

## The Dehumanizing American Dream in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Mehdi Sepehrmanesh<sup>1\*</sup>, Ehsan Dehghani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Literature, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran.

<sup>2</sup> Department of English Literature, Tehran Central Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Emails: mehdi.sepehr330@gmail.com; Mercury\_lyre@yahoo.com

\* Corresponding author

### ABSTRACT

The American Dream is a recurrent theme in American literature. In this response, this paper is an attempt to expose the destructive effects of the dream on the human spirit. It is also shown, through the analysis of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, that despite the promise of the dream it contains many contradictions. Beneath the seeming simple surface of the play lies a deep current of meanings that reflect the calamities of modern American life, and in a broader sense, the modern world. This article indicates how capitalism inculcates ideologies in the mind of individuals in order to facilitate the exploiting process and unquestioning subordination. Ragged individualism, for instance, as the most prominent of these ideologies, disrupts all communal bonds and even exceeds to the disintegration of friendship and family life.

Keywords: American dream; ideology; capitalism; individualism; consumerism

### INTRODUCTION

The American Dream is as old as the very foundation of America when the innumerable immigrants, exhausted from the tyrannies and muffling limitations of the old world, thought of the new continent as the land of opportunities and redemption for their dreams. But from the very beginning, the ignorance, prejudice and greed inherited in human nature began to consume the seeds of the dream and turned it into a nightmare. Thus, one might claim that the dream has been corrupted since the outset despite the fact that there has always been a controversy over whether the dream was corrupted originally or whether it diverged from its true essence and became corrupted later.

Winner of three Obies, a New York Drama Critics Award, the Outer Critics Award for Distinguished Playwriting, a Joseph Jefferson Award, the Society of West End Theatres Award, the Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and numerous nominations for Academy Awards for screenwriting (*The Verdict* and *Wag the Dog*), David Mamet is a "seminal figure in contemporary American drama whose gift for acutesocial observation, depth of moral vision, and continuing productivity account for his broad critical respect" (Varun Begley 4). *Glengarry Glen Ross* is

Mamet's significant work, winning Pulitzer prize, in which the issue of struggle for life in the bossiness is evident. As Piette(2004) argued "*Glengarry Glen Ross* offers a portrait of a battle for survival, a Darwinian struggle in which the salesmen offer a dream of possibility. In a play about real estate there is, in fact, very little real in *Glengarry Glen Ross*"(p. 78), therefore, "the characters of *Glengarry Glen Ross* are deprived of any human warmth and compassion and are constantly steeped in an atmosphere of fear, greed, and ruthlessness: the higher the pressure, the lower the ethics"(p. 78). Moreover, as Brietzeke (2007) elaborates: Mamet in *Glengarry Glen Ross*"reduces the world of the [play] to a series of sales transactions in which the man who succeeds—and it is the man's world—is the one who can successfully close the deal and exert his will upon a victim . . . . How much money they make, what cars they drive, if they're married or not, where they live . . . and how many kids they have remains a mystery" (pp. 125-6). As Bigsby (2004) suggests: "In a utopian society such as America only the past and the future offer a true form. . . . In between is a provisional world in decline, reaching for a perfection beyond immediate reach, existing between impure nostalgia and importunate hope" (p. 20). Mamet's characters inhabit a world where in Harriott's words (1983): "There is a preoccupation with rootlessness—

felt both as discontinuity with the past and the failure of connection with the present—and with the fear of apocalypse” (p. 9). As King states: "Gradations of Criminality in the Plays of David Mamet" (2004) *Glengarry Glen Ross* depicts the essential role of the business ethic in shaping American values (p. 95). ... As a result the characters in *Glengarry Glen Ross* are caught in a moral dilemma, trapped between their desire to possess the land or gain from its sale and their longing for old value systems (p. 97). In fact, this illusion of the glorious past and a utopian future, compared to the devastating conditions of the present time, functions as a defense mechanism, employed to avoid the confrontation of the horrifying reality of their existence.

The objective of this article is to analyze David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* in the light of the American Dream. Therefore, the dehumanizing effects of the dream, how its principles are contradicted in the face of reality and what befalls those who take the dream too seriously and let themselves to be deluded by it will be demonstrated. The characters of the play are obsessed with their would-be life that they cannot see the reality of their miserable existence; likewise, they are enchanted by the American Dream to the extent that they cannot perceive how far they have diverged from reality. They have caught between their past and future that they cannot see their miserable present situation. In other words, the splendid dreams of the past are juxtaposed with the utopian future promised by the American Dream.

## METHODOLOGY

Since this paper is devoted to the analysis of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* in the light of the American Dream, a glance at the background of the dream might be helpful as a starting point. In fact, the American Dream is as old as the foundation of America itself. Ironically, the foundation of America was stimulated by the dream when many people from the old world crossed the ocean in search of better life and future in the fertile west while being tired of the muffling and exhausting conditions of Europe. Thus, America with its abundant opportunities was supposed to be the Promised Land. In the course of its evolution, from the possession of land, freedom and gold fever to the present time greed for wealth, the dream has failed time and again, despite these failures, the dream continues to survive stronger than before. The point is that as Tyson asserts: "The American Dream Blinds us to the enormities of its own failure, past and present: the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the virtual

enslavement of indentured servants, the abuses suffered by immigrants populations, the widening economic gulf between America's rich and poor, the growing ranks of homeless and hungry, the enduring socioeconomic barriers against women and people of color, and the like" (p. 58).

We must bear in mind that the American Dream is an ideology that blinds us to the realities of our life. Here, in order to put more emphasis on the significance of this issue we rely on Hayes's (1998) statement that: "Reality suggests that today's American Dream has become the residue of media technology, that millions of us tune in for instructions on what to buy, wear, think about, and value—even what we should dream. Indeed, for now, we must take time to examine some current realities before we delve further into dreams" (p. 17). This means that the dream sustains itself in the mind of the individuals by the means of different Ideological State Apparatus including the media and advertisements. To be more precise, the media and advertising, as the tools in the service of the dream, help to promote ideologies like ragged individualism, consumerism and emulation. In its advocacy of individualism, for instance, the dream declares that competition is the best way towards success, yet it is not something progressive but destructive since not everyone is given the equal chance and the success of one means the failure of the rest. Therefore, in a society where competition, in its negative sense, is promoted as a value, it comes to follow the Darwinian rule of the survival of the fittest which implies that one's survival depends only on the annihilation of others. Thus, as Tyson (2006) expresses; "the American Dream is certainly good for capitalistic economics, but it sacrifices the well-being of the many individuals who don't achieve it" (p. 65). The American Dream commands that everyone has equal opportunity to get successful, but the truth is that once one volunteers to pursue the dream one enrolls in an endless competition that merely exhaust the competitors but fills the coffers of the bourgeoisie who conduct the process invisibly.

According to the promise of the American Dream, individualism seems to be total independence bestowed upon the individuals to move in every direction they aspire. Yet, the evidence proves that enslavement under the guise of individualism governs and regulates the actions of the individuals. This so-called individualism is, in fact, controlled through different means such as "Ideological State Apparatus" of which the American Dream is an example. So, Tyson (2006) considers: Rugged individualism [as] an oppressive ideology because it puts self-interest above the needs—and even above the survival—of

other people ... Rugged individualism also gives us the illusion that we make our own decisions without being significantly influenced by ideology of any sort when, in fact, we're all influenced by various ideologies all the time (p. 60). On the other hand, the individuals are allowed to act freely as long as they are subservient to the oppressive power that programs them. Consequently, as soon as they cross the line to turn against the system under which they operate, the alarm rings warning those in power that ideological tools have lost their efficiency; therefore, physical force have to be employed to extinguish the uprising. To put it another way, what is referred to as "Repressive State Apparatus" steps forward to restore the slavery of the subjects. In this respect, signs of this overwhelming force can be traced in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

## DISCUSSION

### Individualism and Free Enterprise

*Glengarry Glen Ross* dramatizes four desperate salesmen who work with a real estate office in Chicago which is supervised by a cold manager, Williamson, who hands them out leads and sends them out to persuade gullible customers to buy worthless land in Florida. The play demonstrates how for these men all human relationships are narrowed down to business transactions and how their lack of morality drives them to commit robbery under the guise of free enterprise. Therefore, as Hayman (1994) represents:

Cleverly and disturbingly, Mamet plays with the idea that the difference between robbery and Chicago salesmanship is only a difference of degree. These hardboiled real-estate salesmen have no moral scruples; and what they are selling has no value—tracts of undeveloped land which cannot be developed. The only commodity that has value—for them—is the "lead," the contact with the potential buyer. Some leads are valueless, the value of the lead depending on the wealth and gullibility of the client. (p. 228)

However, despite their impoverished morality, from the beginning of the play we clearly perceive that the salesmen are under severe pressure more than any other time since half of them are at the verge of failure. This is because Mitch and Murray, the heads of the company, have declared a sales contest according to which the top seller wins a Cadillac, the runner-up wins a set of steak knives and the other two get fired. Nightingale (1994) describes the situation that the salesmen are stuck in: "It happens in and around a real estate office in Chicago, a jungle-

within-a-jungle where the only unalterable law is starkly Darwinism. Sell and survive; fail, and be fired" (p. 331).

The first act of the play consists of three scenes which all occur at a Chinese restaurant. The flamboyant atmosphere of the Chinese restaurant is significant since it ironically represents that the corrupt base of business hides under its delicate surface. The play, in words of Billington (1994), "subtly contrasts the borrowed comfort of the Chinese restaurant, where most of the real work is done, with the tackiness of the sales office which stares out onto a white brick wall" (p. 330). *Glengarry Glen Ross* begins with Shelly Levene, the oldest of the salesmen, trying to convince Williamson to give him premium leads. In fact, it might be odd for the readers, at their first confrontation with the words like lead and sit, to determine what these words actually refer to. Yet, Mamet gradually reveals in the course of the play "that a 'lead' is an appointment with a prospective client, that a 'sit' is the actual confrontation and that the 'board' is the office salesmen's graph charting the four salesmen's relative success" (p. 329). Moreover, it becomes clear that there are two sets of leads which include premium leads that are more likely to win and non-premium or ordinary leads that are almost worthless and most probably fail. As Levene's flattering and then threatening of Williamson come to no conclusion, he grabs at bribing him as a last resort which of course fails since he cannot afford it.

The second scene represents Moss and Aaronow discussing the unfairness of Mitch and Murray towards them after all their honest services for the company. In the following Moss suggests that they should break into the office, steal the leads and sell them to Jerry Graff who directs a rival company. Jon Tuttle explains that: Coveting the power and income of Mitch and Murray, who reap the profits of others' labor (and admiring the savvy of Jerry Graff, who went into business for himself), Moss casts himself in the role of executive and doles out the dirty work of breaking into the office to whoever is desperate enough to be his minion.

It proves that the salesmen not only swindle the gullible clients, but also they cheat on each other whenever they get a chance. Moss cunningly tries to persuade Aaronow to commit the break-in and when he does not give up to his temptation, Moss threatens that Aaronow would be an accomplice, willy-nilly, since he listened to the plot.

In the last scene Roma delivers a confusing monolog to a total stranger, named Lingk, sitting in the next

booth, in order to inveigle him into buying worthless land. Roma philosophizes about the freedom of the individual and creates the illusion that the individual must be a risk-taker. Then, he subtly connects the freedom of the individual, the capability of taking risks and security to buying land. In fact, the scene ending with Roma's uttering: "What is this? This is a piece of land. Listen to what I'm going to tell you now" (*Glengarry*, p. 29), clearly anticipates that Lingk will be duped into buying the worthless property. The verbal dexterity of Richard Roma is quite evident from the way he builds on Emersonian conviction in the power of the individual to achieve his goal which is selling worthless land. According to Brucher(2000):

The spiel is intended to coax and disorient Lingk, to never give him an easy place to intervene or redirect the conversation. It is also redolent of Emerson and the vocabulary of independence and promise . . . Roma's answering call to confidence and action seems to turn "Self-Reliance" against Lingk. "I trust myself", Roma boasts, clearly enjoining Lingk to trust him as a means for trusting himself. (p. 218)

Therefore, Roma subtly distorts the meaning of the individual that Emerson has in mind and equates taking risks with being independent. He pretends that he is totally indifferent to selling land, but implicitly points out that buying the land he offers is the first step to be independent. His statement, however, is inherently paradoxical since whereas he asks Lingk to believe in himself, Roma urges him to put his trust in him and let Roma decide for him.

The second act of the play shows the ransacked office the morning after the break-in. Baylen, a police detective, is present in the office to interrogate the staff. As Roma anxiously enters the office and asks about the stolen contracts, it becomes clear that he has closed the sale to Lingk in the previous act and is now worried about his documents. However, Williamson assures him that his contract has been filed and sent to downtown. Meanwhile, Levene enters the office jubilantly announcing that he has just closed a deal with the Nyborgs. Having been interrogated by the detective, Moss furiously humiliates Levene while Roma applauds his recent success. Then, Roma all of a sudden sees Lingk outside the office and immediately enlists Levene to improvise a show to distract Lingk from cancelling the contract. However, the improvisation fails because Williamson intervenes and assures Lingk that his check has been cashed. Therefore, Lingk escapes the trap and Roma furiously turns at Williamson and warns him that he

owes him a Cadillac. Supporting Roma, Levene inadvertently, through a lapse of tongue, reveals to Williamson that he is the one who ransacked the office. Moreover, the worse comes to the worst when Williamson viciously tells Levene that the deal with the Nyborgs is dead since they are nuts. As Levene leaves to be interrogated by the detective, Roma tells Williamson that he and Levene work together as a team and from that time on he keeps his commissions plus fifty percent of Levene's commissions. The play ends as Roma heads out to the restaurant to hook another gullible customer.

Mamet miraculously plays with words in *Glengarry Glen Ross* in order to create a language which is replete with business jargons that best serves his purpose to expose the brutality of an environment struck by corrupt business inclinations. The play indicates how business is elevated to the level of a sacred ritual under capitalism. When business transactions are all that matter, greed and avarice permeate the life of the salesmen and force them to be always closing through fabricating false stories and deceiving the purchasers of dreams in order to secure their top place on the board and win the Cadillac which is the prize to their survival. The salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* put their faith in the American Dream and as they struggle to push each other away, through selling more pieces of worthless land, they sell themselves to the dream. Thus, in selling not only land, but also their souls, they become self-interested individuals who discard all moral scruples.

The way individuals behave under capitalism illustrates that, entangled in the highly competitive atmosphere which threatens their survival; they are left with no other choice except to privilege self-interest over the failure of others. These self-interested tendencies, according to King (2004), lead to "the fragmentation of modern communities, especially the urban worlds, and the sexism and racism that threatens a fragile social fabric" (p. 94). Thus, the rejection of moral scruples under the pretext that there is no bigger concern than the freedom of the individual not only results in the disruption of all communal bonds and moral behavior, but also ignites unquenched greed among social strata. In this response, King (2004) states that "Mamet the craftsman and philosopher, dares to name the 'crimes' of modern life, that actions have consequences and that while moral boundaries are easily transgressed, personal satisfaction remains evasive, and unpunished crimes lead to a wasteland, not a Utopia" (p. 94). Furthermore, it is very significant to note that although the system encourages the individuals to act independently, not all individuals enjoy the same

degree of freedom. Accordingly, King (2004) illustrates that “while the greedy proprietors of the corrupt real estate firm in *Glengarry Glen Ross* are free to accumulate wealth at the play’s end, protected from petty theft by the law that punishes desperate underlings for criminal behavior, they sit precariously on the top of a crumbling financial pyramid” (p. 94). This indicates that there are privileged individuals. To put it another way, some individuals seem to be more individual than the rest of society. It means that the capitalist system hypocritically announces that all individuals share the same degree of freedom and have the equal chance to get successful while in fact the holders of capital usually escape the law which is supposed to punish the law-breaker. Moreover, what exacerbates the situation is that ragged individualism destroys social morality and promotes a predatory culture in which morality is subordinate to the self-interestedness of each separate individual. Thus:

The failures of American society are most frequently attributed to images of capitalism run amok and the self-congratulatory language of support, which encourages situation ethics and relativistic morality. As long as there are no moral absolutes, no inviolate ten commandments of behavior, each character deludes himself or herself into believing that what is best for one individual is applicable to others. (King, p. 95)

Therefore, as it was explained, each individual defines morality the way that best serves his or her ends in the capitalist society. These ends are most frequently monetary interests which are promoted by capitalism that uproots all moral principles and replaces business ethics instead. Under such a system, in which there is not such a thing as fixed morality, each individual learns to adopt the kind of morality that is in accordance with his or her interests. As a result, it is not morality that checks the behavior of the individual, but greed and the dictates of business transactions that shape and define morality.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross* Mamet dramatizes the real-estate office and its desperate staff as a microcosm which truly stands for a universe peopled by individuals who suffer the predatory nature of the modern era and confront the emptiness of their existence. This predatory nature of life, caused by false competition, disrupts all moral codes and drives each individual to struggle unscrupulously for his or her survival. Therefore, enthralled by the corrupt business ethics, propaganda of the capitalist system which encourages unfettered competition, and of course the need to survive, the members of society are turned into amoral individuals who privilege their

private interests over all other considerations. As Roudane (2004) explains, “the myth of the American Dream clearly alters the salesmen in the play, in part because they subscribe to two principles inherent in the free enterprise system” (p. 335). To make it more clear, Roudane quotes Rosenfield who elucidates what these two principles are:

“Free Enterprise” and the “Free Market” are talismanic words for Americans. Traditionally, they are rationalized by two cardinal principles: that competition is the backbone of democratic capitalism, and that competition prospers best when business judgments are unfettered by government “interference.”(p. 335)

It is precisely because of their conviction in the fairness of unrestricted competition that the salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* behave unscrupulously and justify it as free enterprise. However, despite of feeling a sense of power and freedom, bestowed on them by free enterprise, these characters are not immune from the destructive consequences of this unchecked freedom. Accordingly, although the salesmen of the play struggle hard to achieve success through whatever possible way, they are blind to the fact that self-interest and amoral practice finally bring about their own failure.

The language of *Glengarry Glen Ross* aids the playwright to expose the anxiety and obsession of the salesmen who are in pursuit of free competition as one of the pivots of the American Dream. In fact, Mamet has been often referred to as a playwright who writes realistically. However, the language of *Glengarry Glen Ross* is not strictly realistic more than it is poetic and has been polished to serve theatrical purposes. Hence, to refer to Roudane (2004), “*Glengarry Glen Ross* (1996) may appear flawed with its overused expletives, but when audiences understand Mamet’s aesthetic—that the language functions as a kind of street poetry, a deliberately embellished dialogue—then the acerbity of the language takes on *non-realistic* qualities” (p. 335). This language is employed to indicate the intense frustration of the salesmen who strive to survive in the harshly competitive world of capitalism. These salesmen, for instance, do not exactly imitate the way salesmen speak in the real world; instead, Mamet exaggerates the language and puts obscene words in the mouth of the characters in order to expose their anxiety and desperation, the perversity of the business world and how it corrupts human morality. It is also significant to add that the way each character uses the language in the play, to some extent, gives us vital information about his personality.

As we see in the play, Richard Roma is ahead of the real-estate salesmen in the sales contest. He is the most cunning character in the play and also the youngest of the salesmen. Roma's shrewdness and the dazzling way he talks set him apart from his colleagues. In fact, whereas other salesmen all the time boast of their past successes and being at the verge of failure, their survival only relies on future sales, Roma is at the prime of his career and his name is on the top of the board. Moreover, whereas Moss and Levene easily lose their control and nervously try to close a sale, Roma is quite self-confident and patiently cajoles the prospect customers into buying worthless tracts of land. For instance, unlike Moss who becomes frenetic when Levene passionately talks about his recent success, Roma is quite calm and even congratulates Levene since he does not consider him a serious rival. Roma even admits, although insincerely, that he is indebted to Levene and admires his sales skills after Williamson spoils the improvisation which they make up to discourage James Lingk from renege the contract. In addition, Roma humiliates Williamson because he does not know his job, while he appreciates Levene as a salesman. However, the following lines discloses the real intention of Roma and that he has been actually mesmerizing Levene to take advantage of him. Therefore, as the play comes near the conclusion, we realize that Roma's conviction in unfettered individualism inclines him to abuse both clients and colleagues alike in order to get successful.

Roma's cunning nature is evident from his first appearance in the end of act one when he subtly employs his selling tactics to force Lingk into buying the worthless property he offers. Consequently, had not Lingk's wife insisted on cancelling the deal, he would not have returned to the office to renege the contract and Roma would have wined the game. On the other hand, Roma quickly realizes that the deal he closed is at stake as he sees Lingk entering the office and immediately signs up Levene for an improvisation to make Lingk not cancel the contract and postpone it till the cancellation time, which is three business day, is over. Roma pretends that Levene works with the American Express and he is in a hurry to take him to the airport. He even pretends that he concerns Lingk's fears more than anything else and his friendship with him is something beyond business transactions when he utters:

*Forget the deal, Jimmy. Forget the deal . . . you know me. The deal's dead. Am I talking about the deal? That's over. Please. Let's talk about you. Come on. Come on. Come on, Jim. I want to tell you something. 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. Yes. Now I want to talk to you because you're obviously upset and that concerns me. Now let's go. Right Now. (Glengarry Glen, Ross, 1996, p. 56-7)*

By this Roma tries to persuade Lingk that for him business is subordinate to friendship and that he is concerned to solve the problems Lingk has. In fact, as Roudane (2004) represents, "human compassion, argues Roma, overrules this particular business transaction. Of course, the audience recognizes by this point that *only* business considerations pervade Roma's entire argument. He reduces Lingk's marriage to business venture, a mere legal agreement" (p. 336). Therefore, from Roma's point of view, all human relationships, including friendship and family life, are contracts which are merely made with the purpose to invest one with profit. His belief in self-interestedness is implicitly expressed in his words when he urges Lingk to neglect the responsibilities he has as a member of the family. However, as he almost accomplishes to fool Lingk, Williamson interferes and inadvertently assures Lingk that his check has been cashed which makes him realize that Roma has lied to him and he escapes the trap he is about to fall in.

As Roma's chance with Lingk is over, he focuses on Levene as a new lead and in his absence asks Williamson fifty percent of Levene's commissions as his share when he says: "I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is *mine*, whatever *he* gets, I'm taking half" (Glengarry Glen Ross, 1996, p.66). This indicates that Roma is more ruthless than other salesmen and maybe that is why he is more successful and is on the top of the board. He is not content with his share and he never misses the chance to snatch away what his colleagues earn. However, these salesmen fit each other, by and large, since they are committed to business ethics to the extent that they are free to move in whatever direction they desire and they easily legitimize the transgression of all moral codes. Thus, in words of Roudane (2004), "Roma feels ethically justified and therefore continues to lie and rationalize any word or deed under the guise of healthy competition, of earning his rightful place within the American Dream" (p. 336). In this sense Roma is very reminiscent of a character named Teach in Mamet's another play, *American Buffalo*, who justifies:

We're talking about money for chrissake, huh? We're talking about cards. Friendship is friendship, and a wonderful thing, and I am all for it. I have never said different, and you know me on this point. Okay. But let's just keep it *separate* huh, let's keep the two apart, and maybe we can deal with each other like some human beings. (*Glengarry*, 1996, p. 15)

Thus, for Teach it is only negotiating in business terms that makes one human. He also equates free enterprise with the freedom of the individual "To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit" (*Glengarry*, 1996, p.73). In fact, Roma also shows his dedication to what Teach conceives to be the true meaning of individualism when he advises Lingk:

When you *die* you're going to regret the things you don't do. You think you're *queer* . . . ? I'm going to tell you something: we're *all* queer. You think that you're a *thief*? So *what*? You get befuddled by a middle-class morality . . . ? Get *shut* of it. Shut it out. You cheated on your wife . . . ? You *did* it, *live* with it. You fuck little girls, so *be* it. There's an absolute morality? May *be*. And *then* what? If you *think* there is, then *be* that thing. Bad people go to hell? I don't *think* so. If you think that, act that way. A hell exists on earth? Yes. I won't live in it. That's me. (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, 1996,p.27)

As a result, Roma justifies that there's no scruples and people must not be ashamed of doing things that are considered to be immoral. In the following, he admits that "I do those things that seems correct to me *today*. I trust myself. And if security concerns me, I do that which *today* I think will make me *secure*" (1996, p. 28). Therefore, Roma adheres to the idea that there is no absolute morality and everyone is free to define morality based on his or her needs. Likewise, the other salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* passionately stay loyal to Teach's conviction that there is a difference between friendship and business and if they are to get successful they should not mix up morality with business ethics.

### Althusserian Ideology

An ideology is a belief system and in the nowadays world we live, more than any other time, in the realm of infinite ideologies which most of them tend to drive us to think and see the world in a special way. Each ideology is, in fact, the product of a historical-cultural background which nourishes it. Moreover, all assumptions through which we see and understand the world are ideologies. Therefore, it is natural that people from different historical, cultural, geographical

and theological backgrounds hold very diverse ideologies. However, one must bear it in mind that there is a huge difference between personal ideologies which simply shape one's conception of the world, yet at the same time, do not impose themselves on others as the ideal way of thinking, and those repressive ideologies which pursue some exploitive ends, program the individuals to behave in a certain way and consequently dramatically influence the mass culture. It is actually the mechanics and the function of the later set of ideologies which Althusser is interested in and are compatible with the object of the present study. To be more specific, it is the dominant class that produces the repressive ideologies as a means of power to assist them in controlling the society and preserving their dominance. For this purpose, and if they are to be influential, ideologies disguise themselves as natural ways of seeing the world rather than exposing their true nature as the artifact of those who invent them to fortify their dominance.

When ideologies represent themselves as natural ways of seeing the world, they prevent us from comprehending the repressive situation we are in and the fact that we are exploited in order to benefit the dominant class. Althusser asserts that ideologies create an imaginary relationship to reality. By this, he means that ideologies misrepresent reality, but they do so in such a subtle way that people can not see the condition of their real existence. The imaginary relationship of reality creates an illusion that our place and relationships within a repressive system are completely logical. Therefore, for instance, in words of Ferretter (2006), "if I am in business" it seems natural to "think of my life as a kind of competition, in which I need to be more shrewd, intelligent and hardworking than all the others" (p. 77-8). In fact, ideologies, through misrepresenting the reality of our existence, work as a dam against the realization of the truth that may eventually lead us to revolt against our disastrous circumstance.

There are numerous and less suspected ways through which illusions relate themselves to reality. The American Dream, for instance, as an ideology convinces its subscribers that hard work and persistence are the clues to success and blinds them to the fact that their failure is a result of the inequitable circumstance under capitalism rather than their shiftlessness. The American Dream ascribes the slightest success to the promise of the dream while accuses one's failure as a natural consequence of laziness. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the imaginary comprehension of their situation distracts the salesman to conceive the reality that it is not actually

Williamson who is against them, but those absent tycoons (Mitch and Murray) behind the scene who announce the sales contest and hire Williamson to exploit them. Furthermore, each salesman fantasizes himself to be the would-be winner of the Cadillac, but in reality, as Britzke (2007) states, “the expensive foreign luxury car represent[s] things and places out of reach and beyond the realm of the salesmen” (p. 120). Therefore, these salesmen, who aspire to win and fear to fail at the same time, hardly conceive the flaw of the highly competitive system that bestows success on one only at the expense of the failure of others.

According to Althusser there is a more complex undercurrent at work that does not allow the individuals' imaginary relationship to reality vanish and; therefore, preserves the reproduction of production relations. By the reproduction of production relations Althusser means all those relationships that construct the class society and divide the individuals into either the exploiter or the exploited. Althusser terms this phenomenon the Ideological State Apparatus according to which the imposed ideologies mask themselves as rational ways of thinking and; consequently, make the individuals satisfied to be exploited by the upper class. Althusser explains that there are two sets of apparatuses which function together to preserve the order of the state. These apparatuses consist of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which include literature, the media, the educational system, religion and the family; and the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) which include the police, the army and the courts. With reference to *Glengarry Glen Ross*, for instance, we can observe how the real-estate office, which promotes business ethics and competitive culture, stands for an ISA and references to detective Baylen and Attorney Gen represent the ubiquitous present of the RSA. Furthermore, the impotency of the salesman to overpass the ideologies they are dictated by the real-state office is quite evident in Moss and Aaronow's fear to break the rules when they both acknowledge that they are “just *speaking* about it. As an *idea*.” However, as we see Levene ends up in jail (symbolic RSA) as soon as he puts this idea into practice and dares to transgress the rules and ransack the office (symbolic ISA).

Consumerism is one of the noteworthy ideologies within the capitalist system which is promoted by different ISAs including the media, to name the most influential one. In fact, it is very crucial to note that capitalism is founded on consumerism and the American Dream is closely related to the ideology that advocates the consumption of goods as a sign of

social prestige. Thus, if the capitalist is to guarantee the permanence of the sales market, there is no better solution than to internalize the consumption ideology by the means of different ISAs. Advertising is, for instance, one of the means through which the capitalist system promotes consumerism ideology. This ideology in turn encourages the emulative culture which inculcates that one is respected better if one owns what the rest of society do not possess. Consequently, one must incessantly buy the newest products introduced into the market in order not to remain behind the rest of society. However, this buying process never comes to an end since in a society in which all members keep buying to emulate with each other no one looks more prestigious.

The consumerist culture drives the individuals to work more to earn more money. However, on the other hand, the individuals are encouraged to spend what they have earned on goods. Moreover, the emulative culture even forces the individuals to purchase goods, which they cannot afford at the moment, on credit. Thus, as Clarke(2010) concludes, “the outcome has been the steady rise in borrowing, both secured and unsecured, fuelled in recent years by a more aggressively competitive credit industry eager to corner yet more of the money you have not yet earned” (p. 60). Consequently, being entangled into constant debt, the individuals have to keep working even harder to pay back the money they have borrowed. Furthermore, the purchased goods either become old-fashioned or break down before long.

## CONCLUSION

The American Dream is an ideology among the infinite ideologies that dominate American everyday life. This ideology is an example of a well-constructed ideology since it has survived since the foundation of America and has not withered with the passage of time. It aims at the weak point of the human nature that is a dream of better life. Through highlighting the concept of the American Dream in Mamet's play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, this article was an attempt to expose the ways ideologies connect themselves to our real existence and subvert reality in less suspected ways. These ideologies tend to offer themselves as reality and despite the fact that one can not escape the influence of ideologies entirely, it is on us to learn that there exists nothing as absolute to cling to and that every ideology is susceptible to doubt. Moreover, total subordination to the ideologies that impose themselves on us kills the spirit of creativity, hinders logical thinking and thereby leads to prejudice.



## REFERENCES

- Begley, V. (2004). A poetics for thugs. In L. Kane (Ed.), *The art of crime: The plays and films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet*. New York: Routledge.
- Bigsby, C. (2004). David Mamet. In C. Bigsby (Ed), *The Cambridge companion to David Mamet* (pp. 1-41). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bigsby (2004). David Mamet: All true stories. In H. Bloom (Ed), *Modern Critical Views: David Mamet* (pp 163-202). Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publisher.
- Billington, M. (1994). Mamet turns to the world of salesmen. In L. J. Trudeau (Ed.), *Drama criticism*, vol. 4 (pp. 229-230). Detroit: Gale.
- Brucher, R. (2000). Pernicious nostalgia in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In L. Kane (Ed.), *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross: Text and performance* (pp. 211-225). New York: Garland Publishing Inc.,
- Clarke, M. (2010). *Challenging choices: Ideology, consumerism and policy*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Brietzeke, Z. (2007). *American drama in the age of film*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.
- Dorff, L. (2000). Things (ex) change: The value of money in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In L. Kane (Ed.), *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross: Text and Performance* (pp. 195-209). New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Ferretter, L. (2006). *Louis Althusser*. London: Routledge.
- Harriott, E. (1983). *Images of America: Four contemporary playwrights (Wilson, Shepard, Mamet, Fuller)*. Doctoral Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database.
- Hayes, C. D. (1998). *Beyond the American dream: Lifelong learning and the search for meaning in a postmodern world*. Wasilla, AK: Autodidactic Press.
- Hayman, R. (1994). Following the lead. In L. J. Trudeau (Ed.), *Drama Criticism*, vol. 4 (pp. 328-329). Detroit: Gale.
- Kimbal, K. (2004). Gradation of criminality in the plays of David Mamet. In L. Kane (Ed.), *The art of crime: The plays and films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet* (pp. 95-103). New York: Routledge.
- Klaver, E. (2000). David Mamet, Jean Baudrillard and the performance of America. In L. Kane (Ed.), *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross: Text and performance* (pp. 171-183). New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Mamet, D. (1996). *Glengarry Glen Ross. David Mamet: Plays: 3*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Nightingale, B. (1994). Is Mamet the bard of modern immorality? In L. J. Trudeau (Ed.), *Drama Criticism*, vol. 4, (pp. 331-333). Detroit: Gale.
- Piette, A. (2004). *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In C. Bigsby (Ed), *The Cambridge companion to David Mamet* (p. 74). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roudane, M. (2004). Betrayal and friendship: David Mamet's *American buffalo*. In C. Bigsby (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to David Mamet* (pp. 57-73). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roudane, M. (1994). Public issues, private tensions: David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In L. J. Trudeau (Ed), *Drama Criticism*, vol. 4 (pp. 334-338). Detroit: Gale.
- Stafford, T. J. (2000). Visions of a promised land: David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In L. Kane (Ed.), *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross: Text and performance* (pp. 185-194). New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Routledge.
- Tyson, L. (1994). *Psychological politics of the American dream: The commodification of subjectivity in twentieth-century American literature*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.