANNY: You cunt.

DEBORAH: We've established that.

DANNY: I try. (SP 56-7)

If "treat[ing] 'em like shit" stands as the cornerstone of Bernie's philosophy of relating to women, Dan, at this point, has moved from a rebel against his mentor's teaching to Bernie's star student: unlike the man who makes himself emotionally vulnerable by admitting to Deb that he loves her, Dan has developed into the living embodiment of Bernie's pedagogy. As noted earlier, Carroll refers to Dan and Deb's late "conversations" as "power plays"; Dan, in accordance with his education under Bernie, attempts to assert the parameters of the relationship, and, when met with further legitimate questioning as to the specific nature of this framework, replies with the threat of physical violence. Ultimately, in one of the play's saddest scenes, an audience witnesses both Deb and Dan linguistically vying for positions of authority over each other: Dan makes use of the "shifting-issue" strategy seen in Bernie's later "lessons" in moving from an authoritative declaration of the state of the relationship (which requires objective validation) to an expressive mode in his threat of violence and apology. Deborah's response to this purported change of heart is to take charge: she issues

commands to Dan, thus implying her own authority concerning the rules by which Dan will receive "comfort." The audience witnesses Dan finally mirroring the actions of his mentor: like Bernie's attempted pick-up of Joan, Deb's refusal to meet Dan's expectations results in the label "Cunt." The ironic foundation of Bernie's lessons makes itself apparent once again: in this case, by his rough treatment of Deb, Dan contributes to the breakdown of not only the relationship, but also the possibility of any further sexual contact with Deborah. Carroll points out that the irony in this scene presents itself through both parties: Deb, who earlier invalidated Dan's expression of love by labeling it "only words," demands at the end of the scene "What are you feeling. Tell me what you're feeling. Jerk." (SP 58). "Of course, the irony is that, in the crucial bedroom scene, in which they almost connected, [Dan] did tell her what he was feeling, and she chose not to believe him" (Carroll 59). The irony to which Carroll refers takes on added significance within the mentor-student paradigm, as the contradiction implied by his interpretation reflects the conflicts inherent in Joan's lessons concerning men: a woman must recognize that expressive statements probably represent means towards sexual conquest, but the potential for a relationship based in an ideal speech situation requires sincere expressive utterances from both partners. Dan and Deb's last scene together "Splitting up their belongings" illustrates the final victory of the mentors in the play: both partners contribute to the destruction of any possibility of true communicative interaction as Dan hurls childish insults at his former paramour, and Deb responds in the minimal fashion witnessed when he first approached her in the library.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago ends in an ironic twist on the classical comic conclusion as the wounded students return to their mentors, drained of hope for love and ready to accept the lifeworld interpretations presented to them throughout the play.

Joan's last words to Deb confirms the rightness of her breakup with Dan given her consistent assertion that men are "all after only one thing":

> JOAN: It was not your fault. Say what you will, the facts don't change and the fact is if you take a grown man whose actions and whose outlook are those of a child, who wants nothing more or better than to have someone who will lick his penis and grin at his bizarre idea of wit, uh ... if you take that man and uh ...
>
> DEBORAH: I'll thank you for this someday.
>
> JOAN: Yes, you will, Deb ... (Mamet SP 60-1)

Joan, then, once again asserts her interpretation of men as objective "fact": Deb, in noting that she'll "thank" Joan for her teaching "one day" relates to her mentor a "yes" position on Joan's assertion. Dan similarly relents in rebelling against his mentor: Bernie, like Joan, points out Dan's error in "los[ing his] head over a little bit of puss" and that "the shame of it is [Dan got] out of touch with [him]self and lost [his] perspective" (Mamet SP 58-9). Thus, the ending of the play, in which Dan and Bernie, now equals in their lifeworldly perceptions, sit ogling women on the beach, does not point to "the best sense of friendship, of male bonding," as Bert Cardullo claims, but rather reinforces Christopher C. Hudgins' assertion that "comic irony' is the aesthetic key ... to Mamet's work" (6: 198). Hudgins focuses specifically on American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross, and Speed-the-Plow in his analysis of Mamet's use of the ironic mode, but one could easily include Sexual Perversity as a play in which:

> we are intended to look down on the 'wrong beliefs' and follies and sins ... of all of Mamet's characters at the same time as we are intended to

> sympathize with these figures and to recognize their sins and follies as much like our own — and often rooted in the limited possibilities our culture affords us. (199)

In these final portrayals of the play's homosocial "couples," an audience recognizes just this brand of irony as each teacher, while professing a morally corrupt lesson, succeeds in educating his or her student. Yet all of the "fault" does not lie with teachers or students, given Mamet's emphasis on culturally sanctioned media — the television, the porno movie, the fairy tale Joan reads to her students, and the mentor-student model itself as reproducers of "perverse" norms — that steer these characters in their interactions towards an almost inevitable corruption and alienation. While the interaction on stage evokes the mixture of humor and sadness so common to the comic drama of the mid- and late twentieth century, this interaction, in the end, encourages an audience to participate in virtual dialogue with the author on the sources and results of this corruption of acceptable communicative patterns.

ENDNOTES:

[1] In his *Paris Review* interview, Mamet addresses the relationship of rhetorical questions to communicative assertions of power:

> ... all rhetorical questions are accusations. They're very sneaky accusations because they masquerade as a request for information. If one is not aware of the anger they provoke, one can feel not only accused but inadequate for being able to respond to the question. (54)

[2] Anne Dean starts down this path of interpretation with her claim that Bernie's responses to "Danny's tireless questions" about the "professional" status of the woman in the story reveal the narrative act in progress: "As far as Bernie's fantasy is concerned, this information is — at least for his present purposes — irrelevant. He has not yet made up his mind whether she should be a sexually voracious virgin who has been deranged by his charms, or a hard-nosed trouper [sic] to whom such exploits are routine (58). With the shift from "dramatic" to communicative action, a reader realizes that Bernie's interruptions illuminate his story both as (1) a "work-in-progress," (2) a series of narrative speech acts which reinforce/(re)create his role as mentor/regulator of value

reproduction i.e. he, who through the medium of value commitment, diminishes the ideal communicative possibilities between the two men.

[3]In choosing the word "audience," I refer to both an audience of theater-goers watching a performance and a reader of the text of the play. At any point that I discuss specifically text-centered issues, I will then make use of the term "reader."

[4] Bernie's "maxim" takes on additional significance when considered in context of the revised *Lakeboat*, in which able-bodied seaman Fred asserts the same "truth" about sexual conquest. Fred, however, redefines "treat[ing] 'em like shit":

> So, I thought it out a bit and decided to put it into action. I'm going out with Janice. Movies, walk home, couch, dryhumping, no... I hit her in the mouth. I don't mean slap... I mean hit, I fucking pasted her. She didn't know nothing. She is so surprised she didn't even bleed. Not a word did I speak, but off with her dress, panties, and my pants... Anyway, Smacko, spread the old chops and I humped the shit out of her. (162)

Considered in this intertextual context, Bernie's performative contradiction represents the reification of a generalized value of "masculinity" within the lifeworld: the violence implicit in the assertion, or the communicative violence of "treat[ing] [women] like shit," exposes the equally valid interpretation of actual physical violence.

[5]In an early New York Times interview with C. Gerald Fraser, Mamet asserts this fact about gender differences in Sexual Perversity in Chicago himself:

> I kept getting huutzed by the director and the women in the cast [at the Organic Theater in Chicago], you know, write parts for women. I said I don't know anything about women,...
>
> The fleshier parts are the man parts, I'm more around men; I listen to more men being candid than women being candid. It's something I've been trying to do more in the last few years. Women are very different from men, I think. (7)

[6]Habermas contends that, in considering the mass media within the context of lifeworld colonization, one must place this particular brand of media within the same context as "influence" and "value commitment":

> Steering media uncouple the coordination of action from building consensus in language altogether and neutralize it in regard to the alternative of coming to an agreement or failing to do so. In the other case we are dealing with a specialization of linguistic processes of consensus formation that remains dependent on recourse to the resources of the lifeworld background. The mass media belong to these generalized forms of communication. They free communication processes from the provinciality of spatiotemporally restricted contexts and permit public spheres to emerge, through establishing the abstract simultaneity of a

> virtually present network of communication contents far removed in space and time and through keeping messages available for manifold contexts. (TCA II 390)

[7]See note 1, this chapter.

[8] An interesting parallel between Bernie's rhetorical strategy and Mamet's recent characterization of legal maneuvering will perhaps illuminate Bernie's methods:

> (During the O.J. Simpson case I was at a party with a couple of rather famous jurists. I said it occurred to me that a legal battle consisted not in a search for the truth but in jockeying for the right to pick the central issue. They chuckled and pinched me on the cheeks. "You just skipped the first two years of law school," one of them said.) (Knife 30)

As with attorneys, Bernie reinforces his positioning as superior to Dan by not only "pick[ing] the central issue," but also by constantly shifting that issue. His rapid changes in subject matter, while related to his inability to penetrate beyond the surface of matters under discussion, also becomes a means by which he can keep Dan off guard and, thus, having to try to keep up with his mentor. This also illustrates another parallel between Bernie and Joan's perlocutionary strategies: an audience witnesses a similar strategy invoked in Joan's first confrontation with Deb concerning her new relationship (Scene 8).

CHAPTER 3

"I'M TRYING TO TEACH YOU SOMETHING HERE": AMERICAN BUFFALO

> Oppression — overwhelming control — is necrophilic: it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power. (Freire 58)[1]

> TEACH: ... The only way to teach these people is to kill them. (AB 11)

Despite garnering a New York Drama Critics' Circle prize and another Obie for its author, American Buffalo's time on stages at St. Clement's and the Ethel Barrymore Theater in 1977 did not garner the almost universal praise lavished on Sexual Perversity in Chicago and The Duck Variations; surprisingly, a mixture of confusion and outright disdain greeted what for many is now a "modern classic." The Nation's Harold Clurman, for instance, while lauding the performers and staging, was noticeably guarded in his praise for Mamet's newest offering, claiming "the play's incompleteness, though

suggestive, demands something more, which the author's future works may provide (313). Brendan Gill of The New Yorker proved even less encouraging:

> Alas, "American Buffalo" [sic] is so far from being a treat that my disappointment may have led me to dislike it more than it deserves. ... It is a curiously offensive piece of writing, less because of the language of which it is composed — every third word is either scatological or obscene: street language attempting in vain to perform the office of eloquence, ... — than because it is presumptuous. The playwright, having dared to ask for our attention, provides only the most meagre [sic] crumbs of nourishment for our minds. (54)

Despite the initial lack of enthusiasm for the young playwright's second outing on the New York stage, American Buffalo returned to Broadway in 1983, and has become, according to Henry Schvey, "one of the central works in this playwright's already substantial canon" (93). A critic could attribute this centrality to any number of elements: I think that most of the praise lavished on American Buffalo in the years since its New York premiere relates directly to Mamet's masterful representation of mentor-student dynamics within this play. While Oleanna has captured the benevolent attention of critics since its opening in 1992 and become for many Mamet's quintessential play about "teaching," I contend that American Buffalo renders the complexities inherent in this relationship so thoroughly that it's impossible to discuss the linguistic and social elements of the play without reference to the actions of teaching and learning. As I will argue in a later chapter, Oleanna diminishes the dramatic potential of the mentor-student relationship both by localizing it within the formal institution of education and by its

presentation of an impenetrable lack of communication: American Buffalo, on the other hand, locates this relationship within a complex web of larger societal concerns, presents ideal communication as unlikely but possible, and reflects the pervasiveness of Freire's "banking" model throughout American culture. Mamet himself sums this up neatly in his 1984 interview with Matthew C. Roudané:

> [In American Buffalo] I was interested in the idea of honor among thieves, of what is an unassailable moral position and what isn't. What would cause a man to abdicate a moral position he'd espoused. That's what American Buffalo is about. Teach is the antagonist. The play's about Donny Dubrow. His moral position is that one must conduct himself like a man and that there are no extenuating circumstances for supporting the betrayal of a friend. That's how the play starts. The rest of the play is about Donny's betrayal of the fellow, Bobby, whom he's teaching these things to. (Speaking 180)

The question of an "unassailable moral position" leads one to considerations of the lifeworld context in American Buffalo. Mamet presents his audience with two similar visions of unquestioned norms of relationships represented by the teachings of both Donny and Teach. The flaws in both versions of knowledge concerning the business relationship become readily apparent, and an audience may well recognize the complexity inherent in the play's title noted by Jack V. Barbera:

> One way of understanding the play's title mainly applies to [the play's characters] as members of a marginal class of society. ... Don and Teach and Bobby are as antiquated and out-of-it as the American buffalo or bison

> (successful American businessmen may or may not be ethical, but they are not marginal). We must admit that Don and Teach and Bobby are dumb. They are not even streetwise, though Don and Teach may think they are...
>
> This contradiction leads us to the other way of understanding the title ... For "buffalo" read the slang verb "to intimidate." It is because he does not know anything that Teach must try to buffalo Don. (276-77)

Barbera's second interpretation (echoed by Ruby Cohn in her observation that "Even the choice of 'Buffalo' is not fortuitous in a play where all three characters are buffaloed about a buffalo nickel.") points not only to the corruption of American mythology through communicative imperatives of "power and wealth," but also links the dialogue in which Mamet's characters engage to actions implied by this debased mythos (My emphasis, 112-13). Barbera's interpretation, while providing a compelling starting point, limits purposive rationality to the world of "crooks and unethical businessmen": while Mamet himself started the discussion of this parallel, American Buffalo, by engaging the audience in problem-posing education, reveals the pervasiveness of the business ethic throughout the larger lifeworld. Donny, Teach, and Bobby may be "dumb," but the corrupted visions of American idealism that they utter, particularly within the claustrophobic, marginalized environment of the junkshop, leads an audience to the inference that such corrupted ideals must have spread a wide net in order to capture men relegated to the fringes of society.

Both Mamet and a number of critics have noted that the foundation for the contemporary business ethic draws on a wide range of texts and ideas dating at least as far back as the eighteenth century, and that the contradictions brought to the fore in

American Buffalo have existed within the ideals from which this ethical paradigm derives. Mamet himself notes in "First Principles" that:

> The proclamation and repetition of first principles is a constant feature of life in our democracy. Active adherence to these principles, however, has always been considered un-American ... We tolerate and repeat the teachings of Christ, but explain that the injunction against murder surely cannot be construed to apply to war, and that against theft does not apply to commerce. We sanctify the Constitution of the United States, but explain that freedom of choice is meant to apply to all except women, racial minorities, homosexuals, the poor, opponents of the government, and those with whose ideas we disagree. (WR 24-5)

Thus, Mamet presents a vision of an American lifeworld in which the contradiction between first principles ("democracy and free enterprise" in Barbera's conception) and a debased practice of these principles provide a foundation for American identity.

Up to this point, I have painted the social milieu of American Buffalo as dark, contradictory, and potentially violent. Yet, we must not forget that Mamet presents this play in the form of a problem posed, or, to borrow from Christopher C. Hudgins, the author "intends his audience to learn something positive about ethical behavior by watching a negative example. He makes this ethical lesson more acceptable, and more entertaining, by making us laugh" ("Comedy" 203). The comically ironic vision of action for which Hudgins argues underscores the notion that Mamet sees this work as potentially redemptive; or, to borrow again from Freire, Mamet undertakes a

communicative gesture of love for his audience and for life itself (biophily) by presenting three characters engaged in first attempting to destroy one another and then recognizing the outcome of these actions. The Habermasian concept of the audience as virtual participant asserts itself again as Mamet guides us towards an "ethical interchange" with him and with each other through engagement with the characters on stage. At least part of that exchange, as Sheila Rabillard notes, involves "a suspicion of theatrical illusion," or a critical engagement with the role-playing on the stage as a step, in Brechtian fashion, towards questioning the validity claim of mimesis inherent in the dramatic form:

> This crisis of the theatrical medium threatens in dramas (such as American Buffalo .... I argue) that stage their social engagement in part through an attack upon roles and representation itself, even while they, in one respect, mirror social ills. The mimetic 'is' necessarily is read as 'must be': thus, representation is compelled to reveal itself as false so that a new, overtly fictive and hypothetical role may be created. (34)

As in Sexual Perversity in Chicago, the role of the teacher as presented within the heuristic of the banking model ultimately reveals a communicatively achieved acceptance of roles between partners in dialogue rather than a natural structure of authority. Complicating the action, though, Mamet also introduces visions of a corrupted brand of problem-posing education framed within perlocutionary action strategies. As in the earlier play, Mamet introduces the audience to the play's action through presentation of a "lesson" in progress:

> Don's Resale Shop. Morning. DON and BOB are sitting.
>
> DON: So?

Pause.

So what, Bob?

Pause.

BOB: I'm sorry, Donny.

Pause.

DON: All right.

BOB: I'm sorry, Donny.

Pause.

DON: Yeah.

BOB: Maybe he's still in there.

DON: If you think that, Bob, how come you're here? (AB 3-4)

Don's use of techniques similar to Bernie's in Perversity, though, create a much less humorous beginning. Like Bernie, Don makes ample use of the rhetorical question: an audience (and Bobby) easily recognize Don's questions as accusations: Don's "If you think that, Bob, how come you're here?" does not require an answer on Bobby's part, as Donny uses it to illustrate the distance between Bobby's statements and his actions. Similarly, Mamet's use of the Pinteresque pause in this passage heightens the chastising tone in Donny's speech. Don's pauses after Bobby's repeated apology and his "I came in" solidify his position of authority by providing Bob with a moment of uncomfortable silence in which to await the judgement of his statement. By using these techniques, Don establishes the rightness of his characterization of Bob's attempts to justify his actions: "Just one thing, Bob. Action counts./ Pause./ Action talks and bullshit walks" (AB 4).

These patterns of dialogue point to Don's asserting his right to dispense

punishment: both his assertion of that right and the punishment itself come in the form of regulative speech acts that underscore Bob's deviation from the norms of "business" as Don defines it. At no point does Don question the validity of Bobby's representation of the truth of his actions or his sincerity in relating them to his mentor: he does, however, instruct the younger man on the rightness, or lack thereof, of his actions. The normative framework through which Don asserts his authority is that of "business," a term that, as a number of critics point out, proves particularly slippery among Mamet's characters. The audience recognizes numerous contradictions in Don's lecture about proper behavior and attitudes when one engages in "business." For instance, in presenting Fletcher as an example of " a standup guy," and then in attempting to explain the bad feelings caused by a "business" deal between Fletch and Ruthie, Don notes that "there's business and there's friendship, Bobby ... and what you got to do is keep clear who your friends are, and who treated you like what. Or else the rest is garbage..." (AB 7-8). Yet, almost immediately after delineating the difference between "friendship" and "business," Don adds that "There's lotsa people on this street, Bob, they want this they want that. Do anything to get it. You don't have friends this life..." (AB 8). Don leaves Bobby and the audience with an incomplete thought, adding ambiguity to his presumed assertion that friendship provides protection from the dangers of life on the street; as stated, though, one could read his utterance as a milder version of Teach's later proclamation "There Is No Friendship" (AB 103). Don's abruptness leaves Bobby and the audience with the logical conclusion that business provides the most reliable gauge of action within their social sphere, an assertion again contradicted as Don offers to buy Bobby breakfast and lectures him on the benefits of nutrition and vitamins. Despite Don's harsh attitude, an undertone

of caring colors both the older man's exasperation with Bobby's ineptitude in gathering information on a potential "mark," and his repeated assertions of sincerity in chastising his charge: Don notes after informing Bobby "I'm not mad at you" that "I'm trying to teach you something here" (AB 4).

Critics have certainly noted Don's role as teacher in this play, but most focus on Teach's particular brand of pedagogy. The multifaceted irony associated with instruction in American Buffalo, though, largely depends on Don's pedagogical methods and how they, at least as much as Teach's, represent the performative contradictions inherent in a contemporary lifeworld that represents "community" and "individual achievement" as equally laudable goals while supporting the latter at the expense of the former. Teach's pedagogical action, while complex, relies heavily on perlocution; thus, while unreflective enough to believe much of what he propounds, Teach also uses teaching as a means towards individual achievement, regardless of consequences to others. Don, on the other hand, is caught in a contradiction that allows him to preach the "business ethic" in its most ruthless manifestation while still valuing the relationship between Bobby and himself. Don illustrates a brand of naivete, in that he fails to recognize Freire's characterization of "banking education" as necrophilic; thus, though he exhibits genuine concern for Bobby's well-being, he expresses his affection through a communicative pattern that negates the possibility for ideal communicative action, and requires its practitioner to use speech so as to inhibit the potential for maturity in the student. In fact, Don is very much the counterpart to Ionesco's Professor in The Lesson or Pinter's gangsters in The Birthday Party; however, these characters are his superiors in the sense that they consciously make use of the destructive power inherent in teaching. Donny's

obliviousness to the sterilizing effects of his pedagogical methods make him a ripe target for Teach's instruction/con game in that his subscription to the banking method carries the pathology of oppression. Freire reveals the motivation underlying such behavior:

> But almost always, ... the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of "adhesion" to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot "consider" him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him — to discover him "outside" themselves. This does not necessarily mean that the oppressed are unaware that they are downtrodden. But their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction [the "dialectical conflict between opposing social forces"]; the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole. (Freire 27-8)

Freire's examination of the oppressed consciousness offers a number of insights about the dramatic reversals that occur within the play, particularly in Don's movement from Bobby's mentor and protector to accomplice in the young man's punishment for an

alleged lie and betrayal. For instance, within the capitalist model, Don has achieved a level of "liberation," in the sense that he owns a business. Yet, owning a business, even one as apparently unsuccessful as the junk shop, grants Don the authority to dominate others and prevent their own liberation. This opening dialogue illustrates to the audience from the outset the debasement of communicative patterns within the play; at this early point, though, an audience member will likely not recognize Don's "teaching" as contradictory. Rather, one probably interprets this interaction in terms of a surrogate father/son relationship, with Don as the tough but loving father, and Bobby as the repentant son. But, this relationship of paternalism represents the pathology which is the foundation for Don's eventual betrayal of Bobby, because Don views himself as "taking care" of Bobby; as Freire notes, "oppression is domesticating" (33). Or, to use Habermas's model, Don's mentoring of Bob represents a "disturbance in the domain of social integration": by basing their friendship on a paternalistic model which implies domination of one person over the other, solidarity between the mentor and student becomes an illusion. "Anomie" sets in as each member of the social grouping recognizes that their own interests may not conform to those of other members of the group (TCA II 143).[2]

Given relationships based largely on the fragile bonds of teachers and students of "business," seeming minor disruptions will expose this weakness. As Teach enters the scene, an audience may have a difficult time viewing him as a figure of menace. Yet, like Davies in Pinter's The Caretaker, Teach creates a schizoid pastiche combining claims of victimization woven with assertions meant to establish his own position of dominance, i.e. that of a teacher. In one of Mamet's most memorable passages of dialogue, Teach

enters the scene and immediately dominates it with a passionate diatribe against his "victimization" by the unseen Ruthie:

> TEACH (walks around the store a bit in silence): Fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie, fuckin' Ruthie.

This curious chant elicits Don's curiosity, and Teach launches into a narrative describing his encounter with Ruthie at the Riverside earlier that morning. In joining Ruthie and her partner Grace at a table, Teach takes a piece of toast off of the woman's plate. Ruthie's reaction provides the catalyst for Teach's wrath:

> TEACH: ... and she goes "Help yourself."
>
> Help myself.
>
> I should help myself to half a piece of toast it's four slices for a quarter. I should have a nickel every time we're over at the game. I pop for coffee ... cigarettes ... a sweet roll, never say word. "Bobby, see who wants what." Huh? A fucking roast-beef sandwich. (To BOB) Am I right? (To DON) Ahh, shit. We're sitting down, how many times do I pick up the check? But (No!) because I never go and make a big thing out of it — it's no big thing — and flaunt like "This one's on me" like some bust-out asshole, but I naturally assume that I'm with friends, and don't forget who's who when someone gets behind a half a yard or needs some help with (huh?) some fucking rent, or drops enormous piles of money at the track or someone's sick or something [...]
>
> TEACH: Only (and I tell you this, Don). Only, and I'm not, I don't think,

casting anything on anyone: from the mouth of a Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt can this trash come. (To BOB)

And I take nothing back, and I know you're close with them. (AB 10-11)

An audience can immediately recognize that Teach uses language in a manner similar to Don: like the older man, Teach uses this story as a means of communicating violations of the norms of friendship. At the same time, though, a striking difference comes into play that will prove significant in the play's ensuing action. In his final words of the passage, Teach consciously validates his sincerity by noting that his words may well offend both Don and Bobby as they are "close to" Grace and Ruth. Teach, thus, attempts to present himself to the other characters as a man of principle — he's willing to suffer the sanctions associated with a truthful rendering of the story and the conclusions he draws from it. As Thomas L. King notes, "Teach in his interest in 'facts' seems to desire talk as an accurate representation, whereas Don is satisfied with what it is better for him to believe ... Teach wants facts, correspondence between language and things ... Don seems more sensitive to a ... treatment of language as psychological rather than factual" (541). Teach often represents the normative as the objective in his utterances, whereas Don, while not recognizing the inherent contradictions in his ideological bent, does approach teaching as a means of ascribing normative value to action. This allows the older man flexibility: Don recognizes that normative prescriptions can and do change in accordance with the context of such prescriptions. While they both use similar speech act patterns — both "I'm trying to teach you something here" and "I take nothing back..." illustrate a performative stance on the part of the speaker — Teach utters his performatives as a means of underscoring the truth and truthfulness of previous

statements, whereas Don attempts to thematize the normative world in his performative utterances.

The normative framework to which Don subscribes, though, and his relative openness about his concern for Bobby's well-being provide the "soft spots" which allow Teach to begin his manipulation. An audience may assume that Teach's motivation for coming to the junkshop depends on this element of Don's personality. Teach has lost heavily in the previous night's poker game, and sees Ruthie's "slight" as a matter of adding insult to injury. Thus, while denying it outright, Teach goes to Don for comfort and compassion; his "Fuckin' Ruthie" line illustrates Teach's perlocutionary means of requesting such friendship, in that he does not ask for a sympathetic listener, but by cursing Ruthie he relies on both Don's curiosity and desire to comfort as character traits that will provide a forum for telling the story. Though assuming the mantle of the victim, Teach uses language to control the conversation. By playing the victim, Teach engages in a brand of perlocutionary speech similar to Mike's definition of the "confidence game" in House of Games: "The basic idea is this: it's called a "confidence" game. Why? Because you give me your confidence? No. Because I give you mine" (HG 34). Just as Mike uses language in a deceptive manner to convince his "mark" of the rightness of their actions, Teach practices perlocutionary methods of speech in order to convince Don to play the part of friend/comforter. While Teach can not successfully "buffalo" Don into allowing him to replace Bobby in the coin heist without also bring Fletcher into the "shot," Teach can capitalize on Don's compassion by using language to evoke sympathy from the older man.

Teach's ability to play on Don's innate sense of loyalty proves more compelling

as his hearing Don's and Bob's conversation leads him to conclude that they have set a plan in motion. After spouting one of his many maxims on how to "do business," Teach abruptly moves the conversation between Don and himself to the job, presenting himself as a disinterested party only desiring conversation:

> TEACH: You want to tell me what this thing is? ...
>
> DON: Nothing. ... You know?
>
> TEACH: Yeah.
>
> Pause.
>
> Yeah. No. I don't know.
>
> Pause.
>
> Who am I, a policeman ... I'm making conversation, huh? ...
>
> 'Cause you know I'm just asking for talk.
>
> DON: Yeah. I know. Yeah, okay.
>
> TEACH: And I can live without this. ...
>
> Tell me if you want to, Don.
>
> DON: I want to, Teach.
>
> TEACH: Yeah?
>
> DON: Yeah.
>
> Pause.
>
> TEACH: Well, I'd fucking hope so. (AB 26-7)

Teach's strategy involves a two-tiered appeal to Don's innate sense of loyalty and friendship. As Don demonstrates a reluctance to explain the details of his plan with

Bobby. Teach presents himself as a disinterested party, reiterating that he only desires conversation and noting "I can live without this." As soon as Don backs off his guarded position, though, Teach seizes the opportunity to reframe the conversation in terms of norms of friendship: his "Well, I'd fucking hope so" again illustrates Teach's manipulation of these norms, implying that the "right" response on Don's part involves disclosing the details to a "friend." Teach punctuates his interpretation of right action in this context with the question "Am I wrong?"; while Don does answer this question, Teach uses it rhetorically, suggesting that his curiosity has no ulterior motives and that Don has acted in a less-than-friendly manner through his reticence. This illustration of Teach's ability to invoke norms as they suit his convenience is ironic: an audience should note that Mamet juxtaposes it with Teach, just minutes earlier, speaking in a guarded manner about his need to see Fletcher.

Don's willingness to reveal the details of the planned coin heist and Teach's subsequent use of this knowledge to position himself as the superior accomplice to the theft begin the process of "banking education" in earnest between the two men. The first act ends with Teach having achieved his objective because he recognizes in Don the contradictions mentioned above: the older man's simultaneous loyalty to business and friendship and his assertion of authority over Bobby as a means of illustrating his friendship. While an audience (and Don, to a certain degree) quickly recognizes that Teach positions himself through his ability to perform the roles of Don's trusted confidant and his superior in understanding burglary methods, it also recognizes that Teach's success depends on communicative manipulation, not knowledge. Teach also illustrates that he is knowledgeable in one regard: he realizes that constructing a

perlocutionary strategy involving the norms of business and Don's own loyalty to/concern for Bobby will bring his friend around to validating the rightness of replacing Bobby in the job. Teach also recognizes that Don values friendship above the business ethic that he enthusiastically preaches to Bobby at the beginning of the play. The audience recognizes Teach's knowledge as it witnesses his interaction with Don: Mamet again guides the audience towards virtual participation in the dialogue through comic irony. The audience member, then, realizes that Teach engages in a game of improvisation, and that such "thinking on his feet" often leads to patently ridiculous assertions on his part. Thus, despite his obvious lack of knowledge on practicalities related to the proposed crime, Teach, in the first act, shows an uncanny ability to recognize Don's own weaknesses of character and to play on them to a temporarily successful conclusion.

The first part of Teach's strategy involves a very obvious and very funny performance of the sycophant. Once Don has made his phone call to the prospective buyer of the stolen coins, Teach, like Mosca in Jonson's Volpone, responds to Don's anger and feelings of ill-treatment by both the buyer and the mark with enthusiastic agreement meant to convey the experiential connection between the two men:

> DON: ... I feel the same. All right. Good-bye. (Hangs up.) Fucking asshole.
>
> TEACH: Guys like that, I like to fuck their wives.
>
> DON: I don't blame you.
>
> TEACH: Fucking jerk ...
>
> So you hit him for his coins.

DON: Yeah.

TEACH: — And you got a buyer in the phone guy.

DON: (Asshole.)

TEACH: The thing is you're not sitting with the shit.

DON: No.

TEACH: The guy's an asshole or he's not, what do you care? It's business. (AB --)

In this passage, Teach's responses range from the eminently practical ("The thing is you're not sitting with the shit.") to the comically sycophantic ("Guys like that I like to fuck their wives."). In each case, though, Teach validates Don's responses and interpretations. Clearly, Teach does not know the "phone guy," and, thus, is not in a position to characterize him. Furthermore, while statements like "Guys like that I like to fuck their wives" certainly pertain to Teach's representation of himself as a man of the world, their primary purpose, as shown by the rapid pace of this dialogue, is to validate Don's feeling victimized by those above him: Teach lays the groundwork for a partnership by illustrating his understanding of Don's feelings as well as giving his approval to Don's methods. Both men again resemble House of Games's Mike, who, after swindling a young man in a Western Union office, instructs his student, psychologist Margaret Ford, that "everybody gets something out of every transaction. What that nice kid [the mark] gets is the opportunity to feel like a good man" (HG 37). Thus, sycophancy provides the means for the confidence man to "give the mark his confidence." In the case of Don and Teach, the latter builds a foundation for moving in on the deal by uncritically supporting Don's every move at this point. As Don relates the

story of the mark's purchase of the buffalo nickel from Don. Teach continues to respond with approval and praise. Teach reacts with shock at the mark's low initial offer for the coin, and then congratulates Don on his ability to recognize a hustle and respond in kind. Teach's strategy proves successful at this point: by offering praise and support for Don's methods, he draws the shopkeeper into a more heightened awareness of the rightness of his actions. Don's "(get this)" as preparation for his response to the coin collector's offer illustrates this marked increase in confidence: he now wants Teach to recognize the "businesslike" manner with which he handles negotiation wherein he has no real knowledge. At the same time, such a recognition on Don's part heightens his awareness that he may still have been the victim in this exchange, as his lack of knowledge makes him doubt concerning his success in the transaction.

Enthusiastic agreement lays the groundwork for Teach's next step in his con: arguing for his own suitability to participate in the theft. By validating both Don's perceptions of transgression of interpersonal norms by the mark and his feelings of victimization, Teach succeeds in gaining Don's trust. Now playing on this position of confidant, Teach adapts a new strategy: he offers advice to his friend that undercuts Bobby as a suitable accomplice, and highlights his own strengths:

TEACH: You're going in tonight.

DON: It looks that way.

TEACH: And who's going in?

<u>Pause</u>.

DON: Bobby.

<u>Pause</u>.

He's a good kid, Teach.

TEACH: He's a great kid, Don. You know how I feel about the kid.

Pause.

I like him.

DON: He's doing good.

TEACH: I can see that.

Pause.

But I gotta say something here. (AB 33)

While continuing to smoother Don in compliments regarding his feeling towards and treatment of Bobby, Teach begins his performance as the voice of reason, a necessary complement to Don's good will but poor judgment. Teach creates this persona through offering a series of validity claims also marked by their focus on honest personal revelation and prudent evaluation of norms. Teach also senses that he faces an uphill battle at this point: Don's repeated "What?" conveys incredulity on the older man's part. Thus, he gently guides his partner towards a shift of paradigms: Don's actions towards Bobby (which are never specified by Teach) prove him a loyal friend. The coin heist, however, falls into the category of business, and Don's feelings for Bobby have no place here. Teach reinforces his position by moving into the realm of objective validity: the facts of the situation necessarily preclude Bobby from consideration as his level of experience has not prepared him for contingencies such as "a safe" or "a good lock or two." Furthermore, Teach claims that Bobby can not distinguish value in the hypothetical situation, and, thus, can not be trusted to retrieve the items of true value to the thieves. As with his crude condemnation of Ruthie's slight, Teach further masks his

perlocutionary aims by portraying himself as willing to risk friendship for the sake of truth: his "I don't think I'm getting at anything" parallels the earlier "I don't think I'm casting anything on anyone." In both cases, Teach negates a potential illocutionary aim to further his perlocutionary strategy: the equation of reasonable behavior with "business" or profit-driven, goal-directed action.

On the surface, Teach's argument looks solid: one could sum up his position with his earlier statement "You want it run right, be there" (AB 24). Yet even at this early point in the "game," Teach "shows his hand" through his reference to Bobby's drug use. By bringing up this subject, Teach has pushed the conversation beyond the realm of reasonable "talk" into ad hominem attack: he moves from Bobby's inexperience (a relevant consideration within the business context) to the younger man's fight with drug addiction (a personal slight). Teach's performance as Don's partner and confidant misjudges the older man's reaction to this subject. Rather than validate Teach's position, — it's an objective fact that disqualifies Bobby from complete reliability — Don responds by recasting Bobby's character flaw in a normative context:

DON: But I don't want that talk, only, Teach.

Pause.

You understand?

TEACH: I more than understand, and I apologize.

Pause.

I'm sorry.

DON: That's the only thing.

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

DON: Why?

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

DON: But I don't want it in the open.

TEACH: Which is why I apologized.

Pause.

DON: You know the fucking kid's clean. He's trying hard, he's working hard, and you leave him alone. (AB 34-5)

Teach's misjudgment illustrates his tendency to let his confidence game get away from him. Up until this point, Donny has listened to Teach's argument, and he has maintained an upper hand as he talks with confidence about the considerations involved in successfully completing the theft. Teach's not knowing when to quit suggests that he's not as in control as he'd like to portray himself. By crossing the line of acceptable talk, Teach reveals his misunderstanding of Don's emotional attachment to Bobby: he attempts to talk business about a subject personal and painful to Don.

Teach also brings up topics that will further undercut his argument such as locks and safes. Teach again misjudges Don as a mark, since "talk" of locks and safes will come back to haunt him both in this and the second act. Teach's performance of the role of "knowing Subject," thus, begins to deconstruct from the very beginning, and Mamet, in a vein similar to House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner, constructs a confidence game for the audience: a virtual participant in the dialogue will likely identify with the "common sense" that Teach professes.[3] Thus, Mamet, in using a superficially solid argument, also gives the audience Teach's confidence, as those witnessing the dialogue are likely to recognize that (1) Don's attachment to Bobby does cloud his "business"

sense, and that (2) Teach, at this point, does make valid points concerning Bobby's inexperience. As Teach sets himself up for exposure of his chicanery, Mamet also cons the audience into temporary identification with the character he positions as the antagonist.

While Teach's attempt to broach the subject of Bobby's drug use proves futile, his subsequent "demonstration" for Don of Bobby's inability to handle even the most mundane of tasks and questions meets with less resistance. Bob returns from the Riv with Don's and his breakfast, and Teach seizes on Bobby's unsure knowledge concerning the coffee charges as an opportunity to validate his claim concerning the boy's ineptness. He sets Bob up with a question about the weather; Bob, of course, can not answer this question with any degree of certainty, but tries to do so just the same. Teach's follow-up question, concerning the "dead-pig leg-spreader" brings Bobby's desire to express certainty even closer to the fore: he obviously can not identify the object, but repeatedly insists that he can. While Don does attempt to interrupt Teach's interrogation by insisting "We'll do this later," he does not object as insistently as has about Teach's references to Bob's drug use. An audience member may recognize that Don has begun to question Bobby's fitness for the job in allowing Teach to proceed with his "examination"; this same audience member may also accept Don's doubts as valid.

What both "teachers" fail to recognize, though, is Bob's fidelity to Don's instruction from the earlier part of the act. Don, in using Fletcher as a model, has taught Bob that success depends on "Skill. Skill and the talent and the balls to arrive at your own <u>conclusions</u> ... And this is why I'm telling you to stand up. It's no different with you than with anyone else. Everything that I or Fletcher know we picked up on the street.

That's all business is ... common sense, experience, and talent" (AB 4-6). In his awkward attempt to answer Teach's loaded questions, Bobby attempts to "stand up" and "arrive at [his] own conclusions." Ironically, of course, Bobby has already proven his ability to take charge of a situation in his fabrication of the story of the mark's leaving his home: Teach and Don are engaged in their contest based on false knowledge Bobby provided. Once again, though, the audience, like the older men, does not have this knowledge at this point, and thus Bob's adherence to his mentor's lessons may go unnoticed. Mamet complicates the con on the audience by including action on Bobby's part that will reveal its real significance only late in the play. At this point, an audience member will tend to gravitate emotionally towards Don's dilemma as he sees it: remain faithful to Bobby and risk bungling the heist, or follow through on Teach's "talk" and replace the younger man with an allegedly more experienced burglar. Rather than hitting his audience over the head, Mamet directs the play's action towards the ethical and moral considerations demanded by "business" so gently that the audience will likely find themselves judging Bob as wanting in "common sense, experience, and talent," i.e. judging the situation through the context of business.

Bob's negotiation with Don for money heightens this doubt as Teach's statements concerning the boy's drug use overshadow other possibilities as to why Bobby would want money so desperately and immediately. As Teach's interrogation ends, Bob requests a private moment with Don in order to ask for some of his "take" from the job up front. When Don questions the Bob's need for the money, the boy becomes evasive and attempts to shift the subject from need to his own trustworthiness. Don rejects the issue of trust, but, ironically, chooses this moment to tell Bob "I was thinking, you know we

might hold off on this thing" (AB 41). Once he utters the statement, though, Don shifts the subject back to money and offers to pay the boy for spotting the mark. The two dicker over amounts and terms, finally reaching a consensus.

King uses this exchange to illustrate his point that "the play reveals to us and to its characters that value is not intrinsic but a matter of negotiated convention" (542). Thus, Bobby's negotiation with Don highlights the fact that "Value in this play is regularly characterized as something that must be agreed to rather that inhering in the object itself apart from human negotiations (King 543). King's argument, while based in Saussurian linguistic theory, points towards Habermas's conception of communicative action; the latter model, though, recognizes both the equation of "value" with "money," and Don's superior position within this negotiation because he possesses the money Bob "needs." Of course, the equation of "value" with "monetary worth" should come easily enough to a contemporary audience, and this equation has a steering effect on the communication between play/playwright and the audience: Bobby's attempt to participate in the negotiation, despite his lack of any "capital," raises suspicions regarding his motivations; since Don holds the prerogative of assigning value, Bobby's participation in the dialogue appears as begging or an attempt to manipulate Don's feelings. In hindsight, one can see once again that Bob is practicing what Don has preached, but Mamet's constructing Teach as a character with whom an audience will temporarily identify establishes the context for interpreting Bob's negotiation for a virtual participant: Bob's entry into dialogue with Don concerning the value of his work seems to underscore Teach's characterization of the boy as inexperienced and untrustworthy.

Teach's choice of standards by which to judge Bob as wanting return to haunt him

almost immediately, though. Once the boy has left, the two older men begin jockeying for position in earnest. Teach takes the lead by assuring Don that his dismissal of Bob is "best for everybody," and then assumes the position of authority by issuing directives and reserving the right to interpret the "facts" associated with the planned robbery:

> TEACH: ... Don. (Can you cooperate?) Can we get started? Do you want to tell me something about the coins?
>
> DON: What about 'em?
>
> TEACH: A crash course. What to look for. What to take. What to not take (... this they can trace) (that isn't worth nothing ...)
>
> Pause.
>
> What looks like what but it's more valuable ... so on ...
>
> DON: First off, I want that nickel back.
>
> TEACH: Donny ...
>
> DON: No, I know, it's only a fuckin' nickel ... I mean big deal, huh? But what I'm saying is I only want it back.
>
> TEACH: You're going to get it back. I'm going in there for his coins, what am I going to take 'em all except your nickel? Wake up. Don, let's plan this out. The spirit of the thing? (AB 45)

Almost as soon as he feels his position is secure in the job, Teach begins to "tip his hand" concerning his own depth of knowledge. One of his primary assertions of Bob's unfitness concerned the younger man's inability to distinguish the value of potential loot, yet Teach, in attempting to dominate the situation, defers to Don on this

very issue. Don, though, has no more knowledge on the subject than Teach, and the latter takes the "blue book" on coin values from the older man and attempts to use this possession as a means to further assert his authority: Teach picks a random listing out of the book, and quizzes Don on it's worth and the considerations that affect such value.

While Teach would momentarily seem to have the upper hand, Don, after his quiz, shifts the subject to more practical matters such as getting into the house and locating the coins. Again, Teach's answers prove less than compelling in a subject area that he used to discredit Bobby:

DON: How are you getting in the house?

TEACH: The house?

DON: Yeah.

TEACH: Aah, you in through a window they left open, something.

DON: Yeah.

TEACH: There's always something.

DON: Yeah. What else, if not the window.

TEACH: How the fuck do I know?

Pause.

If not the window, something else.

DON: What?

TEACH: We'll see when we get there.

DON: Okay, all I'm asking, what it might be.

TEACH: Hey, you didn't warn us we were going to have a quiz ...

(AB 49-50)

Don and the audience's confidence in Teach as a more suitable, experienced replacement for Bob wavers as his answers to Don's questions become obvious ploys to change the subject from one that he's not prepared to discuss in any detail. As King notes, "[Teach] won his place [in the job] on the field of talk, but he begins to lose it with his talk" (544-5). Teach's earlier assertions concerning Bobby's potential incompetence brought to light a seemingly rational consideration in terms of business, i.e. the goal of successfully completing the coin heist. Now that similar scrutiny is cast on his own knowledge, Teach attempts to maintain the same communicative posture, in that he issues assertions meant to dissuade Don from his line of questioning. Don has given the job to Teach, however, based on assertions of competence, and as Teach has moved the context towards strictly rational business considerations, he finds himself caught when Don refuses to move away from detailed considerations of the practical, goal-directed dimensions of the robbery. His own methods have turned on him, and Teach reverts to a schoolboy as he complains to Don that he wasn't prepared for a "quiz." Reversals in the play "account for some of our laughter," according to Hudgins, and this particular reversal proves both funny and fundamental as Teach, through the communicative norms he established, reveals that his own assertions of knowledge and competence were just that (208). Teach has maneuvered himself into the role of Don's accomplice not on the basis of evidence of his ability, but rather through a perlocutionary strategy of logically critiquing Bob's inadequacies and, by inference, demonstrating that he would make a better accomplice because he knows the basic elements of burglary. When called upon to illustrate his knowledge, Teach becomes muddled in his own rhetoric, and an audience recognizes that not only has Teach played a con game on both Don and them, but that he

is no more competent than Bob to handle the job — his initial answer to Don's question of how to get into the house illustrate that Teach knows no more than the younger man about locks and alarm systems, and his proposed methods are quite similar to those he claimed that Bob would employ. While Don does not directly call Teach on his bluff, he does maintain an adherence to the norms of business established in the communicative context, and decides that he must add Fletcher to the team of thieves.

Teach initially resists Don's suggestion that Fletcher would add "some depth" to the team, attempting again to assert authority through speech. Thus, in arguing his position, Teach claims that Fletch is not necessary to successfully complete the theft, and, furthermore, that the addition of another person does not insure a safe and successful result, but could possibly jeopardize it:

> DON: We could use somebody watch our rear.
>
> TEACH: You keep your numbers down, you don't have a rear. You know what has rears? Armies ... (AB 52)

Teach attempts several logical appeals to both Don's sense of business and friendship, but, eventually, recognizes the older man will not budge on this issue. He finally returns to the rhetorical strategy that seems to have worked most successfully for him: flattering Don's ability to make sensible decisions about the job at hand. From an audience's perspective, Teach's shift back to this rhetorical pattern illustrates another comic reversal, and his final assurance to Don, "I want to make one thing plain before I go, ... I am not mad at you," only heightens the comic aspects of this scene: clearly, Don is not concerned about Teach's potential ill-will (AB 55).

Don's final line in the act, "Fuckin' business," uttered as Teach leaves the shop, is

an ambiguous summary of Don's inner state: at the end of the act, he has proven himself the "businessman" able to make decisions based on goal-directed considerations; in following this credo, he has displaced a friend with a man no more competent than the first and, as a result, has had to lower his share of the potential "take" from the robbery. In doing business, Don has undercut the foundation of the business ethic, later interpreted by Teach as "The freedom ... of the Individual ... To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit ... In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit" (AB 72-3). Don has embarked on such a course, and, so far, this particular path has forced him, through further logical considerations, to lower the price of Bob's friendship after it's already been exchanged for "an honest chance to make a profit."

Don's final lines of Act I may lead an audience to believe that some kind of classical recognition has taken place, but as the action of the second act begins, we realize that any epiphanies Don may have experienced about the cut-throat and contradictory nature of "business" prove short-lived. Bobby appears at the shop as Don attempts to locate both Teach and Fletcher on the phone; as he is understandably irritated that both men are late. His manner with the young man, then, is terse; as Bobby tries to explain that he's located another buffalo nickel and would like to sell it to Don for "What it's worth only," the older man's irritation grows as he attempts to teach Bob about the complexity involved in determining the value of the coin:

> BOB: It's a buffalo, it's worth something.
>
> DON: The question is but what. It's just like everything else, Bob. Like every other fucking thing. ...
>
> BOB: ... I can tell you what it is.

Pause.

I can tell you what it is.

DON: What? What date it is? That don't mean shit.

BOB: No?

DON: Come on, Bobby? What's important in a coin ...

BOB: ... yeah?

DON: What condition it's in ...

BOB: (Great.)

DON: ... if you can (I don't know ...) count the hair on the Indian, something. You got to look it up.

BOB: In the book?

DON: Yes.

BOB: Okay. And then you know.

DON: Well, no. What I'm saying, the book is like you use it like an indicator (I mean, right off with silver prices ... so on ... (He hangs up phone.) Shit.

BOB: What?

DON: What do you want for the coin?

BOB: What it's worth only.

DON: Okay, we'll look it up.

BOB: But you still don't know.

DON: But you get an idea, Bob. You get an idea you can deviate from.

(AB 59-61)

As in the first act, the second begins with Don's attempting to teach Bobby a lesson. Unlike the earlier scene, though, Don's focus is not on his student but on the job. Thus, Bob's entrance represents a nuisance to Don, and his efforts to teach the boy about "value" do not illustrate an attempt to pass on knowledge so much as a means of ending the dialogue and getting Bobby out of the shop. Don's teaching, rather than demonstrating his concern for the boy, resembles Teach's methods of deception: Don utters empty assertions that only serve to reassert his authority in the verbal exchange, and an audience recognizes that his statements reflect a bastardized version of Teach's interpretation of how one determines the value of a coin. Despite the shop owner's undercutting of Teach's claims to authority at the end of the first act, Don has adopted his "partner's" rhetorical strategy of asserting himself not through the substance but rather the force of his utterances. Don, in this exchange, creates the verbal comedy seen in Teach's earlier backpedaling; the communicative context, however, lends a much darker tinge to this comic effect as Don has firmly established himself in the role of Bobby's teacher, protector, and friend. By confusing the boy with his assertions concerning the inability to fix a value on Bob's coin, Don not only undercuts the rigidity of the values he'd earlier tried to pass on to his student, but also abuses his position of teacher by using assertions of knowledge not to enlighten but rather to discourage and dismiss Bob.

Don's abuse of his position heightens as Teach enters the shop, demanding to know why Bobby is present. The junk dealer finds himself in the awkward position of having to both maintain authority in the planned robbery and to encourage Bobby's departure without revealing his deception to the younger man. The dialogue that ensues demonstrates the conflicting motivations of both men: Don, despite Teach's assertions of

the opposite, shows his concern with the "looseness" of the operation, while Teach attempts to reinforce his self-proclaimed "partnership" with Don. Bob's presence, then, has different meanings for each man. For Don, the boy serves as a reminder of his betrayal, and that betrayal threatens to undermine the "business" at hand: if Bob recognizes that he's been replaced, Don will have to divert himself from the strictly goal-oriented dimensions of the robbery to protect his friendship with the boy. Thus, an audience witnesses Don both treating Bob in a terse manner, and yet also attempting to protect his student from Teach's wrath. Teach, however, sees Bob as a threat to his partnership with Don; despite his constant evocation of the business ethic, Teach, when feeling threatened, represents the business partnership in terms of friendship.

The constant shifting between these contexts serves to deconstruct any inherent meaning in the two terms; rather, Mamet exposes "business" and "friendship" as rhetorical figures used to assert superiority. At the end of the scene, both men undercut these values again by giving Bob money to leave, without actually buying the coin he's brought in; money asserts its value as a steering medium because both Don and Teach use it to circumvent any communicative action which might take place concerning the value of Bob's nickel or the reason for their presence in the shop. Thus, both Don and Teach refuse to engage with Bob as a partner in communication (a hallmark of friendship), and give Bob money without any real intention of recouping their loss or profiting from the exchange. As Bob leaves, Don exclaims "Fuckin' kid ...," a brief revelation of his inner state and a line borrowed from Teach (AB 67). Despite his willingness to protect Bob from Teach's anger at finding the younger man present, and his subsequent defense of Bob's motives for coming to the shop at a late hour, Don reveals that his friendship for

Bob must exist on his terms. He is willing to serve as Bob's mentor, protector, and friend, but only when it suits his convenience and does not interfere with business.

After Bob leaves, the dialogue between Teach and Don illustrates each man's need to assert his power, via his interpretation of the present situation, in a game of one-upmanship. Teach views both Bob's presence and Fletcher's absence as suspicious circumstances, while Don is willing to accept these matters at face value. Don shows that he still values trust in a relationship, and assures Teach that Bob's visit and Fletcher's lateness are reasonable: Bob wanted to sell his coin, and Fletcher hasn't previously given Don any reason to doubt his "professionalism." Teach responds to Don's assurances with anger and disbelief; Don's faith in his friends suggests to Teach the tenuousness of his position. Thus, when Don asserts his trust in Bob and Fletch, Teach interprets these statements as indications of his own lack of worth to the shopowner:

> TEACH: So where is Fletcher?
>
> DON: Don't worry. He'll be here.
>
> TEACH: The question is but when. Maybe his watch broke.
>
> DON: Maybe it just did, Teach. Maybe his actual watch broke.
>
> TEACH: And maybe mine didn't, you're saying? You wanna bet? You wanna place a little fucking wager on it? How much money you got in your pockets? I bet you all the money in your pockets against all the money in my pockets. I walk out that door right now, I come back with a broken watch. (My emphasis, AB 67-9)

In this passage, Teach reveals his belief that Don does not hold him in as high a regard as Bob and Fletcher; thus, when Don responds to Teach's consideration of the

possibility that Fletcher's watch broke with the implication that it really might have. Teach responds to the affirmation as a perlocutionary accusation on Don's part. Teach's use of language as a con game has served him well in the previous act: despite his eventual revelation of his lack of knowledge on matters concerning the burglary, he still holds his place in the job. At the same time, though, Teach perlocutionary utterances influence his interpretive action: he distrusts the face value of statements made by others, and attempts to seize upon underlying assertions of his own incompetency. The "business ethic" that Teach proclaims later in the act (quoted earlier) infects his attempts at communication: this discursive framework "poisons" his own conception of objective reality and "normal" behavior so that consensual action becomes almost impossible. Because Teach subscribes to the definition of "free enterprise" he espouses, he can not act as a partner to anyone: he must suspect his partner of taking the necessary steps to "secure an honest profit," regardless of the consequences to himself. An audience will recognize what Teach does not about his own inability to engage communicatively without authority: despite his assertion to Don that they are partners in the job, Teach distrusts the notion of partnership. The lifeworld context that manifests itself in this character's utterances promotes a pathological individuality: "partnership" serves as another language-based ruse with which a "businessman" can forward his own interests. Of course, because of this distrust, Teach can not believe that Bob's attempt to sell the buffalo nickel or Fletcher's lateness can be accepted within the context of partnership: rather, Teach reads these situations as evidence (or "facts") which lead to the logical conclusion of Bob and Fletcher's betrayal of trust.[4]

An audience will likely respond to Teach's rationality with laughter, as he's

proven himself a character who relies on "bullshit" as opposed to "action." Don's actions in the second act present greater problems, though, as he's continually presented himself as a man who values loyalty and trust. Teach attempts to mentor him in his vicious brand of business, and yet Don also recognizes Teach's assertions as hollow. An audience faces a difficult interpretive situation as Bob returns to the shop. Teach violently punishes him for his supposed betrayal, and Don initially approves of Teach's actions. The dialogue prior to Bob's second entrance provides an important interpretive indicator. Teach, in his wild grasping for a communicative context that will convince Don of his worth, finally finds a topic with which he can hold Don's attention: the card game. The game provides the opportunity for Teach to plant a seed of doubt in Don's head because, despite his normal strategy of speculation and logical contortions, Teach has brought up a concrete situation with which he can present "facts" through the interpretive filter of business. His attempts to prove his knowledge on burglary fail because, despite his verbal commitment to "facts" (objective reality), Teach demonstrates that he does not possess hard evidence to support his claims. In the case of the card game, though, Teach can draw upon communicative consensus because both Don and he witnessed the events he relates from the previous night's game, and Don takes a "yes" position as Teach enumerates the events that contribute to his characterization of Fletcher as a cheat: the blow-by-blow of the hand, Fletcher's spilled drink, the improbability of drawing to such a high hand, and Teach's memory of folding one of the cards in Fletch's flush (AB 80-2).

Teach's haphazard means of assertion undermines an audience's ability to recognize the con man's effectively steering his communicative action with Don, but whether he fully realizes it or not, Teach has discovered a rhetorical strategy that gives

credence to his paranoid claims. By narrating the details of the card game, Teach can present himself as a "responsible actor": Don's assent, while still qualified, reveals his agreement with Teach's retelling of the events. Teach's choice of details offer only circumstantial evidence, but when coupled with an appeal to Don's pride ("You're better than that, Don."), Teach's narration provides a compelling claim to truth on behalf of his accusation. Ironically, Teach has also already established Don's penchant for gullibility through his successful maneuvering in the first act, a context which offers further support for Teach's interpretation of the events at the card game. Ultimately, Teach makes an implicit argument for Don's inability to distinguish friendship from business, and the older man's passivity to Teach's violence against Bob suggests that Don has accepted this vision of himself and, by extension, bought into Teach's concept of business as paranoia.

The card games also serves Teach's ends well in that it represents a communal activity grounded in normative consensus. Mamet claims in his essay "In the Company of Men" that "male bonding" activities such as the poker game transcend the rational actions of the game itself and reveal a "community of effort directed towards the outside world, directed to subdue, to understand, or to wonder or to withstand together, the truth of the world" (SF 90-1). Through his accusation of Fletch and presentation of "facts" that could support his claim, Teach undermines the foundations of Don's certainty regarding the inviolability of norms associated with his general conception of friendship and its manifestation in the ritual of card-playing. By stumbling upon this subject, Teach appeals to Don's worst business instincts by demonstrating the frailty of these norms when considered in the context of the business relationship; ultimately, Don's conception of friendship depends upon communicative consensus in its ideal form. The monetary

steering medium, however, dismisses any complex ethical considerations concerning the lines between business and friendship; rather than weighing the moral considerations required by the conflicting norms of the two discursive frameworks, the presence of money in these relationships and activities simplifies the communicative context to roles of oppressor or oppressed: as Teach notes earlier, "It's kickass or kissass, Don, and I'd be lying if I told you any different" (AB 74).

Teach's successful usurpation of authority in the dialogue between the two men continues to make itself felt as he, in preparation to leave for the mark's house, "takes out a revolver and begins to load it" (AB 84). Don protests, but Teach insists that he must have the gun, even to the point of once again contradicting himself: "All the preparation in the world does not mean shit, the path of some crazed lunatic sees you as an invasion of his personal domain. Guys go nuts, Don, you know this" (AB 85). The "fucking fruit" has transformed into a potential "crazed lunatic," thus undercutting the simplicity Teach had repeatedly asserted in his earlier arguments. Teach attempts to fortify his position by using the police driving by as an example of "the right idea": "They have the right idea. Armed to the hilt. Sticks, Mace, knives ... who knows what the fuck they got. They have the right idea. Social customs break down, next thing everybody's lying in the gutter" (AB 86). Thus, in asserting his need to carry the gun on the job, Teach relies on the example of an institution employed to protect "social customs" as he simultaneously prepares to violate such customs by robbing a man's house. Teach has returned to his strategy of forceful assertions devoid of logic or substance; his success in creating a momentary consensus provides enough confidence for him to revert to the brand of talk that has repeatedly led to his undoing.

While Teach's talk has continually proven that he is his own easiest mark, the combination of the communicative agreement over the card game, combined with Teach's insinuations of Fletcher's and Bobby's deceit and Bob's second entrance in the act prove overwhelming for Don. Bob returns to the shop in order to tell the men that Fletch will not be joining them, as he was mugged earlier in the evening and is in the hospital with a broken jaw. Such information should confirm Don's earlier assertion that the third man was late for a reason, but since Don, through his silence, has illustrated his willingness to entertain Teach's interpretation of events, Teach seizes on Bob's presence and news as an opportunity to prove himself beyond any doubts. Initially, he rejects the boy's claim ("You're so full of shit."), and then begins to lampoon Bob's story, implying that it proves his claims of the boy's disloyalty (AB 87). Rather than joining in Teach's mockery, though, Don makes an interesting choice of strategies to test Bob's truthfulness: he begins to question the boy on details, much like Teach's questioning regarding the weather in the first act. Teach had used this method to prove Bob's inattention to detail and, by extension, his incompetence; ironically, Don now uses the same method to reveal Bob's potential duplicity and to discover whether or not he has planned a theft of the theft:

DON: He's mugged?

BOB: Yeah, Grace, they just got back. They broke his jaw.

TEACH: They broke his jaw.

BOB: Yeah. Broke.

TEACH: And now he's in the hospital. Grace and Ruthie just got back. You thought you'd come over.

BOB: Yeah.

TEACH: Well, how about this, Don? Here Fletch is in Masonic Hospital a needle in his arm, huh. How about this?

DON: How bad is he?

BOB: They broke his jaw.

DON: What else?

BOB: I don't know. ...

DON: When did it happen, Bob?

BOB: Like before.

DON: Before, huh?

BOB: Yeah. ...

DON: Where did they take him, Bob?

Pause.

BOB: Uh, Masonic.

DON: I don't think that they got hours start til afer lunch.

BOB: Then we'll go then. I'm going to go now. (AB 88-9)

Bob's participation in this dialogue reveals the extent of his "education": he demonstrates his loyalty to Don by coming to him with the information, but Bob also attempts to present himself as a "businessman" according to Don's earliest definitions by implying that he got the nickel through his ability to "talk," and by claiming that he has pressing "business" engagements elsewhere. Furthermore, Bob once again illustrates his desire to have command of facts: when pressed for the name of the hospital, Bob replies "Masonic," picking up on Teach's naming of a specific hospital and his tendency to

incorporate other's words into his improvisations. In Don and Teach's presence, Bob once again attempts to demonstrate that he possesses "skill and talent and the balls to arrive at [his] own conclusions" (AB 4). Ironically, his adherence to Don's and Teach's examples leads to his punishment: through his evasions and miscalculations, Bob only succeeds in deepening the distrust that Teach has planted in the boy's mentor. Equally, Bob's hollow talk may also contribute to an unease in the audience: upon reflection, we realize that Bob is putting his education to work, but in a performance setting, as we virtually participate in the dialogue, we may also tend to judge Bob's statements in the immediate communicative context established by Teach. Once again, Mamet allows us the opportunity to respond to the immediate situation or to reflect and evaluate the boy's words in light of the larger context established from the play's beginning.

As might be expected, Teach and Don choose not to examine Bob's story in light of larger issues; rather, they seize upon Bob's hesitancy and his mistaken assertion about Fletcher's exact whereabouts to conclude that Teach's suspicions are correct. Once Don establishes that Fletcher is not at Masonic Hospital, the two men assume the roles of interrogators similar to Pinter's gangster's in The Birthday Party: they rapidly fire questions at Bob, which confuses the boy and results in his answers becoming more terse and disconnected. As the men continue to batter him with words, Bob can not maintain his facade; he must finally admit, in scraps of language, that he does not know Fletcher's location or condition. Bob's reduced ability to communicate effectively only enrages the two men, and because Bob can not keep up with the fierce pace of the interrogation, he is presumed guilty and punished:

TEACH: I want for you to tell us here and now (and for your own

protection) what is going on, what is set up ... where Fletcher is ... and everything you know.

DON (sotto voce): (I can't believe this.)

BOB: I don't know anything.

TEACH: You don't, huh?

BOB: No.

DON: Tell him what you know, Bob.

BOB: I don't know it, Donny. Grace and Ruthie ...

TEACH grabs a nearby object and hits BOB viciously on the side of the head.

TEACH: Grace and Ruthie up your ass, you shithead; you don't fuck with us. I'll kick your fucking head in. (I don't give a shit ...)

Pause.

You twerp ...

A pause near the end of which BOB starts whimpering.

I don't give a shit. (Come in here with your fucking stories ...)

Pause.

Imaginary people in the hospital ...

BOB starts to cry.

That don't mean shit to me, you fruit.

BOB: Donny ...

DON: You brought it on yourself. (AB 94)

In a perverse sense, Don's final line in this passage is correct: Bob did bring

Teach's wrath upon himself. He did this, however, by acting loyally (coming to Don with the information), and then by dutifully performing the role of businessman as Don had prescribed it. Teach's striking of the boy brings to the fore the necrophilic quality asserted by Freire in his definition of the "banking concept": by assuming authority over Bob, Don's training proves inherently oppressive. As Freire notes:

> ... the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them";[5] for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "foresaken." (55)

Don's teaching has served the purpose of "integrating" Bob into the communicative framework of "business" as seen through his own position of oppression. Don has claimed earlier that he wants to "teach" Bob the proper means of acting in a business situation, but when Bob puts these methods into practice, they serve as the rationale for his punishment. Mamet moves his own assessment of the

oppressor/oppressed relationship one step beyond Freire's summary by showing his audience the intolerable position of the person playing the role of student: Don teaches Bob the means by which he can act in his own best interest, but, in doing so, he encourages Bob to act ruthlessly. Ideally, the mentor/student relationship would create a bond between the two participants, but the nature of Don's lessons drive a wedge between teacher and pupil: because Don has taught Bob to first consider his own interests, he can no longer trust the boy. After Teach strikes Bob, Don attempts to tell him why the beating was necessary; in doing so, he undermines his earlier lessons of self-reliance, and creates a double-standard in which Bob must adhere to the standards of business except when they are not in Don's best interests. At the same time, though, Don has created an impossible role for himself, because, in protection of his own interests, he can not assume that Bob's performance of "loyalty" is sincere.

Bob's loyalty is confirmed, though, when Ruthie calls the shop to relay the news of Fletcher's mugging to Don. Don calls the correct hospital and verifies the truth of the story: Fletcher has been admitted with a broken jaw. This revelation sets in motion an abrupt shifting of the communicative framework: Don recognizes the injustice of Bob's punishment and prepares to take the boy to the hospital. Teach, however, views the situation as a temporary setback to the night's business: "... we're fucked up here. We have not blown the shot, but we're fucked up" (AB 97). Each man assumes a rigid adherence to the positions of friendship and business, and the partnership that moments before had seemed impenetrable now collapses under the weight of the contradictions which Don and Teach had embraced to legitimate their actions. Don responds to the immediacy of Bob's medical situation and calls the job off for the night; furthermore, as

Bob inquires whether he'll participate when the robbery is committed. Don does not directly answer his question because of his concern for the boy's health. Teach, however, asserts that Bob's position is set and orders Don to assure the boy that he will not participate in the robbery:

BOB: I get to do the job.

TEACH: You shut up. You are going to the hospital.

DON: We aren't going to do the job tonight.

BOB: We do it sometime else.

DON: Yeah.

TEACH: He ain't going to do no job.

DON: Shut up.

TEACH: Just say he isn't going to do no job.

DON: It's done now.

TEACH: What?

DON: I'm saying, this is over.

TEACH: No, it's not, Don. It is not. He does no job.

DON: You leave the fucking kid alone. (AB 98)

Don's refusal to meet Teach's demands and to state unequivocally that Bob will not participate in the robbery enrages Teach, and, in typical fashion, he begins to frantically question the boy on how he came into possession of the second nickel. Bob's response, that he bought it in a coin store, reveals both that he did not obtain it through "business" methods (i.e. a con game) and that his purchase was not motivated at all by business considerations. Rather, he purchased the coin and attempted to sell it to Don at

cost, perhaps so that the older man would have another chance to correctly fleece a buyer, perhaps because he simplistically assumed that getting a buffalo back, any buffalo, would make Don feel better. Bob's confession enrages Teach, as the boy's story not only undermines his assertions of Bob's disloyalty, but also undercuts the foundation of Teach's conception of free enterprise: Bob bought and then attempted to sell the coin without attempting to secure a financial gain.

Teach's questioning does not produce the desired effect, as Bob's answers, while undercutting his earlier presentation of himself as cunning man of business, reveal his unswerving loyalty to Don. The dialogue between the two men degenerates into verbal violence as Don assumes authority in order to take Bob to the hospital while Teach continues to jockey for position in regards to the robbery. The only method left to Teach is abuse, and as Don rebuffs Teach's claims to have acted consistently in the best interest of the job, Teach explodes: "You fake. You fucking fake. You fuck your friends. You have no friends. No wonder that you fuck this kid around... You seek your friends with junkies. You're a joke on the street, you and him" (AB 100-01). In consistent fashion, when appeal to Don's business sense fails him, Teach shifts the dialogue to friendship; Don, however, now fully recognizes Teach's game, and responds both with verbal and physical violence against his partner.

As the two men exchange brutalities, though, Bob begins to repeatedly utter to himself "(I eat shit.)," and, finally, "(A cause I missed him.)" (AB 101). Engaged in their fight, Don and Teach at first don't hear the boy's confession. The fight, though, provokes the confession as Bob utters his recognition that his lie to Don and Teach provided the motivation for the older men's brutal actions. The fact that Bob was beaten for a betrayal

he didn't commit creates a window for his confession: both men have noted the wrongness of his punishment and turned on each other as a result. Only Bob, then, can end the conflict by showing Don and Teach that he has done wrong, and that his wrongdoing stemmed from loyalty to Don. Like his buying the coin, Bob creates the news of the mark's leaving in order to assure Donny that his trust in the boy was not misplaced. Bob finally yells at Don and reveals that the whole foundation of the robbery, the claim that the mark had left for the weekend, was false:

BOB: I missed him.

DON (stopping): What?

BOB: I got to tell you what a fuck I am.

DON: What?

BOB: I missed him.

DON: Who?

BOB: The guy.

DON: What guy?

BOB: The guy this morning.

DON: What guy?

BOB: With the suitcase.

DON (Pause): You missed him?

BOB: I eat shit.

DON: What are you saying that you lied to me?

BOB: I eat shit. (AB 102)

Bob's confession destroys the house of cards created by Don and Teach's talk: all

of their planning, debating, and arguing was based, from the beginning, on a claim that both had validated without second thoughts or questions. As an audience may expect, Teach takes this news much harder than Don, as he had conjured through his talk an entire reality of objectivity and norms based on the acceptance of this one "fact." As the foundation of this reality is pulled out from under him, Teach, dropping all pretense, "picks up the dead-pig sticker and starts trashing the junkshop" (AB 103). As he acts out, Teach utters a series of claims that demonstrate the void Bob's admission has created:

> The Whole Entire World.
>
> There Is No Law.
>
> There Is No Right And Wrong.
>
> The World Is Lies.
>
> There Is No Friendship.
>
> Every Fucking Thing.
>
> Pause.
>
> Every God-forsaken Thing. (AB 103)

For one brief, violent moment, Teach recognizes that he, like Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon, has based his hopes, his plans, and his very sense of self on a claim with no basis in objective reality. Bob's normative violation (the lie) goes completely unnoticed; Teach's dependence on facts provided the grounding for his communicative action throughout the play, and Bob's admission not only robs the older man of the goal he used as context for his action/bullshit (the terms become muddied here), but also invalidates every claim Teach has made regarding his business acumen. Teach has undermined his own claim to "skill and talent" by believing the one false claim made the person he has

consistently labeled as untrustworthy.

Teach's rant calms as he utters "There is nothing out there./ Pause. / I fuck myself" (AB 104). In the course of Teach's last violent outburst, the audience should recognize that his words ironically comment on the business ethic itself. Both Teach and Don have allowed this ethic to "poison" their relationship with one another and with Bob; the formation of a partnership has only served to heighten each man's sense of isolation as he vies for position. Once each man recognizes that his sacrifice of his friends was predicated on a quixotic premise, only one path remains open to any kind of meaningful interchange: mutual reliance and friendship. The last few moments of the play provide the audience with a vision of fumbling for forgiveness, as Teach, while not apologizing for wrecking the shop, pitifully and repeatedly asks Don if he's angry. The older man stops his shocked variations of "My shop's fucked up" and tells Teach "No" (AB 104).

Don's repeated assurance implies not only forgiveness for Teach's destruction of the shop, but also absolution concerning his behavior throughout the day. While Don earlier accused Teach of "stick[ing] ... poison in [him]," the older man's quick forgiveness suggests recognition of his own complicity in the day's actions. His closing forgiveness of Bob, assuring the younger man that he "did real good," reinforces the sense of Don's acceptance of responsibility; as the one character with the position to act authoritatively, Don failed both Bob and Teach by not steering the action surrounding the robbery and allowing greed and short-sightedness to cloud his better judgment.

By the end of the play, an audience has likely ceased to make any evaluations about the rightness of the planned robbery as they recognize the normative violations in the play supersede "crime": burglary serves only as a motivation for self-centered

action, and ultimately represents no more moral depravity than film-making in Speed-the-Plow or teaching in Oleanna. Rather, the pathology represented in the play involves the willingness of "friends" to adjust their communicative posture towards self-interest. The business ethic deconstructs itself as the need for cooperation among selfish parties produces conflict and violence; comic resolution comes about only as Don faces the unwinding of the narrative of American success to which he and Teach had so heartily subscribed. The only responsible course left to the shopowner is forgiveness, and Mamet leaves his audience with the hope that Don's acceptance of Bob's friendship marks the beginning of a new relationship and new narrative born of mutual communication rather than destructive instruction.

ENDNOTES:

[1]Freire borrows the concept of "necrophily" from Erich Fromm's The Heart of Man:

> While life is characterized by growth in a structured, functional manner, the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. ... Memory, rather than experience; having, rather than being, is what counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object — a flower or a person — only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself; if he loses possession he loses contact with the world. ... He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life. (qtd. in Freire 58)

[2]Dennis Carroll offers an alternative reading of the relationships in American Buffalo, claiming that "bonding takes the form of a quasi-business 'partnership' which involves mutual support and respect and — unlike the relationships of teacher-pupil and mentor-protégée — it involves a tacit admission of equality-in-differences, even when the ages of the men are different" (Mamet 36). Yet, as already seen in the play's opening, the dialogue represents educational discourse — Don admits as much in telling Bobby that he's "trying to teach" the younger man something. Similarly, Teach's attempt to

manipulate himself into the planned robbery involves the use of utterances that either purport to defer to Don's superiority or that assert authority: though he does want to serve as Don's "partner" in the crime, the rhetorical strategies employed to achieve this end necessarily imply that Teach is either a more apt pupil than Bobby, or that he knows more than Don about the proper methods of handling such a situation.

[3]Teach's use of the phrase "common sense" as support for the validation of his interpretations concerning the coin heist brings the late Antonio Gramsci's definition of this term to bear:

> ... common sense ... is the "philosophy of non-philosophers," or in other words the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. ... Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes. ... What was said above does not mean that there are no truths in common sense. It means rather that common sense is an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept, and that to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense. (419-23)

In invoking common sense as support for his claims concerning the robbery, Teach thus further exposes the performed nature of his "teaching." This exposure reinforces the "problem-posing" nature of Mamet's pedagogical stance, as Teach's lessons, at least early in the play, prove remarkably resilient to critique. "Common sense" thus serves as another element of Mamet's own "con game" in the play, as he draws the audience into complicity through the use of such concepts.

[4]Another level of irony presents itself to the audience with Teach's assumption of Bob and Fletch's "theft" of the job: if this is the case, then they would have to act in carefully coordinated partnership. As Teach sees Fletcher as an "animal," his later punishment of Bob proves to be an act of complete irrationality: if Fletcher truly cheats his friends, one would have no reason to believe that Bob would possess any reliable information, as Fletcher would not need to work honestly with the boy in order to complete the theft.

[5]Freire quotes here from Simone de Beauvoir, La Pensée de Droite, Aujourd'hui (Paris); ST, El Pensamiento político de la Derecha (Buenos Aires, 1963), p. 34 (55).

CHAPTER 4

"I WOULDN'T SAY IT IF IT WEREN'T SO.": A LIFE IN THE THEATRE

In "Regarding A Life in the Theater," Mamet, reminiscing on the peaks and valleys that each actor encounters in his/her career, observes "Apprenticeship becomes rewarded with acceptance or rejection. This seems to happen overnight, and the event we have decided on as the turning point in a career was, looking back, quite probably not it at all" (WR 105). The year 1977 must have seemed such a moment for the young playwright: American Buffalo had run successfully off-Broadway and was slated for production at the Ethel Barrymore. Reunion and Dark Pony were playing at the Yale Repertory theater, and Mamet's newest offering, A Life in the Theatre, debuted at Chicago's Goodman Theater Stage Two in February. By the end of the year, it had made its way to New York's Theatre de Lys. Accompanying this "bundle of new work" were reviews similar to those received by Sexual Perversity and The Duck Variations: typically praising or occasionally scornful, critics were noticing Mamet's work and hailing him as a young playwright to watch (Kerr 182). New York Times reviewer Mel Gussow, among Mamet's most vocal supporters, called him "an abundantly gifted playwright [who] brings new life to the theater" in his review of the New York production of A Life in the Theatre (176). Even Walter Kerr, while panning the same production, conceded that

"Nonetheless, expectation continues to sit in the air. Mr. Mamet ... will come along" (183).

In hindsight, 1977 was only one of numerous milestone years in Mamet's career; one could argue with Kerr, though, that Mamet, while still young, had "come along" in his development as a playwright. While he continued to focus on themes of love, betrayal, and miscommunication, he also wrote about characters that, while still disconnected, were not so alien to the traditional theater-going audience as those in American Buffalo or even Sexual Perversity in Chicago. Rather, family pairs seemed to become the norm in Mamet's work: Reunion deals with a father and daughter attempting to connect after twenty years of separation; The Woods portrays a young couple on the verge of recognizing their incompatibility; Dark Pony illustrates communion achieved as a father and his young daughter come together through the ritual of storytelling. In each of these examples, Mamet's language has become more stylized. While he has always insisted that his characters' speech is not "realistic" in the sense of mimetic, an audience member will likely recognize the poetic quality of these characters' lines more readily. The Woods, for instance, bears a striking resemblance to Pinter's Landscape not only in the disconnection it portrays but also in the rhythmic, image-laden language spoken by Nick and Ruth.

Mamet's plays during this period are typically two- or three-character dramas. Thus, while he later comes closer in form to Sexual Perversity and Lakeboat in Glengarry Glen Ross, many of the plays of 1977 show a continuation of dramatic situations reminiscent of The Duck Variations and Squirrels (1976). The latter is significant in that it is an example of the playwright's attempts to incorporate a Beckettian brand of

absurdity into his work. As Arthur, Edmond, and the Cleaning Woman forge alliances and attempt to overpower each other in order to control the writing of incredibly bad stories, one may well notice parallels with Ham, Clov, Nagg and Nell in Beckett's Endgame. Like this earlier play, Squirrels portrays much "sound and fury" over the writing of stories that will likely never be read. Arthur, the "senior" writer, attempts to use his position to direct the narratives and criticize the younger writer Edmond and the Cleaning Woman. They ally themselves against Arthur, and spend late nights writing together. Their stories, of course, are no less cliched and predictable than Arthur's. Edmond's successful domination of his mentor illustrates once again the potential for using language as a weapon, as his usurpation of Arthur's position has nothing to do with his ability as a writer; he succeeds only in assuming the mantle of the "big fish" in this very tiny pond.

Squirrels also centers on the mentor-student dynamic, foreshadowing the dueling thespians in A Life in the Theatre. As in the earlier play, A Life concerns the interaction between a seasoned professional and a newcomer — in this case, actors Robert and John. Like Arthur, Robert assumes, by virtue of his age and experience, the role of mentor, and John, like Edmond, initially accepts the terms of the relationship that his partner dictates. The artistic production of each pair is similar: Bigsby notes as "[the actors'] somewhat bizarre repertoire quickly makes clear [that] they are working in a company which is scarcely at the cutting edge of the American theatre," just as Arthur and Edmond's writing is comical in its lack of any literary merit (94). Though the two plays bear a number of striking similarities, A Life in the Theatre has assumed the status of a Mamet milestone in part because it, like Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author or

Weiss's Marat/Sade, recognizes that the theater serves as a compelling metaphor for examining human interaction. Mamet puts his own mark on this old device largely through his evocative renderings of Robert's pompous didacticism and John's struggle to eclipse his mentor. In developing the play's action, Mamet focuses on the tension that exist between the actors' desire for respect and friendship from one another and their inability/unwillingness to express these needs in language untainted by the steering medium of power. Both actors fail to offer genuine acts of friendship to one another, and, as a result, never develop a relationship free from institutional and cultural imperatives of authority and individuality. Because the theater serves as the staged environment for Robert and John's stillborn friendship, Mamet creates a forum in which an audience can consider the performed nature of the actor's interaction, and, by extension, the performance inherent in all human communication. Furthermore, Mamet challenges the spectator to consider the gulf that exists between those roles sanctioned and encouraged in contemporary culture and the ideal communicative practices necessary for genuine human bonding.

As in Sexual Perversity and American Buffalo, A Life in the Theatre opens with dialogue that reveals the pedagogical nature of the relationship. While Robert does not try to teach John a specific lesson as Don does Bobby, the older actor takes advantage of any opening he can find to assert his experience and authority. The play's first few lines illustrate Robert's need to win John's attention by highlighting his prerogative to pronounce judgement:

ROBERT: I thought the bedroom scene tonight was brilliant.

JOHN: Did you?

ROBERT: Yes. I did. (Pause.) Didn't you think it went well?

JOHN shrugs.

ROBERT: Well, I thought it went brilliantly.

JOHN: Thank you.

ROBERT: I wouldn't tell you if it wasn't so.

Pause.

JOHN: Thank you.

ROBERT: Not at all. I wouldn't say it if it weren't so. (LT 11)

From the play's opening, Robert asserts his experience as a foundation for his authority to validate claims of rightness and claims of sincerity. In this passage, Robert represents his inner world to John by judging the bedroom scene as "brilliant"; when John responds to this assertion ambiguously, Robert underscores his pronouncement by (1) equating his judgment with objective truth, and (2) offering a validity claim of the rightness of his statement. Thus, "I wouldn't tell you if it wasn't so" illustrates Robert's performative assertion of his ability to correctly evaluate the scene, his rightness (or "fitness") in doing so, and, again, his sincerity. Such a response also foreshadows Robert's tendency to overreact: as John is inexperienced, his noncommital response to Robert's judgment probably represents his own lack of confidence. Robert response, though, indicates that he takes John's shrug not as a sign of the younger man's modesty, but rather as a questioning of his ability to make such a statement. An audience should perceive at this early point that Robert's assertions of authority in all matters theatrical are themselves signs of his own lack of confidence, as, throughout the play, he, like Teach, tends to overuse speech to assert his authority. Robert's need to consistently

assert himself ends up undercutting his claims to authority for both John and the audience.

While Robert does parallel American Buffalo's Teach in his tendency to keep talking until he's fully undercut his presentation of himself as a wise experienced actor, the content of his utterances and the insecurities they cover also foreshadows the education professor John from Oleanna and the salesman Levene from Glengarry Glen Ross. All three of these characters have what Teach must create for himself: credentials to support their claims of superiority.

Labels designating authority can be just as ironic as claims to experience uttered by Bernie and Teach, though, as these designations create expectations among both characters and audience members. Mamet describes Robert as an "older actor" in the listing of characters, which sets up assumptions for his audience despite such a label's ambiguity. While an audience member will likely associate "older" in this context with experience, wisdom, and professional standing, Robert's actions throughout the play show that "older" also designates less desirable qualities of waning vitality, mental control, and flexibility. The ambiguity of this label contributes much to the humor of this play, as Robert means to highlight the more positive aspects of his age, but often exhibits the more negative ones. At the same time, the existential drama present in this play stems from this irony: the experience Robert has gained is undercut by his choice to repress his fears of the endings of his career and his life. Though he confidently asserts to John that "You start from the beginning and go through the middle and wind up at the end," the prospect of an "ending" clearly terrifies the older man as he can not hide from his impending mortality and its manifestations in his professional endeavors (LT 35).

In his essay "A 'Sad Comedy' About Actors," Mamet understands Robert's decline as a representation of existential inevitability, both in the theater and in human life. He writes that A Life in the Theatre:

> is not a realistic play. That is, it is not a play about two men, John and Robert, who happen to be actors, but about two actors, about two representative members of the profession, and about a turning point in the career of each. The turning point, the moment which has be [sic] abstracted into a play, is the moment of recognition of mortality, at which moment the younger generation recognizes and accepts its responsibilities, and the older generation begins to retire. (D7)

The action of A Life in the Theatre is not as simple and inevitable as Mamet implies. Later, in "Regarding A Life in the Theatre," the author qualifies these earlier opinions about his play, noting "We certainly all need love. We all need diversion, and we need friendship in a world whose limits of commitment (a most fierce commitment) is most times the run of the play" (WR 105). Mamet adds that "Camus says that the actor is the prime example of the Sisyphean nature of life," a notion which suggests that the individual's fight against inevitability is the central struggle in the play (WR 106). Ann Dean notes:

> In A Life in the Theatre, perhaps more obviously than in his other works, Mamet depicts the absurdity of the human condition. In the image of the solitary actor speaking out into an empty space, he conveys not merely the egoistic need for posturing centerstage by an affected narcissist, but the

futility and desperation of man's uncertainty of his place in the universe. (Language121).

As Dean notes earlier, though, a cause and effect relationship likely exists between these qualities of narcissism and "futility and desperation" as Robert and, later, John refuse to recognize and engage with the existential void that Mamet represents with the empty house to which each of them speaks at certain moments. An audience likely recognizes the accuracy of Mamet's oxymoron "sad comedy" as they come to realize the fundamental irony present in the play: that the "artifice of acting" becomes comic through parallels with "the artifice of living" (Gussow 175).

Art, thus, begets artifice, and Mamet lovingly puts his actors on stage in order to portray the joy and sadness associated not just with the theater, but with human life. Pedagogy again comes into play as an audience member recognizes that Robert's preferred means of communication involves instruction. The content of his teaching, like that of Ionesco's Professor, often verges on inanity; yet, Robert, like Don Dubrow, uses teaching with the best of intentions and without the recognition that his pious maxims about the theater underscore his inability to control the circumstances to which he desperately seeks to give form and meaning. Thus Robert, like Don, adapts pedagogical strategies that serve primarily to assert his own position at the expense of any benefit that his student might receive. While the word "dialogue" is most often applied to the lines that actors utter on stage, Robert shuns any meaningful dialogue with John that would involve equal exchange of validity claims judged solely on their representations of communicative worlds. Rather, the older actor prefers to soliloquize, an act that positions him as the primary vehicle of narrative movement within the story coming to shape on

stage. Whether he realizes it or not (and he probably does not), an audience member will almost certainly recognize that Robert's assumption of his mentor role involves a vain attempt to mold the younger man in his image. Robert chooses not to engage with John as a professional colleague, but rather sees the younger man as a medium through which he can further his own ludicrous theories of acting and achieve a sense of immortality, knowing that he lives on in the younger man's work.

Like Sexual Perversity and American Buffalo, A Life in the Theatre opens with a conversation in progress: John and Robert discussing the evening's performance. Unlike the earlier of the two plays, though, A Life does not begin with Robert's hyperbole-laden speech; an audience, thus, likely interprets the opening moments of the play as nothing more than post-performance banter between two colleagues. Yet, as illustrated before, Robert begins to assert his dominance immediately. As John attempts to enter the dialogue by offering an evaluation of the performance's audience as "intelligent," Robert validates John's claim, but in language that asserts his authority: much like Teach, he rewords John's observations in seemingly more precise terms: "They were acute ... They were discerning" (LT 12). When John validates this co-opting of the his own judgment, Robert launches into the first of many overblown statements that suggest his need to perform his self-appointed role as the expert on theatrical matters:

> ROBERT: Perhaps they saw the show tonight (pause) on another level. Another, what? another ... plane, eh? On another level of meaning. Do you know what I mean?
>
> JOHN: I'm not sure I do.
>
> ROBERT: A plane of meaning.

Pause.

JOHN: A plane.

ROBERT: Yes. I feel perhaps they saw a better show than the one we rehearsed. (LT 13)

John's puzzled response shows that Robert's intended profundity is lost on him: an audience will likely have a similar response. In asserting his understanding of an audience's response to a performance, Robert typically resorts to theatrical or literary cliches which, given their seriousness, characterize Robert not as wise, experienced professional, but rather as a man desperate for recognition. Like Teach, Robert illustrates a lack of control over the means to accurately perform his role, and thus finds himself relying on pseudo-profundities that undercut his performative attempts.

Scene 1, the play's longest, highlights a number of communicative qualities that determine the changes that occur in the two men's relationship. Two conversations/topics parallel each other throughout the scene: detailed evaluation of the performance and guarded requests for companionship. The former dominates the scene as John, eager to please Robert, offers the older man a compliment:

JOHN: I liked your scene.

ROBERT: You did.

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: Which scene?

JOHN: The courtroom.

ROBERT: You liked that?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: I felt it was off tonight. (LT 14)

An audience has no reason to doubt John's sincerity, as he offers evaluation without prompting or any direct relation to the dialogue that precedes it. Robert, though, asserts an opposite interpretation, insisting repeatedly that he "felt that it was off" (LT 14). While one might assume that Robert asserts false modesty in his claim, the dialogue also reveals that the older actor finds a challenge in John's judgment: the young actor's assertion of his feelings carries the claim that he has the right to offer evaluation. Robert moves quickly to assert his dominance by invalidating John's interpretation: his repetition of "I felt that it was off" shows that he's not simply playing modest, but that he wants to make clear that he holds the authority to make such evaluative claims.

Robert's strategy backfires, though, as the younger actor, in an attempt to offer fuller evaluation of Robert's performance, follows his first judgment with the claim that "The doctor scene ... may have been a trifle ... Brittle" (LT 15). An audience will likely recognize that Robert's refusal of John's praise involves asserting authority rather than engaging with the young actor in dialogue: John, in turn, refuses Robert's perlocutionary assertion of his authority and continues to offer criticism. As Robert asks for clarification, though, the younger actor backs off his assertion, first noting that his judgment may be incorrect, and then claiming that his statement represented "only an opinion (of a portion of the scene) and in the last analysis, we're talking about a word ..." (LT 16). John finally capitulates totally in claiming that this "brittleness" stemmed not from Robert's performance at all, but rather from the acting of his female counterpart in the scene.

While Robert initially fails to equate his own evaluation with objective truth, and

ironically encourages John to offer the negative criticism of the doctor scene, his responses to the younger man's critique illustrates his ability to steer the conversation. When John pronounces the word "Brittle," Robert's reacts with a question: "You thought that it was brittle?" (LT 15). As John has just said that he thought this, Robert's question is clearly an accusation. Thus, Robert raises questions concerning (1) John's sincerity in making the statement, (2) the statement's representation of objective truth, and (3) John's right to make such a statement. Robert's experience serves to steer intersubjective recognition of validity in his favor: John immediately brings the truth of his statement into question by noting "Well, I could be wrong" (LT 15). Despite his assurance to the younger actor the he respects John's opinion, Robert questions his criticism repeatedly, undercutting validity. Once again, Robert illustrates his ability to recapture authority in a given communicative exchange by subtly reminding John that he is the inexperienced member of the pair.

This exchange also highlights the irony implicit in Robert's assertions of authority, since an audience will likely see his questions as indications of wounded pride rather than as sincere attempts to elicit constructive feedback. For instance, Robert asks John if he thought the scene was "Overly brittle?" (LT 16). Such a question implies that a certain amount of brittleness is acceptable, and thus asserts that John may have offered an evaluation without consideration of this condition. Robert's final thrust in the verbal fencing involves bringing John's sincerity to the heart of the matter: John backs off an assessment of the whole scene, and Robert answers this wavering with a very thinly veiled accusation, stating "I wish that you would tell me if you found the whole scene so" (LT 16). Robert implies that John's backing off from his originally broad statement

indicates insincerity: of course, Robert also asserts his authority to direct the conversation, even if it means insisting that the younger man stand by his sweeping assessment of the scene's weakness. In each of these cases, Robert never directly challenges John's judgment, but, through his choice of questions and statements, uses perlocution to raise claims about the normative propriety of John's critique.

Claims concerning normative violations prove significant, as Robert continues to highlight questions of right and wrong in his teaching. For example, he asks John if the brittleness of the doctor scene was his own responsibility or shared by the actress playing with him. John, seeing a chance to move the conversation away from individual criticism of Robert, responds "Of course not. I told you that I thought you were superb. (Pause.) She was off" (LT 17). An audience may suspect John's sincerity in this statement: Robert, however, despite his questioning of the younger man's truthfulness moments earlier, does not challenge John this time. Rather, he takes John's lead and begins to criticize the unnamed actress's faults in the particular scene, and expands on her flaws in general.

Robert's disdain for the actress, and John's validation of his criticism, represents a discursive thread that runs throughout the play: namely, Robert's reliance on not only his own experience within the theater, but also the theater as an institution. Robert believes that he can invoke norms generally accepted as right within the framework of the institution and its communicatively structured authority to regulate interpersonal relations within its sphere. In lashing out at the actress, he assumes the role of spokesperson for a "generalized other": specifically, the theater as a reference point for validating normative claims.[1] Thus, Robert's critique and John's agreement illustrates the communicative

construction of authority based on institutional sanction. As long as Robert keeps his criticism within the realm of generally accepted theatrical practice, he is free to criticize and expect John to validate his criticism.

Ironically, though, an audience may recognize that Robert's taking on of the role of "generalized other" does not reveal his expertise; rather, it illustrates the shallowness of his assertions. As John continues to praise Robert regarding his ability to work with the actress, the older man responds with clichés meant to convey modesty: "You do the best you can" and "The show must go on" (LT 17). Robert uses these statements to communicate the norms to which he subscribes in pursuing his profession, and continues by claiming "You have a job to do. You do it by your lights, you bring your expertise to bear, your sense of rightness ... fellow feelings ... etiquette ... professional procedure ... there are tools one brings to bear ... procedure" (LT 18). Robert's choice of the second-person "you" adds to the pedagogical tone of his statements as he turns his conception of theatrical norms into commands. His choice of words, however, conveys little to an audience. One might assume that Robert's words carry accepted specialized meanings which he can count on John to recognize as a fellow actor. Yet John's short responses only offer a "yes" position on Robert's statements: an audience may suspect that the young actor has no better understanding of Robert's statements then it does. John is clearly eager to prove himself to Robert, though, and an audience member may safely infer that John's agreement represents his own performance: asserting his own knowledge of theatrical norms.

Robert's ultimate response to the actress illustrates the absurd seriousness which he ascribes to theatrical norms. Like Teach's "The only way to teach these people is to

kill them." Robert ends his tirade on the actress's "mugging" by claiming "I want to kill the cunt" (LT 19). John responds to this unexpectedly violent statement with the imperative "Don't let it worry you," but Robert insists "It doesn't worry me. It just offends my sense of fitness" (LT 19). Yet, in continuing to expound on the actress's faults, Robert reveals that his anger does stem from more than recognition of normative violations as he exclaims "She would make anyone look brittle ... You bring me the man capable of looking flexible the moment that she (or those of her ilk) walk on the stage" (LT 19). Up to this point, Robert has maintained his role as spokesman for the institution in pronouncing judgment on the unseen actress; as he continues to rant, though, an audience may recognize that his speech reveals a less high-purposed motivation: he believes John's charge of "brittleness." His pontificating on theatrical etiquette, thus, proves itself another brand of perlocution: Robert primarily wants to absolve himself of responsibility for a poor performance. As he will do in a number of later speeches, Robert ultimately lets his pedagogical performance undercut any substance of his argument. As the conversation comes to a close, John again notes his admiration for Robert by claiming "It is a marvel you can work with her at all" (LT 20). Robert responds by again referring to his experience and the knowledge of norms that comes with it, but finishes up by claiming "I tune her out ... When we're on stage, she isn't there for me" (LT 20-21). Robert's pedagogical tone may well overshadow the fact that he has just undermined his placement of responsibility on the actress for his own brittle performance, as his final words imply that his performance has no connection with hers.

In asserting his ideas on theatrical "fitness" throughout this scene, Robert uses speech as a means of establishing the boundaries of his and John's relationship. As the

conversation about the night's performance begins to wane, though. Robert's attempts to control the direction of conversation illustrate that he desires more than a professional relationship of mentor and student: he also wants John's friendship. Once his criticism of the actress has ended, Robert abruptly moves the conversation towards the "table scene," which John praises effusively. Robert offers more pseudo-profundities: "That scene was a little play. It was a poem tonight. ... Just like a little walnut ... I mean that it was meaty ... meaty on the inside ... And tight all round" (LT 22). The subject of a meal, and sharing a meal (as John has claimed "I wanted to be up there with you") leads naturally enough to Robert's returning the conversation to the younger man's plans for the evening. John tells Robert "I was going for dinner ... I've been feeling like a lobster" (LT 23).

As Robert has now brought the subject up twice, an audience could interpret his questions as a request for an invitation, and perhaps even expect Robert to ask John if he might join the younger man. Robert, however, does just the opposite, telling the younger man that he can not eat at night because of his weight and that he intends to take a walk. The first claim seems an obvious ploy to elicit a positive response from John concerning Robert's weight, and it does. The second seems innocent enough, but when John accepts Robert's statement as sincere, the older man, after a pause, asks John why he inquired about Robert's plans. John responds "No real reason," and an audience could assume that the younger actor was being polite. Robert, though, obviously does not want John to accept his statement; his method of imparting this knowledge, though, includes restating his intention to take a walk and then repeating his question about John's intention. One might liken this dialogue to Don and Teach's saying "goodbye" at the end of Act I of American Buffalo, in that one partner in dialogue uses a standard normatively prescribed

exchange as means to steer his partner. Robert's questioning implies an insistence that John meant something more than simply responding in kind. John, after again stating that he asked his question for "No real reason at all," seems to understand the intent behind Robert's reference to the question and, after a pause, asks "Unless you'd like to join me for a snack?" (LT 24). Robert maintains his position that he "really couldn't eat ...." so John modifies his invitation: "Well, then, some coffee. I could use the company" (LT 24). Though an audience member will recognize that Robert desires John's company, John's invitation provides the older man with the opportunity to take a "yes" or "no" position on their spending time together outside of work. Robert again reveals his performance as the two leave the theater and states "I'm famished," which comically undercuts his claims that he "can't eat at night."

In scene 1, Mamet creates a nearly flawless example of using dialogue between two characters to communicate the protagonist's goal to an audience. By the end of the scene, an audience member should understand that Robert, as the play's central character, acts on his contradictory desires to build a friendship with John and to formalize a professional relationship structured by dictates of institutional norms and banking education. Thus, while lauding the ability of actors to devote themselves to profession defined by "giving things away," Mamet also bring to his audience's attention the needs and desires of the giver: that a recipient will accept this gift uncritically as an act of gratitude. Thus, the giver holds the prerogative of asserting the boundaries of a relationship founded in his/her act of unselfishness. As Robert's initial acts of "teaching" serve to bring about the ends he desires in Scene 1, the older man has reason to believe that he has successfully established static norms through which the two men will continue

to relate to one another. Perhaps a reaction to the ephemeral nature of theatrical "giving," Robert seeks to create permanence; in doing so, however, Robert is like Shaw's Professor Higgins in his unreflective attempts to mold his protégée into his own image of "fitness."

An audience should easily recognize the irony of in the scenes from plays in which the two men act. In the opening exchange, Robert's attempts to make profound statements are humorous, typically, because of his inability to utter assertions that support his claims of theatrical norms and aesthetic considerations. This humor becomes more apparent as the audience watches Robert and John in the first of several excerpts from performances. This scene, probably set during World War I, shows two soldiers biding their time until the signing of the Armistice and the official ending of the war. A fellow soldier has recently fallen, and the younger of the two, played by John, angrily decries the injustice of the man's death: "They left him up there on the wire ... Those bastards ... My God. They stuck him on the wire and left him there for target practice ... He had a home, he had a family. (Pause.) Just like them. He thought that he was going home ... On the last day, Johnnie, on the last day ..." (LT 28-9). John's character's railing against the injustice of the situation is met with indifference by "Johnnie," Robert's older, more pragmatic character. In the heat of his rage, the younger soldier rushes the enemy, shouting "You hear me, Heinies? Huh? This is for Richard J. Mahoney, Corporal A.E.F., from Dawson, Oklahoma" (LT 29). As the soldier "runs off right," a shot is heard, presumably killing the young soldier. Robert's character "draws on his fag deeply" and, unfazed, utters "Well, looks like that's the end of it ..." (LT 29).

This excerpt typifies the mediocre plays Robert and John's company chooses to produce, while also providing a context for Robert's musings and maxims on the theater.

While the situation of the scene certainly holds possibility for dramatic exploration of human frailty and limitation, the unnamed author chose instead to limit its scope to melodramatic action played out by stock characters. In other words, the scene plays out as a piece of "emotional pornography" that Mamet frequently criticizes in his nonfiction writings. By allowing the audience to see Robert and John at work, Mamet makes the seriousness and passion that Robert exhibits for the theater even more comic and pathetic.

This juxtaposition of the actors on- and off-stage allows Mamet's to create a virtual dialogue with his audience concerning the conflict between the actions and words of the actors. An audience member familiar with the author's work may recognize that Don Dubrow's maxim "Action talks and bullshit walks" serves as an apt evaluation of Robert's assuming the role of pedagogue. Robert's attempts to "buffalo" John parallel the shopkeeper's early efforts to initiate Bobby into the communicative norms of "business." There is no Teach, however, to mirror and exaggerate Robert's teachings to such an extreme that he, like Don, must recognize the harm he's inflicted through his lessons. In American Buffalo, an audience may recognize Don's role in creating the crisis, but still feel sympathy for the shop owner as he recognizes his wrongdoing and tries to repent. In A Life in the Theatre, though, an audience recognizes both Robert's damaging pedagogy and his failure to see the harm caused by his actions. Because Robert never realizes the consequences of his actions, and, further, consistently cast himself as victim of circumstance rather than a responsible "actor," Mamet challenges his audience's ability to identify and sympathize with this character and create comic and critical distance. Such distance allows the viewer to both criticize Robert's lack of insight and recognize his tenacity in the face of old age and waning vitality.

Both of these qualities play determining roles in his choice of pedagogical methods. In scene 5, as the two men work out in the Dance Room, Robert launches into a diatribe concerning his disapproval of "ugly sounds." Robert's speech is again full of empty assertions: he claims that sound is "quite as important as physical beauty," that "An ugly sound, to me, is more offensive than an ugly odor," and "To me, an ugly sound is an extension of an ugly soul. An indice of lacking aesthetic" (LT 32-3). As in Scene 1, Robert tests John's acceptance of his claim through reverse psychology: "You think that's harsh, don't you?" (LT 33). John responds affirmatively, but Robert continues his grandstanding on "The crown prince of phenomena," claiming that ugly sounds "To me [are] like an odor. Sound. For it emanates from within. (Pause.) Sound and odor germinate within, and are perceived within" (LT 33). Robert again asks for confirmation of his perception: John responds this time with a "No," he does not understand Robert's claims. Robert attempts to simplify his idea for his student: "All that I'm saying is that it comes from within. (Pause.) Sound comes from within. You see?" (LT 33). In simplifying his idea, Robert has removed any room for philosophical speculation on the concept, and John responds with a noncommital "Mmm" (LT 34). Robert finishes this "lesson" by noting "I am not opposed to odors. (Pause.) On principle" (LT 34).

Though Robert clearly intends to communicate an idea that he finds profound and relevant to their present situation, the meaning behind his lecture is lost on John and probably on the audience. As an audience member has already witnessed Robert's success in gaining his student's approval and desired response through perlocution, s/he may well judge that Robert's attempts to bring John around to his point of view actually serve, initially, as critiques of his own acting. For example, as the first conversation

ends. Robert begins another lecture on "style":

ROBERT: Do you know when I was young my voice was very raspy.

JOHN: No.

ROBERT: But I was vain. I was untaught. I felt my vocal quality — a defect, in effect — was a positive attribute, a contributory portion of my style.

JOHN: Mmm.

ROBERT: What is style?

JOHN: What?

ROBERT: Style is nothing.

JOHN: No?

ROBERT: Style is a paper bag. Its only shape comes from its contents. (Pause.) However, I was young. I made a fetish of my imperfections.

JOHN: It's a common fault.

ROBERT: It makes me blush today to think about it.

Pause.

JOHN: Don't think about it.

Pause. (LT 34)

Robert justifies his early expectations by noting "I was young," a statement that implies that these imperfections resulted directly from his inexperience. This, coupled with his generalized assertion that "Style is nothing ... Style is a paper bag," indicates that the older man wants to communicate to John both a universal norm associated with acting and a perlocutionary judgment: as John is young and inexperienced, he may be guilty of

transgressing these norms. As Robert does not directly assert that John's acting is flawed, though, the younger man fails to recognize the evaluation of his own work implied in Robert's speech, and ironically notes "It's a common flaw," which an audience may realize is Robert's point. Robert's agreement with John's imperative "Don't think about it" is framed as an acceptance of the necessary growth that one experiences as s/he learns his/her craft: "You start from the beginning and go through the middle and wind up at the end" (LT 35). If left at that, an audience might assume that Robert has accepted this process. But his continuing to expound on the concept of "process" and "learning," alerts the virtual participant in the dialogue that Robert has quickly reassumed the mantle of the pedagogue: once again, these generalized statements seem directed at John. The younger man, however, is more concerned with his exercises at the barre, so Robert undercuts his perlocution by asking directly "Do you follow me?" (LT 35). As in the first scene, Robert brings elements of community into his rhetoric: not only does he rephrase his assertion concerning education and development, but follows it with "We must support each other, John ... We are society" (LT 36). John's continued concern with his exercises shows that Robert's attempt to create a dialogue with the younger man has failed, and thus his response of "No" to John's repeated question "Is my back straight?" suggests that Robert recognizes that John has rejected communication, and the implied norms carried with it.

An audience will recognize that John has begun to reject Robert's role as his mentor by the scant attention he now gives to the older man's lessons; in response, Robert tries a different means of asserting his authority in the relationship. In Scene 8, as the two men prepare for a performance, Robert begins to criticize John more openly. As

John applies his make-up. Robert takes notice of one of John's brushes, calling it "lovely" and asking if it is new. John responds by correcting Robert's labeling the brush as a "quarter-inch," claiming "It's an eighth-inch" (LT 39). After a pause, Robert begins again:

ROBERT: Well, it's awfully splayed, don't you think?

JOHN: No.

ROBERT: It's not splayed a bit?

JOHN: No.

ROBERT: Well, it's not new ... (Is it new?)

JOHN: No, I've had it a while.

ROBERT: A while, eh?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: A long while?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: What is it, camel?

JOHN: It's sable.

Pause.

ROBERT: (Sable brushes.) (LT 40)

Rather than communicating through implication, as he did in earlier scenes, Robert tries to goad John through his evaluation of the younger actor's make-up brush. His initial comment, "That's a lovely brush," appears genuine; rather than simply accept the compliment, though, and accede to Robert's assertion of authority implied in such a judgment, John attempts to dismiss the older man by focusing on the incorrect labeling of

the brush's length. As John undercuts Robert's discernment through noting his mistake, the older man presses the issue by turning the conversation towards the brush's condition. An audience should quickly realize that Robert contradicts his first evaluation and follow-up question. In doing this, Robert reveals his strategy: as John rejects the older man's positive judgment of his brush, Robert attempts to assert his dominance by implying that John is careless with his tools of the trade. While John follows Robert's line of questioning to its logical conclusion, and verifies the older man's observation of the brush's age, he offers nothing in his responses that clearly validates Robert's claim to authority. Robert's utterance of the phrase "(Sable brushes)" indicates disapproval of John's indulgence in undue luxury, but, again, the younger actor fails to respond in any meaningful manner.

Robert attempts to use the brush metonymically as representative of John's failures as an actor; as this claim is rejected, he attempts a more direct approach and begins to criticize John's acting: "In our scene tonight ... Could you ... perhaps ... do less?" (LT 41). Robert's criticism parallels John's in the first scene; however, the younger actor, in asking for an explanation of Robert's charge, does not immediately accept the claim to truth of the critique. Rather, he persists in asking Robert for elaboration. As the older man can offer no concrete explanation in support of his accusation, John haughtily dismisses Robert by sarcastically stating "Well, thank you for the thought" (LT 42). John's curt rejection of Robert's advice allows the older man to shift the focus of the conversation away from considerations of John's acting ability to justifying his own rightness and sincerity in offering the criticism:

ROBERT: I don't think you have to be like that.

JOHN: I'm sorry.

ROBERT: Are you?

JOHN: I accept the comment in the spirit in which it was, I am sure, intended.

Pause.

ROBERT: It was intended in that spirit, John.

JOHN: I know it was.

ROBERT: How could it be intended otherwise?

JOHN: It couldn't.

ROBERT: Well, you know it couldn't.

JOHN: Yes, I know.

ROBERT: It hurts me when you take it personally. (LT 42-3)

Each actor's vagueness allows him to pursue different communicative goals with his speech acts. Robert takes John's sarcasm as a sign that the younger actor has rejected his criticism because he has judged it insincere, and feels the need to defend himself from the charge. John, on the other hand, recognizes that Robert seeks agreement, and thus constructs his speech acts so he may reply affirmatively to Robert's defense without relinquishing his initial position. Humor comes into play as Robert misreads John's statement on the "spirit" of the comment, interpreting it as a reference to the difference between the right "spirit" in which one offers such comments and Robert's real motivations. John, however, means this statement literally: he recognizes that Robert had motives other than to offer constructive professional advice. John does, thus, take the comment in the "spirit" of those unstated motives. John uses his facetious tone to

manipulate Robert into defending his intentions in a manner inconsistent with the charge John levels at him: Robert mistakenly assumes that "spirit" refers to the normatively prescribed manner of offering such criticism and therefore defends the propriety of his speech.

As both of Robert's attempts to assert authority in this scene fail, he backs away from this mode and presents himself, much like in the first scene, in a more pitiable position. He suddenly exclaims "Shit! ... My zipper's broken" (LT 43). The quick shift focuses the conversation on this immediate problem, and John offers his assistance to the older man. Much like he did in coercing a dinner invitation from John, Robert insists on handling the situation himself. His frantic reaction to the discovery, though, and his means of conveying his ability to handle the situation ("I'll manage ... I'll get it.") communicate a sense of helplessness over the broken zipper. Though John's motivations may not be as friendly as when he invited Robert to join him for a meal earlier, the younger man recognizes the tension that the broken zipper produces; his insistence on fixing Robert's pants illustrates again that Robert can take control of the relationship by playing to John's sense of sympathy. Once again, an audience may recognize that Robert deceives only himself with his pompous musings on acting and the theater; he finds brief moments of forced companionship only by dispensing with his role of the experienced pedagogue and overemphasizing his loneliness and growing lack of control.

Mamet reveals Robert's fading abilities in the next two scenes, in which the audience sees another passage from a play and Robert's violent reaction to negative reviews of the performance. Mamet communicates Robert's waning vitality at two levels as the two actors perform "A scene from a play in a lawyer's office" (LT 46). The first,

and most obvious, example is a flubbed line on Robert's part. As the two actors perform the highly contrived and melodramatic scene concerning "David" (played by John) confronting "John" (played by Robert) about the latter's impregnating the former's wife, Robert utters the line "She's told you that I am the husband" (LT 48). The line doesn't make sense in the context of the conversation, as David is the unseen woman's husband: John, while staying in character, simply states "No." Robert understands John's cue, and repeats the line correctly: "She's told you that I am the father" (LT 49). On a second level, Mamet suggests Robert's fading vitality through the scene's action: the character John has impregnated David's wife, which suggests the husband's literally weak virility. This situation serves, perhaps, as a dramatization of Robert's "real-life" fears: replacement by another man who is able to "perform" more successfully than himself.

Robert's reaction to reviews of the play in the following scene foreshadows his later muddled pronouncement concerning parallels between "real life" and the life actors present on-stage. Just as the character David must confront both betrayal and an undercutting of his masculinity, Robert lashes out at critics that presumably have harshly criticized his performance, perhaps even singling out his mistaken line as a sign of failing ability. Robert attempts to cast these reviews as an attack on more than himself: he angrily asks John "Why can they not leave us alone?" (My emphasis, LT 50). John's mild response to Robert's outburst suggests, though, that both of them have not received unfavorable reviews. Robert attempts to justify his anger by framing these implied criticisms as attacks upon actors as a group, or, at the very least, all of the actors in the criticized play. As in earlier scenes, John calms Robert by finally offering vague affirmative responses: his "Yes" after Robert's question does not answer the question but

communicates without conviction that he agrees with Robert. The affirmative response has its desired effect: Robert, assuming that he's received validation from John for his characterization of the critics, calms down.

John's choices to patronize Robert rather than to enter into debate with the older man encourage Robert to offer additional verbal inanities. In scene 13, as the two men read yet another script, Robert interrupts the rehearsal in order to take on the role of literary critic:

JOHN: "It'll rain soon" ... ROBERT (musing): Salt ...

I'm sorry? saltwater ...

ROBERT: Eh?

JOHN: I'm sorry. What?

ROBERT: No, I'm just thinking. Salt. Saltwater. Eh? The thought. He lets you see the thought there.

Pause.

JOHN: Mmm.

Pause.

ROBERT: Salt! Sweat. His life flows out. (Pause.) Then saltwater! Eh?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: To the sea.

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: All right. Good. (LT 57)

Robert's interpretation of the scene is as cliched as the lines themselves, and as he builds his "reading" to the point of claiming a trite existential subtext underlying the play,

an audience should laugh at Robert's attempt to show off his interpretive skills. This scene, though, illustrates a more complex point regarding the evolving relationship of the two actors: John again tries to dismiss Robert through quickly offering assent to Robert's show of literary prowess, but succeeds in encouraging the older man to continue his interpretive acts as they rehearse. An audience member may realize that John's attempt at subtle dismissal are aimed at a man unable to recognize them; when coupled with the praise Robert heaps on the banal play they read, one can see that reading subtext is beyond Robert's gifts as an actor or a partner in "real-life" communication. John's strategy fails because it involves a mode of communication ill-suited to his hearer.

John unwittingly finds a more effective means of registering his disdain for Robert in scene 14: Robert focuses the conversation on John's audition that day for a job outside of their company. John's action marks an important shift in communicative dynamics: until this point, Robert could assume his authority was buttressed by the fixed nature of their positions in the company. John's audition, though, implies a desire to dissolve this relationship, and highlights its instability. Robert responds to this challenge by clinging to the role he has created for himself. The scene open with Robert asking about the audition and John responding in a conventional fashion: he answers Robert's questions but offers little more. John's positive outlook on the audition clearly takes Robert off guard, as the possibility that John's audition was successful undercuts the older man's assumptions that his student's success relies on his coaching. Because John's success means losing his perceived authority over the younger man, Robert steers the conversation away from John's positive evaluation towards the possibility of failure:

ROBERT: ... There are two classes of phenomena.

JOHN: There are.

Pause.

ROBERT: There are those things we can control and those things which we cannot.

JOHN: Mmm.

ROBERT: You can't control what someone thinks of you.

JOHN: No.

ROBERT: That is up to them. They may be glum, they may be out-of-sorts. Perhaps they are neurotic.

JOHN: How's your duck?

ROBERT: Fine. (Pause.) One can control, however, one's actions. One's intentions.

JOHN: Pass the bread, please.

ROBERT: That is all one can control.

JOHN: Please pass the bread. (LT 60-1)

In opening his "lecture" with a statement concerning "phenomena," Robert repeats the successful strategy of his earlier speech concerning offensive sounds. As in that speech, Robert backs off from the direct confrontation he's offered in more recent lessons to generalized observations: he chooses to offer claims of objective validity which imply that John should prepare for disappointment. Robert's reference to "intentions" calls into question not only John's perception of the audition but also the rightness of taking this course of action: an audience member, given Robert's perlocutionary presentation of his need for John's companionship, will likely interpret this phrase in

terms of John's intention to pursue other professional opportunities. Similarly, an audience will probably not fail to notice the change in Robert's stance towards his student's growth: Robert had stated earlier that "We have a right to learn ... We must not be afraid to grow" (LT 35). Now that John's "growth" includes the possibility that he may leave the company and Robert's tutelage, the older actor uses his assumed position to imply that John's auditioning outside of their company constitutes a normative violation. As Robert has continuously shown that he can or will not openly assert his desire to maintain a relationship with John, his implication of a normative transgression serves as his means of attempting to maintain the relationship without expressing his need for it.

At this point in the play, Robert is unwittingly comic in his attempt to mandate a normative framework that masks his emotional desires with rhetoric conveying institutional imperatives. Any relationship between the two men is maintained out of professional necessity rather than mutual consent. John does not even attempt to humor Robert as he launches into his speech on phenomena; rather, the younger man ignores Robert's lesson and attempts to return to the small talk that characterized the initial conversation regarding the audition. John's asking Robert "How's your duck?" and repeatedly requesting that the older man "pass the bread" conveys that he has no interest in Robert's thoughts and wishes to keep their communication at the level of polite necessity. Robert attempts to insert another judgment by asking "You're eating bread?" but John also refuses to recognize the accusation of a normative transgression by simply replying "Yes" (LT 61). As Robert makes one more attempt to focus on the possibility of John's not getting the job for which he auditioned, the younger actor tersely tells Robert

that he is aware that rejection does not imply inability: "I think I know that" (LT 61). John's abrupt response indicates to both Robert and an audience that he no longer wishes to pursue the subject, and Robert, in acknowledging John's assertion, closes the conversation with polite but cliched statements of support. His final statement, "Good things for good folk," rings especially hollow, and a virtual participant in the dialogue may well recognize this comment as not another encouraging statement for John, but rather as a facetious observation offered on his own professional and personal accomplishments (LT 62).

A subsequent "onstage"scene continues such indirect commentary on Robert's work: alone on stage, Robert performs a soliloquy from play set during the French Revolution containing a call to action propped up by a series of nonsensical observations on the human condition. Again, this scene mirrors Robert's own approach to asserting profound truths about the theater: as Dean notes "The [play's author] clearly believes he can display a linguistic flourish in bombastic rhetoric and overwhelm though the power of words alone. Alas, the rhetoric is fatuous and frequently downright silly" (Language 143). Lines such as "Now: we must dedicate ourselves to the spirit: to the spirit of humanity: to life" mirror Robert's own assertions concerning the role of actors as "explorers of the soul" (LT 64; 36). Dean suggests that "At this half-way stage of the play, Robert is still mostly in control, but there are already hints of John's lessening dependence upon him, and Robert's sad realization of this fact" (Language 143). Yet Mamet has clearly illustrated John's growing irritation with and contempt for Robert's teaching at this point in the play. From the perspective of a virtual participant in the actor's dialogue, any control Robert asserts is illusory, as John has shown his desire to

leave his mentor and, when in his presence, frequently ignores him or mocks his efforts at illuminating the nature of theater. Robert's performance of these overblown lines, then, clearly echoes his own attempts to make a comment of some depth on the human condition: the empty assertions, the cliched images, and the careless organization emphasize again his shallowness. Instead, an audience witnesses a pathetic attempt at performative profundity, and likely recognizes that this scene's author, like Robert himself, settles for creating a linguistic facade that succeeds only in drawing attention to itself as a poorly performed attempt to assert "truth." The scene fails to create consensus between Robert and the audience not only by offering propositions unlikely to receive verification but also by structuring these lines so that any meaning that might be found by a hearer is lost in its muddled organization.

Robert's performance of the French Revolution scene verifies the audiences' likely position that his teaching reflects not attempts to engage his student in dialogue concerning the theater but perlocutionary assertions of his authority concerning such matters. Whether John accepts any of Robert's pronouncements is, at least, questionable: as the actors and audience return to the dressing room in the next scene, Mamet clarifies that the younger actor has reached the limit of his patience in regards to Robert's mentoring. The scene opens with Robert beginning another speech in the dressing room, this time on the nature of greasepaint. Robert's speech bears a striking resemblance to Gayev's overblown praise of a desk in Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, and, like this character, the older actor attempts to convey an idea of objective truth embodied in greasepaint's composition. An audience will probably find this humorous; John, though, reaches the limits of his patience and interrupts Robert's philosophizing with "Would you

please shut up?" (LT 65). As the two actors are preparing to go on stage, one might attribute John's impatience to the anxiety expected prior to a performance. Robert, however, labels John's behavior as "a breach of etiquette," to which the younger actor replies "What breach? What etiquette?" (LT 65).

An audience member might interpret John's questions as a rejection of Robert's assertions that such norms exist: Robert, though, responds to them as requests for information and seizes on the opportunity to further lecture John on the norms of professional behavior. John again attempts to silence the older actor: as Robert begins his lesson, John interrupts with "Can we do this later?" (LT 66). The younger actor's question implies not only further irritation on his part, but also an assumption about the nature of the impending lesson. Robert's response, "I feel that there is something here of worth to you," not only shifts the basis for communicative validation from the normative to the subjective, but also answers John's implied charge of repetitiveness in their pedagogic relationship. By asserting that he offers his speech primarily for John's benefit, Robert draws on a vision of the theater they may even share, one articulated by Mamet himself in "Regarding A Life in the Theater": "Excellence in the theater is the art of giving things away" (WR 104). An audience may see John's response to Robert's shift in communicative strategy as a validation that this idea is central for both actors: John responds with "You do?", a question that seems to convey surprise towards, but not rejection of, Robert's stated motive. By asserting that he acts in a spirit of selflessness, Robert reinforces the rightness of his action and forces John to recognize that he can reject his lesson at the cost of further normative violation. John grudgingly agrees to hear Robert out, and the older actor begins to lecture on his student's "attitude":

> ROBERT: Forms. The Theatre's a closed society. Constantly abutting thoughts, the feelings, the emotions of our colleagues. Sensibilities (pause) bodies ... forms evolve. An etiquette, eh? In our personal relationships with each other. Eh, John? In our personal relationships. ... One generation sows the seeds. It instructs the preceding ... that is to say, the following generation ... from the quality of its actions. Not from its discourse, John, no, but organically. (Pause.) You can learn a lot from keeping your mouth shut. (Mamet LT 66-7)

The last line of this speech conveys Robert's real feelings and point: the preceding lines illustrate another botched attempt at couching such "lessons" within the larger sphere of institutionally-sanctioned norms. Robert's invocation of "the Theatre" serves to create a institutional grounding for his argument concerning professional etiquette; however, his jumbled listing of elements that come together to create a standard of behavior makes little sense, and his repetition of "In our personal relationships" communicates to John and the audience that Robert is likely improvising rather than relating a logical development based in a shared perception of fact. As Robert continues speaking, he fumbles a line, using "preceding" instead of "following," and then forces his discourse towards the conclusion "You can learn a lot from keeping your mouth shut." This assertion likely strikes an audience as ironic; John certainly sees it as such and responds facetiously in the affirmative: "You can" (LT 67). John's response serves as further commentary on Robert's own inability to "keep his mouth shut," but, as usual, the older actor understands the response literally, missing the intended sarcasm. An audience will likely recognize another misunderstanding on Robert's part a few lines later as he

offers the rhetorical question "But what is 'life on stage' but attitudes?" (LT 67). John's response, "What?" likely means to question the meaning of Robert's observation, and probably parallels the audience's response. Robert, however, interprets John's question literally, and offers his next statement, "Damn little," as an answer to the question he posed, assuming that John has asked him not for clarification of the question but for its answer. As the play progresses, an audience realizes that Robert's teaching, as well as his acting, are continually losing connection with any logical patterns of argumentation and coherence. The older actor's assumption of authority becomes more and more absurd as his waning mental faculties become more and more apparent.

John's choice to apologize to Robert at the end of this scene may indicate that the younger actor recognizes Robert's growing inability to successfully play his roles both on- and off-stage. Mamet uses the remaining scenes of the play to clarify to the audience Robert's absurd battle with the effects of aging. Scene 18 portrays the actors' rendering of "The famous lifeboat scene," which Robert had earlier praised for its literary merits, and which, when seen in full, more fully shows itself as another piece of play writing riddled with cliches and hollow emotion. Like the earlier World War I scene, Robert plays an older, experienced character who accepts grim reality at face value. John again plays a younger character concerned with larger issues of injustice. The fictional playwright seems to have had a rather simplistic political agenda in mind, rendered in John's long speech concerning the past "when a man had a stake in what he went out after, when he had a stake in his ship ... and a stake in himself," juxtaposed with their present situation: "Now we're dyin' 'cause some ... shipowner in Newport decided that rather than make his ships safe for men, it was cheaper to overinsure them" (LT 70).

Additionally, the scene offers a parallel to the relationship between the two actors, as John's character Danny not only rejects the older character's assertion "That's what life on the sea is about," but offers his own interpretation of their present situation based on a different understanding of the objective facts and normative contexts. Danny's speech in the scene further undercuts Robert's earlier interpretation by not only highlighting the banal nature of the dialogue that Robert had praised, but also by showing that the lines containing the "literary merits" to which Robert had pointed serve to set up the younger character's speech. Robert had focused on the lines which his character spoke in offering his interpretation, but the presentation of the scene shows an audience that the writer likely intended for the older character's poetic musings to pale when met with the challenge offered in Danny's speech.

Similarly, Robert's assumed position of authority takes another blow in scene 19, while he and John are "standing in the wings" as John prepares to go on stage. John can not remember the line he speaks as he enters the scene:

JOHN: What comes after: "The men got together, ma'am, and kind of thought you'd like to have this"?

ROBERT: She says, "Thank you."

JOHN: I'm aware of that, I think. After that. What comes after that?

ROBERT: Your line?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: Uh...

JOHN: Have you got a script?

ROBERT: What would I be doing with a script?

JOHN: I'm going to go get a script.

ROBERT: Wait. I know what the line is ...

JOHN: What?

ROBERT: Uh, after you give her the watch, right?

JOHN: Yes.

ROBERT: Right. You give her the watch. You give her the watch ...

JOHN: And?

ROBERT: Ah, Christ ... you hand the cunt the watch: "Ma'am, we kinda thought that maybe ..."

JOHN: "The men all got together, ma'am ..."

ROBERT: Yes. And ... um ... this is ridiculous .. You give her the watch ... (What's her line?)

JOHN: "Thank you."

Pause.

ROBERT: Ah, fuck. You'd better get a script. (LT 71-2)

As a result of Robert's failed attempt to remember John's line, the younger actor misses his cue and has to rush onto stage still not knowing the forgotten line. An audience will likely recognize that had Robert not prevented John from following his first instinct, he probably would not have made this mistake. Up to this point, Robert's teaching has proven humorous, even ridiculous, and annoying; by choosing to assert knowledge which he does not possess at this moment, though, Robert undercuts the foundation of his assumed authority: he wants to help John succeed as an actor. At this late point in the play, this scene also illustrates an exception to John's practice of ignoring

the older man's teaching: at this critical moment, he accepts Robert's assertion that he knows the line, thus momentarily accepting Robert's claim to knowledge. As this claim proves false, Robert, in attempting to reinforce his claim to the position of mentor, ends up paralleling Freire's necrophilic teacher: his claim to knowledge of the play, like Teach's claims to knowledge of burglary or Bernie's assertions concerning sexual relationships, proves merely a performative stance, and his student pays for his trust with failure.

John's choice to accept Robert's authority in scene 19, as mentioned before, is exceptional; similarly, the mistake that results from this choice appears to deviate from the norm also, as several following scenes indicate. Scene 20 presents a brief encounter between the two men in which Robert compliments John on a new sweater. Robert asks John if the sweater is cashmere, an indication to the audience that John has achieved a level of success necessary to afford such luxuries. Scene 21 reinforces this perception as John returns a phone call related to work on a film; his joyous response and thanks indicate that he has successfully found work outside of the theater company. The news of his success comes as Robert preaches another lesson to the young actor. As John attempts to hold a conversation, Robert condemns a host of theatrical parasites: "... ten-percenters, sweetheart unions, everybody in the same bed together. Agents. All the bloodsuckers. The robbers of the cenotaph" (LT 75). These condemnations lead to an assertion of the need for unity amongst "fellow workers," a claim that John questions by bringing up "talent" (LT 75-6). Robert answers John's question with more questions: "And what of it? (Pause.) What of humanity?" (LT 76). Robert's motivation becomes clearer as he drops the potential discussion and invites John out for a drink; again, an

audience member may recognize the established pattern of Robert's capturing John's attention through his lesson, and then steering the conversation towards social interaction. John, however, is more concerned with his phone conversation and, after ignoring Robert's attempts to revive the lesson, finally asks the older actor "Do you know who this is?" (LT 76). The statement underlying this rhetorical question comes through clearly: "Bonnie," the woman on the phone, offers John an opportunity to advance his career while Robert can only offer more useless lessons. Robert's attempt to assert that drinking is "fitting" at this time falls on deaf ears; John has dismissed him completely.

The following scene illustrates a similar pattern of dialogue: Robert opens with the exclamation "Fucking leeches," which leads to an enumeration of the failings of theater critics (LT 77). Since Robert has already offered criticism in this vein in Scene 10, an audience member might assume that his speech is also motivated by more poor reviews of his work. Though that may contribute to his anger, he focuses his lecture not on his own reviews but on John's, telling the young actor "They've praised you too much," and that the young actor deserves credit, but "Not ... for those things which they have praised you for" (LT 77). After attempting to ignore the older man's criteria for acceptable critical motivations, John challenges the validity of Robert's evaluation of the reviews: "I thought that they were rather to the point" (LT 78). Robert questions the sincerity of this statement; John holds to his position, and the older actor, in typically bombastic form, laments John's naivete: "Oh, the Young, the Young, the Young, the Young" (LT 78). John's response, "The Farmer in the Dell," rejects Robert's implied assertion of experience in his lamentation, and undercuts any claims to profundity on Robert's part by highlighting the rhythm of the older actor's statement rather than its

content (LT 79). Dean points out that John's response, "with its echoes of nursery rhymes and childhood, ... suggest[s] Robert's incipient senility and imbecilic childishness": while this subtext may exist, John's intentions do not seem to go beyond undercutting the presumed substance of Robert's implication (Language 135).

John's rejection of Robert's observations regarding the reviews infuriate the older actor: while John has mocked and/or ignored Robert up to this point, he has never before offered an assertion directly challenging Robert's claim to insight. The combination of John's dismissal and apparent success proves too much for Robert's role-playing: he drops all pretense of polish and civility, and exclaims "You fucking TWIT" (LT 79). Robert's use of profanity, similar to the language of characters from earlier plays, emphasizes the failure of his strategy to play the role of the experienced pedagogue. Because he can no longer ignore these failures, Robert desperately grasps for another means to assert himself: without his empty rhetorical flourishes, he reveals that the only means left him are profane insults meant only to beat his student into submission. Like Teach's, the failure of Robert's performative construction of the mentor illustrates the limitations of language available to him. When subtlety and perlocution fail him, he lashes out brutally, revealing that the foundation of his performance lies in a desire for power over John. If the student rejects the mentor's narrative, the mentor's only remaining choice is to destroy the student.

In momentarily dropping all pretense, though, Robert only succeeds in showing his powerlessness: the violent language he utters has little effect on John, and serves to further alienate him. The play's last four scenes portray Robert's decline unmercifully: though Mamet claims that he intended "to look with love" at this play's actors, Robert's

final attempts to capture John's attention and affection typically evoke pity and possibly scorn in the audience (WR 106). As Robert can no longer trust his role as mentor to serve his goals of asserting his authority and winning John's friendship, the older actor attempts to play on John's sympathy. This shift in strategy occurs, though, as John has exhibited a complete loss of patience with Robert and a complete unwillingness to further play his assigned role of student.

An audience should recognize that Robert's performance as mentor has failed to win him the respect and companionship he desires; thus, the older actor's last attempts to mold his student communicate little more than the absurdity of his posturing. As John rehearses alone in scene 23, Robert calls to him from offstage: "Ah, the sweet poison of the actor, rehearsing in an empty theatre upon an empty stage ..." (LT 80). Robert seizes this opportunity to offer further criticism of John's development as an actor, noting "You're very good, John," but then tempering his praise by observing "The flaws of youth are the perquisite of the young. It is the perquisite of the young to possess the flaws of youth" (LT 80-1). Dean notes that Robert's criticism and John's mocking response, "It's fitting, yes ...," illustrate "a sour sense of the alienation that is gradually developing between the two men" (LT 81; Dean Language 133). The previous scenes, though, have firmly established alienation between the two characters: Robert's faint praise and John's facetious response highlight that the potential professional relationship between the men has degenerated into half-masked barbs asserted for no reason other than hurting one another.

John's obvious poke at the older man's standard utterance conveying normative rightness creates an opening for Robert; as he shifts his strategy towards evoking John's

sympathy, the young man's insult allows Robert to highlight his inner world: "Ah, don't mock me, John. You shouldn't mock me. It's too easy. ... it is a hurtful fault, John, to confuse sincerity with weakness" (LT 81). Robert's choice to assert his sincerity rather than his authority again provides him with the means to offer John more of his thoughts on the Theatre:

> ROBERT: ... And I must tell you something.
>
> JOHN: Yes.
>
> ROBERT: About the Theatre — and this is a wondrous thing about the Theatre — and John, one of the ways in which it's most like life ...
>
> JOHN: And what is that?
>
> Pause.
>
> ROBERT: Simply this. That in the Theatre (as in life — and the Theatre is, of course, a part of life ... No?) ... Do you see what I'm saying? I'm saying, as in a grocery store, that you cannot separate the time one spends ... that is, it's all a part of one's life. (Pause.) In addition to the fact that what's happening on stage is life ... of a sort ... I mean, it's part of your life. (Pause.) Which is one reason I'm so gratified (if I may presume, and I recognize that it may be a presumption) to see you ... to see the young of the Theatre ... (And it's not unlike one's children) ... following in the footpaths of ... following in the footsteps of ... those who have gone before. (Pause.) Do you see what I am saying? I would like to think you did. Do you? John? (LT 81-2)

Robert's discourse on the connections between life and theater reveals itself as a

reflection on his life in the theater. Robert presents his subject in the third person which implies that he intends to illustrate to John more objective truth concerning the institution. His reliance on a generalized other for grounding his argument quickly fails him, though, and instead of a profound existential observation, Robert offers the obvious: one's time on stage is a part of one's life. As Robert seems to shift abruptly into his claim of gratification regarding John's progress, an audience may recognize the intent underlying his claims: rather than revealing to John a truth regarding "the Theater" and "Life," Robert attempts to use his utterances as a means of constructing a narrative which frames John's success as a result of his own mentoring. His repetition of the questions "Do you see what I'm saying?" offers John an opportunity not to validate any larger objective claims about the institution, but rather to acknowledge that Robert's mentoring has contributed to the younger actor's professional standing.

John does not validate this claim though; instead, he ignores it. While his dismissal of the older man probably strikes an audience as cold, Robert's choice to request this validation in the guise of mentor makes John's response predictable. This scene, and a following one in which Robert makes a half-hearted suicide attempt, reemphasizes the absurdity of the older actor's mentoring. John clearly feels sympathy for Robert: when the older man approaches the younger with his bleeding wrist, John illustrates genuine concern. Robert, however, refuses to recognize that his goal of personal connection with John is possible, provided that he ask for it not as John's superior but rather as a colleague and equal.

The play's last "onstage" scene illustrates this absurdity most pointedly for an audience. The scene portrays two surgeons in the middle of an operation; it

unsuccessfully attempts to create drama out of predictable dialogue and a less-than-compelling situation. Robert and John manage to bring some life to this scene unintentionally, though, as they engage in a "debate" over the play's next line:

> JOHN (pointing): What's that?
>
> Pause. ROBERT shakes his head minutely. JOHN nods his head.
>
> What's that?
>
> ROBERT minutely but emphatically shakes his head.
>
> Pause.
>
> JOHN mumbles something to ROBERT. ROBERT mumbles something to JOHN.
>
> Pause. (LT 85-6)

As the two actors can not reach agreement through their gestures to one another, Robert attempts to improvise in a manner meant to convey to John his need for a script. John continues to utter "What's that?" and even moves on to his next lines concerning "A Curious Growth Near [the patient's] Spleen" (LT 86). Robert, however, keeps to his improvisation, asserting through his character that John, not he, has uttered the wrong lines. An audience should recognize that Robert's earlier assertion concerning connections between the theater and life makes itself manifest here as Robert tries to stay in character but still attempts to assert his authority in the situation, even to the point of threatening John: "Now: if you desire to work in this business again, will you give me a reading? If you wish to continue here inside the hospital?" (LT 87). Despite the older actor's attempt to save it, the stage illusion breaks down as real animosities become apparent; Robert's speech to the fictional audience only serves to highlight the

breakdown of realism that the actor's attempted to create. Moreover, this scene emphasizes the wane of Robert's professional skills: rather than attempting to keep the scene intact by following John's lead, Robert allows his jealousy of the younger actor to enter the performance. By engaging in a power struggle with John during a performance, Robert illustrates that his need for authority over the younger actor is more powerful than his desire to show his thespian abilities. The irony of Robert's asserted authority makes itself abundantly clear as he chooses to assume this performative stance in a situation that ultimately reinforces John's and the audience's perception that Robert's role of mentor is nothing more than a role he plays. The ultimate failure of this performance is highlighted in the play's last scene in which the two actors, as in the first scene, discuss that night's performance. In the last scene, though, the roles have reversed: now Robert claims that he is "not eating too well these days" while John offers authoritative evaluations of the older man's performance (LT 92).

A Life in the Theatre illustrates a continuation of Mamet's engagement with the mentor/student relationship as a framework for examining human interaction. Like the later Oleanna, though, Mamet explores in this play the more tragic dimensions of this relationship. Characters like Don Dubrow finally come to a recognition of their guilt in a given situation; a character like Robert, though, who bears a resemblance to Sexual Perversity's Bernie, either can not or will not accept his own failings and thus uses the role of teacher as a means of dismissing these failings. The choice of this role, though, only serves to highlight the "tragedy of the common man" in which these characters engage: like Miller's Willy Loman, Robert can choose companionship and community from the outset. While an audience can recognize that Robert desires a relationship with

John, the parameters he asserts for their friendship succeed in pushing the younger man away. Robert accepts a conception of friendship, central to many of Mamet's plays, that fails to distinguish between the imperatives of ideal communicative action and those of power over another. By assuming authority over the younger actor, and failing to recognize the deleterious effects such claims have on his and John's relationship, Robert's decline in A Life in the Theatre presents its audience with an invitation to witness and examine the futility inherent the paternalistic model of the banking educator.

ENDNOTES:

[1]Habermas, in reference to the work of George Herbert Mead, explains this term by claiming:

> [Mead] tries to explicate this concept through the idea that the actor who asserts his rights speaks from the lofty position of the "generalized other." At the same time, he stresses that this position becomes a social reality only to the extent that the members of a social group internalize roles and norms. The authority with which the generalized other is outfitted is that of general group will; it is not the same as the force of the generalized will of all individuals, which expresses itself in the sanctions the group applies to deviations. ... To the degree that A [a speaker] anchors the power of institutions, which first confront him as a fact, in the very structure of the self, in a system of internal, that is, moral behavioral, generalized behavior patterns acquire for him the authority of a "thou shalt!" — no longer in an imperativist sense — and thus that kind of normative validity in virtue of which norms possess binding force. (TCA II 38)

CHAPTER 5

"LIKE YOU TAUGHT ME...": GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS

Unlike its predecessors, Mamet's Pulitzer prize winning Glengarry Glen Ross did not follow the traditional path to its Broadway opening at the John Golden Theater on March 25, 1984: debuting in London, the play also ran at Chicago's Goodman Theater before moving to New York. As numerous critics have noted, this curious path to Broadway resulted from Mamet's own lack of confidence in the play's viability and structural integrity. His doubts about Glengarry prompted him to send the play to Harold Pinter: the older playwright's now-famous response was that the only thing the play needed was a production. Pinter's instinct was validated numerous times over: on it's way to the Pulitzer, the play also received accolades and awards for its productions in Great Britain and Chicago.

New York critics overwhelmingly praised the play and its author, a new experience for Mamet. Joel Siegel, writing for WABC-TV, claimed "Mamet has given us a slice of life -- rough cut but real. This is one of the season's best new plays by one of our best playwrights" (339). Jack Kroll's review for Newsweek introduced an oft-repeated label for the playwright: "Mamet seems to get more original as his career develops. His antiphonal exchanges, which dwindle to single words or even fragments of

words and then explode into a crossfire of scatological buckshot, make him an Aristophanes of the inarticulate" (my emphasis, 337). Clive Barnes wrote in the New York Post that "This is a play to see, remember and cherish. Mamet holds up a mirror to America with accusatory clarity. Characters and situations -- these are Mamet's specialties, and they have never looked more special" (337).

While Siegel's and Barnes's focus on Mamet's choices of "situations and characters" was certainly well-founded, Kroll's praise of Mamet's dialogue serves as an appropriate segue into academic responses to Glengarry. Robert Vorlicky, for instance, writes of speech and its relationship to gender: "[Masculinity] 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 the men's active identification with the cultural ideal of male virility" (82). David Sauer observes the "misdirection" inherent in the play's "sales talk," and notes the immaturity inherent in such speech: "... beneath all the salesman misdirection about the golden age and real men, the truth is that these characters really speak and act like boys" (139). David Worster's labeling of Glengarry Glen Ross as Mamet's "speech-act play" erroneously suggests that the centrality of speech and its contexts -- "the ideological, social, and cultural conventions and rituals which constitute and are in turn constituted by language" -- is unique to this play. As I hope I have already demonstrated, the exchange of speech acts is fundamental to understanding the action of any of Mamet's plays (63). Our understanding of speech in Glengarry, like that in A Life in the Theatre and Oleanna is colored by the professional status of the speaker. In this play, though, unlike the other two, most speech emerges from the lips of "salesman," a generally perjorative

professional label, that presents an audience with an opportunity to immediately judge these Levene, Roma and Moss as "talkers." While the narratives created by earlier characters such as Bernie and Teach are just as worthless as the value attributed to the land pitched in this play, Mamet's salesmen carry the additional burden of their job titles, which many audience members will likely equate with "charlatains." Thus, these salesmen must not only convince their "marks" of the worth of the product they attempt to sell, but must also use language as a means to challenge perceptions of their inherent insincerity when making a pitch. Glengarry Glen Ross does stand out from Mamet's other plays in that its subject matter directs an audience towards examining overtly institutionalized insincerity.[1]

As in the plays already discussed, Mamet uses the act of teaching to highlight the element of insincerity in his characters' attempted communications with one another. One of the few direct references to mentorship comes towards the end of the play as Roma, in validating Levene's methods of closing a sale, notes that the older salesman had acted "Like you taught me ...": Levene, in convincing the Nyborgs to buy into Mountain View, had used the methods which helped Roma become successful at his job (GGR 74). While this event represents one of the play's few moments of community, Roma's intentions (and his judgment) are called into question by the play's end as he instructs office manager Williamson to aid him in taking half of Levene's commissions. In hindsight, this brief reference to a pedagogical relationship provides context for the rest of the play's communicative acts, as the various salemen use the language of the mentor, and the accompanying implications of trust and confidence, as their preferred method of swindling their customers and each other.

Roma's choice to call attention to Levene's status as his mentor also points to the more insidious elements of the pedagogical relationship that come to light in this play. Specifically, teaching in Glengarry tends to mirror the confidence game at its most vicious. While the plays already discussed tend to portray subterfuge as a means of connecting with another character, relationships in this play frequently depend on using love and friendship as the bait with which a conartis can gain his mark's trust. This is the opposite dynamic to that of the early plays, shown in the films House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner. Thus, while Bernie, Teach, and Robert all make use of discourse similar to that of Mike or Jimmy Dell, their ultimate goal, human connection, creates an understanding, if not a justification, for their methods. The salesmen of Glengarry, like the con men of the films, display no parallel motivations; rather, human connection is their method. With the exception of George Aaronow, Mamet's salesmen use friendship as the means towards their goal of material gain.

As reprehensible as an audience may find the sales methods in the play, Mamet does not allow his audience to accept a simple characterization of the salesmen as "bad." Rather, from the opening scene, an audience should come to recognize that the "closed moral universe" the playwright mirrors encourages such behavior. Beginning with Levene's early argument with Williamson over the injustice of dispensing premium leads to the most successful salesmen, an audience is presented with a lifeworld context that justifies and celebrates the swindle.

The play opens with a desperate attempt by one character to assert his authority and experience over another: salesman Shelly Levene attempts to convince office manager John Williamson that his reputation as a "closer" has earned him access to

premium sales leads despite a recent run of bad luck. Levene's method of convincing Williamson that he deserves the leads relies on creating a narrative of past successes to which the younger man was not a witness. Thus, as Hubert-Leibler notes, "when Levene is threatened with losing his job in the first scene of Glengarry, he assumes a professorial pose as a defense tactic... Levene is trying to force Williamson to see him as he wants to be seen -- as the student must see the teacher: competent and irreplaceable" (564). Levene's method of establishing this relationship involves offering a vision of objective truth for his student, and, in doing so, implying to the office manager that Williamson's treatment of the veteran salesman falls outside of accepted norms.

Levene begins his teaching by attempting to establish the criteria by which Williamson should make the decision regarding the distribution of premium leads:

> The Glengarry Highland's leads, you're sending Roma out. Fine. He's a good man. We know what he is. He's fine. All I'm saying, you look at the board, he's throwing ... wait, wait, wait, he's throwing them away, he's throwing the leads away. All that I'm saying, that you're wasting leads. 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 mindset.... A guy gets a reputation. We know how this ... all I'm saying, put a closer on the job. There's more than one man for the ... Put a ... wait a second, put a proven man out ... and you watch, now wait a second -- and you watch your dollar volumes. ... You start closing them for fifty 'stead of twenty-five ... you put a closer on the ... (GGR 15)

In this opening speech. Levene frames the current method of distributing leads as detrimental to the ultimate goal of the office: not to just sell investment properties. but to do so in the largest possible blocks. thus bringing in the maximum profit for the company. His criticism of Roma hinges not on the younger man's ability to sell (which would be foolish. since we quickly learn that Roma is at the top of the "board"). but his willingness to settle for numerous small sales. Levene presents the office manager with an implied definition of a "closer" as a salesman who makes individual sales with large profit margins for the company.

An audience may be willing to accept Levene's logic: Williamson. however. does not. As the office manager enters the dialogue. Levene's rationale quickly falls apart as we learn that he has not made any sales recently. The ensuing argument over Levene's success boils down to semantics and quickly establishes a difference between the two men in terms of their definitions of success. Levene attempts to make the case that he has actually closed recent sales: unforeseen events. however. have prevented those closings from translating into actual profit. Williamson's approach. though. rejects Levene's concept of closing: "anybody falls below a certain mark I'm not permitted to give them the premium leads" (GGR 19).

Mamet's typical in media res opening presents an immediate challenge to his audience: confronted with the concepts of success as defined by these characters. we may reflect on our own perceptions. Thus. as each man argues his position. an audience member must continually reflect on this concept in deciding which vision of success s/he will validate as legitimate. Yet. an audience should also recognize that neither man relies on a pure presentation of ideas which will stand or fall based on their merits. but rather

attempts to load his argument by appealing to different sources of authority. As noted earlier, Levene's stance can be categorized as "professorial," in that he attempts to create a narrative vision of truth and, perhaps more importantly, rightness that supports his position. In assuming this role, Levene mirrors Freire's conception of the banking educator, particularly in his attempt to "[project] an absolute ignorance" onto Williamson (53). Through Levene's dialogue, an audience member should recognize that he relies on narratives of past successes as his sources of authority, a past in which Williamson was generally not present. Like the actor Robert, Levene presents himself as the voice of experience: Williamson's arguments, thus, have no merit because he does not know Levene's history.

Levene's choice of pedagogical discourse seems particularly apt once an audience has the chance to hear Williamson speak at some length. The office manager's responses to the salesman's pleas and offers similarly characterize him as a prototypical student within the framework of banking education. Williamson clearly is a product of banking education, and his speech presents the audience with an opportunity to observe the actions of a student who has been "filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system" (Freire 53). Williamson's cold responses to Levene's various requests portray a character quite comfortable within a system that discourages creativity and imagination. As Levene lectures him, berates him, and finally attempts to apologize for his outburst, Williamson seizes his opportunity to present a summary of the narrative by which he operates:

> Let me tell you something, Shelly. I do what I'm hired to do. I'm ... wait a second. I'm <u>hired</u> to watch the leads. I'm given ... hold on, I'm given a

> policy. My job is to do that. What I'm told That's it. You, wait a second, anybody falls below a certain mark I'm not permitted to give them the premium leads. (GGR 19)

If an audience member listens closely, s/he will notice that Williamson typically uses passive voice in his speech. Thus, he willingly characterizes himself as a worker who performs his tasks under the auspices of outside authority. Within this first scene, Mamet allows the irony of the banking education relationship to reveal itself in all of its complexity. Levene, in assuming the role of the teacher, goads Williamson into action (which, of course, holds direct benefit for the teacher), while Williamson, in presenting himself as a functionary created by others, reveals that he has already been "educated" in a manner that does not allow him to even consider the potential validity of the salesman's argument, much less act upon it. In strict adherence to his own definitions of drama, Mamet presents his audience with a clear sense of the protagonist's goal; however, he also places that same character in confrontation with another person who recognizes and even approves of the goal, but will not validate the protagonist's means because of his own unwillingness to stray from the authority which has placed him in such a position.

In opening the play with this argument, Mamet also shifts the audience's position as virtual participant. In earlier plays, a spectator watched a would-be teacher achieve this position; in Glengarry, however, Williamson resists Levene's assertion of authority. As with Bernie and Robert, an audience member likely sees through Levene's strategy; unlike these predecessors, Levene is not successful in convincing Williamson to accept a subordinate position. As a result, the salesman chooses to invoke the steering medium of

money directly: he offers the office manager a ten-percent kickback on his sales in exchange for premium leads. This shift in discursive strategy allows Levene to move the conversation away from a debate over his recent success as the two men haggle over a fair price. Williamson counters with twenty percent and fifty dollars a lead, which Levene grudgingly accepts.

Levene's decision to bribe Williamson is significant to the theme of communication and its corruption in this play. Levene and Williamson's initial argument humorously represents an attempt by both men to use verbal propositions as the means towards their goals. An audience will likely call each man's motivations into question, but will recognize that Levene's need and Williamson's risk represent legitimate positions from which they can argue. Money, however, allows them to disregard the communicative process in favor of a strictly goal-oriented rationale. Williamson, in tacitly agreeing to consider Levene's bribe, offers his loyalty to the company, his respect for the rules, and his job security up as commodities over which the two men may haggle. The office manager will not take a risk because he recognizes and sympathizes with Levene's predicament; he will, however, forego ethical considerations if the price is right. In presenting this situation to his audience, Mamet creates an ethical and communicative framework for the play, almost an exposition: "selling" is a corruption of ideal communicative processes. While convincing a potential buyer of the worth of one's product involves offering propositions that the hearer may accept or reject, a salesman is motivated by profit, not consensus. Such attempts at communication discourage either participant from considering mutual interests. Rather, the goal-oriented nature of this particular process requires both speaker and hearer to consider self-interest only; if either

participant allows mutual interests to affect his/her position, s/he inevitably opens him/herself to exploitation.

Scene 1 establishes the moral context through which an audience will judge characters' speech acts in the rest of the play. As a virtual participant, the spectator will probably realize that in Glengarry s/he should judge communicative success by one person's ability to dominate another. Levene's efforts to convince Williamson of his worth as a salesman are admirable; ultimately, he must surrender this line of argument because it offers nothing of immediate value to Williamson. The salesman's final attempts to use emotional discourse, such as his brief "my daughter," are ironic, for Levene himself has proven that only money can serve successfully as the means to the end he desires (26). Thus, as the scene closes and the play moves into Moss and Aaronow's conversation, an audience is prepared to judge these characters based on the criteria established in the first scene.

As the next scene opens, an audience may initially believe that s/he will be witnessing a different kind of relationship than the one between Levene and Williamson. The first lines certainly suggest a conversation between friends: Aaronow is worried about his job, and Moss attempts to comfort him. As their dialogue continues, though, a spectator will likely realize that the two salesmen's relationship is that of mentor and student. Moss's opening tirade against "Polacks and deadbeats" and his subsequent discourse on Indians illustrates a perlocutionary claim to knowledge and experience: unlike George, he would have never expected to close a sale to a member of one of these ethnic groups (28). An audience member may also remember that, in Scene 1, Williamson had said that Moss was ranked second on the sales board; he has enjoyed

recent success and does not face the immediate threat of termination. An audience will probably accept Moss's position as the superior salesman in this pairing: George's general pattern of repeating portions of Moss's statements will reinforce this perception as it marks the older salesman as the less gifted "talker."

Moss's domination of the conversation, though, should provide the audience with its first clue that friendship is not his ultimate goal. From the beginning of their conversation, Moss attempts to associate Aaronow's self-pity with victimization rather than inability. His rant against Poles and Indians, for instance, we quickly understand as more than simple racism: Moss presents his perception of these people as standard knowledge of their buying habits. Because Aaronow's missed sale involved a Polish customer, Moss implies that the lead itself was a set-up: Poles, as a rule, do not buy. This characterization of the two ethnic groups initially serves as means of creating consensus between the two salesmen, and Aaronow agrees with Moss's assessment. In the larger scheme of the scene, though, an audience member may recognize in hindsight that Moss's racist rant allows him to direct the conversation towards the real enemies: Mitch and Murray. By establishing an "us vs. them" context for their conversation, Moss "hooks" Aaronow by creating a target towards which the salesman can direct his anger and frustration.

Moss methods should strike an audience as a repetition of the strategy Levene pursued in Scene 1: by asserting his knowledge, Moss makes a perlocutionary claim to authority. Unlike Williamson, though, Aaronow tacitly accepts Moss's positioning of himself. This repetition reflects Christopher Hudgins' claim that "The unifying structure in Mamet's ... plays and films relies on parallels, repetitions, and foreshadowing, subtle

exposition: one element or scene comments on another informing it, pointing toward meaning through the ordering of content" (22). In this case, the parallel provides the audience with the opportunity to consider the characteristics that contribute to successful salesmanship. Levene patronizes Williamson by focusing on claims that highlight the younger man's inexperience; Moss, however, finds common ground by drawing on knowledge that Aaronow already possesses. Furthermore, there is an element of community building in Moss's strategy: the two men reach further consensus on both the destructive nature of their present working conditions and the ideal situation that existed when the company sold Glen Ross Farms property.[2]

While Moss's criticism of the company has the repeated effect of creating solidarity, it also represents a shift away from the sphere of objective reality (the buying habits of Poles and Indians, which is accepted as "fact") to that of normative validity. Thus, his criticism of present management practices within the company focuses on the rightness and effectiveness of such policies:

> MOSS: ... We fuckin' work too hard. You work too hard. We all, I remember when we were at Platt ... huh? Glen Ross Farms ... didn't we sell a bunch of that...?
>
> AARONOW: They came in and they, you know...
>
> MOSS: Well, they fucked it up.
>
> AARONOW: They did.
>
> MOSS: They killed the goose.
>
> AARONOW: They did.
>
> MOSS: And now...

AARONOW: We're stuck with this...

MOSS: We're stuck with this fucking shit...

AARONOW: ... this shit... ...

MOSS: It's not right.

AAROWNOW: It's not.

MOSS: No. (Pause.)

AARONOW: And it's not right to the customers.

MOSS: I know it's not. I'll tell you, you got, you know, you got... what did I learn as a kid on Western? Don't sell a guy one car. Sell him five cars over fifteen years. ...

MOSS: ...sales promotion. "You lose, then we fire your..." No. It's medieval... it's wrong. "Or we're going to fire your ass." It's wrong. (30-32)

In his negative characterization of management practices by the company, Moss further illustrates his ability to appeal to Aaronow's inner world, specifically his desire to perceive himself as a knowledgeable, experienced salesman. Moss frequently uses phrases like "You know" or asserts his knowledge of George's inner state: "You work too hard. We all, I remember when we were at Platt...huh?" (my emphasis). Such phrasing allows Moss to communicate to Aaronow an a priori consensus: Dave understands their situation well enough to speak for both of them confidently. Because such statements also flatter Aaronow, he generally follows his initial impulse to agree with Moss. Futhermore, Moss shows his ability to recognize differences in George's perceptions and concerns, and to steer the conversation towards consensus on these matters. Aaronow's

assertion that the sales competition is "not right to the customers" moves away from Moss's focus on the self-interest and victimization of the salesmen; Moss's response about building a long-term relationship with a customer shows that he can incorporate Aaronow's expressions into his argument without losing focus on his ultimate goal of drawing the other salesman into his plan to rob the sales office.

An audience familiar with films such as House of Games and The Spanish Prisoner, or the play The Shawl may recognize that Moss's method of creating consensus with Aaronow parallels the communicative methods used by professed confidence artists such as Mike, Jimmy Dell, and the fortune teller Robert. In fact, Moss's communicative strategy closely resembles the methods employed during the "classical" period of American confidence games, the turn of the twentieth century. While an audience member may not recognize such historical parallels, s/he should see that the progression of scenes in Act I corresponds to these salesmen's abilities to "close" a sale, an act which mirrors the con artist's activities. In just the first two scenes, a spectator should realize that Moss is more successful than Levene because he is able to steer Aaronow towards self-incrimination, or at least instill in George the belief that he is "an accessory. Before the fact" to the robbery of the office (GGR 45). Levene had a similar opportunity: Williamson demonstrated that he could be bribed. Shelly, however, either chose not to threaten Williamson with the younger man's openness to bribery or did not realize that he had an opportunity to extort the leads; wither of these recognitions may have provided cover for his material inability to provide the bribe. In the "closed moral universe" of the play, Levene proves to be the less gifted salesmen because, unlike Moss, he does not attempt to exploit every available possibility for achieving his goal. Mamet, thus,

apparently presents conventional morality turned on it head: a perceptive spectator, though, will realize that this skewed morality results directly from the "business ethic," which extols the virtues of self-interest and material gain. As in American Buffalo, Mamet asks his audience to assume critical distance from the characters on stage by realizing that their vicious treatment of one another does not contradict larger moral conventions; rather, because norms are regulated by the discourse of the market, the salesmen's actions represent the logical consequences of the business ethic.

In aligning individual human relations with the larger concerns of business, Mamet, in Glengarry Glen Ross, vividly illustrates to his audience Habermas's concept of lifeworld colonization. In all three of the first scenes, an audience witnesses interaction that veers between friendship, a relationship determined through communicative action, and business, an institution structured by external forces of money and power. Each of these pairings illustrates the interconnection of these concepts, which results in dysfunctional relationships. Levene, for instance, attempts to reach his goal of better leads by invoking communicative norms of friendship; Williamson, however, only responds positively to bribery, a form of interaction based on the exchange of money. Levene attempts to conform to Williamson's position, but when he finds himself unable to play his role successfully because he has no money, he comically attempts to resurrect friendship as the standard by which his and the office manager's interaction should be measured. Conversely, Moss recognizes that his own goals are economic, and that friendship serves as a convenient ruse until he can trap Aaronow into a conversation that places the latter salesman under the threat of legal sanction. A spectator may realize that, ironically, Moss and Levene hold similar ideas regarding both business and friendship as

means to a desired end. Levene loses in his push for dominance because he fails to recognize that Williamson does not subscribe to a similar notion of the interconnectedness of friendship and business. Similarly, Aaronow does not recognize this connection either.

The only difference between the salesmen, then, is their willingness to disregard norms associated with either sphere in order to achieve success. Levene does recognize the benefit of shifting his and Williamson's conversation into a business context; he does not, however, recognize that he can use Williamson's greed against him. Economics and legality collide, but Levene does not use the former as a means of drawing Williamson into a legally compromised position and then exploiting that position. Moss, however, has no qualms about using friendship as his method to entice Aaronow into another normative sphere, legality, and then using these differing norms as a means of taking advantage of his partner. By the end of the second act, an audience has witnessed two acts of salesmanship, and should realize that a salesman reaches success not by creating compromise, but by finding the means to expose vulnerability in his "customer" and then by exploiting that vulnerability.

In the third scene, Mamet offers his audience a view of his most successful salesman, Richard Roma, at work. An audience will likely comprehend the salesman's speech to James Lingk, a potential customer, in the context of manipulation and exploitation. As the first two scenes have also displayed increasing levels of communicative brutality and betrayal, a spectator may expect to witness a sales pitch unmatched in its lack of feeling and its drive towards a close. Yet Roma's pitch to Lingk is remarkably free of the angst and anger illustrated by Levene and Moss. Rather, an

audience member may have difficulty seeing the pitch at all in Roma's speech, as its rhythms and content resemble those of a sermon.[3] Roma initially presents himself to Lingk and the audience as the thoughtful man who considers larger, abstract consequences of his actions:

> ROMA: ...all train compartments smell vaguely of shit. It gets so you don't mind it. That's the worst thing that I can confess. You know how long it took me to get there? A long time. When you <u>die</u> you're going to regret the things you don't do. You think you're <u>queer</u>...? I'm going to tell you something: we're <u>all</u> queer. You think that you're a <u>thief</u>? So <u>what</u>? You get befuddled by a middle-class morality...? Get <u>shut</u> of it. Shut it out. You cheated on your wife...? You <u>did</u> it, <u>live</u> with it. (<u>GGR</u> 47)

Roma's vernacular rendition of ideas similar to Camus's in "The Myth of Sisyphus" should strike an audience as odd in this context, and an audience will be tempted to reconcile this speech to the play's previous action by viewing it as the opening gambit in the salesman's strategy. At one level, this is a correct assumption, and numerous critics have focused on Roma's use of philosophical bar talk as his weapon to hook the unsuspecting Lingk. Anne Dean, for instance, labels the speech "vacuous and pretentious," and further argues that "The only type of listener who would be impressed by such verbiage would be someone like Lingk, a gullible, easily swayed individual, apparently with few opinions of his own" (204). Andrea Greenbaum categorizes it as a "sophistic monologue" and further characterizes it as "captivating, sexual, teasing" – a means of "seducing" Lingk (40). And Johnathan S. Cullick writes "Roma erases the

boundary between communal and competitive discourse by utilizing the participatory mode of speech to seduce a sales prospect into a business transaction" (31).

Roma's speech is seductive, and succeeds in not only drawing in Lingk, but also the audience. Given the context of the first two acts, a spectator can easily surmise that s/he is witnessing the most subtle and effective of the sales/confidence games yet portrayed. As such, it is easy to characterize Roma's philosophical speculation as a mere ruse to draw in Lingk, who so clearly wants to find friendship free of the power relations he experiences with his wife. I would argue, though, that Roma's speech also serves as a commentary on the sales pitch itself. That is, Roma's relationship to House of Games' Mike is more aptly reflected by the con man's late statement to Margaret Ford "Of course, you gave me your trust. That's... you asked me what I did for a living ... this is it" (67). Similarly, Roma tells Lingk "I do those things which seem correct to me today. I trust myself," a statement which illustrates his refusal to "get befuddled by a middle-class morality..." (GGR 49, 47). Roma's claim to amorality serves as a clue to Lingk and the audience that he will not conform to normative expectations; thus, he is perfectly able to offer genuine community to the younger man and still attempt to make a sale. The conflicting desires of friendship and business tend to make "a hell on earth" for characters like Levene and Aaronow, who do not recognize the differing norms inherent to each of these concepts. Like Moss, Roma recognizes the differences; unlike Moss, though, Roma's use of friendly conversation does not seem to serve solely as a means of "roping" Lingk into a sale. Rather, Roma's speech exemplifies his attempt to live in the moment: genuine friendliness does not preclude taking Lingk's money. Each action is individual, and should be judged only by the norms associated with it.

If, in hindsight, an audience member recognizes that Roma's speech in scene 3 serves as an indirect warning to Lingk that he can not expect the salesman to forego his more mercenary goals, s/he may realize that a professed acceptance of absurdity provides the foundation for Roma's success. The situations on which Roma draws serve to illustrate his ability to compartmentalize his actions into different normative spheres. For instance, the subject of "the great fucks that you may have had" serves to create a sense of male bonding based on sexual experience. Roma's development of this topic, though, also creates a parallel of his treatment of Lingk. The salesman, whether seducing a client or a woman, sees no conflict in the domination and objectification implied by the phrase "great fucks" and the connection and tenderness associated with "morning-after" rituals: "the next day she brought me a café au lait. She gives me a cigarette...." (GGR 48). "The moment" requires justification only in terms of itself, and bears no relationship, in Roma's mind, to other actions/moments related to it.

My understanding of Roma echoes those of several other critics. Jon Tuttle, for instance, also writes of the "breathtaking lack of hypocrisy" in Roma's speech, but also asserts that Roma's identity as a salesman serves as the foundation for his actions: "While he may have abjured the absoluteness of social or religious moralities, he nonetheless has identified and acts in accordance with that principle at the center of his reconstructed cosmos: profit" (163). I would argue, though, that his success as a salesman is equally as important to Roma's philosophical outlook as the job title itself. Roma has reached a position of financial security, so he has more liberty to speculate on the metaphysical underpinnings of his profession and his existence in general. Roma can offer genuine companionship to Lingk because he literally can afford to do so. As an audience member

watches Roma spellbind Lingk with his speech, s/he must remember that his ease and confidence are related to the success he has already enjoyed: the other salesmen act desperately because they perceive their own vulnerability. Roma's self-confidence allows him freedom from desperation; it also contributes to further success because, to again paraphrase Mike from House of Games, he has confidence to give to his mark.

Roma's confidence, though, marks him as vulnerable because it is predicated on his belief that he controls his own destiny, regardless of his statements to Lingk communicating his "powerlessness." For instance, Roma's opening statements to Lingk in scene 3 concern the desensitizing effects of habit. While much of this speech, as mentioned above, relates directly to this salesman's choice of self-serving behavior, these opening lines function ironically: Roma has become habituated to success, and acts accordingly. Such self-perception provides the foundation for the pedagogical tone of Roma's speech, as recent success provides the foundation for claims to authority among the salesmen. Thus, in scene 3, Roma possesses all of the attributes necessary to validly assert knowledge and, by extension, the right to dispense it.

As the play progresses to the second act, the structure of the first act has established the ranking of the four salesmen for the audience, both in terms of ability and success. The act opens to "The real estate office. Ransacked. A broken plate-glass window boarded up, glass all over the floor. Aaronow and Williamson standing smoking" (GGR 52). The two men resemble Beckett's tramps Didi and Gogo as they make idle conversation unrelated to the destruction that surrounds them. As detective Baylen "comes out of the inner office" and Roma "enters from the street," an audience quickly

realizes that Moss's planned robbery has occurred. A spectator, however, will likely not find this revelation as disturbing as Roma's changed demeanor upon entering:

ROMA: Williamson... Williamson, they stole the contracts...?

BAYLEN: Excuse me, sir...

ROMA: Did they get my contracts?

WILLIAMSON: They got...

BAYLEN: Excuse me, fella.

ROMA: ...did they...

BAYLEN: Would you excuse us, please...?

ROMA: Don't fuck with me, fella. I'm talking about a fuckin' Cadillac car that you owe me...

WILLIAMSON: They didn't get your contract. I filed it before I left.

ROMA: They didn't get my contracts?

WILLIAMSON: They – excuse me... (He goes back into inner room with the Detective.)

ROMA: Oh, fuck. Fuck. (He starts kicking the desk.) FUCK FUCK FUCK! WILLIAMSON!!! WILLIAMSON!!! (Goes to the door Williamson went into, tries the door; it's locked.) OPEN THE FUCKING... WILLIAMSON... (Mamet GGR 52-3)

Roma's behavior obviously provides a striking contrast with the smooth-talking, friendly salesman seen in the Chinese restaurant, and an audience member might assume that s/her is seeing the "real" Ricky Roma now. Yet Roma's violent reaction to the news that contracts were stolen illustrates does not simply illustrate the voracious materialism

that underlies much of his actions. Rather, the potential loss of the Lingk contract represents a challenge to Roma's self-perception, or, at least, his ability to further assert it: the sales contest equates "success" with the top prize of the Cadillac. Even if he loses that prize through no fault of his own, Roma's claim to authority is undercut if another salesman receives the car. Though Roma asserted to Lingk that he recognized and accepted his own powerlessness to direct external circumstances, and even celebrated this recognition through his conscious choices of action, his reaction to the robbery conveys the desperation that Levene demonstrated in the play's opening scene. Roma bears a striking, and surprising, resemblance to Arthur Winslow and Joe Ross in this situation: like the protagonists of The Winslow Boy and The Spanish Prisoner, Roma naively believes the concept espoused by Klein in the latter film "Let's all do our jobs, and I'm sure we'll all be rewarded, according to our Just desserts..." (SP 33). Roma has performed his job according to the rules, and expects the company to hold up its end of the bargain.

Roma's perception of a "closed" sale differs from that of the management, though: for him, as for Levene, the customer's signing of the contract and check represents his victory. The violent language that he directs at Williamson, however, illustrates Roma's recognition that the company does not accept his definition of a closed sale, and that Williamson, Mitch and Murray's representative, is the ultimate arbiter of the salesmen's success. Roma, unlike his mentor Levene, also seems to realize that Williamson will not succumb to sales talk. Thus, Roma cannot rely on his arsenal of smooth words to reach his goal; like the actor Robert, he is reduced to rage and profanity and must attempt to verbally beat the office manager into submission when stripped of

his role as the authority on successful selling. Roma's later abuse of Williamson, after the office manager exposes the salesman's chicanery to Lingk, demonstrates his ability to use language to subdue Williamson. Roma is able to draw on his authority as an experienced salesman in this case; at the beginning of the act, though, his violent language only highlights his inability to control the situation. Mamet's having Roma pound on the closed door while shouting obscenities, an action that underscores the falseness, the sterility, of Roma's belief that he can exert his will in any situation.

Roma's anger over the stolen contracts provides the first suggestion that his self-perception is skewed by his success; ironically, the next clue comes as he calms down and attempts to console Aaronow, who has sat silently through the previous action except for occasional interjections concerning insurance of the stolen leads. Roma initially acts in manner that he later repeats when Moss expresses concern about the stolen contracts: "What do <u>you</u> care...?" (<u>GGR</u> 55). This rhetorical question, as Moss later notes, conveys a perlocutionary insult: Aaronow should not worry about the leads because he would not have received any of them. George misses the slight, though, and nervously expresses his hope that Mitch and Murray may be less upset if the leads are insured. Despite his own anger and insecurity, Roma presses the conversation towards Aaronow's troubles, and, like Moss in the first act, attempts to show him that his lack of success does not automatically reflect upon his abilities:

> AARONOW: ... <u>(Long pause.)</u> I'm no fucking good.
>
> ROMA: That's...
>
> AARONOW: Everything I... <u>you</u> know...

ROMA: That's not... Fuck that shit. George. You're a. hey. you had a bad month. You're a good man. George.

AARONOW: I am?

ROMA: You hit a bad streak. We've all... look at this: fifteen units Mountain View. the fucking things get stole. (GGR 57)

Roma's shift from rage to sympathy likely proves jarring for a spectator. as s/he can see no obvious gain that could come from this display of compassion. An audience will probably be on guard. as Roma and Aaronow's conversation is similar to Moss's earlier act of entrapment: George exhibits trust by revealing his inner world to Roma. and this act makes the older salesman again vulnerable. Yet Roma seems to have regained his grounding. and offers his own bad luck to Aaronow as an example of their powerlessness to control all of the contingencies of their profession. Roma's attempt at companionship seems one of good faith. and yet further illustrates to the audience his habituation to success: he is concerned about reclosing sales that will guarantee him the contest's first prize while Aaronow is faced with the possibility of unemployment. In pairing the two salesmen. Mamet further illustrates Roma's inability to recognize himself as an equal victim of the vicious competitive atmosphere created by the company's management.

While a member of the audience may evaluate Roma by the criteria he set forth in the first act. s/he will likely focus on Aaronow here. The older salesman's nervous speech. his repeated inquiries about insurance for the leads. and his revelations to Roma about his tenuous position on the sales board will likely be interpreted as signs of his guilt in the robbery. As Aaronow and Roma begin to discuss Baylen's impending

questionings. George's nervousness becomes even more palpable. As Roma asks him where he was the previous night, Aaronow's responses seem to offer further evidence of his guilt:

ROMA: ... "Where were you last night..."

AARONOW: Where was you?

ROMA: Where was I?

AARONOW: Yes.

ROMA: I was at home, where were you?

AARONOW: At home.

ROMA: See...? Were you the guy who broke in?

AARONOW: Was I?

ROMA: Yes.

AARONOW: No.

ROMA: Then don't sweat it, George, you know why?

AARONOW: No.

ROMA: You have nothing to hide. (GGR 60-1)

Roma asks his initial question not to elicit information from Aaronow, but rather to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the police's interrogation techniques; Aaronow, though, interprets it as a literal question and immediately goes on the defensive, throwing the question back at Roma. When asked again, he seems to parrot Roma's answer much in the way he repeated portions of Moss's dialogue in the first act. Similarly, he responds to Roma's next question with a question. All of these edgy responses seem to point at Aaronow's guilt. Yet Roma's next assertion to George actually provides a clue to his

innocence: Roma claims that only thieves are not nervous when talking to police officers because they are used to such questioning. He finishes by assuring George that telling the truth is his best course of action: "It's the easiest thing to remember" (GGR 61).

This conversation, as much as any in the second act, presents the audience with an illustration of the destructive communicative dynamics, and, by extension, the larger colonized lifeworld, that exist within the office. Mamet himself has said that:

> 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. (Studies 75)

Mamet's characterization of Aaronow suggests a spectator must remember that George is guilty: he is an "accomplice before the fact." Legally, this is a problem for Aaronow: if he follows Roma's advice, he must admit that he did know of a plan to rob the office. Yet George's dialogue with both Roma and Williamson does not point to concern with legal issues as much as it does to matters of community: his inaction in not reporting his conversation with Moss has harmed other salesmen. In protecting Moss, George has contributed to a no-win situation for himself: in order to maintain loyalty to any of his colleagues, he must betray others. Tuttle writes that "Aaronow's presence is not enough to countervail the indictment the play makes of the American business wilderness. He is impotent to condemn or even identify corruption..." (165). In fact, George's inability to act reinforces the concept of the play's closed moral universe as a colonized lifeworld: "friendly" action on Aaronow's part furthers the cause of one-

upmanship, regardless of whom he chooses to befriend. The cut-throat ethics of the sales office undercut any effect that George's awareness of corruption may have: in this context, sensitivity to the moral implications of salesmanship proves a liability.

These same ethics ironically provide the foundation for any expressions of community that occur in the office. Roma and Aaronow shared a moment of understanding grounded in their common self-perceptions of failure: as Levene enters the office proudly proclaiming his success in the morning's "sit," an audience witnesses bonding created over one of the salesman's accomplishments. Roma immediately praises his colleague for this feat, which is impressive not only because of the large monetary take, but also because Levene overcame obstacles set up by the company ("On fucking deadbeat magazine subscription leads.") and closed with clients who had previously stymied both Aaronow and Moss (GGR 63). An audience may expect to witness resentment from Roma in particular, as the potential "kicking out" of the Lingk sale could result in Levene winning the Cadillac. Roma's graciousness, though, is understandable given his general perception of himself as successful: praising Levene allows the younger salesman to position himself as having knowledge of and experience with winning sales technique. Just as George's lack of confidence allowed Roma to assume a position of authority through empathy, Shelly's narrative of his methods allows Roma to position himself as the arbiter of success: while his claims that Levene's technique mirrored what he had taught the younger man, Roma assumes the role of giving sanction to Shelly's conquest. Levene's joy provides Roma with confidence that he can then give back to his mentor in the form of approval.

As Levene launches into his story, an audience member will probably recognize that the salesman's pitch bears a striking resemblance to Roma's conversation with Lingk in the first act. Perhaps not as obvious is a parallel also with Moss's entrapment of Aaronow. By having Levene present his sales pitch as a narrative to the other salesmen, Mamet allows his audience to see "the trick from behind": Levene structures his story so as to emphasize his winning technique, and thus presents a commentary on sales strategy in general to the audience. Levene's opening gambit, "You have to believe in yourself...." most obviously resembles Roma's assertion to Lingk concerning the source of his own confidence: "I do those things which seem correct to me today. I trust myself" (GGR 67, 49). Levene's imperative allows him to demonstrate to the Nyborgs that they are capable of action: "What we have to do is admit to ourself that we see that opportunity... and take it. (Pause.) And that's it" (GGR 72). Levene, like both Moss and Roma, urges his prospects to action by asserting that they perceive themselves as lacking: "You look around, you say, 'This one has so-and-so, and I have nothing..." (GGR 68). Finally, he claims to know the method by which the Nyborgs can fulfill their desire: full investment in the property that he's pitching to them.

In order to further emphasize his expertise, Levene adds "narration" to his story in order to highlight the normative rightness of his technique. When Roma comments that Levene's sale represents the maxim "Always be closing," the older salesman validates this claim with his understanding of correct sales methods: "That's what I'm saying. The old ways. The old ways... convert the motherfucker... sell him... make him sign the check" (GGR 72). The concept of "conversion" directs the audience towards the salesmen's particular understanding of communicative action: offering a vision of

objective truth without allowing the hearer to reject that vision. By presenting himself as knowledgeable, successful, and/or powerful, the salesman asserts his authority through perlocution: he is able to rely on these asserted characteristics as foundations for the validity of his claims. In short, he adopts the methods of the banking educator who presents him/herself as an authority and then uses that authority to further validate other claims that s/he may make. Friere writes:

> Indeed the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, ... [The oppressed] are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken." (55)

Friere's explication of the methods employed by the banking educator serves as an apt framework for examining the common link behind each of the salesmen's ability to initially close their "sales." While Levene, Moss and Roma each engage their marks through subtly different styles of presentation, they all subscribe to a sales ethic embodied in Levene's definition of the "old ways." As a spectator reflects on the acts of

salesmanship s/he has witnessed thus far, s/he will likely recognize that each employed a method of "conversion" that involved convincing the prospect that goal-oriented action is both laudable and possible. In order to achieve according to the norms implied in each sales pitch, the marks must "[change] their mentality": they must accept a vision of themselves as lacking, and then take action in the manner prescribed by the salesmen. As he tells his story, Levene is able to create a momentary bond with Roma: his story upholds their belief that "selling" a client means creating consensus regarding the "health" and necessity of taking action to right the wrongs to which the salesman has exposed him/her.

Levene and Roma's bond over this verification of their sales practices is obviously ironic: the two salesmen create community by celebrating its exploitation. Mamet clarifies this contradiction by bringing Moss into the conversation in its early stages. While Roma and Aaronow have discussed the latter man's frustration, and Levene has entered proclaiming his success, Moss has been off-stage undergoing interrogation by Baylen. He enters the scene directly after Levene, cursing his treatment by the detective:

> MOSS: Fuckin' asshole.
>
> ROMA: What, they beat you with a rubber bat?
>
> MOSS: Cop couldn't find his dick two hands and a map. Anyone talk to the guy's an <u>asshole</u>...
>
> ROMA: You going to turn State's?

> MOSS: Fuck you, Ricky. I ain't going out today. I'm going home. I'm going home because nothing's accomplished here... Anyone talks to this guy is... (GGR 65-6)

Moss's dialogue resembles Teach's upon his first entrance in American Buffalo. Unlike the latter character, though, the audience knows Moss, and knows that he is likely involved in the robbery of the office. As such, his indignance at his treatment during the interrogation proves humorous, he can not effectively selling his innocence to the spectator. Roma's responses heighten the comedy, implying that Moss is overreacting. Another level of irony should also strike the audience member: as s/he knows that Moss planned a robbery of the office, his self-righteousness undercuts Roma's earlier assertion to Aaronow that thieves are able to comfortably talk to the police.

Mamet uses this knowledge by the audience as his own "lead" (in the argot of the confidence artist) to the audience. At this point, an audience's view of the scene will likely follow Robert Vorlicky's observations:

> 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 rejects Levene's "fucking war stories"... (94)

Vorlicky also points out, though, "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... [Moss] is revealed later on, after all, to be the instigator of the robbery" (95). Levene is revealed later as the actual burglar, so this scene, in hindsight, resembles Roma and Levene's later improvisation for Lingk as he comes to the office to cancel the deal. Just as Roma and Levene attempt to salvage the former's sale, Moss's jealous anger towards Levene may serve as a cover-up for their collusion in the robbery. More likely, though, Moss's anger may also be genuine, but colored by his knowledge that Levene committed the robbery: a spectator, upon finding out that Levene committed the crime, may conclude his involvement resulted from a conversation similar to the one between Moss and Aaronow. If that's the case, then Moss may assume that Levene's sale to the Nyborgs undercuts one of the main foundations of his dominance over the older salesman: Moss's use of Levene's financial desperation.

Regardless of Moss's motivation, Roma responds to the other salesman's bitterness towards Levene as a normative violation: "... <u>you</u> make a close the whole <u>place</u> stinks with your <u>farts</u> for a week... Your <u>pal</u> closes, all that comes our of your mouth is <u>bile</u>, how fucked <u>up</u> you are..." (<u>GGR</u> 71). In labeling Levene as Moss's "pal," Roma represents Moss's anger as a failure to respect norms of friendship. This implies that Roma's own behavior is motivated strictly by his happiness for Levene's good fortune and his admiration for his mentor's skill. By comparison, Moss's behavior represents pure self-interest. An audience member will likely validate Roma's behavior towards both Levene and Moss as genuine: since the rules of the sale contest establish each salesman's gains as potential losses for the others, Roma has no immediate material

interest in celebrating Levene's success. Moss recognizes this, and represents Roma's display of community as false and paternalistic: "And what are you, Ricky, huh, what are you, Bishop Sheean? Who the fuck are you, Mr. Slick...? What are you, friend to the workingman?" (GGR 71).

Despite the attractiveness of Roma's speech in this scene, Moss's characterization of Roma offers a potentially valid means of interpreting the younger man's behavior. Roma's behavior is paternalistic, in that it draws on his position as "top name on the board" (GGR 70). Earlier in his rant, Moss links Roma's authority to bestow praise or criticism to his position on the sales board:

> MOSS: (To Roma:) Bring that shit up. Of my volume. You were on a bad one and I brought it up to you you'd harbor it. (Pause.) You'd harbor it a long long while. And you'd be right.
>
> ROMA: Who said "Fuck the Machine"?
>
> MOSS: "Fuck the Machine"? "Fuck the Machine"? What is this, Coutesy class...? You're fucked, Rick – are you fuckin' nuts? You're hot, so you think you're the ruler of this place...? You want to...
>
> LEVENE: Dave...
>
> MOSS: ... Shut up. Decide who should be dealt with how? Is that the thing? I come into the fuckin' office today, I get humiliated by some jagoff cop. I get accused of... I get this shit thrown in my face by you, you genuine shit, because you're the top name on the board... (GGR 69-70).

Despite his irrational tone, Moss, whether consciously or not, challenges Roma's behavior based on the "philosophy" that he'd presented to Lingk in the first act. Roma is "be[ing] that thing" which he perceives himself: the company's most successful salesman. From the authority implied through that position, Roma assumes his prerogative to dispense favor and punishment. Moss implies, though, that Roma has forgotten the corollary to his assumption of power: his position results from factors of contingency. The set of the trashed office serves as a reminder to the audience that Roma's perlocutionary assertions of superiority do not necessarily reflect present realities: Levene's sale, along with the potential theft of "closed" contracts, may well have cost Roma his position on the board. In spite of his claim to live in the moment, Roma's authority (or, its present foundation) may already be a thing of the past.

Maintaining the appearance of success, though, illustrates Roma's ability to fictionalize, if necessary, in order to assert privilege through position on the board. Regardless of his own tenuous situation, Roma can dismiss Moss because the latter's lack of success is empirically evident. Furthermore, at this point, neither Levene nor Moss is aware of Roma's possible misfortune. Thus, while Moss can assert contingency as a factor in Roma's position, the board itself stands as the final arbiter, and Roma is still listed at the top.

An audience becomes even more aware that Roma's assertion of success relies on his narration of this quality as he spots Lingk about to enter the office. Recognizing that his customer's return likely spells trouble for the sale, Roma hastily improvises a performance of his present success for Lingk. He cues Levene: "You're a client. I just sold you five waterfront Glengarry Farms. I rub my head, throw me the cue 'Kenilworth"

(GGR 78). The two salesmen immediately assume their roles and begin playing out a conversation between Roma and "D. Ray Morton," who turns out to be "director of all European sales and services for American [Express]" (GGR 79). While this "play within a play" has evoked a variety of critical responses, it is generally heralded as an impressive display of the salesmen's skill at improvisational performance. From the perspective of communicative action, Roma demonstrates his ability to adapt his strategy to Lingk's concerns, in a manner similar to that described by "mystic" John in The Shawl: "You see: it comes down to confidence. They'll test you. And you can do nothing till you have their trust" (17).

Roma initially "directs" his and Levene's performance towards an assertion of his success: he's a busy man with prestigious clients. When Lingk says that his wife has called a consumer protection agency associated with the state's Attorney General's office, Roma shifts his performance in recognition that Lingk needs to know not that the salesman is successful, but that he's honest. Roma accepts this questioning of his integrity as a test, and attempts both to demonstrate knowledge of consumer protection laws and to confuse Lingk over the definition of a "business day."

As Roma begins to calm Lingk down, assuring him that his three-day grace period does not begin until his check is cashed, Aaronow "comes out of the Detective's office" cursing Baylen's treatment of him: "I'm through, with this fucking meshugaas. No one should talk to a man that way. How are you talking to me that...?" (GGR 87). Mamet's shift from the Roma-Lingk dialogue to Aaronow's anger and Williamson's attempts to quiet him creates a connection between the two "interrogations": while Aaronow literally curses the detective's off-stage questioning, an audience may realize that the salesman's

Yiddish-inflected rhetorical questions also serve as a commentary on Lingk's challenge to Roma's integrity. In creating this dynamic, Mamet steers his audience towards critical observation of Lingk's role in preventing any bond between Roma and himself from solidifying. In an interview with Leslie Kane, actor Joe Mantegna has stated that while Roma's "main drive and his pursuit of success is for himself, what also helps make him successful is that he's doing what he actually thinks is beneficial for another person... There's a genuine compassion there" (Kane Casebook). Mantegna's assertion would seem to validate Roma's claim to act according to present circumstances, and also implies that the salesman understands the complexity involved in building friendship in the context of a business deal. Lingk, however, maintains a distinction between friendship and business, and treats his relationship with Roma almost exclusively as a business partnership. Both men have allowed the dictates of business to corrupt any possibility for genuine bonding: Roma does not recognize that he can not have it both ways, and Lingk, in accord with his wife's instructions, interprets Roma's friendly overtures as attempts to further manipulate him.

Thus, an audience may well view Roma's attempts to move their discussion away from "the deal" as genuine, but he fails to recognize that Lingk not only does not have the power to negotiate, but also chooses not to separate their communication into categories of business and friendship. Acting as a mouthpiece for his wife Jinny, Lingk also does not choose to accept Roma's gestures as friendly: the men's financial dealings remains primary for Lingk, and colors his view of all of Roma's speech acts.[4] As Aaronow exclaims "Call an attorney,' that means you're guilt[y]... your under sus[picion]...," an

audience may realize that Mamet has inserted into the older salesman's rant a Brechtian label that marks Lingk's behavior as "unfriendly" (GGR 89).

Roma deals with Lingk's behavior in a manner befitting his philosophy of action: he removes the land deal from further consideration by assuring his client "The deal's dead" (GGR 93). This act of good faith on the salesman's part momentarily succeeds in establishing friendship as the appropriate context for their communication. This does not mean that Roma has created a space for ideal communicative action between the two men: rather, he immediately begins to instruct Lingk on the nature of his relationship with his wife:

> Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife. You have certain things you do jointly, you have a bond there... and there are other things. Those things are yours. You needn't feel ashamed, you needn't feel that you're being untrue... or that she would abandon you if she knew. This is your life. (GGR 93)

Once again, Roma asserts norms that offer perlocutionary reasons for his own behavior. By asserting to Lingk that he should not allow the "bond" with his wife to interfere with acting according to his own needs and desires, Roma again creates a normative context that explains his own behavior to his client. Roma, while acting in a friendly manner, has no intention of allowing his bond with Lingk (their budding friendship) to dissuade him from making a sale. A number of critics have read these lines as Roma's attempt to persuade Lingk to act by agreeing to the sale without his wife's consent. The salesman certainly has his own financial goals in mind, and Lingk has shown his propensity towards judging Roma's speech solely on the basis of business

considerations. Roma, however, has repeatedly asserted that "the deal" is no longer a fit subject of their conversation, and his advice addresses the core of Lingk's dilemma: he, like his new mentor, must act assertively in order to wield the power due to him as an individual. Preparing to act means Lingk recognizing that his self-interest and his mutual interests with his wife are not necessarily contradictory. Roma again attempts to teach his student that different situations bring different norms into play, and power results from accepting a philosophy most commonly associated with twelve-step recovery programs: acting within one's power to change those things that s/he can, accepting those things one cannot change, and recognizing the difference between the two. In asserting such a paradigm, Roma also reveals his knowledge of banking education: his "philosophy" positions Lingk as marginalized, but also as able to effect his own "recovery" from behavior and mindsets that separate him from the norms that Roma asserts are preferable.

Unfortunately, Williamson amply demonstrates Roma's own powerlessness to him by attempting to enter the "shot": he tells Lingk that his check has been cashed. Lingk panics, and his muddled words to Roma upon leaving the office show a spectator the effects of the salesman's teaching: "Don't follow me... Oh, Christ. (Pause. To Roma:) I know I've let you down. I'm sorry. For... Forgive... for... I don't know anymore. (Pause.) Forgive me" (GGR 95). In assuming the role of Lingk's mentor, Roma positioned himself not only to make a sale, but also to indoctrinate his client into a worldview that offered him existential and material freedom from externally imposed norms. Yet the contradictions of Roma's philosophy serve not to empower Lingk, but rather to render him impotent: in recognizing Roma's aims as a salesman, Lingk sees

himself placed in the untenable position of having to betray his bond with either Jinny or Roma. The power of Roma's lie overwhelms the situation, though: Lingk can not separate the saleman's business activity from his acts of friendship. In requesting forgiveness, an audience member may realize that Lingk, despite his apparent naiveté, realizes that Roma believes the spheres of business and friendship can be separated without one influencing the other; he can not accept this ethical categorization, however, and rejects Roma's friendship. Ironically, Lingk's actions do conform to Roma's initial instruction in Act I: he chooses to remain faithful to his "contract" with his wife, and acts rightly according to that agreement. Roma's teaching, though, has complicated Lingk's perception of correct behavior, and though he acts in a manner that demonstrates his fidelity to his role of husband, he has lost faith in his ability to "trust himself."

Roma's pedagogical performance succeeds in damaging his student rather than empowering him. As he begins his infamous chastising of Williamson, an audience should recognize that Roma has stripped from his assertions of authority any pretenses of mutual interests. The salesman's violent language demonstrates that he is only interested in punishing the office manager for his assumption of camaraderie with the salesmen. Roma's use of epithets such as "cocksucker," "cunt," "company man" and "child" illustrate that he has no intention of merely marginalizing Williamson within the office "community"; rather, he wants to unequivocally categorize him as everything a salesman (which Roma rhetorically equates with masculinity) is not. Roma's shift to violent, dehumanizing language illustrates to an audience the link that Freire establishes between banking education and oppression:

> For [the oppressor], having more is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own "effort," with their "courage to take risks." If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the "generous gestures" of the dominant class. Precisely because they are "ungrateful" and "envious," the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched. (41)

Because Williamson has dared to act as though he were a part of the "dominant class" of the office, and in doing so has denied Roma a symbol of the salesman's worth (the Cadillac), he must be reminded of his status as "object" for the salesmen. Roma's castigation of Williamson asserts not only that the office manager is undeserving of his menial position ("I don't care whose nephew you are, who you know, whose dick you're sucking on."), but also that he is existentially bereft of any of the qualities that would allow him to rise to the salesmen's level (GGR 96). At the heart of Roma's rant is his early instruction to Lingk to "be that thing": Williamson is a "cunt," a "child," a "company man," and any attempts on his part to break free from these labels only risks damage to the fixed order of the office.

Roma's violent speech against Williamson brings a primary narrative thread of Glengarry Glen Ross to its climax. From the beginning of the play, each of the "successful" salesman has asserted a commitment to the myth of individual achievement, an idea summed up by American Buffalo's Don Dubrow in his description of Fletcher: "Skill. Skill and talent and the balls to arrive at your own conclusions" (AB 4). Levene, Moss and Roma have all professed that individual action asserted towards a goal is the

foundation of their own success. Furthermore, each of them seem to have proven the rightness of this formula: Levene and Roma have both "closed" sales through assertion of their "skill and talent," and an audience assumes that Moss has convinced one of his fellow salesmen to commit the burglary. The verification of this narrative provides the thread that connects each of the first Act's scenes and the action of the second act. Dennis Carroll observes that in Glengarry, "the dialogue does not derive mostly from one character's energy [as in American Buffalo], but seems to be shared in different ways by all the characters" (David Mamet 42). This myth of individual achievement provides that energy, which is most violently demonstrated in Roma's anger directed at Williamson.

Ironically, this fervent belief in individual ability is what proves the undoing for each of the three salesmen, for the myth implies that one's partner in goal-oriented dialogue will be passive and controllable in his/her reaction. Repeatedly, though, this proves incorrect. Ultimately, each of the salesmen's marks rejects the assertion of power offered by the speaker: Williamson does not bow to Levene's narrative of past glory or his empty offer of bribery, Aaronow does not commit the robbery despite Moss's threat of legal implication, and Lingk accepts Jinny's assertions of Roma's dishonesty. Each salesman attempts to build consensus, and fails because he does not take into account the force of other narratives to which the hearers have access. Furthermore, when faced with challenges by other visions of truth and rightness, Levene, Moss and Roma all use dishonesty as their method for verifying their own positions. In making these strategic maneuvers, each must face the consequences of working against Roma's proverbial assertion "Always tell the truth. It's the easiest thing to remember."

Lingk's ultimate rejection of Roma's friendship and "the deal" demonstrates the high price paid for the salesman's self-reliance. In attempting to "buffalo" Lingk regarding the status of his contract, Roma opened up the possibility for an error like Williamson's killing the deal and ruining his chances for winning the sales contest. As his methods have failed him, Roma chooses to react in a manner that undercuts his professed belief in his own ability: he blames Williamson for the loss. Similarly, Levene takes Roma's place as the office manager's teacher when the latter salesman must submit to Baylen's interrogation. Levene's motivation for replacing Roma are well-established: not only did Williamson refuse to assist Levene in the first act, but he also attempted to undercut the salesman's joy after making the sale to the Nyborgs. In both cases, Levene viewed Williamson's discouragement as judgments of his own abilities, and attempted to school the younger man in his professional "history." Levene thus views Williamson's mistake as validation of his earlier claims, and takes this opportunity to reinforce his assertion that the office manager's lack of experience makes him unfit to determine proper courses of action for the four salesmen: "You can't think on your feet you should keep your mouth closed... You can't learn that in an office. Eh? He's right. You have to learn it on the streets. You can't buy that. You have to live it... 'Cause your partner depends on it" (GGR 97).

An audience will likely see the irony in Shelly's assertion of "partnership" as the foundation for right behavior: at the play's beginning, he attempted to undercut both Roma's and Moss's success in the sales contest. Levene's assumption of the role of teacher reveals the most significant of his actions undercutting his commitment to partnership, though: he is the burglar. As Williamson attempts to leave the conversation,

Levene becomes so focused on showing the younger man his errors that he lets slip his knowledge of Williamson's lie to Lingk: he had left the contract on his desk the previous night. By directing his speech towards hurting Williamson, Levene follows his argument to its most logical conclusion: the office manager was so inept as to lie incorrectly. Williamson is cognizant enough, though, to recognize the implications of Levene's knowledge of the lie, and immediately uses the salesman's slip to reassume authority in their communication.

Once Levene has exposed himself as the burglar, the action of the play, and the balances of power, return to those seen in the opening scene: Levene begs Williamson for his cooperation, and, that failing, attempts to bribe the office manager. At this point, though, Levene believes that John has knowledge of his ability to sell, and uses the Nyborg sale to support his position that Williamson will profit by not turning him in. Ironically, Williamson is the participant in this conversation with history on his side:

> WILLIAMSON: Where have you been, Shelly? Bruce and Harriet Nyborg. Do you want to see the memos...? They're nuts... they used to call in every week. When I was with Webb. And we were selling Arizona... they're nuts... did you see how they were living? How can you delude yours[elf]... (GGR 103)

Without the Nyborg sale, Levene has no foundation for his promise to enrich Williamson by kicking back a percentage of his profits. Desperate again, Levene attempts once more to gain the office manager's sympathy: "John: John: ... my daughter..." (GGR 104). Just as in the play's opening scene, Williamson is not interested in sympathizing with the salesman's plight: his "Fuck you" shows that he has learned

from the salesmen that human connection has no place in the discourse of business (GGR 104).

Mamet closes the play by bringing Roma onstage one more time. Like Moss, Roma is angry about Baylen's treatment in the interrogation; unlike the other salesman, though, Roma recognizes an opportunity to further "bond" with Levene. He asserts to his fellow salesman that they represent a "dying breed" of "men" who are challenged by "clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders..." (GGR 105). He further asserts that the salesmen "have to stick together" in order to combat the deadening effects of others who would remove the "adventure" from their calling. Roma's observations about their existential condition are, as they were with Lingk, a prelude to a pitch: he suggests that the two men should combine their talents and form a partnership. In making this offer, Roma claims that he would be the main beneficiary: "Hey, I've been on a hot streak, so what? There's things that I could learn from you" (GGR 105).

Roma's offer of community to Levene is simultaneously touching and comic because he does not realize that "the Machine" has revealed his guilt to Williamson. Just as he did with Lingk, and Moss did with Aaronow, Roma asserts that the two men face a common enemy; pooling their skills seems an appropriate strategy. Roma's pitching this offer to Levene, though, repeats the latter's action with the Nyborgs: he is attempting to sell to a "prospect" that cannot accept the offer. As Levene is forced into the office with Baylen and Williamson re-enters the scene, Roma engages in a final act of absurdity: he orders Williamson to "work out" a system in which he would claim half of Levene's commissions. Despite his generous gestures, Roma demonstrates that the "correctness" of his actions always relates to profitability; if necessary, he, too, is willing to steal from

his colleagues if it adds to his success. Only an audience member may recognize the final irony of the play's close: Levene's crime and punishment represent poignant lessons on the price of betraying community for individual gain, but Roma's drive towards success does not allow him to recognize and learn from his mentor's mistakes.

In an interview with Matthew C. Roudané, Mamet claimed "The purpose of the theatre, to me, is to examine the paradox between the fact that everyone tries to do well but that few, if any, succeed" (181). Glengarry Glen Ross allows an audience member to examine this paradox at several levels: to "do well" has connotations of both material success and of ethical behavior – but mostly, for Mamet, the latter. The salesmen's sabotage of one another in pursuit of of individual glory challenges an audience to recognize the contradictions inherent in these two connotations, and to realize that American myths of success assert the superiority of material gain over communal behavior. In allowing an audience to virtually participate in the communicative action of Glengarry's salesman, Mamet draws his spectators into a dialogue on the frailty of friendship, and its sanctioned exploitation

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ENDNOTES

[1] One could argue that this concept does appear in Mamet's film work. House of Games, for instance, challenges the legitimacy of psychiatry as scientific and, perhaps more importantly, useful to the patient. Homicide raises questions concerning the validity of ethnic community offered to policeman Bobby Gold. And The Winslow Boy presents conflicts between the British government's dedication to the principle of "Let Right be Done" and its actions against the Winslow family.

[2] Tony J. Stafford, Leslie Kane and David Sauer all write about the theme of the "Promised Land" that exists in Glengarry Glen Ross. Stafford associates this idea with another of the play's themes, illusion: "Since the primary illusion that the salesmen offer is based on land, the idea of land and illusion become joined in the play to create the motif of the 'promised land,' or more accurately, the perversion of the promised land, ..."

(186). Kane, in her examination of Mamet's "cultural poetics," claims that the play, particularly in terms of its "hierarchal structure, unseen power, and confluence of contract and conduct ... evokes the Book of Numbers" (Weasels 62). This cultural reference includes the notion that the Promised Land of Israel, like the myth of American success and prosperity, "is both exceedingly fertile and 'eats its inhabitants" (64). Sauer writes of the "golden age" motif as evidence of ideology at work in the play's environment: "Since the salesmen find no meaning in their jobs and are exploited by Mitch and Murray, they fantasize about a time when selling real estate was really good – the golden age of real estate sales. In Adorno's view, invoking or inventing past history like this is the reaction to increasing dehumanization (135).

[3] More specifically, Roma's speech bears a striking resemblance to Jim's sermon in We're No Angels. While Roma's instructions involve integrity, Jim's improvised sermon concerns spiritual "comfort": "All I know, something might give you comfort... maybe you deserve it... it comforts you to believe in God, you do it" (108).

[4] Vorlicky writes "Lingk can assert his presence before the domineering Roma only by adopting his wife's voice, the authority of the absent woman." (96). In recognizing this, Roma "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" (97). Though Roma's motivations are always suspect, Hudgins notes that Roma "is also genuinely concerned for Lingk: he wants to listen, to council, which has overtones of power, of superiority, but which can still be a generous activity" (38).

CHAPTER 6

"WELL, SO WE LEARN A LESSON": SPEED-THE-PLOW

On May 3, 1988, Mamet's new full-length play Speed-the-Plow debuted at Broadway's Royal Theater. At this point in the playwright's career, one might expect the high level of excitement that accompanied this opening. Mamet had won the Pulitzer Prize for 1983's Glengarry Glen Ross, and had received an Oscar nomination for his screenplay of Sidney Lumet's 1982 The Verdict. He'd also penned the screenplay for the Brian DePalma's highly successful The Untouchables, and directed his first film, the critically acclaimed House of Games. Given the success the early and mid-eighties brought Mamet, it seemed fitting that Speed-the-Plow created such a stir in New York theater circles prior to its production. Yet the buzz surrounding this play had almost nothing to do with Mamet's now-solid reputation as an award-winning dramatic writer; rather, it grew from his and director Gregory Mosher's choice to cast pop star and stage newcomer Madonna in the role of Karen.

Casting the infamous "Material Girl" proved a mixed blessing for the production. Jack Kroll noted in his review for Newsweek that "Demand for tickets was so great that the Lincoln Center Theater [the play's underwriter] opened the play on Broadway instead of pursuing its plan for a five-week preliminary run at its uptown house," and William H.

Henry III reported that "Advanced [ticket] sales promptly topped $1 million" (82:98). At the same time, "the project immediately became 'Madonna's play,' and the press from around the solar system came clamoring and yammering" (Kroll 82). Time titled Henry's review "Madonna Comes to Broadway," and the Daily News ran two contrasting critiques of the actress's performance. Madonna's star power brought well-deserved attention to the play and attracted audience members who otherwise might have never ventured to the theater; her presence, however, threatened to overshadow the work itself.

Once reviewers managed to get past Madonna's role in the play, their evaluations of Speed-the-Plow tended to parallel the mixed critiques of Mamet's pre-Glengarry plays. Frank Rich, in the New York Times, wrote "In 'Speed-the-Plow,' [sic] Mr. Mamet has created riveting theater by mastering the big picture that has nothing to do with making films" (C17). The New Yorker's Edith Oliver praised the work as "vintage Mamet, passionate and witty and terribly funny. His ear is as sharp and discerning as any in the theatre today..." (95). Other reviewers, however, were less generous. William H. Henry III claimed that Mamet's work in general contained "a moral ambiguity that verges on cynicism, coupled with a high-minded tone that verges on sanctimony," and that "In Speed-the-Plow Mamet makes the unastonishing revelation that movie moguls are venal and pandering. Perhaps he means to prick spectator's consciences by holding them responsible for the box-office triumph of trivia over moral concern" (99).

Whether praising or panning the play, most reviewers of Speed-the-Plow approached it in simplisitic terms: the play was either a brilliant or clichéd satire of Hollywood. In his review for the New York Times, though, Mel Gussow wrote of the larger issues in this work that connected with other Mamet plays:

> In direct contrast [to Mamet's "romances" like Lakeboat, The Water Engine, and A Life in the Theatre] are "American Buffalo" [sic] and "Glengarry Glen Ross" [sic] and "Speed-the-Plow" [sic] – plays that explore a harsher, even a sinister side of life. The three share that Mamet theme of "doing business," of "business as usual," in which personal feelings are not allowed to intrude on what passes for professionalism. At the same time, each of the works raises the matter of the limits of loyalty, which in a dog-eat-dog world is always superseded by self-interest and the survival instinct. One can only carry friendships so far – and not as far as the bank. (B5)

Numerous scholars have continued the examination of parallels between these three plays. Ruby Cohn has dubbed them Mamet's "Business Trilogy," observing that in each play "business is presented as lethally circular: after shaking the characters to the depths of their insecurities, each play circles back to its beginning" (120). Christopher C. Hudgins notes a similar circular structure to the three plays which he attributes to Mamet's comic vision: "We return to an order, of sorts, at the end of a Mamet play, though we often laugh at that order as wrong-headed. But there is always a vision of needed change implied by Mamet's ironic humor, coupled with a tremendous love for his characters and for humankind in general" ("Comedy" 225). Leslie Kane observes Jewish cultural elements in all three plays and writes that "[American Buffalo], as well as [Glengarry Glen Ross and Speed-the-Plow], has as much to do with making a life as making a living" (Weasels 26).

Perhaps more important to my discussion here is Kane's claim that "In a plot rich in theology and practical lessons one naturally presumes that a critical motif in Speed-the-Plow is learning. And, ... pedagogical relationships are integral to this play" ("Sanctity" 85). As in American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross, and the other plays under discussion here, Speed-the-Plow presents its audience with characters who must choose between genuine human connection and the dictates of business. These choices are presented as norms of action, and the play's protagonist Bobby Gould must choose not only between film projects that are "promoted" to him by his long-time colleague Charlie Fox and his temporary secretary Karen, but must also decide between the benefits of material and spiritual security respectively associated with each of these projects. Fox's project, a prison buddy film, contains all of the elements of a box-office success: "Action, blood, a social theme..." and the backing of Hollywood star Dougie Brown (STP 13). Karen's proposed film, an adaptation of the novel The Bridge or, Radiation and the Half-Life of Society, offers Gould the opportunity "To do something which is right" (STP 68). In proposing their respective projects, both Fox and Karen assume the position of mentor to Gould. Each attempts to teach Gould not only about the benefits of making the film s/he proposes, but also about a vision of himself as the new Head of Production that demands subscribing to norms of action associated with either business (the prison picture) or community (The Bridge).

As in his other plays, Mamet provides a moral context here, for the choices that Bobby must make in deciding which film he will recommend to Richard Ross, his superior. The play's epigram, a passage from Thackeray's Pendennis, presents the audience with two visions of action based in moral choice: "Which is the most

reasonable, and does his duty best: he who stands aloof from the struggle of life, calmly contemplating it, or he who descends to the ground, and takes his part in the contest?" The passage ends by noting a cosmic unity between the "immeasurable blue yonder" and the earth, and claiming that the "Power" that created both earth and sky ordained "to each some work upon the ground he stands on, until he is laid beneath it." Thus the type of work is not as important as doing it: both the philosopher and the "earth-bound" worker play roles in a greater whole.

A similar notion of goodness underlying human endeavor is implied also in the play's title. Tony J. Stafford writes "The medieval expressions 'God-speed' and 'God speed the plow' are blessings, comparable in modern English to wishing someone 'Good luck" ("Speed-the-Plow" 39). Actor Ron Silver, who played Fox in the debut production, offers a slightly different interpretation: "Do your work, and God will help you" (qtd. in Henry 98). Director Gregory Mosher provides yet another explanation, suggesting that the title "has to do with turning fresh earth – and of course there is a sexual pun" (qtd. in Henry 98). The play's ambiguous title offers literal and ironic connotations, implying a mixed "blessing" on the action of the play and its characters. Both the title and the epigram convey the affection Mamet has for these characters while also raising questions about the goals towards which these characters "speed" and the morally ambivalent means they employ in pursuit of these goals.

As in American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross, Mamet ties the means and ends of characters' goal oriented action to narratives that they present to one another as visions of truth, rightness and sincerity. Phillip C. Kolin writes that these characters' interactions involve "fill[ing] their empty world with scripts, fictions, and games.

Characteristic of Mamet's deceptive simplicity, Speed-the-Plow is a labyrinth of scripts each wrapped about through the other" ("Scripts" 4). The result of this "scripting" by the characters "is that we as audience, too, are unsuspectingly enmeshed in a web of deceptions" (Kolin "Scripts" 4). While most performance reviews label Speed-the-Plow as a play "about Hollywood," the background of show business serves more precisely as a commentary on the characters' interactions. Gould and Fox are film studio veterans; their professional lives are dependant on their ability to create narratives. Karen, while not experienced in the business, demonstrates her own talent for weaving stories as a means of accomplishing her own goals. Gould's moral dilemma in the play's third act can be summarized as choice between narratives: both Fox and Karen promote not only film ideas, but also stories that assert structures of reality and rightness. At a practical level, Gould must choose which film to back; morally, though, his choice involves his self-perception and the actions that seem most appropriate for the identity to which he wants to remain faithful. Karen's entrance into the play's action challenges Gould to question the assumed structures against which he's measured his sense of self, of meaning, and of success. She offers him an alternative fiction that he can use both to construct his own identity and to present it to the world. As a spectator witnesses Bobby's struggle to define himself in terms of different lifeworlds, s/he must also struggle with the concept of narrative construction as the means of real-world interaction.

Mamet opens the play with an immediate demonstration of Gould as troubled. The opening set, "Boxes and painting materials all around," hints at a state of flux; Gould's opening lines reinforce the set's sense of indeterminacy:

GOULD: When the gods would make us mad, they answer our prayers...

> I'm in the midst of the wilderness...
>
> If it's not quite "Art" and it's not quite "Entertainment," it's here on my desk. I have inherited a monster. (STP 3)

Though Gould is quickly engaged in conversation with and performance for the entering Fox, Mamet presents his audience with an opening rendering of the new head of production as confused and conflicted. As a spectator hears of Gould's success through his conversations with Charlie and Karen, s/he may realize that the prayer that "the gods" have answered is Gould's promotion; rather than feeling secure and successful, he finds himself overwhelmed. To further complicate matters, The Bridge, a novel by an "Eastern sissy writer," has been passed to him for a "courtesy read" (STP 23). Though brief, Mamet provides the audience with a unique opening portrait: a representation of his protagonist's inner state prior to interaction with other characters.

These opening lines prove significant to a spectator's understanding of Gould himself and of the development of the play's through-line. Toby Silverman Zinman notes "Bobby Gould is Mamet's Dante figure, traveling through a spiritual terrain of crisis, doubt and confusion..." ("Hollywood" 103). She writes that Gould, like the fictional Dante of the Divine Comedy, is in the midst of a "mid-life crisis of epic proportions," and that he is also "surrounded by the same temptations: lust, pride and avarice (or, more interestingly put, self-indulgence, bestiality and fraud)" (103). Also, like the historical Dante, Gould's opening lines illustrate a quality unique among Mamet characters: introspection. While previous characters such as salesman Roma and actor Robert also professed themselves soul-seekers, their self-probing always occurred in a conversational setting. Though Fox enters the scene immediately, an audience likely

understands that Gould's opening lines are uttered in disregard of the other character's presence.

Once Gould acknowledges Fox's presence, though, his self-examination quickly deteriorates into poking fun at passages from The Bridge. Given Gould's initial philosophical musings, a spectator may believe that in reading from the book to Charlie, Gould intends to share these insights with his friend, much as Karen does in the play's second act. Fox, at best, feigns interest in the book; his sense of urgency moves Bobby to chide his friend for acting "too busy to have 'fun' this business..." (STP 4). If Gould was attempting to offer some of The Bridge's ideas to his friend in a sincere manner, his friendly criticism of Fox marks a shift in his stance toward the other man: Gould meant nothing serious by reading the passages, and was in fact mocking them. Almost too quickly for a spectator to grasp, Mamet suggests through Gould's conversational shift that the ideas presented in the novel are not fitting for two "macho" men to talk about. Gould's spiritual dilemma falls outside of the communicative norms that have developed between the two men in their working relationship.

Business, however, is an appropriate subject for communication between Gould and Fox, and Charlie, after playing along with Bobby's discourse on "having fun," attempts to steer the conversation towards work by asking Gould about his relationship with the studio head, Richard Ross. Gould is cautious with Fox, and suggests that his friend has come to "promote" him. Fox allays Gould's fears, however, by telling him the good news: the famous actor Doug Brown has met with Fox, and offered to "cross the street" in order to make a "buddy" film with Ross's studio. Gould's immediate change in demeanor, and his attempt to arrange a meeting with Ross emphasizes for a spectator the

good fortune that has befallen the two men: Fox describes his earlier meeting with Brown as "Sonofabitch like out of some damn fairytale" (STP 10).

In displaying the two men's shared joy over the Doug Brown film, Mamet allows an audience member to examine the nature of Gould and Fox's friendship. As already noted, Fox shows no interest in Gould's philosophical musings, and Gould is initially suspicious when Fox begins to ask about the nature of Bobby's new job. Once Fox has told his story, though, both cast all cautions aside, and Gould effusively demonstrates affection and gratitude to his old friend. Thus, business success begets friendly action between the two men: Hudgins notes "Clearly, what Bobby wants to attribute to friendship is actually commerce" ("Comedy" 218). An audience member should recognize that Gould and Fox's friendship is based in shared perceptions of truth, rightness and truthfulness, but that these spheres of action are all mediated through the promise of financial reward: their loyalty to one another has produced the possibility of "Great big jolly shitloads" of money (STP 20).

Gould and Fox's joy over landing the Brown option is also a celebration of the American work ethic as presented by The Spanish Prisoner's Klein: "Let's all do our jobs, and I'm sure we'll be rewarded, according to our just deserts" (SP 33). Though a spectator may conclude that the men's good fortune results largely from contingency and connections, Bobby and Charlie see their impending success as a reward for their years of following the prescribed order of "business." Their excitement parallels Mamet's own observations on Hollywood success in his essay "Film is a Collaborative Business": "Hollywood is the city of the modern gold rush, and money calls the turn. That is the first and last rule, as we know, of Hollywood – we permit ourselves to be treated like

commodities in the hope that we may, one day, be treated like valuable commodities" (SF 139). Both Gould and Fox recognize that the opportunity to present this project to Ross will bring them the gratitude of their superior, and the material rewards that inevitably accompany it.

Their celebration of the chance to be Ross's "Fair-haired boys" reinforces Hudgins' assertion that "Bobby and Charlie still see themselves as outsiders. They've not yet arrived. The unseen Ross, on whom they wait, is one of the insiders, one of the truly wealthy and powerful, and they both aspire to his league" (STP 19; "Comedy" 219). Along with Doug Brown, Ross resembles Mitch and Murray from Glengarry Glen Ross and the stockholders in The Spanish Prisoner: off-scene characters who define the environment in which men like Bobby and Charlie work. Just as Williamson, Mitch and Murray's representative, had the authority to determine whether a sale was legitimate or not, Ross is the final arbiter of Fox and Gould's success. Thus, Ross not only holds the purse strings, but his authority to distribute rewards also provides him with the power to determine the means by which he will bestow favor. Like Roma in the earlier play, Gould and Fox at this early point have accepted as valid the narrative of success prescribed by those in power: in this case, making a film deal that will make the studio money will result in a reward for "the Bringer[s] of Good News" (STP 18).

An audience does not witness the relationship between Ross and his employees on-stage, but Gould and Fox's interaction provides a parallel. Mamet establishes early on that Gould is Fox's superior; as such, Gould presents himself, and Fox responds to Bobby as, the character with the authority to bestow favor. Though Gould uses the language of

friendship when praising Fox's loyalty and humility, he asserts his superiority in the relationship by outlining Charlie's imminent rewards:

GOULD: ... Alright. Now: Now: when we go in...

FOX: That's what I'm saying. Bob.

GOULD: Don't even say it.

FOX: Bob:

GOULD: I understand.

FOX: ... I wanted to say...

GOULD: I know what you wanted to say, and you're right. I know what you're going to ask, and I'm going to see that you get it. Absolutely right: You go on this package as the co-producer. (Pause.) The name above the title. This is your... ...

This is your thing and you should get a bump. (STP 13-14)

At one level, Gould's assurance that Fox will "get a bump" demonstrates an admirable generosity; at the same time, it underscores this event as a transaction: Bobby tells Fox "You Brought Me Gold," and norms of exchange dictate that he must reciprocate (STP 16). While the exchange of favors itself appears to level the playing field between the two men, their dialogue also suggests an awareness of hierarchy: Fox never literally asks for the promotion, but suggests it in a sort of verbal foot-shuffling. Once Gould has promised the promotion, Fox maintains his humility, asserting that bringing the film to Gould was "only common sense," and that he "hesitate[s] to ask it, to ask for the credit" (STP 15; 16). Their dialogue suggests a mutually-held perception of

Gould as a benevolent dictator, with Fox playing the part of servant and sycophant. This mirrors the relationship that Hudgins observes between Gould and Ross ("Comedy" 218).

Bobby and Charlie's relationship depends on the acceptance of roles prescribed by the lifeworld context that constructs these norms as unproblematic. At the heart of this lifeworld is self-interest: Gould's gratitude, for instance, stems from Fox's bringing him the film rather than taking it "Across the Street." Yet Charlie admits that he brought Gould the film because of his promotion: "... and I feel that I'm lucky... [...] to have somebody I could come to" (STP 15). Similarly, once the two men begin to celebrate their imminent good fortune in earnest, they almost immediately associate their success with an ability to impose their will on others:

GOULD: ... But don't fuck "people."

FOX: No.

GOULD: 'Cause, people, Charlie...

FOX: People... yes.

GOULD: Are what it's All About.

FOX: I know.

GOULD: And it's a People Business.

FOX: That it is.

GOULD: It's full of fucken' people...

FOX: And we're going to kick some ass, Bob.

GOULD: That we are.

FOX: We're gonna kick the ass of a lot of them fucken' people. (STP 21-2)

Gould and Fox's fantasies of power over others correspond to Mamet's own observations on the "collaborative" nature of making movies: "Working as a screenwriter I always though that 'Film is a collaborative business" only constituted half of the actual phrase. From a screenwriter's point of view, the correct rendering should be, 'Film is a collaborative business: bend over" (SF 134). Mamet's conclusion implies that violation is inherent to collaboration in Hollywood, and Bobby and Charlie's dialogue suggests a similar truth to the audience. While both demonstrate that they do not fully comprehend the financial rewards that will accompany the film, both men clearly recognize that their success will allow them to assume the roles of violators: as Fox gleefully claims to Gould, "But, but... oh maan [sic]... I'm gonna settle some fucken' scores" (STP 22). The two men's celebration of what they believe will follow their meeting with Ross resembles Levene's joyful retelling of his sales pitch to the Nyborgs: in both cases, the joy of success proceeds from imposing one's will on another; financial success is simply a byproduct of this authority.

Gould and Fox assert the authority that they seek through the language of sexuality; in no play since Sexual Perversity in Chicago has Mamet explored the parallels between contemporary constructions of sexuality and power as thoroughly as he does in Speed-the-Plow. While Fox and Gould's early conversation certainly suggests this parallel, it comes to full blossom once temporary secretary Karen enters the scene. In Karen's presence the two men adjust their communication so as to perform for her, and Fox offers the opening line by exclaiming that Gould "takes his coffee like he makes his movies: nothing in it [...] 'Cause he's an Old Whore" (STP 25). The phrase "Old Whore" becomes the central metaphor for their performance, and in acting for the

secretary, the two men reinscribe Hollywood power relationships through a routine of quick insults and self-depreciation similar to that of Frank Sinatra's, Dean Martin's and Sammy Davis, Jr.'s off-color and sexually-charged "Rat Pack" performances. As funny as this dialogue is, it also allows the two men to further refine their communicative action towards asserting their power/authority as given: Gould notes to Karen "I'm a secure whore," just as Fox earlier noted that he is "Soon to be a rich old whore" (STP 26; 25). Karen's presence, thus, allows for reproduction of the narrative the two created in their earlier dialogue.

Karen's presence complicates the action of the play at several levels. Ann C. Hall, for instance, notes that Karen presents a "danger" to Gould and Fox's phallocentric outlook because she "violates categorizing": their subsequent bet on whether Gould can seduce her represents an effort to stabilize gender distinctions ("Playing" 154). Karen's very presence, then, creates "subtle disruptions in [the text] which tempt us to return, rethink, and reconsider" (158). Howard Pearce, who, like Hall, suggests a parallel between Karen and Dr. Margaret Ford, notes that the men regard Karen as a "freak and alien" because she represents "a sense of the sincere in an apparently cynical, game-driven world" ("Plato" 143). Pearce notes that these women function as artist figures in their respective texts because they challenge the prevailing narratives by which the male characters operate. Clearly, both Karen's gender and her alternative conceptions of rightness complicates Gould's worldview at the moment he perceives that his own "story" has reached a point of "justice": he is about to reap the rewards of his "whoring" in the film business.

While Mamet presents Fox and Gould's self-deprecation as humorous, Karen's first challenge of Bobby's lifeworld assumptions involves questioning the rightness of such labels. As the two men continue their performance for her, Gould informs Karen that she arrived "at an auspicious time [...] Because in this sinkhole of slime and depravity, something is about to work out [...] ... and all that garbage that we put up with is going to pay off" (STP 28-9). An audience should realize by this point that Bobby and Charlie's performance for Karen is an elaborate ritual of attempting to impress her with their business savvy – they know the rules of the game, and have manipulated them to their own advantage. Rather than accepting the men's portrayal of the environment in which they operate, though, Karen calls their characterization into question: "...why is it garbage...?" (STP 29). Fox attempts to keep the light tone of the conversation intact, noting that "Life in the movie business is like the, is like the beginning of a new love affair: it's full of surprises, and you're constantly getting fucked" (STP 29). Gould reinforces Fox's assertion by claiming "It's a business, with its own unchanging rules" (STP 29). Fox and Gould continue their humorous tone with these assertions, but a spectator may realize that the men do subscribe to these particular norms: others have established the rules of the business, and the best way to succeed is to follow those rules without question. In fact, their presentation of these norms illustrates again that the business interaction is at the core of their lifeworld: the rightness of seeking profit is unquestioned and unquestionable.

Karen's entrance provides the audience with an opportunity to observe conflicting visions of the pedagogical relationship. In attempting to humor Karen, Fox and Gould construct their performance as performative: their vaudeville-like routine serves the

perlocutionary function of asserting both their comfort and ease with their authority, and their knowledge of the business. In playing for the temporary secretary, Bobbie and Charlie project roles of experience in contrast to Karen's professed naiveté. Their bet on Bobby's ability to seduce her functions not only as an attempt to reinforce gendered roles and distinctions, but also parallels the role of the banking educator: both men want to use their professed authority to indoctridate Karen into a structure of authority that benefits them.

Mamet complicates the action, though, by having Karen respond to the men's assertions about the "rules" of the movie business in a "problem-posing" manner. Though the men understand her question about the "garbage" produced by the studio as deference to their experience, a spectator will likely realize that Karen momentarily attempts to engage them in dialogue.[1] The men quickly reassume their authority over the communication among the three, and Karen seemingly undercuts her own authority through her repeated characterization of herself as "naïve," and through her admission to Gould that she does not know what to do in her position as temporary secretary. The concept of naiveté is ironic, though, when considered in the context of pedagogy. Though Karen imposes this label on herself, an audience should realize that Gould and Fox are the truly naïve characters. Freire writes that naiveté is characteristic of the immature, banking-oriented thinker:

> Critical thinking contrasts with naïve thinking, which sees "historical time as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past," from which the present should emerge normalized and "well-behaved." For the naïve thinker, the important thing is accommodation to

> this normalized "today." For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men. (Pedagogy 73)

While Karen does not succeed in making Fox and Gould take a critical position towards the film they want to make, she does produce one measure of critical distance in the two men: they do not know what to make of her. As she leaves the scene, the conversation quickly turns from the impending Doug Brown deal to a debate over Gould's ability to seduce his new secretary. Fox doubts that Gould can succeed, because Karen "falls between two stools [...] she is not, just some, you know, a 'floozey"... [...] ... on the other hand, [...] I don't think she is so ambitious she would schtup you just to get ahead" (STP 35). Hall notes that the men's inability to label Karen directs the viewer towards her "revolutionary femininity":

> [Fox's observation] is dangerous in a world which is 'always closing,' because she violates categorizing. In order to minimize the threat Karen signifies, Gould wages a bet with Fox: he will sleep with Karen that night. Fox is relieved. After all, that is the manner in which women should be treated. ("Playing" 154)

Fox and Gould's scheming illustrates more that just their devotion to phallocentric norms, however. Karen's question about the essence of their films not only threatens the security of their subject positions as men, but also as skillful game-players. It injects a note of seriousness into their fun, which Fox characterizes by his label "Young America at WORK and PLAY." (STP 31). Karen's question, in line with the ideal communicative framework of problem-posing education, represents an effort to erase

distinctions and establish dialogue between the three characters. Fox and Gould, however, are unable to recognize Karen's communicative gesture; their worldview does not allow for "collaboration," only competition between goal-oriented subjects.

In contrasting Fox and Gould's adherence to tradition-bound norms of the film business with Karen's "naïve" ethical questioning, Mamet subtly directs the questions from the play's epigram toward the audience: are Karen's ethical considerations appropriate in the closed moral universe of the film studio? An audience has the opportunity to play virtual participant to this very question as Fox leaves Karen and Gould alone in his office. As the two discuss her mistake in not mentioning Gould's name when attempting to secure a reservation at a restaurant, Karen observes that "much of a job like this, [...] is learning to think in a ... [...] To think in a ... business fashion" (STP 40). Bobby quickly validates her observation, adding that such a mindset "makes the life exciting, addictive, you know what I'm talking about, you want a thrill in your life?" (STP 40). In both admitting to her lack of knowledge about norms of the film business and implying that she herself does not think in a "business fashion," Karen submits herself to Bobby's mentorship – Gould seizes on her assertion of ignorance and naiveté and assumes the role of pedagogue. Gould's final line in the act, "...and tell [Fox] he owes me five hundred bucks," demonstrates his recognition that Karen has submitted to his authority, and such a communicative submission parallels the sexual submission on which he and Charlie have wagered.

Karen's acceptance of the role of Gould's student does not conform as clearly to banking education norms as Bobby would like to think, though. Once she assumes her role, she almost immediately begins asking questions of Gould similar to her earlier

query about "garbage." For instance, rather than verify that Gould's summary of the morning's events aptly demonstrates the excitement of the film business, Karen asks him "Is it a good film?" (STP 40). Gould's response constitutes a lecture on his view of film as a business: "The question: Is there such a thing as a good film which loses money? In general, of course. But, really, not" (STP 41). A spectator may realize that Bobby answers Karen's question by rejecting its validity: "Some people are elected, try to change the world, this job is not that job" (STP 41). Aesthetic questions are not within his sphere of knowledge; his decisions involve questions of profit. His livelihood depends not on artistic quality, but on the production of a saleable commodity.

In moving the discussion away from the artistic quality of a film, Bobby also attempts to recapture his authority over the dialogue with Karen. He asserts "in this job, [...] somebody is always trying to 'promote' you: to use something, some 'hook' to get you to do something in their own best interest" (STP 41). In moving from questions about a film's quality to his relationship with people attempting to sell him on film ideas, Bobby demonstrates his kinship with Ricky Roma: like the salesman, Gould's assertion of other's motives in "promoting" him is self-referential, as he is trying to sell Karen on his power within the studio. Gould sums up his job by asserting "My business is to make decisions for the studio," and notes that he often has to reject ideas brought to him. While an audience member may accept this rendering of his work, s/he may also realize that Gould has returned to a perlocutionary assertion of his power: his ability to aid those who show loyalty to him. "Whoring," then, is a reciprocal arrangement: Gould does not put himself on the line unless the "people" with whom he works demonstrate their

fidelity to his interests. This, for Gould, makes the film industry a "people business" (STP 42).

In attempting to further illustrate his particular brand of salesmanship, Gould turns the conversation towards the novel The Bridge. For him, the book serves as a perfect example of his job:

> GOULD: Author's agent gave this book to Ross. A novel. Written by a Very Famous Eastern Writer. What's this book about? "The End of the World." Great. Now: Ross, no dummy, says, of course, he'll read the book. Gives me the book to read, so when he tells the author "how he loved the book but it won't make a movie," he can say something intelligent about it. You get it? This, in the business, is called "a courtesy read." (STP 42)

In explaining the concept of the courtesy read, Gould resembles yet another Mamet character: Mike the con man. The "take" in this case is good will: Ross's charade maintains a positive relationship with the author's agent, who may well present him with a book suitable for filming. As with the making of "garbage," Gould frames this action as another norm of business: "It's just business... how business is done, you see?" (STP 42). A spectator may realize that Gould engages in another instance of self-referentiality: Gould's speech resembles Ross's "courtesy read" game in that he rejects Karen's questions of artistic quality without antagonizing her. He ropes her in further by asking her to play a role in the courtesy read: "Let's be frank: it's probably, it's almost definitely unsuitable, it probably is artsy. But as you said, maybe it isn't. You read it, you'll tell me, and I'll tell Mr. Ross" (STP 45).

In presenting the issue of the courtesy read to Karen, Gould uses his knowledge of business practice to reassert his authority in the dialogue with her, and also offers a performative assertion of his trust in her by giving her a role in the game. A spectator familiar with Mamet's work will recognize another parallel with House of Games: like Mike, Bobby attempts to seduce Karen by treating her as an equal and offering to show her how film producers deal with the people that attempt to promote them. Bobby's final line in the act ironically shows his own trick: he instructs Karen to "tell [Charlie] he owes me five hundred bucks," demonstrating to the audience that he believes he has successfully created a communicative relationship with Karen that makes her seduction inevitable (STP 46).

In Speed-the-Plow's first act, Mamet challenges his audience to recognize the performative nature of Gould and Fox's celebration by both beginning the play with a rendering of Bobby's self-doubt and introducing Karen as a source of challenge to the prevailing narrative to which the men subscribe. From the act's opening, Mamet encourages his audience to realize that Fox and Gould engage in acts of fictionalizing by rhetorically rendering the film option into a metaphor for the professional and personal security they seek in their unstable environment.

Fox and Gould's acts of lifeworld affirmation provide the audience with their vision of the "good life" promised to those who remain faithful to goal-oriented logic. Karen's appearance in the first act provides a counterpoint to that vision by offering the virtual participant the option of validating action based in an alternative sphere of rightness: "principles" and "purity." By the end of this act, an audience member may well believe that the playwright has constructed the action of this play around a binary

heuristic similar to the Platonic opposition of the material and the ideal. Pearce suggests that Mamet does this consciously; he writes:

> As much as Plato sets up the antithesis of Socrates and Philebus, the philosopher and the aesthete, so much does Mamet undercut the distinction in a defense of the artist... since the occurrence of art in the world entails appearances – the illusions that Plato objects to in the artist as sleight-of-hand man – Mamet's habitual playing upon illusions must be recognized as a means of probing the reality of both his characters and their worlds. (142)

Pearce connects Mamet's Platonic parallel with audience response by using Hans-Georg Gadamer's theories of the theater presented in Truth and Method and The Relevance of the Beautiful. In these works, Gadamer posits the theater as a disruptive experience for the audience because it disturbs "the customary course of events.... It ventures out into the uncertain" (qtd. in Pearce 141). In the play's first act, Mamet demonstrates the "customary course of events" by illustrating how Gould overcomes his initial doubt: Fox brings him not only an opportunity for financial and professional success but also validation of his belief that following rules dictated by the marketplace provides the most direct route to security and comfort.

Bobby's assertion to Fox and Karen that, because of the Brown film, he is now a "secure whore" reflects Mamet's own theories of dramatic structure. In "Second Act Problems," he writes: "In the first act the manifest dream is brought forth. The hero elects/consigns himself to a struggle: to create a Jewish Homeland, to find the cause of the plague on Thebes, to free the Scottsboro Boys" (Knife 39). The news of the option

gives Gould purpose: he believes that the deal will create a mutually beneficial situation for the studio, Fox and himself. It allows him to repress the listlessness demonstrated at the play's beginning and to devote himself to a goal. Karen's entrance represents a challenge to the achievement of that goal because she complicates Gould's unquestioned adherence to norms that validate his desire for material success through support of "garbage." Her presence brings forth the "latent dream" of Gould's quest for success and security, and in the second act he finds himself forced to justify why he chooses to promote "the thing everyone made last year... the image that people want to see" (Knife 39; STP 56).[2]

As the play moves into the second act, though, a spectator may realize that Karen's efforts to promote the "Radiation Book" to Gould involves pedagogical methods similar to those used by Bobby in the first act, as well as those of characters such as the actor Robert and Ricky Roma. In the first act, Karen asserted general notions of "principle" and "purity" as challenges to Fox's and Gould's unquestioned celebration of the prison film. At the beginning of the second act, however, Karen has not just read The Bridge, but she has accepted it as a valid narrative through which she can ground her alternative ideas about both successful filmmaking and the "good life." As the act opens, Karen, at Gould's apartment, reads to him from the novel and offers her interpretation:

> [...] that's the perfection of the story, when I read it... I almost, I wanted to sit, I saw, I almost couldn't come to you, the weight of it [...] He says that the radiation ... all of it, the planes, the televisions, clocks, all of it is to the one end. To change us – to, to bring about a change – all radiation has been sent by God. To change us. Constantly. [...] To this new thing.

And that we needn't feel frightened. That it comes from God. And I felt empowered. (Pause.) Empowered. (Pause.) (STP 48)

In presenting the ideas from the novel, Karen offers Gould a holistic, almost pre-modern, worldview: technological advances serve as part of a cosmically ordained plan to move humanity to another step in its evolution. In accepting this vision, Karen herself performs the pre-modern role of prophet, a pedagogical performance authorized through asserted revelation of divine wisdom. At this point in the act, Karen bears a striking resemblance to Roma in his initial conversation with Lingk: like the salesman, she presents herself as only wanting to share knowledge and wisdom to which she has access. Bobby's initial responses create a parallel with another Glengarry salesman, Aaronow. Like the salesman in his first-act dialogue with Moss, Gould responds to Karen's speeches with incomplete sentences or partially repeats her speech back to her. Roles have reversed from the first act, and Karen now dominates Gould by asserting her knowledge of the novel, which lends authority to her interpretations of selected passages.

Karen's ability to interest Gould in the novel's ideas may seem strange to a spectator after his celebration of the Doug Brown deal in the first act. Mamet, however, skillfully demonstrates to his audience the desire underlying both Gould's joy over the deal and his fascination with the novel: both events appeal to Bobby's desire for security. As mentioned earlier, his opening lines reveal a lack of certainty: Gould can not place The Bridge firmly within the categories of "Art" or "Entertainment." His indecisiveness mirrors his fear about his new job: nothing is certain, yet everything depends on his making the right decision. According to the normative dictates that Gould has followed in building his career, the Brown film appears as reassurance that both Fox and Gould

have made the right decisions. Gould need no longer question his ability to perform his job as the imminent rewards that should follow this deal confirm that he and Fox have played by the rules. The deal emerges as evidence of the rightness of their beliefs, and gives objective weight to truths previously only promised by normative constructs. As a result, Karen's questions in the first act have little impact, because they address concerns deemed insignificant by the narrative on which the men rely to provide guidance for their actions.

In the second act, though, Karen is able to persuade Bobby that an alternative narrative exists that can also direct him towards the security that he seeks. As noted above, she initially attempts to validate her ideas by reading passages from the novel and offering her interpretations. This method proves ineffective, however, because Gould still relies on a market-driven lifeworld to provide the standards by which these ideas should be judged. He goes so far as to accept Karen's enthusiasm for the novel, and also validates that the book accurately addresses his own spiritual longings: "That's what I've been missing. I'm saying, you come alive, and you see everyone's been holding their breath in this town, twenty years, forever, I don't know..." (STP 51). Bobby, however, does not accept Karen's assertion of a unified sphere of action; while the novel has value as a work of spiritual reflection, a film of the novel must hold promise of material wealth:

> This book. Your book. On The End of the World which has meant so much to you, as I see that it has: Won't Make A Good Movie. Okay? I could tell you many things to influence you. But why? I have to respect your enthusiasm. And I do respect it. But this book, you want us to make, won't Get Their Asses In The Seats. Sounds crass? Whatever the thing

> just may be. My job: my job, my new job ... is not even to "make," it is to "suggest," to "push," to champion ... good work, I hope ... choosing from Those Things Which the Public Will Come In To See. If they don't come to see it, what's the point? (STP 53-4)

A spectator should realize at this point that Gould offers these ideas sincerely, and that they validly address Karen's arguments concerning the worth of the material in The Bridge. Bobby's answer asserts, however, that "worth" in the film business has nothing to do with touching people's lives; it's about coaxing people into buying a ticket. Gould thus reasserts a "truth" originally presented in the first act: a "good" movie is one that people pay to see. In making this assertion in a more sincere fashion, Bobby demonstrates to the audience that, ironically, he has dropped his pedagogical posing of the first act: he now risks failure at seducing Karen by adamantly holding to his position. This is doubly ironic because Gould's actions fly directly in the face of his assertions: he does not tell Karen what he believes she wants to hear, but offers a genuine display of respect by challenging her beliefs with reality as he understands it. For a moment, Gould and Karen actually communicate in nearly ideal terms: they exchange claims of truth, rightness and sincerity, and allow these assertions to stand or fail solely on their merits.

Bobby's choice to communicate with Karen sincerely, though, opens up the possibility for exploitation. As their argument concerning the box-office potential of The Bridge winds down, Karen momentarily offers Gould a glimpse of her inner world: "... I, I don't like to be naïve... [...] ... I don't think it's attractive, and I don't think it's right. To be naïve" (STP 56). In response to Karen's self-chastisement, Gould offers her a claim to his own inner world: "Everyone Is Trying To 'Promote' Me... Don't you know

that? Don't you care? [...] Every move I make, do you understand? Everyone wants something from me" (STP 57). Bobby attempts to show Karen that her "naïveté" not only makes her "unattractive": it also puts him in the awkward position of having to say "no" to an idea that means so much to her. Gould implies that her "promotion" of The Bridge undercuts the bond that they've formed – she's bringing business concerns into a conversation between friends. Gould implies that Karen is using their "connection" primarily as a means of selling him on the novel.

Gould's shift towards his feelings about the situation demonstrates an attempt on his part to maintain the narrative context that he knows and accepts. Karen responds in a similar manner by revealing to Bobby that she knows that he asked her to his home in order to seduce her. Gould attempts to act incredulous, but Karen presses her point and further asserts that Gould's intentions illustrate not depravity but a need for companionship:

> This is what I am saying. Are we so poor ... that we can't have those simple things: we want love, why should we deny it. Why should you? You could of [sic] asked me, you did ask me. I know what you meant. That's why I came. (STP 57)

An audience member will likely recognize that Karen's assessment of Gould's inner state is correct: s/he has seen Gould express fright and confusion in his opening lines of the play. Karen's ability to observe Gould's emotional state, in spite of his performance for her, is impressive; however, it may overshadow the shift in her pedagogical method. In moving towards further revelation of her own inner state, Karen subtly takes the authority to represent and interpret Bobby's own inner state to him.

Furthermore, she reproduces Gould's feelings within the context of lifeworld assumptions underlying the narrative of The Bridge. Karen assures Gould that he is frightened of asking for friendship, and that his fright is understandable and well-founded. She further asserts that, despite his joking, she is the answer to his prayer for purity: "Show me a sign.' And when it reaches us, then we see that we are the sign. And we find the answers [...] What if your prayers were answered? You asked me to come. Here I am" (STP 58; 60).[3] Gould's revelation of his inner state to Karen provides evidence to her of the best means to reach him: not by trying to appeal to his outward show of greed, but by playing on his inner desire for security and connection. Karen can not "sell" the novel to Bobby by grounding her assertions in "worth" because Gould's conception of that term is fundamentally tied to material wealth. She can, however, create a fictional construct within which his desire for companionship is part of a larger scheme to bring people together and "change the world." As the second act ends, an audience is left wondering whether Gould will validate Karen's assertions that the day's contingencies (the "courtesy read" request and her temporary assignment) point towards revelation of Bobby's role in a cosmically ordered plan.

As the third act opens, Gould quickly shows both the audience and Fox that he has accepted Karen's narrative and plans to greenlight the novel instead of the Doug Brown film. Fox enters the scene seeking assurances that Gould plans to include him as co-producer in the pitch to Ross; Gould responds by asserting "I'm not going to do the film" (STP 61). Fox thinks Gould is joking and continues to discuss their joint effort on the prison picture, and finally brings up the previous day's bet. This long speech is similar to his dialogue from the first act, and a spectator will likely surmise that Fox is

attempting to engage Gould in the same type of light banter that dominated Act One. Gould's responses, however, are disjointed and confused. When Fox brings up the bet, Bobby questions it as if he does not understand his friend's meaning. Finally, Fox presses his question by asking "You fuck the temporary girl? You fuck her?" (STP 63). Gould responds "I'm going to see Ross myself" (STP 63).

Unlike in the first act, Bobby does not play along with Fox's attempt to lighten the situation with humor; in fact, he acts as if he does not understand his friend's sarcasm. An audience member should quickly realize that Bobby's failure to respond in kind to Fox's joking points to his own sincerity in asserting that he will not promote the Doug Brown film to Ross and that his feelings for Karen have matured beyond a desire for mere sexual conquest. Once Fox realizes that Gould is serious about abandoning the prison film, he offers Bobby a rendering of the normative violation involved in this decision:

> Because, um, you know, I had the package. Doug gave me one day. Doug Brown gave me the one day to have the package. I could have, I could have took the thing across the street, you know that? Walked right across the street, As People Do In This Town, and I'd done it yesterday. I'd been Executive Producer of a Doug Brown film. Yesterday. Yesterday. (STP 65)

Fox's description of his own decision involving the film option implies that he made his own decision strictly out of friendship for and loyalty to Gould. While a spectator may suspect other selfish motivations on Fox's part, s/he may remember that Gould first brought up the possibility of Fox "walking across the street" to offer the

option to another studio. The men's excitement in the first act made it clear that a film with Doug Brown's name attached to it was a hot property, and one can safely assume that Fox would have made a profitable deal had he chosen to present the package to another company. Thus, Fox's claim that he acted primarily out of loyalty to Gould seems valid. An audience member will likely accept Fox's perlocutionary premise that rightness in this situation is based not only in profitability (which is a given), but in reciprocal friendship, which Fox chose to honor in offering the deal to Bobby.

As an audience member has witnessed the second act interaction between Gould and Karen, s/he will likely realize that Bobby has chosen a precarious moral position from which to make his decision. Karen's offer of community and spiritual security is based in a normative framework that stresses self-sacrifice for a larger communal good. In order to accept her position, though, Gould must not only forego his own material rewards, but also must break a promise made to a friend. If Gould were only sacrificing his own prospects, the decision might seem relatively simple, but he must also choose to hurt Fox's prospects in deciding to promote the Radiation book. Fox's shock, which quickly grows into anger, forces the audience to recognize the moral complexity underlying Gould's decision: he is not simply making a Christ-like sacrifice in the name of the greater good. Rather, he is using his authority to impose his newly-found morality on Fox. Karen has taught Gould not only a new narrative with its own vision of right and wrong: she has also taught him that his authority allows him to impose this normative framework on others without regard to their own capacity for choice or their own well-being.

A perceptive audience member will likely recognize at this point that Mamet, in structuring the second act as dialogue between Gould and Karen, has offered to him/her a vision of reality similar to Shaw's "Life Force": progress towards a greater good has been pre-ordained, and an individual's choice revolves around acceptance or rejection of his/her role in this cosmically ordered evolution. Karen's method of presentation, however, bears a resemblance to Teach's pedagogical methods in American Buffalo: if Gould wants to pursue the "greater good," he must sacrifice his promise to Fox. Unlike Teach, however, Karen does not present Gould's choice in these terms: rather, she focuses on the choice of film projects and the moral abstractions represented by each choice. In structuring the argument this way, Mamet succeeds in directing his audience towards a communicative position similar to Gould's: an audience member, like the play's protagonist, will likely not consider that acceptance of Karen's version of rightness necessarily involves rejecting Fox's show of friendship. Mamet complicates this position considerably by portraying Karen as sincerely committed to the ideas contained in The Bridge: unlike Teach's lessons, Karen's perlocutionary assertions of sincerity are likely never in doubt.

Fox's display of disappointment and eventually anger in the third act, then, will likely have a more jarring effect on an audience member than Teach and Don's "punishment" of Bobby's assumed betrayal because Mamet encourages his spectator to identify with the protagonist in Speed-the-Plow rather than assume critical distance. An audience member will likely approve of Gould's choice in the third act. This approval should produce discomfort, because that same spectator should recognize that Fox is right to be angry. In making his promise to promote the Brown film, Gould made a point to

assert that Fox acted in a genuinely friendly manner by bringing the option to him. Gould's decision to renege, however, involved no consideration of Fox's friendship, and Bobby himself has "gone across the street" in choosing to accept Karen's community over Charlie's. Fox's anger culminates in striking Gould twice and claiming that he has given up both his professional future and his masculinity in choosing to promote The Bridge rather than the prison film. While his actions demonstrate the ultimate failure of his communicative performance, a spectator will find it difficult to reject the assertion that Fox's violence results from the disregard that Gould has demonstrated towards their friendship.[4]

Bobby's violence towards Charlie is much more subtle, yet is not limited to his off-stage agreement with Karen to promote the novel in place of the prison film. As mentioned before, Gould's demeanor in the third act is strikingly different from his repartee with Fox in Act One. Leslie Kane connects such behavior with Fox and Gould's presumed Jewishness, noting that in this exchange "Gould is strangely silent; and when he does speak of 'alien' concepts like 'respect' and caring, his discourse is notably devoid of the bawdy humor that has historically been viewed as a marker of the Jew, 'an atavistic sign' of his or her 'sexuality' (Gilman 1991b, 136)" (Weasels 124). Regardless of its source, Gould's actions towards Fox are notably less friendly, demonstrating the darker aspects of his banking educator personality. Though Gould makes several feeble attempts to explain to Fox the lifeworld shift he has undergone, he primarily relies on his authority as Head of Production to justify his breech of friendship. Gould tries to convince Fox that his decision is based in a different concept of rightness, and, thus, that he is acting ethically. Fox rejects Gould's assertions, though, claiming that he is only

deceiving himself: "You're a whore... Bob. You're a chippy... you're a fucken' bought-and-paid-for whore, and you think you're a ballerina cause you work with your legs?" (STP 71-2). Fox further asserts that Karen's interest in Gould lies only in his ability to help her achieve her goal of having The Bridge filmed. As Fox continues to demonstrate that, according to the criteria by which they have both worked, Gould finally drops all attempts to justify his decision and relies solely on the authority inherent in his new job:

> GOULD: Okay, Okay. That's enough.
>
> FOX: I beg your pardon.
>
> GOULD: I said that's enough. Get out.
>
> FOX: Fuck you.
>
> GOULD: Fuck me. Fuck me in hell. Fuck me in hell, pal. You read the plaque on my door. I am your superior. Now, I have made my decision. I'm sorry it hurt you. [...]
>
> FOX: Would you tell me why?
>
> GOULD: I told you why. Because I've found something that's right.
>
> FOX: I can't buy that.
>
> GOULD: Then "why" is because I say so. (STP 74)

An audience member may see Fox's earlier striking of Gould as the crescendo of violence so common in Mamet's plays. Yet, a spectator may also realize that Fox, while crude in his approach, has remained consistent in his argument. Throughout the act, he argues for his position based on profitability for both himself and Gould. Fox is angry that Gould has hurt Fox's own prospects; he is equally frustrated that Gould would make such a self-destructive decision. Fox's argument remains founded in the belief that the

two men must remain loyal to one another so that they may both succeed. Gould, however, demonstrates that his new found devotion to the "good" recognizes community only as an abstraction: when he can no longer argue with Fox on the merits of his decision, he reverts to his original narrative of success in order to forcefully take the upper hand. By attempting to dismiss Fox, Gould shows a spectator that his new moral outlook compels him towards "purity" as a banking educator. Gould's new normative framework automatically rejects as invalid any alternative visions of truth or rightness, thus eliminating the possibility of ideal communicative action.

Gould's intransigence forces Fox to revert to role-playing. Rather than continue to argue with Bobby, Charlie focuses on Gould's offer of an apology. While an audience member will probably interpret Gould's saying "I'm sorry" as a perfunctory ending of the conversation, Fox challenges the sincerity underlying this statement by asking "How sorry are you?" (STP 74). Though Gould likely makes the statement as a formal convention, Fox focuses on the performative aspects of this speech act, and challenges Gould to demonstrate the validity of his sincerity: "One question... [...] just say it's a boon, and grant it to me to assuage your guilt. I want to ask your girl one question. Then I swear I'll go" (STP 74). Bobby accepts this challenge, and, in order to validate his sincerity, agrees to allow Fox to call Karen into the office to ask his one question.

Fox's request for a "boon," though, is a con game: as Bobby refuses to engage with Fox in communication over the wisdom of Gould's decision, Fox challenges his friend's sincerity in order to offer a final example of the shaky foundation of his choice. The con itself, though quick, is fairly obvious: in granting Fox's request, Gould implicitly

admits that he feels guilty. This admission should signify to Fox and the audience that Gould's commitment to his new morality is shaky.

Recognizing that Gould is not as firm in his beliefs as he asserts, Fox continues his performance as he calls Karen into the office. In order to head off any interference by Gould, Fox maintains a polite, though condescending, demeanor while firmly taking control of the dialogue with the temporary secretary. Fox frames his reasons for talking to Karen as a simple request for information, and further misdirects Gould and Karen by focusing initially on the decision to promote The Bridge: "I understand. Karen. I understand ... that things have been occurring ... large decisions ... do you follow me...? (Pause.) Do you follow what I'm going to say?" (STP 75). By maintaining a civil tone and asking seemingly harmless questions, Fox is able to steer the conversation towards the question that he wants Karen to answer in front of Bobby: "My question: you answer me frankly, as I know you will: you came to his house with the preconception, you wanted him to greenlight the book. (Pause.) [...] If he had said 'No,' would you have gone to bed with him?" (STP 77). Karen does not want to answer the question, but by raising it, Fox successfully makes Bobby doubt his new belief system: he does want it answered. Fox manages to verbally push Karen into a corner: if she answers "yes," Gould need not feel compelled to greenlight the "radiation film." A "no," however, implicates her in her own confidence game and validates Fox's earlier assessment that she slept with Gould in order to get something from him.

Karen's performance of purity thus proves her undoing. She answers honestly: "No (Pause.) No" (STP 77). Bobby's reaction, "Oh, God, now I'm lost," proves that Fox has successfully established a communicative paradigm that favors himself: Karen either

is a "Tight Pussy wrapped around ambition" or an idealist who does not understand the criteria by which films are made (STP 78). The former is preferable for Fox's purposes, and allows him to unleash his wrath on Karen with Gould's support. Karen attempts to win Gould back with dialogue similar to that in the second act: Fox, however, has successfully exposed her the goals underlying her actions and frames her pressuring of Gould as further evidence of Karen's manipulation. Bobby accepts Fox's interpretation of the situation, and curtly dismisses Karen: "We're rather busy now. You'll excuse me. Mr. Fox will show you out" (STP 80). An audience member will probably accept Gould's choice as valid: Fox has demonstrated his loyalty while Karen shows the men and the audience that her offer of friendship served her selfish goals. While Charlie could have chosen not to include his friend in the deal, Karen had no other means available to advance her goals than Gould's patronage.

The ending of Speed-the-Plow bears a resemblance to the end of American Buffalo. Gould, like Don Dubrow, recognizes his own failing in betraying a friend; Fox, like Bobby, offers forgiveness without blame. Yet, the latter play resolves matters in a much more complicated fashion. While Gould has been seduced into betraying a friend, an audience member may hold to the belief that Bobby had valid reasons for accepting Karen's alternative vision of truth. Hudgins, for instance, writes that we should recognize "that Karen is basically a positive figure, that the novel she supposedly loves has merit, and that Charlie's and Bobby's partnership at the end of the play is more like Levene's and Roma's than the generous restored friendship, beyond 'Fucking business,' at the end of American Buffalo" ("Comedy" 216). On the other hand, Leslie Kane argues:

> whereas Hudgins would have us believe that at the conclusion of Speed-the-Plow the playwright intends us to see Gould as failing, that both "his 'reconversion' to Fox's gospel.... and the system [is] being indicted for its destruction of love and art" (1992, 223-24), and Dean posits that Karen's "idealism and fecund creativity leave their mark on an otherwise barren and arid play" (1992, 66), both astute readers of Mamet's work fail to take into consideration the nature of the vision of change that Karen presents and the condemnation of degradation and depravity in Hollywood ultimately educates him about his own worth. (Weasels 138)

My own position diverges from all of these opinions. Karen has the potential to serve as a positive force within the play, and her use of problem-posing questions in the first act demonstrates that potential. In the second act, however, she chooses to play the role of banking educator by dictating an infallible vision of truth and rightness to Bobby. Her admission in the third act amounts to confessing this role: the community that she passionately links to the novel in Act Two is revealed as a bribe to induce Gould to act in her favor. Karen enters the play as a character who could serve as a communicative partner to Gould. Her questioning of Bobby's assumptions regarding artistic merit originally forces him to think about ideas that he'd previously dismissed as extraneous. In accepting the message of The Bridge, though, Karen forsakes her own full humanity: by accepting the novel as a valid representation of truth and rightness, she surrenders the critical inquiry she demonstrated earlier, and encourages Gould to do the same.

Such an interpretation addresses the questions of gender often raised about Mamet's portrayal of Karen. My argument could be understood as supporting the notion

that Mamet's characterization of this woman relies on the traditional binary of Madonna/whore. I believe that the communicative and pedagogical dynamics in the play demonstrate that Mamet succeeded with Karen where he may have failed with characters like Deborah and Joan: Karen consciously chooses to abandon her role of problem-posing partner in favor of the easy answers provided by the novel. Ironically, in making that choice, she acts in manner consistent with market-oriented action similar to Fox's and Gould's in the first act, which the men describe as "whoring." Rather than forcing her into a stereotype, Mamet provides Karen, as he does Gould, with a choice. She chooses to reject choice itself, allowing the novel to serve as her guide towards the good life. In doing so, Karen tacitly accepts a means/ends mentality comparable to Fox's and Gould's willingness to promote a bad film in the name of financial success and security.

While Mamet is loathe to attach any particular message to his writings, Speed-the-Plow does fulfill the role of the drama as a medium for posing problems to an audience. A spectator should realize that, as in so many of Mamet's plays, the protagonist's actions have the absurd quality of returning him back to where he started. Yet, like Don Dubrow, Gould has both observed and transgressed the fine line between friendship and manipulation. Fox still encourages him to promote the prison picture, and Gould now seems willing to do this. A spectator, however, should realize that though Bobby may not have made the "purest" choice available, he did recognize that the security he sought was available to him in the friendship and loyalty that Fox steadfastly offered him.

ENDNOTES

[1] Freire contrasts "dialogue" with "banking education," noting:

> Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. (Pedagogy 73-4).

[2] Mamet parallels the "latent dream," or "second act problems" with the "midlife crisis." He writes:

> Tolstoy wrote that if you don't undergo this reexamination, this revision, in your thirties, the rest of your life will be intellectually sterile. We correctly identify the advent of this phenomenon as a "midlife crisis" and strive to live through it so that we can return to our previously less troubled state – believing that this state stands between us and any possibility of happiness or success. To the contrary, however, this state is the beginning of a great opportunity. Tolstoy suggested that it was the opportunity to change myth by which one lives; to rethink everything; to ask, "What is the nature of the world?" (Knife 39)

[3] Mamet repeats this dynamic in a number of works in which Gould appears as a character. For instance, in the short play "Bobby Gould in Hell," the Interrogator attempts to represent Gould's sexual relationship with Glenna as evidence of his evil nature. In the film Homicide, police detective Bobby Gold participates in the bombing of a toy store because members of a radical Zionist group successfully cast his decisions regarding a murder investigation as evidence of Jewish self-loathing. In each situation, antagonists successfully assert the truth of Gould's/Gold's inner state in a fashion that impels him to act against his own best interests. Community becomes a weapon used against him.

[4] Leslie Kane writes of Gould's betrayal and Karen's role in it in terms of "Jewish ethical law," noting:

> [Gould] has betrayed his friend in favor of Karen. The abrogation of his oral promise that he would promote Fox's buddy film and further his career by naming him co-producer is conduct that Jewish ethical law would denote as morally objectionable, namely the violation of trust (Levine 124). Thus, when Karen subsequently says, "I think I'm being punished for my wickedness" (80), she is not far off the mark, because apparently empowered by the apocalyptic novel, Karen attempts to induce change in a done deal, conduct that would similarly be viewed as unethical. As an interfering third party who profits by "Snatching away another's anticipated gain" just prior to the consummation of that deal, Karen, according to Jewish law, would be termed a rasha, one who is wicked, whose crime is not the interference in the deal but the perversion of the truth (Levine 124). (Weasels 125)

CHAPTER 7

"I CAME HERE TO INSTRUCT YOU": OLEANNA

The premiere of Oleanna at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts on May 1, 1992, represented a homecoming of sorts for Mamet. This was his first production of a full-length play since Speed-the-Plow; in the intervening years, he wrote the screenplays for 1988's Things Change (with Shel Silverstein), 1989's We're No Angels, and 1991's Homicide. He directed Things Change and Homicide. Despite his criticism of the film industry in Speed-the-Plow, Mamet was now busier than ever with this medium. As a result, his work for live theater lessened. He and Silverstein wrote Oh, Hell!, a "double bill" of Mamet's Bobby Gould in Hell and Silverstein's The Devil and Billy Markham, which Gregory Mosher directed at Lincoln Center, but Mamet wrote no major plays during this period.

Mamet's return to the theater in 1992, though, was marked by the most intense controversy to arise out of any of his work for stage or screen. Premiering about six months after the well-publicized contentious hearings over the confirmation of Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas, Oleanna seemed programmed to disturb with its dialogue touching on political correctness, sexual harassment and radical feminism. Leslie Kane, for instance, notes that the Cambridge opening "occasioned strident student accusations

of the playwright as "politically irresponsible" (Weasels 141). After the New York opening in October 1992, at the off-Broadway Orpheum Theater, intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic weighed in publicly. After traditional performance reviews, the New York Times published a piece entitled "He Said... She Said... Who Did What?" which collected six responses to Oleanna from prominent scholars and social critics. The responses ranged from apologetic to apoplectic. In the playwright's defense, Susan Brownmiller wrote "Oleanna has electrified me. Mr. Mamet makes cogent drama our of P.C. by hanging his play, and his professor's ruination, on an insupportable charge of sexual harassment and, worse, on a false charge of attempted rape" (C6). On the opposing side, feminist critic and linguist Deborah Tannen opined "Right now, we don't need a play that helps anyone feel good about a man beating a woman" (C6). NPR commentator Enrique Fernández, in a rare bit of humor, noted that "Oleanna says very little, except: find out what college served as David Mamet's model, and don't send your kids there" (C6).

Theatrical reviewers also tended to focus on the current issues seemingly mirrored in the play. David Richards labeled Oleanna as "David Mamet's contribution to the national debate on sexual harassment," and claimed that the play "is not going to calm anyone down" (1). Jack Kroll in his review for Newsweek wrote that "There will be family fights over this play" and that "Mamet has sent a riveting report from the war zone between genders and classes, a war that will cause great havoc before it can create a new human order" ("Lesson" 65). Frank Rich wrote "David Mamet... has marched right into the crossfire. Oleanna... is an impassioned response to the Thomas hearings... [It] is likely to provoke more arguments than any play this year" ("Detonates" C11).

Numerous scholars have echoed the reviewers in focusing on sexual harassment and gender difference within the play. Elaine Showalter wrote "In making his female protagonist a dishonest, androgynous zealot, and his male protagonist a devoted husband and father who defends freedom of thought, Mamet does not exactly wrestle with the moral complexities of sexual harassment" (17). Harry J. Elam, Jr. observed that "Mamet's approach in Oleanna... is not one of balance. Rather, Mamet decidedly loads the conflict in favor of his male protagonist, John, the professor" (160). Daniel Mufson, in response to Robert Brustein's review of the play for the New Republic, offers the tongue-in-cheek commentary "Oleanna's working title could have been The Bitch Set Him Up," and further claims that the author courted controversy with this play (111). Marc Silverstein branded the play as decidedly "anti-feminist," and argued "through the kind of humanism to which it appeals, Oleanna inscribes a 'cultural imaginary' that lends itself to articulation in terms of neoconservative social ideology," in spite of Mamet's expressed preference for more liberal economic ideology (105).

Despite the predominance of such critical perspectives, I tend to agree with Christine MacLeod's assessment that

> ...the majority of Mamet's critics, whether approving of Oleanna as a much-needed shot across feminist bows or condemning it as a piece of unregenerate male chauvinism, have signally underestimated and indeed distorted the subtleties of the dramatic action by representing the play as a mere fusillade in the so-called war between the sexes. (200)

Macleod offers an alternative to gender-based readings, arguing that they have "obscured what is in fact a far wider and more challenging dramatic engagement with issues of

power, hierarchy and the control of language" (202). Several scholars have explored similar paths. Alain Piette, for example, posits that the play's conflict lies primarily in its character's language rather than their genders; he argues that Oleanna presents the spectator with "a nightmarish world picture in which [political, social, racial and gender] tensions have been exacerbated because of a too fanatic application of the precepts of political correctness..." (178). Steven Ryan observes "Oleanna is developed around one of Mamet's most basic themes: human beings' never-ending battle to dominate one another," which the playwright presents to the audience through "linguistic gaps" that create confusion and hostility (393, 396).

Ryan notes that these gaps result from the roles that John and Carol have assumed, an observation that introduces more promising critical responses to the play: those that focus on the teacher-student relationship that Oleanna dramatizes. For instance, several critics have observed the play's parallel with Eugene Ionesco's The Lesson. Verna Foster argues

> An exploration of the relations among sex, power, and pedagogy in ... The Lesson and Oleanna suggests that Mamet's play is less of an antifeminist statement that it is an indictment of an educational culture in which, in Mamet's view, power-roles and power-games played by both professors and students make teaching destructive and learning impossible. (37)

Craig Stewart Walker observes parallels with Nietzsche, and writes that both plays display "the Nietzschean idea that there is no order or essential human nature that one can appeal to in order to make moral judgements [sic]. There is only the will to power imposed upon chaos" (158). Finally, Richard Badenhausen writes

> Indeed, when examined outside the context of the explosive headlines of the early 1990s, the message of Oleanna appears to have much less to do with political correctness and sexual harassment and more to do with the difficulties of acquiring and controlling language, especially in the specialized environment of the academy. (2)

Mamet's own perceptions on the play, as well as his scattered references to teaching in essays, lectures and interviews tend to support Badenhausen's argument. For instance, he has offered the interpretation that Oleanna "is a play about a failed Utopia, in this case the failed Utopia of Academia" ("Playwrighting" 10). In 3 Uses of the Knife, Mamet briefly describes the artistic urge as potentially oppressive: he clarifies this point by noting "that as we exercise these impulses, we do not say we wish to 'oppress and enslave' – we say we want to 'help, teach, and correct.' But the end is oppression" (27). Thus, Mamet, throughout his career, has observed the potential parallel between education and oppression. In describing Oleanna as a dystopia, the author points us towards narrative construction of oppression: truth, rightness, and sincerity blend to form a lifeworld that justifies structures of authority. If we follow the lead provided by Miriam Hardin, who initially applied Freire's banking concept to Oleanna, as well as to The Lesson and Christopher Durang's Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You, we find that divorcing the play from the Thomas-Hill controversy allows us a fuller understanding of this work as further examination of the power inherent in discourse characterized as pedagogy.

The epigraphs to the published version of the play foreshadows Oleanna's paralleling of education and oppression. The first, from Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, describes a particularly Darwinistic vision of ideological conditioning:

> So the absence of a genial mental atmosphere is not commonly recognized by children who have never known it. Young people have a marvelous faculty of either dying or adapting themselves to circumstances. Even if they are unhappy – very unhappy – it is astonishing how easily they can be prevented from finding it out, or at any rate from attributing it to any other cause than their own sinfulness.

The second epigraph, a passage from a folk song, refers to the 19th-century Utopian community Oleanna. In the song, the community is presented as an alternative to "be[ing] bound in Norway/ And drag[ing] the chains of slavery." While several critics have explained the historical context of this reference, Foster characterizes this quotation in more general terms: "Oleanna' refers to an American utopia, a place of freedom where one need no longer 'drag the chains of slavery" (42). Mamet's Eisensteinian juxtaposition of these two epigraphs creates a written equivalent of Brechtian distancing: is the utopian image of the folk song merely an ideological masking of oppression, as described in the Butler passage? Much as he did in Speed-the-Plow, Mamet uses the convention of the epigraph as a means of both providing a larger context for the written play, and challenging his reader to assume a critical relationship with the story to follow.

In performance, Mamet engages his audience in virtual communication with his typical in medias res opening. John, a Professor, is engaged in an animated conversation on the phone with his wife while his student Carol waits. An audience member hears just

enough to realize that John's conversation is related to his purchase of a new house, and that some problem has arisen. Though brief, the one side of the conversation provides a revealing illustration of John's character: he repeatedly asks agitated questions, many that imply criticism of his wife's lack of knowledge concerning the issue. He also attempts to comfort her by assuring her that he is on his way to join her and by implying that she may be over-dramatizing the situation: "We aren't going to lose the deposit. All right? I'm sure it's going to be..." (Oleanna 2). Though brief, the phone conversation reveals John to an audience as a man struggling to assert control, even if it means making claims of truth that he can not validate.

As in earlier plays, Mamet's opening immediately establishes the goal of the protagonist. Much as in the opening of Speed-the-Plow, the author provides his audience with a glimpse of John at an unguarded moment. Though John is not alone, the animated nature of his speech demonstrates that he is not concerned with Carol's presence. He is fully engaged in the conversation and chooses his statements based on norms that govern communication between himself and his wife. Subtly, then, Mamet illustrates John's attitude towards Carol's presence: he feels free to acknowledge her or ignore her as it suits his needs. His lessening of the amount of time he'll need to meet with his student ("I'll be there in fifteen, in twenty... I'm leaving in ten or fifteen...") communicates to a spectator that John views Carol's presence as an interruption in the course of more important matters (Oleanna 2).

In establishing John's goal as the purchase of a new home, Mamet creates a context for the pedagogical performance to which John shifts after ending his phone conversation. As teacher and student begin conversing, a spectator will likely view

John's communicative choices as a result of his desire to quickly end the meeting with Carol in order to meet with his wife and realtor. Thus, as Carol asks him "What is a 'term of art?" John finds it difficult to hide his irritation with her presence: "Let's take the mysticism out of it, shall we? Carol? (Pause.) Don't you think? I'll tell you: when you have some 'thing.' Which must be broached" (Oleanna 2-3). John's response once again illustrates Mamet's definition of the rhetorical question as a veiled accusation: rather than accepting her question as sincere, John implicitly accuses her of avoiding the real reason for her presence in his office.

Carol's opening question, and John's hasty response establish for the audience the nature of the student-teacher relationship that will propel the action of the play. Carol's stammering after John's accusation reveals to an audience that her question was offered sincerely. From the play's beginning, Carol consistently demonstrates that she views her relationship with John in a banking education context: as Hardin suggests "From Freire's perspective, she dutifully accepts the information – 'deposits' John hands her in class – but when she takes them out, she cannot tell what she has" (41). Thus, John's characterization of her question as perlocutionary confuses Carol, as she expects communicative dynamics consisting of literal questions and answers. For Carol, the banking concept of education means that she has the right to expect straightforward answers to her questions: it never occurs to her in the first act that her questioning could be viewed as anything other than a request for the deposits that John, as her teacher, is required to make.

Though John is all too willing to play the role of banking educator, Mamet does not allow the action between student and teacher to remain as simple as a question and

answer session. While Carol holds to a rather simple conception of banking education, John demonstrates clearly that he is unaware of his own preference for the authority vested in him through traditional mentor-student structures. In fact, John's performance in the first act can be characterized as his attempt to play the problem-posing educator. He attempts to connect with Carol by telling her of his own difficulties with education, an act he characterizes as "tak[ing] off the Artificial Stricture, of 'Teacher,' and 'Student,'..." (Oleanna 21). He claims that tests "were designed, in the most part, for idiots. By idiots... They're nonsense" (Oleanna 23). He claims that his own tenure review, which his department has recently conducted, was just such a test designed not to evaluate his value to the institution, but to reinforce the lack of self-worth that he claims to have lived with since childhood. Since John maintains that he uses such illustrations to show Carol the artificial nature of the educational institution, thus revealing to her that she has the power to recognize and challenge the narrative that serves as its foundation.

The more John rails against the institution, though, the more evidence he provides for an audience member/virtual participant that his own understanding of the "institutional hazing" he describes is shallow at best. In describing his ideas to Carol, John engages in the most basic act of banking instruction: he assumes the role of "narrating Subject (the teacher)" to a "patient, listening [objects] (the [student]) (Freire 52). This action involves invoking the authority to not only represent his own visions of truth, rightness and sincerity, but also to claim the right to describe Carol's own vision of these communicative spheres to her. For instance, John twice tells Carol that he believes she is "angry" as she attempts to explain her lack of understanding to him. Similarly, his story of his own struggles with education asserts a perlocutionary context for her

troubles: though he knows nothing about her childhood. John assumes that Carol's frustration stems from experiences similar to his own. Consistently, he fails to consider alternative possibilities to the narrative he creates as he interacts with his student.

John's imposition of his own ideas on his and Carol's interaction demonstrates that, despite his avowed kinship with Freire-esque conceptions of pedagogy, he fails at one of the most basic requirements of problem-posing education: establishing dialogue with the student. Freire defines "dialogue" as "the encounter between [human beings], mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (69). In further qualifying this concept, he argues "Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another" (70). These definitions shed light on a fundamental irony of Oleanna's first act: Carol actually presents John with the opportunity to engage in problem-posing education, as she comes to him steeped in the narrative of banking education. From a problem-posing perspective, John's initial task is relatively simple: he must question Carol's basic assumptions that education consists of rewards bestowed for following instructions, and that these rewards fall within conventional notions of "get[ting] on in the world" (Oleanna 12).

Carol's assumptions provide a framework in which John can initiate dialogue that will allow his student to recognize the narrative quality of her assumptions; instead, though, John uses the language of radical educational theory to solidify his authority over her. Mamet structures the characters' lines to emphasize John's dominance of the dialogue: while John's speech's are frequently long, Carol's generally consist of halting,

broken sentences. Often, her speech takes on this quality because John chooses to interrupt her or even attempt to finish her thoughts for her. This structure of the dialogue emphasizes the gulf that exists between the ideas John presents in his speech and the effect his speech acts have upon his student.

Both the structure and content of John's speech immediately undercuts any claims he makes about his teaching methods, or his desire to help Carol learn. Throughout the first act, John continuously engages in communicative action that serves to reinforce his authority in his and Carol's relationship. For example, his first response to Carol's assertion that she has trouble understanding "The language, the 'things' that you say..." John immediately rejects this statement as untrue: "I'm sorry. No. I don't think that that's true" (Oleanna 6-7). He counters this argument by asserting "you're an incredibly bright girl," but than chooses to read to Carol from an essay she's submitted and offers her the assessment "What can that mean?" (Oleanna 7-8). An audience member may recognize that John's claim of Carol's intelligence is ultimately patronizing, as he suggests that her essay is meaningless and even begins to suggest that she might consider withdrawing from his course. In direct contradiction of pedagogical dialogue, John refuses to entertain Carol's suggestion that he purposefully uses difficult language that serves only to remind her of her ignorance. Rather than consider Carol's difficulties from her perspective and from the perspective of teaching as a communicative act, John accepts her characterizations as reflections of his ability as a teacher, and rejects them outright. This passage demonstrates to a spectator that John is not concerned with Carol's understanding; he seeks the most expedient means of dispensing with her problem so that he may return to personal matters surrounding the purchase of his new

home and his tenure. He is also more concerned with maintaining his own self-perception than engaging in genuine dialogue.

As in Speed-the-Plow, an audience member may recognize that, ironically, Carol is the character in this scene that attempts to play the role of problem-poser. As John becomes frustrated with Carol's questions about the concepts he presented in his book, he attempts another method of bringing the conversation to a close: "Look. It's just a course, it's just a book, it's just a ..." (Oleanna 12). He suggests to Carol that she gives much more weight to her lack of understanding than she should. For the first time, Carol rejects his assertion. The course and book are not meaningless to her because "There are people out there. People who came here. To know something they didn't know. Who came here. To be helped. To be helped. So someone would help them" (Oleanna 12). Carol's challenge is significant because it contains a perlocutionary invitation to dialogue on the ideas John espouses. She provides him with a sincere representation of her own motivations for wanting to understand the material in the course. Though Hardin is correct in noting that Carol has uncritically accepted the banking concept as the foundation of her's and John's relationship, that narrative encourages her to challenge John's dismissal of the book and course as unimportant and not worthy of her effort. From the perspective of banking education, John is acting in a manner that undercuts his claim to authority: he inadvertently tells Carol that his previous "deposits" were not worthy of her concern.

Contradictions such as this one demonstrate how the action of the first act provides a logical premise for Carol's radical shift of character in the second and third acts. Though John attempts to help Carol by offering to "start the course over" for her,

the only consistent action on his part is his willingness to assert his own authority in their dialogue. John unintentionally "teaches" Carol by example that the way to "get on in the world" is to eliminate those who would stand in the way. Though John claims that his frustration stems from both his concern for Carol's progress as well as the problems relating to his new house, a spectator and Carol can logically conclude that he is more worried about the latter. In fact, Carol demonstrates confusion on this point as John finishes with yet another phone call from his wife:

CAROL: You're buying a new house.

JOHN: That's right.

CAROL: Because of your promotion.

JOHN: Well, I suppose that that's right.

CAROL: Why did you stay here with me?

JOHN: Stay here.

CAROL: Yes. When you should have gone.

JOHN: Because I like you.

CAROL: You like me.

JOHN: Yes. (Oleanna 20-21)

John's claim that he "likes" Carol may strike an audience member as a bit disingenuous: after all, he was unsure about her name at the beginning of the act, and continuously mocks her efforts to accept the "deposits" he gives her. His subsequent claim, that he will "take off the Artificial Stricture, of 'Teacher,' and 'Student,'..." proves equally suspect as John latches on to Carol's question about his problems to use his own experience as a means of demonstrating his ideas about educational hegemony.

After John lectures her on his own feelings of insecurity, Carol finally interrupts him successfully enough to tell him her real concern: "I want to know about my grade" (Oleanna 24). This moment of humor further demonstrates John's inability to listen to Carol and identify with her position: Carol's previous statements should indicate that her grade is her main concern and reason for coming to the office. John, however, assumes that the similarity he claims means that they would both find his educational experiences interesting and instructive.

John is unsuccessful, however, in establishing common ground through his use of radical educational theory, so his next step involves trying to approach the problem from Carol's perspective: "We'll start the whole course over. I'm going to say it was not you, it was I who was not paying attention. We'll start the whole course over. Your grade is an 'A.' Your final grade is an 'A' (Oleanna 25). John offers this solution as a gesture of magnanimity that further confuses Carol: "But we can't start over... There are rules" (Oleanna 26). John answers her concerns by again asserting his own authority: "Well, we'll break them... We won't tell anybody... I say that it's fine" (Oleanna 26-27). This approach is equally unsuccessful because, despite his effort, John has still not understood Carol's perspective. A spectator may realize that Carol equates learning, or, more specifically, mastery of knowledge, with her grade. A good grade is necessary to "get on in the world," but at no point does Carol suggest that she wants John to merely raise her grade; rather, she wants to understand the course material in order to see that understanding reflected in the grade. As he does with his book, John unintentionally communicates to Carol that the grade she has attempted to earn is also meaningless because he, as the authority figure, has the power to arbitrarily change it on a whim.

Ironically, John is successful at one of the aims he professes: he demonstrates to Carol the fictitious nature of the authority structure that exists in the educational setting. What John does not consider is that Carol, as a product of banking education, does not feel freed by his removal of these strictures; rather, John's "radical" methods only increase her confusion by removing the narrative structure on which she relied for security. While problem-posing theories also advocate dialogue as a means to expose structures of authority as constructs, Freire cautions

> dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression. (69)

In attempting to "free" Carol from the confines of traditional structures of education, John fails to recognize that he also denies her the right to "name the world": rather, he attempts to impose his own form of radical critique on her without allowing her a voice in that critique. This only reinforces Carol's sense that she is not in a position to "name the world," but, rather, must rely on John to do that for her. To Carol, John's criticism appears anarchistic: he merely criticizes without suggesting alternatives. Furthermore, it appears hypocritical: John accepts Carol's linking of the purchase of his new home to his tenure and promotion. Thus, as an audience may also believe, John's criticism amounts to "biting the hand that feeds him": he fails to recognize the contradiction inherent in criticizing the establishment while accepting its recognition and

rewards. An audience member will probably have no difficulty discovering why Carol complains of confusion: John is blatantly inconsistent in his words and actions. He is willing to question traditional structures, but only abstractly; he fails to realize that "Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers" (Freire 68). John is unable or unwilling to reflect on the contradictions that exist between his own words and actions, and thus produces an unreconcilable dilemma for Carol: one must question the very means that allow him/her to achieve success and security, but not to the point of rejecting the success and security themselves.

At this point, an audience member familiar with Mamet's work will likely see further parallels between the action of Oleanna and Speed-the-Plow. In both plays, the male protagonist takes it upon himself to serve as mentor to a younger female character. In each case, that teaching consists of tearing down the woman's belief system in an arbitrary and contradictory manner. Each represents a case of exploitation: Gould wants to seduce Karen sexually; John wants to similarly seduce Carol into seeing him as an effective teacher. Both men have received rewards for their previous work, and believe such rewards are justified. Finally, both Bobby and John are short-sighted: they each fail to consider the range of possible repercussions for their actions, confident in their abilities to control and dominate the female character. Yet other possibilities do exist, and Carol, like Karen, responds to John's destruction of her lifeworld by latching on to another narrative that provides structure and security for her. As Karen finds comfort in The Bridge, Carol allows her "Group" to provide a secure narrative framework for her.

At the end of Act One, as John takes one more phone call from his wife, he makes the observation to Carol that one can perceive a surprise as "a form of aggression" (Oleanna 41). As Act Two begins, John's words take on a prophetic quality as he attempts to defend his actions in the previous act against Carol's "surprise" charges of inappropriate behavior. John's opening speech of the act reinforces the idea that tenure and a new home represent his primary goals: while he begins his speech by asserting his love of teaching, his main point concerns the need to achieve tenure for both security in his professional life and security for his family. Thus, as it becomes clear that Carol has filed a complaint with the tenure committee, a spectator recognizes another parallel with Bobby Gould: John's primary concern and goal is security, and Carol's new lifeworld, and her actions that are based in it, threaten that security.

In his opening speech, John attempts to present himself to Carol as reflective and thoughtful: he claims not only to love teaching, but also that he believes that he is "skilled at it" (Oleanna 43). In rejecting the role of a "cold, rigid automaton of an instructor," John also claims that he recognizes the perils of engaging in more radical pedagogy: "And, so, I asked and ask myself if I engaged in heterodoxy, I will not say 'gratuitously' for I do not care to posit orthodoxy as a given good – but, 'to the detriment of, of my students" (Oleanna 43). Thus, the promise of tenure and the material comforts associated with it create a "win-win" situation for John: he can have security while engaging in the type of teaching he loves. He wraps up his speech by noting that Carol's complaint threatens that security to no good end: "They will dismiss your complaint; and, in the intervening period, I will lose my house. I will not be able to close on my house. I will lose my deposit, and the home I'd picked out for my wife and son will go by the

boards" (Oleanna 45). The tenor of John's speech should be apparent to an audience member: no good can come of Carol's action, and he and his family will suffer because she chose to pursue it.

Like so many of Mamet's characters, though, John inadvertently provides ammunition for Carol to attack his speech as he makes it. Early on, he confesses "And I love the, the aspect of performance. I think I must confess that" (Oleanna 43). In sincerely relating this element of his teaching, John invites both Carol and a spectator to view the rest of speech as a performance, an action designed to bring about a certain reaction. John offers this observation in order to underscore the sincerity of his speech, but he provides Carol and the audience with ammunition to judge him as less than sincere. Carol asserts this interpretation to him as she sums up his several minutes of speaking: "What you can do to force me to retract?" (Oleanna 46). As in Act One, John begins his interaction with Carol by attempting to create a communicative context that allows him to "name the world" in the situation. As he has previously done, John dismisses Carol's concerns by asserting that they are another example of the "anger" that he has observed throughout their interaction.

In the second act, though, Carol is not the stammering, confused student of the first. She asserts herself confidently and speaks with authority and even poise. For instance, she confesses to John that she "[doesn't] know what a paradigm is" (Oleanna 45). When he tells her that "paradigm" is a synonym for "model," Carol retorts "Then why can't you use that word?" (Oleanna 45). She no longer asks about John's speech in order to elicit further banking deposits; rather, she uses John's own language as further evidence of her charges of sexism and elistism. Numerous critics have pointed to Carol's

abrupt transformation between acts as one of the play's weaknesses: an audience has a difficult time believing that she has suddenly transformed into an articulate advocate for postmodern feminism. Others, however, have argued that this shift demonstrates Mamet's larger structural plan for this play. Badenhausen, for instance, writes

> The fact that so much dispute hovers over not only the meaning of the episodes in Oleanna but about literally what events actually take place grows out of Mamet's approach to theater, which I would characterize in this case as Brechtian. As Walter Benjamin wrote of Brecht's epic theater, it attempts to achieve "not so much the development of actions as the representation of conditions." (3)

Act One demonstrates to an audience that the act of teaching itself is at the heart of the play's conflict: the debate between John and Carol constantly returns to the meaning of "teaching," representing its "conditions." As in earlier plays, the subject matter in Act One becomes self-referential: Carol, in Acts Two and Three, appears as the reproduction of John's unintentional mentoring in the first act. As Badenhausen trenchantly observes:

> Carol does become quite a good student who learns her lessons well by the play's end, for she has come to master many of her teacher's own tricks, including a penchant for intellectual bullying; an ability to use language ambiguously so as to get her way; and an outlook on the world informed by deep-seated cynicism about human relations. (14)

Carol learns these particular lessons because John fails to consider her understanding of education in banking terms; she thus takes John's actions as the educational "deposit" in

the first act, since, from her perspective, John has succeeded in his profession by engaging in just such tactics.

When viewed in terms of John's actions in the first act, Carol's transformation seems much more appropriate. Assuming that Mamet is engaged in "representing conditions," Carol's changed demeanor in the second act demonstrates for the audience the effects of John's teaching. The radical shift to the action of Act Two further illustrates Mamet's own problem-posing for the audience: the juxtaposition of these two very different renderings of Carol encourages the audience to critically assess the cause of her changed attitude. An astute spectator will realize that, once Carol begin to speak in Act Two, she engages in the same kind of speech that John used in Act One. Carol responds to John's characterization of this second meeting, as noted above, by labeling it as an attempt to "bribe me, to convince me... To retract" (Oleanna 46). Soon after, she dismisses John's question concerning her personal feelings, claiming "Whatever you have done to me – to the extent that you've done it to me, do you know, rather than to me as a student, and, so, to the student body, is contained in my report" (Oleanna 47). Almost immediately, Carol demonstrates that she has quickly learned the methods that underlie John's own particular brand of pedagogy: not only does she begin to frame John's own word within the narrative framework provided to her by her group, but she also presents herself as representative of larger concerns, much as John did in telling the story of his childhood difficulties and insecurities. She has learned astutely that pedagogy can serve as a means of masking hypocrisy and ideological conflict: by claiming authority, the banking educator need not justify inconsistencies or incongruities in the narrative structure that s/he gives to her/his student.

Carol's behavior certainly extends beyond a mere mimicry of John's pedagogical methods, though, as an audience member is likely to question the objective truth of her claims of sexual harassment and possibly even her sincerity. John has taught Carol, through both his actions and the content of his speech, that teaching involves asserting control over language. Several examples come to mind from the first act. John's labeling of Carol's emotions as "anger" demonstrates, as noted before, his taking the prerogative to represent Carol's inner world to her. Similarly, his interpretation of education as an institution shows his method of renaming as asserting power: phrases such as "institutionalized hazing" and "virtual warehousing of the young" serve John as communicative means to illustrate his authority over the subject matter. Such communicative action bears a distinct resemblance to Freiran critique; John, however, uses labels such as these not to spur his students into dialogue, but rather to reproduce their shared belief that he is the source of the knowledge they need to "get on in the world." John allows the steering medium of power to redirect his pedagogical goals towards affirmation of his own worth as a source of knowledge for his students.

In the second act, then, Carol demonstrates her own ability to "name the world" without regards to dialogue. Though her retelling of the events of the first act is shocking, a spectator should realize that Carol, in attempting to reject the content of John's first-act claims, validates his pedagogical strategies. First, Carol demonstrates her recognition of grounding her claims in external authority: not only does she refer to her "Group" as the source of her understanding of the situation, but she also recognizes that she can exert her influence over John by attempting to influence those that hold authority over him: the tenure committee. Carol, as well as Mamet, recognizes the destabilizing

nature of the charge of sexual harassment: the implication of such a violation allows her to "level the playing field." She also recognizes that asserting power allows her to represent John's inner state not only to him, but also to others. In framing his actions as a sexual violation, Carol makes a claim to know John's intentions. She then uses "facts" selectively to validate her representation of the objective truth of the situation and her own sincerity in presenting their initial interaction as exploitive. She justifies these actions by claiming critical distance from them: "What I 'feel' is irrelevant" (Oleanna 49). Just as John claimed an affinity with the act of teaching, Carol validates her methods by asserting that she has no interest in benefiting herself: her actions are taken on behalf of the larger community.

By examining Carol's second-act transformation in terms of pedagogy, a spectator will likely realize that her communicative methods are at the core of the play's action rather than the content of her speech. The radical feminism that Carol espouses serves as a means to the end of dominating John: in this respect, Carol is similar to Speed-the-Plow's Karen in that she succeeds in finding a narrative framework that allows her to assert authority within the communicative context. When interpreted in that sense, a spectator may realize that both John and Carol twist discourses based in equality into means of creating or extending domination. John, for instance, claims to engage in a challenge of authority-based pedagogy, but uses this discourse towards very traditional ends: the re-authorization of his ability and even right to dispense knowledge. Similarly, Carol attempts to challenge John with feminism, a brand of narrative originally concerned with equality between genders. Both contexts are equally suspect, not because

they are harmful in ideal forms, but because both John and Carol dispense and receive their "knowledge" through the steering medium of power. As MacLeod writes,

> ...the contestation of hierarchy and linguistic control in Mamet's drama is not necessarily dependent on gender difference. Men do to men in Glengarry Glen Ross much as woman does to man and man to woman in Oleanna. And what this polymorphous ruthlessness suggests is that the sexual politics of Oleanna needs to be understood in a wider context, as part of the writer's overall critique of a capitalist system based on competitive individualism. (206)

MacLeod's observation may remind us of Mamet's definition of the dramatic as goal-oriented; perhaps the difficulty critics have in understanding Oleanna stems from the fact that they tend to believe that Carol's goals are sincerely expressed in her rendition of feminism, or that they ignore the fact that John professes less than ideal goals. Both characters view education and learning as means to the end of "getting on in the world," and John reinforces this message for Carol by using his own story as a metaphor for the problems with higher education. He fails to recognize the context within which he tells this story, and thus Carol views it as a fable of success: dominating others through placing their actions within a paradigm which villianizes them and valorizes oneself carries rewards such as tenure and a new home. John's attempt to engage in problem-posing pedagogy never problematizes the goal that Carol has expressly asserted; in fact, he reinforces individual achievement by claiming that "economic betterment" is just as valid a reason for pursuing education as "A love of learning" and "The wish for mastery of a skill" (Oleanna 33). Both John's lesson and his action regarding his new home and

promotion actually reinforce the notion that education is a means of surviving and thriving within the dominant economic paradigm rather than a challenge to that model itself. In fact, John's thoughts on the subject lead him to the surprising yet logical conclusion:

> We were talking of economic betterment... I was thinking of the School Tax (He continues writing.) (To himself:) ... where is it written that I have to send my child to public school.... Is it a law that I have to improve the City Schools at the expense of my own interest? And, is this not simply The White Man's Burden?" (Oleanna 33-4)

As this remark follows John's assertion that college education is no longer a matter of utility, but rather a "fashionable necessity," both Carol and a spectator have the opportunity to observe that, when coupled with the concept of "economic betterment," John reveals a normative vision much closer to the Protestant work ethic than to radical equality. Though John uses terminology in keeping with education as a communal experience, the narrative he constructs for Carol portrays him as the prototypical individual struggling against a hostile environment: the rewards he has earned stem from success in that struggle. As he momentarily drops his performance, John demonstrates that he has accepted the American myth of individual achievement as valid. In keeping with this cultural paradigm, John's portrayal of "public education" as being against his "own interest" shows that he has taken the next logical step in this argument: as he constructs his own experience as individual success, he sees contributing to communal welfare as a challenge to that experience.

As a spectator comes to understand the internal contradictions of John's pedagogy, s/he will probably realize that Carol's behavior in Acts Two and Three is a reproduction of those inconsistencies. Throughout the first act, Carol repeatedly asserts her understanding of the pedagogical relationship: John has knowledge and understanding that he has agreed to give to her as a student. Her role as "hearer," then, is colored by this understanding and constitutes an element of her lifeworld. Thus, she distills John's speech and behavior down to its constituent elements: success comes from overpowering those who would prevent one from "getting on in the world." Carol comes to John's office believing that she can only succeed through understanding of the material John has assigned; through their dialogue, though, he teaches her that such "assignments" are merely signs of "institutional hazing," and have no real relevance to her understanding. John further demonstrates that he himself has succeeded: he is in line for tenure, and plans to indulge himself and his family based on that success. Furthermore, that success serves as evidence for his assertion that individual struggle against hostile authority is the only means for a student to prove him/herself: those in authority will almost inevitably attempt to keep one from succeeding, and must be exposed as frauds intent only on maintaining their power and position.

Given these "lessons," a spectator can easily recognize how Carol's subsequent behavior should be seen as putting John's teaching into practice. Like John, Carol chooses an alternative paradigm within which to frame the situation to her advantage. By characterizing John's behavior in the first act as sexual harassment, Carol attempts to reframe the norms by which this behavior should be judged. Just as John uses his ideas of teaching to authorize his dominant position, Carol uses gender difference as means of

placing herself in the position of knowledgeable subject. Her Group's narrative allows her to claim possession to knowledge John does not have: namely, victimization due to her gender and class positions. Because Carol can assert her authority by shifting the normative paradigm, she places herself in the position of controlling the dialogue between John and herself. Thus, the second act becomes a battle between the two over who will determine the normative framework through which the action of the first act will be interpreted. John attempts, for instance, to demonstrate his claim that Carol's charges are "ludicrous" by reading from her report to the Tenure Committee: "He told me he had problems with his wife; and that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me..." (Oleanna 48). A spectator watching a performance will likely find a note of incredulity in John's reading, and Mamet skillfully weaves these portions of Carol's report into the dialogue in order to "introduce information in such a way, and at such a time, that the people in the audience don't realize they have been given information" ("Playboy" 56). Using the report also draws a spectator further into the role of virtual participant: s/he has witnessed the action of the first act, and will probably reject Carol's characterization as false. Carol, however, responds to John's perlocutionary rejection of the truth of her report by claiming:

> You think, you think you can deny that these things happened; or, if they did, if they did, that they meant what you said they meant. Don't you see? You drag me in here, you drag us, to listen to you "go on"; and "go on" about this, or that, or we don't "express" ourselves very well. We don't say what we mean. Don't we? Don't we? We do say what we mean. And you say that "I don't understand you..." (Oleanna 48-9)

Carol characterizes John's reaction to the report and their first-act interaction much in the way that he represented her original complaints to her: he imposes on her and the other students (as she did in asking for an unscheduled conference), fails to communicate effectively (as he claimed in his response to her writing and his original assertion that she was dodging the reason for coming to him), and then places the blame for that lack of communication on the hearer (Carol's first-act assertion that she understood nothing in the class and that she wanted him to teach her). Likewise, she implies that the fault is his own for failing to recognize the legitimate norms governing the communication between them and for believing that the conflict between them represents a personal failing rather than recognition of larger communicative practice. Even Carol's report to the tenure committee is similar to John's methods, in that Carol chooses to air her grievances publicly, just as John did in publishing his book criticizing higher education.

At this point in the play, the option for John to sincerely play the role of problem-posing education still exists, as he could attempt to expose Carol's methods to her as mediated through a will to power. Doing so would mean critically reflecting on his own methods, though, and John is still unwilling to engage in such self-critique. His only option, then, is to appeal to Carol's sense of pity, and he does so numerous times in the second act, claiming that her action will only harm him and his family without really addressing the issues that she raises. In challenging Carol with these potential consequences, John does, ironically, engage in a brand of problem-posing; as this pedagogical action is self-serving, though, it again undercuts the foundation of mutual respect that must underlie sincere radical educational technique. John continues to try to

use his methods of achieving dominance in the communicative context, and also continues to try to teach Carol that the proper goal of educational communication is authority as opposed to mutual understanding. Furthermore, John continues to reproduce a paradigm similar to traditional capitalistic economic transactions: he characterizes Carol's withdrawal of her complaint as a "win-win" situation in which he will get to keep the fruits of his promotion and she will not be humiliated by the tenure committee's rejection of her charges.

While John is not successful in brokering this arrangement, he does succeed in underscoring to Carol that communication is ultimately an act of negotiation: compromise provides a mutually beneficial situation for both partners in dialogue. Unintentionally, he also demonstrates that one should negotiate from a position of power and present terms that are favorable to oneself as beneficial to the hearer. For instance, he tries to shift the conversation by offering the observation "Nice day today" (Oleanna 52). John's offer of this "conventional" statement in an unusual context allows him to use the aggression of a surprise to reassert his command of their dialogue: he asserts to Carol "[This] is the essence of all human communication. I say something conventional, you respond, and the information we exchange is not about the "weather," but that we both agree to converse. In effect, we agree that we are both human" (Oleanna 53). John again exposes his hand: his method here subtly convinces Carol to continue conversing rather than leaving his office. Despite his implication that their shared humanity serves as an equalizing force, an attentive spectator will notice that he returns to his pedagogical methods of the first act: he attempts to label Carol ("you're not a ... 'deranged,' what? Revolutionary...") and instructs her again on how to present her argument ("I want to

hear it. In your own words. What you want. And what you feel.") (Oleanna 53, 54). John's request for moving his and Carol's dialogue to the level of common humanity veils another poor attempt to re-establish his dominance over their interaction.

In making this perlocutionary attempt at reauthorizing his position of superiority, John again fails to consider Carol's potential response. Carol believes that she has followed "conventional" channels in communicating her complaint: "I mean, we're talking about it at the Tenure Committee Hearing... I think that we should stick to the process... the 'conventional' process" (Oleanna 56). As John recognizes that this strategy has failed, he desperately attempts to again keep Carol from leaving: "One moment. No. No. There are norms, here, and there's no reason. Look: I'm trying to save you..." (Oleanna 57). As he fumbles for an effective argument, John commits the act that Carol will later present as "attempted rape": (He restrains her from leaving.) (Oleanna 57).

Though the play's second act presents these characters in more obvious conflict, the elements of teaching and learning remain consistent: the third act again illustrates Carol putting into practice the lessons she has learned from John. An audience member will likely realize that, though the situation has changed dramatically between the first and second acts, John repeatedly attempts to assert himself by assuming the position of mentor to Carol. In the second act, though, John is faced with a genuine threat of loss of those things he clearly values while the threat of the first act was a fiction created by his wife and realtor.Here, an audience member may question his sincerity in attempting to play the paternal pedagogue, as the lines between "teaching" Carol and protecting his own interests have blurred considerably. Education is no longer a simple subject of

debate, but, rather, has mutated into a more tangible method of self-protection. Mamet challenges his audience with a representation of education as primarily a method of domination: though the stakes have risen for John, he keeps to a performance very similar to that of the opening act.

The equation of education with domination becomes more palpable also as Carol begins putting John's methods into play. As noted before, Carol's performance provides John with the opportunity to figuratively observe his "teaching" in a mirror. Thus, Carol in the second act, like Karen in the second act of Speed-the-Plow, challenges John with his own rhetorical weapons. Despite his claims to her that mutual agreement is possible, though, John, like Carol of the first act, finds himself in a must-win situation: choosing to submit to Carol will not result in mutual satisfaction, as they are engaged in a zero-sum game. John could still make an attempt to shift their communication towards a paradigm of mutual understanding; despite his espousal of radical theory, though, John does not trust ideal communicative action enough to attempt its practice when his reputation and material well-being are on the line. Attempted domination is the only method in which he engages, and a perceptive spectator may conclude that John's lifeworld is quite conventional: offering to remove artificial strictures of authority is only an element of a rhetorical shell game he plays with Carol's desire for education and betterment.

The opening of Act Three illustrates John and Carol's communication stripped to purely functional elements: the two trade short, often incomplete, sentences that demonstrate each of their attempts to dominate the other. John tries to claim again that he has invited Carol to his office for her own benefit: "I feel that it profits, it would profit you something, to... [...] If you would hear me out, if you would hear me out" (Oleanna

60). Similarly, Carol implies that her presence is a breach of norms and, thus, an act of good faith: "I came here to, the court officers told me not to come" (Oleanna 60). As John attempts to move the conversation towards the content he intends, Carol almost immediately challenges his choice of words:

> JOHN: All right. I cannot... (Pause.) I cannot help but feel you are owed an apology. (Pause.) (Of papers in his hands) I have read. (Pause.) And reread these accusations.
>
> CAROL: What "accusations"?
>
> JOHN: The, the tenure comm... what other accusations...?
>
> CAROL: The tenure committee...?
>
> JOHN: Yes.
>
> CAROL: Excuse me, but those are not accusations. The have been proved. They are facts.
>
> JOHN: ... I...
>
> CAROL: No. Those are not "accusations." (Oleanna 62)

From this point, the two engage not in a conversation about the content of Carol's charges, but about the proper words to use to describe matters. John attempts to revise his statement and chooses the word "indictment." Carol still refuses to accept his language, as he attempts to define an indictment with the word "alleged." Just as John attempted to police Carol's language use in the earlier acts, Carol questions every statement John offers as an affront to the "facts" of the case and as exposure of ideological biases. She again refers to the process of fact-finding in which the tenure committee engaged, and notes "That is what the tenure committee has said. That is what

my lawyer said" (Oleanna 64). Carol refuses to engage John in dialogue unless it is clear to both of them that they agree on the objective reality of the situation. She quickly demonstrates, though, that her "facts" are necessary to characterize John's behavior in earlier scenes as violations of norms by explaining to John that the reward he seeks is to speak without question: "Do you know what you've worked for? Power. For power. Do you understand?... Don't you see? You worked twenty years for the right to insult me. And you feel entitled to be paid for it" (Oleanna 64-5).

Carol's anger betrays her, though, as she states "You ask me why I came? I came here to instruct you" (Oleanna 67). As Carol herself has just finished listing the benefits of "instruction" for the teacher, a spectator will probably realize that Carol has become what she criticizes: she uses her own language not to enlighten or help John, but to beat him into submission. Ironically, Carol uses the language of the problem-posing educator. She offers questions that are meant to bring John to a recognition of the world around him: "The thing which you find so cruel is the selfsame process of selection I, and my group, go through every day of our lives. In admittance to school. In our tests, in our class rankings..." (Oleanna 69). Carol attempts to demonstrate to John the realities of the "institutionalized hazing" he attempted to define earlier in the play, and to further refine that concept in a manner that validates the rightness of her actions in challenging John's fitness as a teacher. As she engages in her instruction, she begins to closely resemble Ionesco's Professor from The Lesson: she shouts rhetorical questions at John ("Do you hold yourself harmless from the charge of sexual exploitation?) and then mocks his answers: "YOU FOOL... You think I want 'revenge.' I don't want revenge. I WANT UNDERSTANDING" (Oleanna 71). "Understanding," however, bears a striking

resemblance to John's idea of this concept in the first act: submissive validation of the teacher's assertions of truth, rightness, and sincerity.

Just as Carol was not concerned with John's theories of education but her grade in Act One, John responds similarly, noting that his job is "over." The action continues to parallel that of the first act as Carol, in response, suggests that all is not yet "over": "All right. (Pause.) What if it were possible that my Group withdraws its complaint" (Oleanna 72). Just as John did, Carol offers to change the "rules" of the situation "as an act of friendship" (Oleanna 72). A spectator must realize, though, that Carol claims to have viewed this "offer" by John as an exploitive act; by making this connection, s/he may realize that Carol has perfected her performance of John's pedagogical methods. Her offer to John involves his agreeing to allow his own book, as well as others, to be "removed from inclusion as a representative example of the university" (Oleanna 75). Foster observes "The doublespeak is chilling" in this context: Carol has learned that she too can use language to obfuscate her hearer into submission (47).

Several critics point to this exchange as the prime example of Mamet's "deck-stacking" in this play: Carol requires that John recognize her and her Group's privilege to police thought as absolute. They note that John responds with the argument of academic freedom and conclude that Mamet constructs an argument between a rabid indoctrinee of political correctness and a victimized supporter of traditional liberal humanism. John, however, seems willing to cast aside considerations of academic freedom until he finds his own book on the list. His argument after this discovery hardly bears resemblance to standard liberal conceptions of free thought, though. Rather, his refusal relates to his

own reputation as a "teacher": this "reputation" is still grounded, though, in John's ability to direct the discourse between himself and his student:

> No, no. It's out of the question. I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking of. I want to tell you something. I'm a teacher. I am a teacher. Eh? It's my name on the door, and I teach the class, and that's what I do. I've got a book with my name on it. And my son will see that book someday. And I have a respon... No, I'm sorry I have a responsibility... to myself, to my son, to my profession... (Oleanna 76)

John tips his hand one final time in this speech: he again equates his role as "teacher" with his authority to represent both truth and rightness. The moral situation is certainly ambiguous at this point: Carol does seek to quash the ideas in John's book as well as others that she and her Group find "objectionable." John, however, still refuses to engage Carol in dialogue over the repercussions of her request; rather, he attempts once again to take the upper hand by asserting his institutionally-sanctioned authority and the norms associated with it.

Carol still has a "card to play," though, as John discovers when his lawyer calls to tell him that Carol's Group is considering charges of battery and attempted rape for John's attempt to restrain her at the end of the second act. In taking this step, Carol escalates the tensions by threatening to continue her communicative assault in yet another level of the public sphere. Mamet, in playing the role of problem-poser to his audience, does seem to court controversy here, as a spectator who may have accepted Carol's second-act charges of harassment as valid must certainly realize that she purposely twists legal norms by now characterizing the same actions as "attempted rape." Once again,

though, if that spectator considers the early action of the play, s/he may accept Carol's actions as legitimate within the closed moral universe of the play: John, when his authority was secure, demonstrated that his power allowed him to shift normative contexts at will. Though severe, Carol's behavior, at the level of communicative action with the goal of power over another person, demonstrates further understanding of John's lesson.

While the portrayal of Carol late in the play provides an extreme challenge to an audience member's ability to play the impartial judge to both character's claims of truth, rightness and sincerity, a spectator who manages to maintain his/her distance will recognize that at this point, the action of the play still follows the internal logic created by the communicative dynamic between the two characters: neither John nor Carol, at any point, attempts to challenge the paradigm that requires each of them to assume dominance over the other. In instructing John not to call his wife "baby," though, Carol moves beyond their public roles of teacher and student and attempts to expand her dominance over John's relationship with his wife. By doing this, Carol transgresses an implied norm of her communication with John: their disagreement and debate concern <u>only</u> their public roles of teacher and student. By attacking John's communication with his wife, Carol moves into an unregulated communicative space. John, thus, lashes back at her violently, using her move into the private realm as an opportunity to drop any semblance of civility:

> You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life? [...] After how I treated you...?

> You should be... Rape you...? Are you kidding me...? [...] I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. You little cunt... (Oleanna 79)

For the first time, in no uncertain terms, John utters language that falls within the realm of sexual harassment: he uses Carol's gender as a means of demeaning her ("bitch," "cunt"), and then, in a clichéd manner, demeans her further by asserting that she's not worthy of sexual attention. As such, the physical violence is secondary and serves only to punctuate the narrative implied in John's language: she is inferior to him, and is even sub-human, not worthy of the respect he offered by attempting to dominate her through reasoned language. Carol's response, "Yes. That's right [...]... yes. That's right," demonstrates her attempt to further assert her own power through narrative: John acts in a manner consistent with her accusations.[1] An audience member likely finds the ending distressing because there is no resolution: the play ends abruptly with each character reduced to a sub-human representation of their need to dominate the other.

While Oleanna is certainly a play that should distress and even enrage its audience, claims that this rage should stem from Mamet's portrayal of gender roles and stereotypes fail to recognize the playwright's goal of posing problems of communication within an environment structured as "educational." Such an idea may have turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: through choices of timing and dialogue content, Mamet may have well brought the misunderstanding that he claims upon himself. Oleanna may have produced unintended controversy because the author overestimated his audience's ability to distance itself from events and ideas that had not yet subsided from public discourse. As such, Mamet may have well subjected Oleanna to the fate of serving as the play that

demonstrates his own occasional failure in recognizing that problem-posing techniques only work if the teacher using them is interested in a dialogue with his/her student.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Carol's final words are ambiguous, and a critic could derive other meanings than the one presented here. For instance, one could argue that her words are meant literally: her goal has been to goad John into punishing her. Such an interpretation would be in line with Thomas H. Goggans' interpretation of Carol as a victim of child molestation. I believe that her words, though, represent a claim to the validity of her evolving characterization of John because such meaning would be consistent with her attempts to create a narrative that demonizes her professor. This, again, demonstrates what Carol has learned from John: teaching is an act of dominating, even to the point of representing the "Other's" internal state.

CHAPTER 8

"THEY SAY WE LIVE AND LEARN": THE CRYPTOGRAM

After a London debut and a run at the Cambridge, Massachusetts American Repertory Theatre, Mamet's The Cryptogram arrived in New York on March 28, 1995, in a production at the Westside Arts Theatre directed by the author. While Oleanna generated a torrent of debate and criticism regarding its political and cultural implications, The Cryptogram showed the author delving into subject matter largely absent from his body of earlier work: the "traditional" American family. The domestic setting and the hints of autobiographical detail in the play took critics by surprise, and most were delighted by Mamet's seemingly abrupt shift to matters of home, family and the pain produced by their unraveling. Vincent Canby, in his review for The New York Times, observed

> "The Cryptogram" [sic] is a horror story that also appears to be one of Mr. Mamet's most personal plays. It's not about the sort of physical abuse we see in television docudramas, but about the high cost of the emotional games played in what are otherwise considered to be fairly well-adjusted families... I'm not sure that he entirely succeeds, but the effort is fascinating. (210)

Jeremy Gerard, in Variety, argued that this new play was central to the author's large body of dramatic writing, noting that "the play is one of the least elliptical Mamet has written: indeed it's a skeleton key to the work of a playwright who has electrified the stage for more than 20 years, provoking fist fights as often as praise along the way" (211). Linda Winer wrote in her review for New York Newsday that "The work has power – undeniable sorrow and power. Mamet, not known for plays and movies that spill his personal guts, is said to have been working from the misery of his own parents' divorce" (210).

Reviewers that took a less charitable position often seemed to tilt at Mamet's theatrical celebrity rather than the play itself. John Simon, for instance, wrote in New York that "Mamet's characters, after all, are guilty of having become involved with one of our most pretentiously vacuous playwrights" (209). Howard Kissel offered a different, yet no more positive interpretation of the new play in his Daily News review: "Perhaps the most charitable was of viewing David Mamet's new play "The Cryptogram" [sic] is as a plea for help. 'Save me!" Mamet seems to be crying. 'I have become a prisoner of my own style" (212). And Donald Lyons, in The Wall Street Journal, criticized both the subject matter and Mamet's trademark style:

> Mr. Mamet's trademark is a punchy Ping-Pong repetitiveness in dialogue. Indeed, this stylistic tic is not only the form but the only content of his plays. Here, it is slower that usual and is deployed in aid of exposing the hollowness of the '50s family – a project by now so overdone that true originality would lie only in celebrating the myths of the era. (213)

Though a large body of scholarship has yet to emerge concerning The Cryptogram, the scholars that have written about it note not only the personal elements of the story, but also the complexity with which Mamet examines his typical themes of community and betrayal within a dramatic form (the domestic drama) often criticized for its simplicity and predictability. Jill B. Gidmark, for instance, labels The Cryptogram as "the most tightly wound, the densest, the most uncompromising statement in its implication that real truth can only be spoken in silence. It is a painfully compelling play haunted by silences; it shocks us with what silence can mean and do" (186). Martin Schaub argues that "Mamet falls back on a prolific dramatic convention" in addressing home and family in The Cryptogram, but does so in order to create "a suggestive and subversive play within these genre conventions. Mamet's family den has completely lost its function as a protective haven; his protagonists are drifting and, quite literally, on the move" (327). Leslie Kane notes the link between the home and memory, and argues that

> The Cryptogram, Mamet's most personal work... merges personal history with cultural history, for the family in Jewish culture has long been viewed as "the secret of cultural transmission, the Jewish double helix that codifies and replicates the historic destiny of an ancient people" (Whitfield 1984, 257). (Weasels 187).

The concept of "cultural transmission" leads almost inevitably to a consideration of both the content of the histories represented in the play as well as their methods of transmission. Much like he does in American Buffalo, Mamet presents his audience with interaction between older, experienced characters who consciously and unconsciously represent truths and norms to a younger character struggling to make sense of his

environment. By setting his play at a time of crisis for the family (father Robert's abandonment of wife Donny and son John), Mamet invites his audience to participate in these characters' attempts to make sense of the chaos that has descended upon them.

As in the other plays discussed, Mamet uses an epigraph to frame the play's action. In the published edition of The Cryptogram, he chooses lines from a "Camping song": "Last night when you were all in bed/ Mrs. O'Leary left a lantern in her shed" (5). The use of the camping song relates to the opening action of the play, as John, Del and Donny discuss the camping trip that Robert and John are supposed to take the next day. The reference to the Chicago fire of 1871 also provides a parallel for the events of the play: like the fire, Mamet's characters will be consumed by other characters' thoughtlessness. The irony of such horror contained in the "innocent" genre of the camping song resembles John's development in the play as he must face adult concerns with the perception and understanding of a child. The "cryptogram" of the play's title, thus, partly refers to John's attempts to understand the actions and symbols of adult experience, a task that is daunting and frustrating to him as well as to the adult characters. Mamet's story of initiation, then, is not so much about a coming to awareness as it is about the disintegration of security that comes with maturity.

The play's opening action subtly conveys both John's developing quest for certainty and Del and Donny's inability to provide it for him. The opening conversation between Del and John is similar to those of Sexual Perversity in Chicago, American Buffalo, and Oleanna: Del, the older, experienced character, attempts to instruct John on the meanings attached to events and things with which they are concerned. John enters the living room set with the line "I couldn't find 'em," referring to his slippers that he

packed for the next day's trip (Cryptogram 7). Their opening conversation quickly establishes the traits that both characters will display throughout the play's action: John, a ten-year-old boy is deliberate and thoughtful, while Del, though well-meaning, is quick to assume the prerogative of authority. In discussing the slippers, the two characters demonstrate these qualities immediately: John is concerned with keeping his feet warm, and even shows forethought in bringing a pair of socks with him downstairs. Del, however, quickly questions the wisdom of John's planning, asking "Why did you pack them?" and following up with "How are you going to use your slippers in the woods?" (Cryptogram 7). John's answers to these questions again demonstrate his ability to better size up his situation than the adult Del: he responds that he wanted the slippers to wear in the cabin, and knows that he "couldn't wear them in the woods" (Cryptogram 8).

While done so subtly, Mamet immediately establishes Del as a character who often speaks without thinking, a characteristic that will contribute to the breakdown in his relationship with Donny. Del's questioning John about the slippers and their use on the camping trip may seem harmless enough to a spectator, but Del has already slipped by providing information about his betrayal of his and Donny's friendship. As the events of the first act proceed, an audience member discovers that Del and Robert had been to the cabin the previous weekend on a "men-only" camping trip. Even the most perceptive spectator will likely not realize that Del's question to John about his use of the slippers points to his duplicity that will later be revealed: one might expect that, had Del actually been to the cabin, he would not have to ask why John would want to take his slippers with him. Though minor, the slippers, like other items in the play, become charged with meaning through the characters' discussion of them.

The use of inanimate objects as touchstones for these character's interactions forms the core of the play's "cryptogram": meanings are assigned, revised and challenged for objects like photographs, a stadium blanket and a military knife. As in all of the other plays discussed, conflict arises over the prerogative to assign meaning to these objects and, by extension, to claim authority within a given communicative context. The play's opening dialogue concerning John's slippers foreshadows the type of interaction that occurs repeatedly throughout the play: communication tied to an object creates a space in which the characters battle for authority and control over one another. By engaging in communication meant to establish authority rather than to create connection, Donny and Del undermine the secure narrative in which they participate and on which John relies for a sense of order in his unstable environment.

From the perspective of problem-posing pedagogy, then, Mamet renders for his audience the perversion of dialogue. As noted earlier, Friere defines "dialogue" as "the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (69). He qualifies this definition by noting that "[Dialogue] is an act of creation: it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another" (70). A further qualification proves significant for the interaction among the "family" in The Cryptogram: "The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love... Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated" (70). Throughout the play, the "naming of the world" characterizes the action in which these characters engage. Mamet aptly demonstrates the pathological nature of this naming: meanings and labels become

means not to establish love and trust, but rather to destroy one character's sense of meaning and security in order to impose an authorized narrative on him/her.

The pathology of communication rendered in The Cryptogram is additional dark because of the family home setting. This is certainly not unusual for an American playwright: Janet V. Haedicke notes that "Ever the stepchild in theatre scholarship, American drama suffers extra-familial status because of its focus on the familial" (1). Though this setting is unusual in his body of work, Haedicke argues "Consistent with the playwright's avowed intent to demystify the American dream, Mamet's defection to domestic realism signals a subversive and transformative ethic in American drama which constitutes its most significant legacy" (2). The home generally signifies the locus of cultural stability and continuity; one need only think of recent political debates invoking "family values" to recognize that home and family have achieved mythical status in the American mind. American plays which center on the family, however, generally use this setting as a means of challenging the fiction of the loving, stable family; one need only remember Miller's Death of a Salesman, Williams' The Glass Menagerie or Wilson's Fences to recognize the "subversive and transformative" element of which Haedicke writes. In this tradition, Mamet uses the family as the prime location of mythic recreation and, ironically, mythic deconstruction for both characters and audience. His focus on the family engages his audience in a communal dialogue on the lifeworld status accorded the family in America's cultural landscape.

In opening the play with dialogue between Del and John, a spectator may realize that Mamet plays on lifeworld connotations of the family to expose its narrative character. As a number of critics have noted, Del performs the role of paterfamilias at the

beginning of the play. In engaging John in a conversation about the missing slippers, Del accepts the opportunity to ascribe norms to the situation. As in so many other pedagogical situations, Del uses the rhetorical question in a perlocutionary manner: asking John why he packed his slippers or stating that he "wondered that you'd take them with" implies that John has transgressed a norm. As noted earlier, Del's attempt to assert himself over this minor event proves telling: not only does John demonstrate aptly that he acted rationally in packing his slippers, but Del also gives away his first clue to the truth of his camping trip with Robert. Just as important, though, is Del's performance as the male figurehead in the situation. Much like Donny Dubrow or even Shelly Levene, Mamet opens his play with an older male character attempting to instruct a younger man on given norms for the situation under consideration. Throughout the first act, an audience member watches Del play the role of mentor to John. And, like his predecessors, Del's instruction demonstrates his inadequacy for the role.

Once they dispense with the subject of the slippers, Del changes the conversation to another matter in which he attempts to demonstrate his position as knowing subject: John's sleeplessness. The matter clearly concerns the boy, and he tries to move the conversation in that direction even as Del attempts to apologize for his subtle chastisement about the slippers. He tells Del twice that he couldn't sleep the previous night either. Del approaches this subject as another opportunity for mentoring, challenging John with the question "What does it mean 'I could not sleep'?" (Cryptogram 8). The question proves a set-up: John ponders it, and Del quickly retorts "It means nothing other than the meaning you choose to assign to it" (Cryptogram 8). Though Del claims that John has a choice in the matter, and, by extension, the ability to discover the

meaning behind his own sleeplessness, he does not continue to discuss the matter in terms of a problem posed to his student. Rather, Dell announces, "I'm going to explain it myself," and subsequently tells John that his sleeplessness is a result of his excitement about the camping trip with his father.

Del's framing of John's sleeplessness demonstrates his affinity with Oleanna's John: like the professor, Del contradicts his assertion of radical epistemology (meaning is perception) by offering a single vision of objective truth to explain John's inability to sleep. Del similarly offers his position as the experienced member of the pair as authority for his interpretation, telling John "And I will tell you: older people, too. Grown people. You know what they do? The night before a trip? [...] Well, many times they cannot sleep. They will stay up that night," and responding to John's question on the source of his knowledge with "Well, you know, they say we live and learn" (Cryptogram 9). Though well-meaning, a spectator may recognize quickly that Del, like the professor John, does not engage in genuine dialogue with his student; rather, he continually argues for his own perception of the situation without listening to or considering John's concerns. Like the professor, Del even attempts to demonstrate John's own state of mind to him:

> DEL: [Older people] can't sleep. No. Why? Because their minds, you see, are full of thoughts.
>
> JOHN: What are their thoughts of?
>
> DEL: Their thoughts are of two things.
>
> JOHN: Yes?
>
> DEL: Of what they're leaving?

JOHN: ... yes?

DEL: And what they're going toward. (Pause.) Just like you. (Cryptogram 9)

While a spectator can only recognize this in hindsight, Del has already begun to expose his real concern at this point of the play: his knowledge that Robert is leaving Donny and John. Like characters such as Roma and Gould, Del's speech serves as a commentary on his own actions; Del's speech differs, though, in the fact that it reveals his subsequent claim "a human being ... [...] ... cannot conceal himself" (Cryptogram 10). In other words, Roma's and Gould's subtle revelations of their intentions serve as caveats; Del, on the other hand, is unable to hide his knowledge and complicity in the "disorder" that is about to strike the family. His performance as John's mentor, then, is motivated by guilt: he tries to give order to an environment that he knows is disintegrating. Thus, ironically, he is probably right about the source of John's sleeplessness: the boy likely is excited about the camping trip. Del's explanation, though, is not motivated by a desire to show John an objective version of truth, but rather to link it to a cause other than Robert's absence.

A spectator may start to realize Del's instruction resembles a con game as he responds to the first sign of Donny's presence: "(A crash is heard offstage. Pause.)" (Cryptogram 9). Del uses this situation as another example of the lesson he's attempting to teach John by making his above-mentioned claim concerning inevitable human response to disorder. John demonstrates his own perception of the situation, though, by questioning the legitimacy of the connection between Donny's breaking of the teapot and the upcoming trip: "That's an example?" (Cryptogram 10). Del pushes his argument,

again contradicting himself by returning to his claim about perceptions: though John sees his trip as a minor "upheaval," Del retorts, "Who is to say?" (Cryptogram 10). Del's wavering between singly acceptable interpretations of the situation and different meanings based on one's perception mirrors his own conflicted state: though a spectator may accept that he is sincere in attempting to help John make sense of the "minor upheaval" of sleeplessness, he continues to demonstrate that he himself "cannot conceal himself." His "instruction" is corrupted by his knowledge of Robert's betrayal of his family.

Del shows another "tell" as John, in an attempt to further verify Del's claim, asks him if he, too, felt a similar excitement in preparation "When you took your trip" (Cryptogram 11). Del repeats the question several times, and finally responds that he did not, "Because, and this is important. Because people differ" (Cryptogram 11). An audience member, even without the knowledge of Del's "secret," will likely realize that he's undercut his whole argument at this point, as he's presented the cause of John's sleeplessness up to this point as a universal. This, along with the revelation in the dialogue that Del is not John's father, demonstrates to the audience Del's performance as "man of the house," a role he acts with only modest success. Within the scope of the family drama, Del's lackluster performance serves as the first sign to the audience that all is not as it seems in Donny's house. Del attempts to create order for John by asserting truths that he himself does not believe; as the boy has shown himself prodigiously perceptive, a spectator may easily conclude that John is also not convinced by the performance. In a poor attempt to rationalize his guilt while providing guidance for John,

Del demonstrates his further complicity in John's budding dismay over the disintegration of his secure environment.

Donny's entrance into the scene and her interaction with both Del and John provides Mamet with the opportunity to subtly introduce further background information about the sense of dis-ease that pervades Del's instruction. As she enters, Donny interrupts her apologies concerning the tea to ask John "why aren't you asleep?" (Cryptogram 11). Donny seems overly dismayed at John's presence, a state of mind indicated by her repeated, almost desperate questioning as to the reason behind John's presence. As the conversation turns quickly to Robert's absence, Donny indicates that this state of affairs is nothing new: "John. Must we do this every night?" (Cryptogram 12). Both Robert's absence and John's restlessness appear to be part of a pattern, and in this brief exchange a perceptive spectator may realize that John's inability to sleep may relate to matters beyond his upcoming camping trip. This sense is heightened by Del's interjection into the conversation between mother and child, suggesting that John "busy" himself. Del's suggestion springs from his assertion that John's restlessness is related to the camping trip, and, thus, implies a dismissal of Donny's observation that such behavior has become a pattern.

A spectator may notice that Del seems almost overly concerned with presenting the signs of disorder in the house as temporary occurrences brought on by the impending trip. As John leaves to straighten up the attic, Del and Donny's subsequent discussion illustrates further his desire to simplify the issues related to John's inability to sleep. An audience member likely will notice that Del seems to grasp for simple explanations, claiming first that restlessness is John's "nature," and then asserting that this situation is

"special." Del continues this line of reasoning, claiming that sending John up to the attic to clean up represents

Donny's allowing the boy to "participate" in the events surrounding the camping trip: thus, she has found the "solution" to this particular problem. Donny also notices the overly dramatic quality of Del's concern, but rather than investigating it, she instructs Del to "Shut up" (Cryptogram 14).

While Del's speech dominates the early interaction of the first act, an audience member may recognize that each of these characters is attempting to create order out of the situations under discussion. Del desires to play the role of father figure and consistently attempts to impose order and reason upon the evening's events. While John questions Del's instruction, he also demonstrates a need for security; thus, he acquiesces to Del's narrative, as it provides answers to situations he does not understand. Donny, however, not only shows the most obvious sense of agitation, but is the most unwilling to validate Del's context for the disorder represented by John's sleeplessness. As such, she seems disconnected: when John and Del perform the ritual of quoting from the missing book about the Wizard ("My blessings on your House"), Donny can not remember her role in this performance (Cryptogram 15). Though these characters seem concerned with mere trivialities at this early point in the play, a perceptive spectator will likely notice that patterns emerge in the character's interactions that point to disturbance in communicative norms demonstrated through memory loss and the quiet desperation pervading their attempts to impose meaning on these seemingly minor events.

Mamet provides his own "tell" to the pattern of disruption present in the play through the use of the name "Donny": a spectator familiar with the author's work will

likely make the connection with American Buffalo's Donny Dubrow. At one level, the use of this name refers to the subtle "gender-bending" at work in the play, as Donny will have to assume the authority traditionally vested in the father figure. More importantly, though, the use of this name also foreshadows a relationship between Donny and John that resembles the interaction between Buffalo's Donny and Bobby. In this play, Donny shows an exasperation with her son similar to the shopkeeper's treatment of his protégé: both "parent" figures are frustrated with their charges' inability to behave within the normative boundaries that the two Donnies have prescribed. Subsequent action will show that John's mother, like Dubrow, is preoccupied early in the play, and that her short temper relates at least as much to other worries as it does John's "misbehavior." The most important element for a spectator at this early point in the play, though, may well be the threat of betrayal that s/he will likely perceive in making this connection between the two characters.

Donny's preoccupation in The Cryptogram is revealed to the audience through the introduction of two other objects: the old photograph and the stadium blanket. Donny presents the photograph to Del after sending John to the attic with the words "Look what I found up in the attic" (Cryptogram 14). She presents the object in a manner that suggests meaning; Del, however, does not react in a similar manner, asking twice "When was this taken?" and then confessing "I don't understand this photograph" (Cryptogram 14-15). In fact, Del seems to avoid discussing the photograph: John comes back to the landing, and Del directs his attention to the boy's needs rather than discussing the picture. As the discussion continues, an audience member realizes that the photograph portrays Donny, Del and Robert together at the cabin before World War II. While Del has trouble

remembering the time and event of the photograph. Donny's reaction shows her longing for a time before John's birth: as they discuss the picture, Donny reveals to Del "I went to the Point. [...] And I remembered. When the Three of us would go. Late at night. Before the war. [...] And Robert and I. Would make love under a blanket" (Cryptogram 27). These memories help an audience understand the context for earlier statements she makes to Del. For instance, she makes the seemingly off-hand statement "Sometimes I wish I were a Monk," an image she qualifies with "An old man for example... [...] ... and all his sons are gone" (Cryptogram 17). She characterizes this wish as "A fantasy of rest..." (Cryptogram 18). Similarly, when Del tries to further rationalize John's odd behavior by arguing that the boy may be jealous of the time Del and Robert spent together the previous week, Donny responds "Let him be jealous. What if he was? Yes. I think he needs to spend more time with his father: and, yes, I think that he has to learn the world does not revolve around him" (Cryptogram 26). She then chastises herself: "Oh, Lord. I'll tell you. No. You're right. It's guilt. It's guilt. I'm guilty. I get to spend one weekend on my own. And I'm consumed with guilt" (Cryptogram 26).

As Donny is clearly consumed by her conflicting emotions of resentment and guilt, and Del is attempting to alleviate his own guilty conscience by keeping John occupied with searching for items for the trip and teaching him games designed to hone his observation skills, a spectator will likely come to realize that John's anxiety is not a product of excitement, but rather the reaction of a sensitive child to a disordered environment. His speech throughout the act demonstrates at once both perception of the sources of disruption in the house and a very childlike inability to understand the sources of his discontent. Because he can sense disorder but feels impotent against it, John

attempts to take it upon himself to set things right. In doing so, he also unconsciously accepts responsibility for the rupture in the environment he knows and understands. For instance, John's belief that he has torn the stadium blanket shows his attempt to take responsibility. Donny's later revelation that the blanket served as both a cover for her and Robert's lovemaking and a baby blanket for the boy associates it with familial love. Since much of the chaos in the house relates to a breakdown of that family bond, the tear serves as a symbol to the audience and the characters of the breakdown of family connection. Since John can not rely on either Donny or Del for comfort and reassurance, he, very naturally, looks to himself as the source of disruption within the family. Donny's confession of her desires and guilt to Del communicates to an audience that John recognizes his mother's validation of his fear of responsibility.

John's assertion that he is experiencing phenomena that a spectator will likely associate with psychopathology (particularly hearing sounds and voices) points to Habermas's conception of a crisis in reproduction processes. As noted before, the family in contemporary Western culture is viewed as the prime location of cultural reproduction. Thus, an individual develops his/her sense of identity first through cultural and social reproduction processes enacted within the family. Habermas claims that psychopathologies specifically result from disturbances in socialization processes, and that the dimension of evaluation for such disturbances is the realm of personal responsibility (TCA II 143). John's attempts to take responsibility for the disturbances within the home, as well as the manifestation of psychopathic experiences, communicates to the audience a breakdown in the boy's socialization. Though only ten years old, John has clearly accepted as valid his perceived responsibility for the crumbling order seen in

his home. John no longer sees himself as a child who can and should look to his parents for security and a rational narrative framework for his experience: rather, he has taken responsibility for finding narrative structure upon himself.[1]

Habermas's conception of social disruption within the realm of communication serves as a telling heuristic for a spectator's understanding of John's behavior in the first act. An audience member will likely notice that John's behavior veers sharply between that of boy mature beyond his years and a child desperate for attention and affection. In each case, though, John demonstrates his longing for order and predictability. As one might expect, John looks for this order from the adults around him. A spectator will probably recognize John's repeated request for information concerning his father's whereabouts as both very typical and very telling. Since the father traditionally stands as the figurehead of the family, Robert's absence communicates to the boy a very real sense of chaos. Similarly, in preparing for the trip, John constantly refers to his father as the source for norms in the situation: his concern about the "right" fishing line illustrates John's reliance on Robert for his knowledge of rightness.

Robert, however, is not the only missing source of authority in the first act. John also makes numerous references to the book about "the Wizard": the book clearly serves as a source of common knowledge between him, Del and his mother. Like Robert, though, the book is nowhere to be found, and only Del recognizes John's references to it. Because Robert is not present, John must make do with the sources of normativity and narrative structure available to him: his memories of the book and Del's teaching. In each case, though, John places his reliance on fictions constructed for his comfort: like

the book. Del's instructions to the boy are fictitious and useless because he knows that John will not take his camping trip the next day.

Because Del knows the truth of the imminent breakdown of the family, the "game" that he teaches John in the first act takes on additional significance. Del tells John that the game of comparing observations is useful because "If you were lost it could assist you to orient yourself" (Cryptogram 23). Though Del claims that this game will be useful in the context of the camping trip, an audience member will probably recognize that, in hindsight, Del again reveals his knowledge and guilt of Robert's abandonment of his family. As such, Del resembles Ricky Roma as he reveals his own methods to Lingk in his discussion of personal philosophy: like Roma, Del attempts to subtly prepare John for the events about to take place. Like Donny later in the play, though, Del's attempt to instruct John through the game ignores the fact that John is a child: Del's game of preparing for misfortune through observation demands a mature perception of cause and effect. John, as a child, is looking for immutable principles in which he can place his faith; thus, Del's attempt to prepare the boy for the impending "third Misfortune" does not account for John's inability to shift contexts in order to recognize causality.

The opening of Act Two demonstrates John's reaction to his father's leaving and, by extension, demonstrates the inadequacy of the "tools" Del tried to give John to comprehend the situation. The act opens with John discussing his own loss of meaning:

> I thought maybe there was nothing there. (Pause.) I thought that nothing was there. Then I was looking at my book. I thought "Maybe there's nothing in my book." It talked about the buildings. Maybe there's nothing in the buildings. And ... or on my globe. [...] Maybe there's

> nothing on the thing that it is of. We don't know what's there. We don't know that those things are there. (Cryptogram 32)

John's speech aptly demonstrates his own questioning of the truths he had accepted as valid prior to the first act's events. Rather than recollecting "observations" and reconstructing them so that he might see the progression of events that led to the present situation, John can only recognize the loss he is experiencing. Because this loss involves the child's lifeworld, he naturally questions any narrative of order that he's come to accept as given.

In offering John's reactions to his audience, Mamet highlights an element of his spectator's lifeworld: s/he accepts as given the passing of knowledge and norms from parent/adult to child. In focusing on this seemingly natural framework of cultural reproduction, the author forces his audience to consider not only the readily accepted nature of this structure, but the associated given that this particular realm of instruction is inherently positive. An audience has already begun to see the corruption of the father figure in Del's awkward attempts to expiate his own guilt and substitute himself for Robert. In Act Two, a spectator also observes a fuller picture of Donny's inability to perform the role of the selfless, nurturing mother. Once Del and Donny begin to speak in earnest in the second act, a spectator will realize that both adults merely humor John's musings rather than performing the role of ideal recipient of the boy's speech. Donny's first lines in this act, in fact, offer no responses to John's concerns; rather, she focuses on getting John to bed and interrogating Del as to his search for the missing Robert. She responds to John's refusal to sleep by attempting to give him medicine: "Take the medicine. Did you hear me? You're sick, and you're going to bed" (Cryptogram 33).

Given the circumstances, an audience member may well feel pity towards Donny rather than judging her harshly for attempting to medicate her son into sleep. In her desperation, though, Donny uses speech and her position as John's mother to manipulate the boy. Her labeling of John as "sick" shows her using speech to frame John's difficulties within a context that she can understand and act upon. Similarly, as she attempts to question John about his possible fear of going to bed, Donny moves into a realm of communicative action that an audience will have difficulty justifying: she tells John "All right, all right, I'm going to promise you ... look at me, John. I'm going to promise you if you take this and ... you take this and go upstairs then you won't be afraid. I promise. (Pause.) I promise you" (Cryptogram 34). Donny's repetition of the word "promise," as well as Mamet's emphasis of the word in its first two usages focuses an audience on Donny's speech act: the act of promising includes a perlocutionary assertion that the speaker has the means to make the promised result occur. An audience member will likely recognize that Donny does not have such power, and that her promise further illustrates her failure to listen to John's concerns and attempt to come to consensus on his sincere representations of his inner state. Del joins the conversation in a similar manner, attempting to calm John with their ritual: "John? 'My blessing on this house....' the Wizard said" (Cryptogram 35). Each adult shows his/her inability to understand John's emotional state despite his attempts to render it accurately, and, thus, each of them uses speech in a manner that demonstrates their wish to create a desired result (John's sleep) rather than to communicate with him in ideal terms.

Del and Donny's inability to adequately address John's loss of meaning does not extend just to the boy, however; as John does go to his room, the conversation that the

two adults try to engage in also demonstrates their inability to offer speech in a truly interactive fashion. Del attempts to distract Donny much in the same way that she did with John: "Do you want a drink? [...] Would you like to play Casino? [...] No, you're right, that's stupid. Oh God, oh God, that's stupid. (Pause.) Would you like to play Gin?" (Cryptogram 35). As they decide to have a drink, Del continues to try to find a comforting ritual by offering clichéd toasts and by justifying drinking heavily as a means of both forgetting pain and remembering pleasure. Donny offers her own attempt at ritual behavior, telling Del "You should get married" (Cryptogram 37). This line, which Mamet encloses in quotation marks, briefly creates a space for role-playing; neither participant is able to sustain this fiction, however, and Del offers to "look at John."

This particular scene proves telling as it contrasts with Donny and Del's earlier conversations in the first act. In those dialogues, the two characters, though guarded, each offered the other a bit of his/her internal world in a sincere fashion. In this act, however, the two avoid meaningful conversation and desperately grasp for worn rituals that allow them to fill the silence between them without discussing the events of the past day. As these attempts fail, though, Del returns to the inevitable, assuring Donny that, although he believed that "it wasn't a good idea to have [Robert] come here," he did search for his friend in earnest (Cryptogram 37).

While Del's admission that he had mixed feelings about Robert's return home provides another tell for a spectator, Donny's shifting of the conversation to Robert's knife and the "Odd Gesture" of her husband giving it to Del pushes him towards overt revelation of duplicity later in the act. Donny finds significance in the gift because this particular knife served a very specific purpose: "It's a pilot's knife ... [...] If he was

forced to parachute ... [...] The pilot would use it to cut the cords. If his parachute snagged" (Cryptogram 38). Donny implies that Robert chose the gift of the knife because of it was a "tool" to aid Robert in an action of abandonment: "He looked for safety, and the knife, it cut... It 'released' him" (Cryptogram 38). Her emphasis on words like "abandon" and "release" asserts both to Del and an audience member that Robert gave his friend the knife as a sign of his own abandonment of his family and his release from familial duty.

A spectator familiar with Mamet's work will recognize the symbolism, as Mamet frequently uses the knife as a simultaneous signifier of both friendship and betrayal.[2] As he has done with John, Del attempts to create a fiction for Donny to explain Robert's "Odd Gesture": Robert offered it as a spontaneous gesture of friendship while the two men were camping together. This fiction quickly unravels, though, as Donny tells Del that she saw the knife in the attic after their camping trip. Del attempts to "rewrite" the story, telling Donny first that two knives must exist, and then that he must have been mistaken about the timing of the gift. An audience member quickly recognizes the irony of the symbol as Del finally confesses that he and Robert did not go camping the previous week: rather, Del allowed Robert to use his hotel room for a liaison with another woman, and the knife was a gift of gratitude for Del's duplicity.

At this point, John re-enters the scene to ask Donny "Are you dead?" Given the circumstances, the boy's question is, at the very least, unnerving for a spectator, as Donny has experienced two "deaths" in the past twenty-four hours: her marriage to Robert and her friendship with Del. Kane argues that John's question, and his subsequent

revelation of a dream involving the image of a single candle accompanied by a sense of isolation, points to Mamet's reinscription of a "trauma narrative":

> Reworking Freud's classic interpretation of the narrative of a burning child who has died of fever and whose body is consumed by an overturned candle unnoticed by the father sleeping in another room and who, when visited in a dream by the dead child, is unable to recognize "the child in its potential death" (103), Mamet creates the circumstances whereby in the father's absence, John attentive to voices and his mother's cries, is responsive to their call. (Weasels 212).

Kane's use of Freud's extended metaphor provides a compelling framework for John's cryptic remarks at the end of Act Two. When examined within the heuristic of communicative action, a spectator may come to similar, if not exactly the same, conclusions: John's question and his dream point to fragmentation of the boy's internal world, which is related to the breakdown of external structures that previously held lifeworld status. "Death," in this sense, is equated with the loss of meaning that occurs with the destruction of a firm narrative grounding for John's experience with his family. The strange images and questions result from the implied communication between John's inner world and the truths that now confront him. His normative structure has been proven a fiction; a sense of isolation results from the irreconcilable differences between John's perception of security (a product of his socialization) and the objective truths that challenge that perception. John must wrestle with this challenge to his own perception of certainty and, through interaction, attempt to create new meaning out of actions that extend beyond his understanding.

If Mamet were only portraying a child's attempt to reconcile actions with his/her sense of truth and rightness, The Cryptogram could have served as a means to validate the family structure as a secure source of knowledge and normativity. As already discussed, though, the two adults in the play are also wrestling with similar challenges to their lifeworlds. Furthermore, both Del and Donny are so consumed with their own guilt and loss that they reject John's attempts to reach out to each of them for comfort. Though an audience member will likely judge Del harshly for his act of betrayal against both Donny and John, Donny's reaction to the twin betrayals more aptly demonstrates the necrophilic potential in her manipulation of her roles of mentor and mother.

As the third act begins, a spectator may believe that Donny is trying to make the best of the situation for her son: she makes him tea and tells him that she's kept "some things I thought you might like to have" out of the moving boxes (Cryptogram 45). As in earlier acts, though, John is troubled by thoughts unusual for a child. As Donny attempts to leave for the kitchen, he asks her "Do you ever wish you could die?" (Cryptogram 45). As this question comes from a child, an audience member will likely find the question disturbing; Donny, however, attempts to deflect it by quickly answering, "I don't know" (Cryptogram 45). Both she and a spectator sense the meaning behind John's question: he's reaching out to his mother for an explanation that might give order to the disruptions of home and family. Like Del, Donny assumes the role of pedagogue in response to the boy's questions; unlike her friend, though, she does not attempt to comfort John with familiar narratives. Rather, Donny attempts to teach him truths that a spectator might characterize as "hard facts of life":

> At some point ... there are things that have occurred I cannot help you with ... that ... [...] John, at some point, do you see...? (Pause. Exits. Offstage.) John, everyone has a story. Do you know that? In their lives. This is yours. [...] And finally ... finally ... you are going to have to learn how you will deal with it. You understand? I'm going to speak to you as an adult: At some point... At some point, we have to learn to face ourselves ... (Cryptogram 46)

While Donny's "lesson" for John might, in some circumstances, show her as a character willing to challenge her son with objective truth as she perceives it, a spectator has repeatedly witnessed Donny's attempting to silence John. Earlier instances, such as encouraging John to sleep or take medicine, may have seemed relatively innocuous; in this case, however, Donny uses her authority in a manner painfully consistent with Freire's characterization of banking education as "necrophilic." An audience member will probably see the irony implicit in her claim to "speak to [John] as an adult," as she shows no willingness to accept or even consider John's concerns. Rather, one might believe that she chooses to address her son in such a manner because of its relative ease: if she considers John an "adult," she does not have to conform to norms governing the relationship of parent and child.

Donny's conception of "speaking like an adult" comes into sharper view as she realizes that Del has entered the scene. As one might expect, she is terse with her friend, and fires short questions and answers at him in rapid succession. Del attempts to break the tension of their encounter with light philosophical speculation and gifts: "Aren't we a funny race? The things we do. (Pause.) And then what we say about them. You'd think,

if there were a 'Deity' we would all burn. (Pause.) Swine that we are" (Cryptogram 48). Donny does not allow Del to unburden himself of his guilt; rather, she plays instructor to him by telling him that all of the associations Del had with Robert's knife were wrong: "He was in the air. Could he capture the knife in the Air? [...] Could he get it in the Air? You 'fairy'? Could he capture the knife from the other man in the Air? You fool" (Cryptogram 49). Donny's rapid shifting between rhetorical questions and blatant insults demonstrates that she has no intention of attempting to reconcile with Del: she uses her words as weapons, taking every opportunity possible to harm him. Del responds in kind: despite his observation that "if we could only speak the truth [...] Then we would be free," he also does not engage in speech aimed at creating community and consensus with Donny, but attempts to counter her insults with self-pity: "I'm pathetic. I know that. You don't have to tell me. The life that I lead is trash. I hate myself" (Cryptogram 51-52). Neither adult attempts ideal communication; rather, they each use their words as means of establishing dominance over the other. They become dueling pedagogues, each attempting to bludgeon the other with a self-serving narrative that makes the other the cause of his/her distress.

The brutality of such language reaches another level as John "appears on the stairs" (Cryptogram 51). Donny immediately transfers her anger from Del to the boy, using rhetorical questions to punish the child for asking for her help: "What can I do about it, John? [...] What do you expect me to do?" (Cryptogram 51). An audience member may believe that Donny has forsaken any hope of communion as she lashes out at the boy, but, with Del's pleading, she allows John to return once more to the attic to find the stadium blanket, now packed away for the movers. While Donny exhibits

maternal concern in making this allowance, she also uses this boon as an opportunity to extract a promise from John: "You can unwrap it if you go to sleep. [...] But you must promise ..." (Cryptogram 52). A spectator may realize that Donny's deal with John bears a resemblance to extortion: s/he may also remember that Donny herself used a promise in the second act as a means of directing John towards action that she desired from him.

While an audience member may have felt sympathy for Donny's desperate promise to John in Act Two, she make clear upon John's final return that she has no intentions of allowing John similar leeway with his own coerced speech act. John does return because he could not remove the twine from the box containing the blanket, much as he could not open a box in Act One. Instead of attempting to reassure the boy that he is not at fault as she did with the purported tearing of the blanket, Donny lashes out much as she has at Del: she tells John that she doesn't care about the reason for his presence: "Go away. You lied. [...] I love you, but I can't like you" (Cryptogram 55). Del once again tries to step in and mediate the situation, but Donny refuses to moderate herself or her harsh speech. Rather, she seizes on John's failure to return the blessing "Good night" to Del and offers another series of rhetorical questions: "What must I do that you treat me like an animal? [...] Can't you see that I need comfort? Are you blind? For the love of God..." (Cryptogram 56). Her final exclamation is also the final statement of Fortunato to Montresor in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado": Donny's use of the statement at once conveys desperation and exaggeration. While she clearly feels trapped, the line implies an accusation: John is willfully attempting to hurt her. Del, in an attempt to gain Donny's favor perhaps, adopts a milder form of her accusatory tone: "John: Your mother's waiting for you to ... [...] What does she want to hear you say?" (Cryptogram 56). Both adults

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understand, and did understand, that these wounds [caused by broken glass] were our fault" (Cabin 3-4).

[2] Mamet has pointed to the slippery significance of knives in several works. In the essay "3 Uses of the Knife," the author paraphrases blues legend Leadbelly's characterization of this symbol: "You take a knife, you use it to cut the bread, so you'll have strength to work; you use it to shave, so you'll look nice for your lover; on discovering her with another, you use it to cut out her lying heart" (Knife 67). In Mamet's screenplay The Edge, a knife functions in a similar fashion: Robert Green gives Charles Morse a knife as a birthday gift. A spectator learns later that Green has carried on an affair with Morse's much younger wife. In each instance, the knife functions of a symbol of friendship/love and betrayal simultaneously.

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Dissertation Title: "The Only Way to Teach These People is to Kill Them": Pedagogy as Communicative Action in the Major Plays of David Mamet

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