CHAPTER ONE

Introduction:

Drama, Language and Communication

The twentieth century pathos has been the pathos of communications. In the last four decades, especially, Western men and women have become obsessed and preoccupied with a breakdown of communications, with their inability to say what they mean and to communicate with others. and with their tragic isolation, loneliness and alienation as the result of their inability to bridge the gap from one intelligence to another. (Weathers 6)

This question of effective communication among human beings has been a major concern of philosophers, writers and humanists alike for centuries. In the present age to which many would like to attribute the term “postmodern” we have seen the development of the most sophisticated and elaborate systems of communication ever designed on earth. In spite of all such conveniences, man is made aware of the appalling yet inevitable silence that surrounds his soul, the lingering darkness that besieges his psyche, which prompts him to suspect that there is no way out, that he is trapped for ever.
This entire phenomenal concern for the need of proper communication 
and the problems arising from the lack of it have effectively become the focus of 
a variety of significant literary works written in the latter half of this century. The 
dehumanizing experiences of the two World Wars have considerably altered the 
sensibility of modern man. Living in "an age of diminishing expectations..." to use 
Christopher Lasch’s phrase, he now anticipates the end of the world which 
may either occur with a "bang" or with a "whimper." Demolishing the very 
foundations of friendship and universal brotherhood the wars have served only 
to alienate one culture from the other, each man from his fellow beings, evoking 
a sense of despair, disillusionment and chaos. All post-war literature has 
emerged out of this perspective of cultural paranoia, abnormality and distortion. 
Hence they reflect or portray a world that has become unfixed, where reality is 
an illusion, where men find themselves at odds with their environment, beliefs, 
heritage, cultural myths, and even their sense of personal identity. George 
Steiner observes:

We come after and that is the nerve of our condition. After the 
unprecedented ruin of human values and hopes by the political 
bestiality of our age... what man has inflicted on man, in very 
recent times has affected the writer’s primary material – the sum
and potential of human behaviour - and presses on the brain with a new darkness. (4)

The two World Wars have generated serious repercussions in America too. Much of the literary works written during the post-World War Two period adumbrates a world gone astray, devoid of hope and redemption. The horrors of the Second World War and the continuing threat of a global nuclear holocaust have convinced man of his powerlessness, as well as the insignificance and meaninglessness of his existence. Bigsby remarks:

The two great flashes over Japan did something to the eyesight and the nerves and spirit of the more civilized, sensitive, thoughtful and humorous people . . . and this change was reflected in literature drama, music, art and politics. (American Drama 3: 4)

Drama, the literary genre that identifies itself as a visual form of art exposes the communication crisis experienced by human beings in a variety of ways, through its subtle combinations of themes and techniques. A closer look at the representative plays written in Europe and America in the latter half of this century will substantiate this point. The genuine purpose behind all serious dramatic works is, as Martin Esslin observes,

. . . to exercise its most powerful and lasting moral impact by reflecting the attitudes of the more advanced groups among the
population, exposing them to public outrage and discussion and thus gradually penetrating the consciousness of a society. This process is one of a continuing circle of feedback: changing views in society reflected in drama, in turn change the moral climate of society and prepare the stage for the next phase of change that will in turn again eventually be reflected in drama and so on.

(The Field of Drama 172)

During his dramatic endeavour the playwright confronts the no less serious task of selection and co-ordination of suitable dramatic devices through which he can examine, highlight and communicate the major issues that come under his focus of attention. This can be explored through action, which constitutes the plot, situations, language and a variety of other dramatic techniques. All these elements of a dramatic performance – the language of the dialogue, the setting, the gestures, costumes, make up and voice inflections of the actors as well as a multitude of signs – each in their own ways contribute to the creation of the meaning of a performance. According to Esslin,

... drama in performance is human life put into a pedestal to be exhibited, looked at, examined and contemplated. And every detail of what is exhibited during the course of a dramatic performance on stage and screen, becomes a sign, a signifier, one of the
multifarious basic ingredients from which, in the mind of each individual spectator, the basic information about what is happening in the drama is perceived and established. (*The Field of Drama* 39)

Being one of the most expressive of art forms, the communicative act in drama is a complex process that involves the subtle mixing up of the various signs and symbols inherent in its system, so as to create meaning-producing elements, during its performance or during the act of reading it as a text. Understanding a dramatic text or a performance demands a knowledge of the interaction of the different signs and sign systems inherent in it. A dramatic piece communicates on two significant levels. First, being a visual form of art, it has to communicate to its spectators or as a readerly text it has to communicate to its readers. This constitutes the external communication system. Secondly there occurs another level of communication between the characters in the play itself, which relate to the development of the plot or action of the play. This forms the internal communication system. Hence there arises the necessity for understanding how such a communication is brought forth, how the dramatic piece formulates, and transmits its messages, what techniques it employs to convey them to the audience, and how the audience can grasp, ingest and understand the meaning of these messages.
Aristotle, in his *Poetics* speaks of six elements of tragic drama, which are applicable to all well-made dramatic forms. The first three which constitute the "means and manner of the mimesis" include diction (Lexis), spectacle (Opsis) and the musical element (Melos). The other three elements concern the objects represented by these means. They are plot (Mythos), character (Ethos) and thought (Dianoia), which form the intellectual content of the play. The individual signs and sign systems like the language of the dialogue, the gestures, setting, costumes, make-up, voice inflections of the actors, silences, pauses and so on will coalesce in order to create the subject or content of the play. The interaction between characters merges into the plot or the theme of the play. Finally out of the interaction of characters and plot, the spectator or reader grasps the idea of what the drama is all about that is, its "ultimate intellectual, ideological and moral meaning" (Esslin, *The Field of Drama* 107)

According to Keir Elam, one of the contemporary formulators of the theory of communication in drama, the encoding and decoding of messages is made possible by the "code", that is the ensemble of rules known to the addressee who assigns a certain content or meaning to a specific signal. In linguistic communication the code allows the speaker and the addressee to form and recognize syntactically correct sequences of phonemes and to assign a semantic content to them. Similarly during a dramatic
performance. "the spectator will interpret the complex of messages or signs like
the speech, gesture, the scenic continuum etc. as an integrated text, according
to the theatrical, dramatic and cultural codes at his disposal" (Elam 38).

Another factor that becomes significant in the communication system of
drama is the role of the dramatic or cultural milieu. This functions primarily as a
matrix for the playwright since it provides a common ground between the
stage and the audience, the common stock of experience which makes
communication and meaning possible. Esslin observes:

The “meaning” or indeed the multitudes of meanings
simultaneously perceived, or sublimally received, by the individual
spectator of the dramatic action will always be the product of the
interaction between the content of the signs it emits themselves,
on the one hand; and the spectator’s competence to decode them.
on the other, and always, necessarily, in the context of his or her
personal situation and the social and historical circumstances in
which he or she finds him/herself. (The Field of Drama 167)

Commenting on the cultural milieu of modern drama Francis Fergusson
points out that “the contemporary cultural picture is complex and fragmented,
without a neat cosmic focus, but even at this juncture it continues to supply
attitudes and ideals that are grist for the dramatist’s mill” (qtd. in Porter12).
Every form of drama draws copiously from the cultural milieu in which it is written. Modern drama, that is, the plays written particularly in the post-Second World War period, mainly springs out of an age of crisis, which in turn affects the very structure and form of the dramatic piece. It becomes an expression or embodiment of the intellectual as well as socio-cultural conflict of the age, and a reflection of the age's convictions, which are examined and evaluated by the playwright. This may sometimes coax the dramatist to subvert traditional structures and introduce new elements into the play's structure. The Aristotelian concept of a well-made play with a beginning, a middle and an end has to be radically revised. The playwrights resort to the ingenious use of certain devices and techniques as well as the imaginative or revolutionary use of language and imagery.

American drama and theatre of the post-Second World War period moulds itself out of the new intellectual moods and attitudes that have emerged in Europe and America after the war. The existential worldview, which gathered momentum in Europe through the writings of Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus, provided a new kind of perceptual mode for the literary artists. This philosophy which placed existence over essence rejected the abstract ideals of traditional moral codes in favour of the concrete experience of an individual's existence. It analysed man's existence in the universe as an alien one accompanied by
anguish and nausea on encountering death and the physicality of earthly objects. The post-Second World War playwrights have also been influenced by the expressionistic movement, which emerged in Europe as a radical revolt against realism in art and literature. The expressionists believe in perceiving and presenting the essentials of things instead of the things themselves. This demands the dissolution of the normal consciousness and elimination of all the naturalistic details and the normal logical transitions between things. Yugendernath observes:

As dramatic art, Expressionism aims at freeing drama from the Aristotelian absolutes and achieving a fluidity of form and expression and simplicity and economy of structure and characterisation. As a theatrical style, expressionism makes every attempt to destroy the representational stage reality and the theatrical illusion and its acting is explorative, unmasking the deeper emotional states through gesture, pantomime and physical action. (38)

In expressionistic works the progression is always from one heightened state of things to another, and this involves a distortion and transformation of normal cognition. The “expressionistic perception and vision concretizes itself in the formation of certain images” adds Yugendernath (38). In Shepard’s theatre
we find the characters experiencing an intense state of consciousness and thereby undergoing sudden transformations. Images are also abundant in his plays.

Antonin Artaud holds a significant position among the proponents of the surrealist aesthetics in drama and theatre. Artaud's revolutionary theories and ideas regarding the language and nature of dramatic performance have considerably influenced the post-Second World War dramatists in formulating their own concepts of drama and theatre. Artaud advocated dispensing with the word in favour of other means of expressing human thoughts and emotions. He was really on the outlook for another language for the theatre which was not so literary, but which would "make use of everything – gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness" (qtd. in Martin 58) in order to get in touch with life. In his theatre, language used is designed to shock by its use of unconventional words. This would make the theatre capable of "exposing the audience to its own secret crimes and obsessions and thereby help it to rediscover the metaphysical, mystical meaning of life" (Martin 58). In his play *The Spirit of Blood*, the phrase "I love you" is delivered in repetition in a non-realistic manner in different rhythms and tones of voice, in order to create an ironic effect. This language when "coupled with the use of screams, shouts, and cries, choking noises, dialects, ventriloquists' voices, the strange placement of pauses
and above all long silences, polyphonies of speaking voices and odd, unexpected sound effects, results in a textual performance which is rich and varied and above all never realistic or predictable" (Martin 60). All these new streams of thought collectively influenced a group of new playwrights of this period in Europe and in America, which channeled their talents towards a form of drama new both in form and subject matter—the absurd drama. It abandoned the traditional notions of a well-defined or developed plot as well as characterization. The absence of plot serves to reinforce the monotony and repetitiveness of time in human affairs. J.L. Styan notes:

The sudden outburst of French absurdism may in part be explained as a nihilistic reaction to the recent atrocities, the gas chambers and nuclear bombs of the war. Theatre of the Absurd revealed the negative side of Sartre's Existentialism and expressed the helplessness and futility of a world, which seemed to have no purpose. (12)

The absurdists thus perceive the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of rational approach and try to express it by the “open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd 24).
The structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss, the Gestalt psychology of Kohler, the cybernetics of Wiener and the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein have radically altered man's understanding of himself and his world. Says Gomez:

Wittgenstein's arguments concerning language have the most immediate repercussion on literature and the use of language in it. Language is no longer taken for granted as a medium of communication. It is seen as being opaque and incapable of faithfully transmitting an individual's vision of reality. (214).

Wittgenstein, it may be pointed out, considered thought to be inseparable from language. This is how R.N. Coe summarises Wittgenstein's arguments on language:

Where is no language . . . there is no thought; and where there is no thought, there is nothing but the massive and unidentified totality of existence. There is All and Nothing. There are words or . . . Silence. (Beckett 39)

Man's profound sense of discontent and disillusionment with life is explored by placing him in a hostile world where he is destined to struggle against blind forces. Human glory, power and life are all found to be transient
and shadowy. Language becomes an absurd structure. There is no way to communicate meaningfully with other human beings, and each one becomes isolated and forever estranged from others. The dislocation of time and space happens to be a permanent condition in the absurd universe. To quote Coe again,

The avant garde theatre has grown to be almost by definition, timeless, a drama of broken watches . . . . The laws of space are equally arbitrary. (Ionesco 54)

Playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov and Jean Genet heralded this new form in France and Harold Pinter popularized it in England. The absurd tradition has left its mark in America too, with Edward Albee and Arthur Kopit as its chief practitioners.

Martin Esslin in the introduction to his famous book The Theatre of the Absurd has remarked on the absurd theatre’s concern with a “critique of language, an attack on fossilized forms of language which have become devoid of meaning” (14). Esslin comments:

The conversation at the party, which at one moment seemed to be an exchange of information about the weather, or new books or the respective health of the participants, is suddenly revealed as an exchange of mere meaningless banalities. The people talking
about the weather had no intention whatever of really exchanging meaningful information on the subject, they were merely using language to fill the emptiness between them, to conceal the fact that they had no desire to tell each other anything at all. . . . From being a noble instrument of genuine communication language has become a kind of ballast filling empty spaces. (14)

Eugene Ionesco has remarked that he experienced a "collapse of reality" in language while writing his play, *Bald Soprano*. He describes a state where "dialogue was reduced to syllables, consonants and vowels, and words [were] turned into sounding shells devoid of meaning". *Notes* 178).

*Bald Soprano* discloses the problematics of language in the act of communication. The conversation between the characters becomes so disconnected and disoriented that it at last is reduced to a mere exchange of letters in the alphabet.

Mrs. Smith: Mice have lice, lice haven’t mice.

Mrs. Martin: Don’t ruche my brooch!

Mr. Martin: Don’t smooch the brooch!

Mr. Smith: Groom the goose, don’t goose the groom.

Mrs. Martin: The goose grooms.
Finally the language breaks down completely and the characters are left shouting at each other.

Mrs. Smith : A e i o u, a e i o u, a e i o u!

Mrs. Martin : B c d f g l m n p r s t v w x z! ("The Bald Soprano" 40-41)

Language thus is reduced to its lowest common denominator, words emptied of content, sounds without meaning. Ionesco's own remarks confirm the barrenness felt by human beings both within and without: "Words had become empty, noisy shells. Without meaning, the characters as well, of course had become psychologically empty. Everything appeared to one in an unfamiliar light, people moving in a timeless time, a spaceless space . . . (qd. in Vos, The Great Pendulum 40). In The Chairs also a similar situation arises when language completely breaks down. The dialogue between the old couple collapses into mere sounds:

Old Man: No... I don't want, I don't wa - a - a - ant.


Old Man: No - o - o .... No - o - o.

Old Woman: Li lon la la, li lon la lay, Orphan - ly.
Orphan - lay, relee - relay, orphan - lirelee - rela.

(482)

For Ionesco, “much of the absurdity in human existence emerges ritualistically from failures in language, communication, motivation, judgement and relationships” (Yugendernath 54). In Ameedee or How to Get Rid of It, the living corpse that has been hidden in the next room grows day by day to a monstrous size, until a giant foot crashes through the door into the stage. This is a symbolic or surreal manifestation of the marital disharmony and lack of communication in the life of Ameedee and Madeline. Ionesco thus tries to create a bewildering experience on the stage, by displaying a series of irrational, often nonsensical, goings on that seem to alter all accepted standards of stage convention. Martin Esslin observes:

... it is often unclear whether the action is meant to represent a dream world of nightmares or real happenings. Within the same scene the action may switch from the nightmarish poetry of high emotions to pure knock about farce or cabaret, and above all, the dialogue tends to get out of hand so that at times the world seem to go counter to the actions of the characters on the stage, to degenerate into lists of words and phrases from a dictionary or traveler’s conversation book, or to get bogged down in endless
repetitions like a phonograph record stuck in one groove.

(“Theatre of the Absurd” 230)

Arthur Adamov, another important playwright of the absurdist tradition, observes how he came to write his first play *La Parodie*:

I began to discover stage scenes in the most commonplace everyday events. [One day I saw] a blind man begging; two girls went by without seeing him, singing: “I closed my eyes; it was marvelous!” This gave me the idea of showing on stage, as crudely and as visibly as possible, the loneliness of man, the absence of communication among human beings. (qtd. in Corrigan 231)

Samuel Beckett’s drama is also characterized by a retreat from the word. from the world of physical, emotional as well as linguistic entrapment. We exist, suggests Beckett, by virtue of our ability to maintain the illusion of communication. Thus Beckett’s characters use words, quite often monosyllables, repetitions, pauses and stichomythic phrases as Gogo and Didi do in *Waiting for Godot*. just to keep the linguistic ball rolling. Beckett makes use of disjunctive language to convey the rhythms of realistic speech patterns. Fragmented utterances accompanied by pauses and silences expose the fundamental incompleteness and disjunction both in the world and in the
individual. The fumbled and fragmented speech from *Krapp's Last Tape* illustrates Krapp's incapability to think in a coherent manner. Krapp, the old man, reviews his life, ponders the decisions he once made when he was young, and assesses his present predicament by means of a tape recorder. He speaks in a thoroughly fragmented manner constantly interrupting both himself and his taped voice.

Krapp: Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago. hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank god that's all done with anyway (pause) the eyes she had! (Broods. realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally). Everything there. everything, all the — (Realizes this is not being recorded, switches on.) Everything that there. everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of . . . (hesitates) . . . the ages! (In a shout) Yes! (pause) Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! Jesus! (pause. Weary) Ah well. may be he was right (pause) May be he was right. (Broods. Realizes. Switches off. Consults envelope.) Pah! (Crumples it and throws it away. Broods. Switches on).
Nothing to say. not a squeak. What’s a year now? The sour
cud and the iron stool (pause). (222)

Edward Albee dominates the American dramatic scene of the sixties.
experimenting with new themes and techniques. Anne Paolucci observes:

. . . he is exploring with the brazenness of the confident innovator,
new areas of human experience with totally new dramatic
means . . . . Experimentation, for Albee, is a slow internal
transformation of the dramatic medium, not an arbitrary exercise
in Expressionism or Freudian Symbolism or stream of
consciousness. Albee represents the first sober attempt to effect a
transformation at the core. He has given arbitrary
experimentation, direction and purpose. (3)

Including Albee in the category of the playwrights of the absurd theatre,
Martin Esslin traces his affinities with Beckett and Pinter. Albee’s first play The
Zoo Story tackles the basic problem of an individual’s inability to establish
genuine contact or communication with his fellow beings. Albee perceives this
as a sort of socio-psychological alienation generated by the defective capitalist
system in America. The individual himself is responsible for the absurdity of his
situation. The Zoo-like separatism felt among human beings is basically due to a
failure or evasion of human interaction.
The American Dream also exposes the debasement of the American society through the deterioration of family bonds. The communication between Mommy and Daddy has long lost its intimacy and affection. They just keep on talking to fill the silence lurking in their emotional relationship.

Mommy : I went to buy a new hat yesterday.

(pause)

I said, I went to buy a new hat yesterday.

Daddy : Oh! Yes – yes.

Mommy : Pay attention.

Daddy : I am paying attention. Mommy.

Mommy : Well, be sure you do.

Daddy : Oh, I am.

Mommy : All right, Daddy! now listen.

Daddy : I am listening, Mommy.

Mommy : You’re sure!

Daddy : Yes – yes. I am sure. I’m all ears. (12-13)

On a close examination of the plays written by the playwrights belonging to Albee’s generation and after, one can detect a growing concern with the problem of communication between human beings. The proponents of the absurd drama attribute this to be the major issue concerning man living in an
absurd universe. Hence in this theatre it manifests as verbal nonsense. It may precisely be the desire of the playwrights to express that human beings have lost their capacity to communicate effectively in a bleak, futile and meaningless world that they are compelled to resort to such verbal nonsense, mimes and gestures, distorted and disjointed phrases with pauses and long silences in between. The theatre of the absurd is more or less a theatre of situations and therefore uses “a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument and discursive speech” (Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd 403).

Sam Shepard and David Mamet, who have been focussed upon in this study, are perhaps two of the most significant and powerful voices of the contemporary dramatic scene in America. They have splendidly incorporated in their works all that have been said by the expressionists, the surrealists and the absurdists.

Sam Shepard grew up in Southern California embracing the car culture, movies, rock 'n' roll and the ersatz spiritualism which sprouted out of the culture of post-Second World War America. In his teens he realized his inclination towards music and jazz which he must have inherited from his father who was an amateur musician, and drummer in a local band. Later when Shepard took to playwrighting, this leaning towards music and rhythm became quite evident in his plays. Oumano observes:
His fractured rhythms composed of speech, bursts of monologue, sudden switch gearings down to quiet loneliness are the subtle indications of the rhythms of our lives. “Words are tools of imagery in motion” he says. His rhythms create the unarticulated meanings. they are the glue that holds together Shepard the playwright, the musician, the artist, the screen writer, the movie star, the cowboy, the family man. They are the bonds that hold us to him. (5-6)

In the early sixties Shepard arrived in New York. His acquaintance with Caffe La Mama. Theatre Geneses and Caffe Cino made him part of the Off-Off Broadway movement in America. Even though he initially tried play acting, he gradually realized his genuine talent for writing plays. The works of Tennessee Williams. Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter have been of considerable help to him in developing his own style and craft. He has thus “painted an inner landscape of his own imaginative response to the personal and social conflict engendered by the culture that has shaped him” (Mottram 159).

Extracting exuberantly from American popular culture, folk lore and folk mythology, Shepard has moulded his own personal mythology which is manifested in his themes, images, and rhythms. Ruby Cohn suggests that
“Shepard enfolds figures of popular culture into more lasting patterns of myth” (185).

David Mamet, a contemporary of Sam Shepard, established himself as an important figure in the modern American dramatic scene with the production of American Buffalo in Chicago and later in New York. Mamet’s plays deal mainly with themes like broken relationships and the failure to form genuine relationships, which ultimately result in a sense of loss, frustration and alienation, the reason for which he traces back to the failure of the American dream of success and the decay of American revolutionary principles and spiritual pieties. The characters he creates live in a world of spiritual sterility and boredom and are sustained by a language with which they distance themselves from one another. In his plays like American Buffalo, The Water Engine, Lake Boat, Mr.Happiness, A Life in the Theatre, Glengarry Glen Ross, the cultural as well as spiritual dimensions of the American success myth are evident.

Mamet has pointed out that

. . . the national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive and succeed. Instead of rising with the masses, one should rise from the masses . . . That American myth, the idea of something out of nothing . . . Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone’s got an equal chance, but only one guy is going to get
to the top . . . one can only succeed at the cost of some one else, which is what a lot of my plays — American Buffalo and Glen Garry Glen Ross are about. (Roudane 74)

Mamet's works exhibit his extraordinary affinity for the sounds, sense and rhythms of the street language. Jack Kroll has described him as "a language playwright" whose "ear is tuned to an American frequency" (Kroll 79). His mind "functions through words — repeating, inverting, clipping phrases, pacing short exchanges with arbitrary 'Yeses' and 'Nos' — woven in to tapestries of lonely people in brief tense scenes" (Cohn 46).

New theatrical devices, new approaches to language, character, plot and construction of plays are essential for the continued vitality of drama and the theatre. These playwrights of the post-absurdist era have at their disposal, a judicious selection of dramatic techniques. They use these techniques freely, separately and in an infinite variety of combinations, together with those bequeathed to them by other dramatic conventions of the past. Thus through subtle modifications and alterations in the signifying system of drama itself, they attempt to "communicate" the problem of communication experienced in the postmodern world. Jacqueline Martin's observations on theatrical language seems relevant in this context:
Theatrical language has undergone radical changes over a very short space of time, as it has explored new ways of writing, ranging from naturalism, through absurdism to the non-verbal utterances of the contemporary theatre. (xiv)

Carol Gelderman uses the term “hyperrealism” to refer to the new kind of realism prevalent in contemporary drama. She traces the noticeable difference between the old and new kind of realism to their use of language and points out:

Because traditional realistic and naturalist plays are written in prose and not poetry people assume that the dialogue is naturalist . . . . But even prose stage speech is not a true equivalent of real-life conversation. An accurate transcription of real-life dialogue would include silences, grunts, yawns, irrelevant remarks references to people unidentified except by name, in short, real conversation is exceedingly undramatic . . . The dialogue in new realistic plays is not a convention; it is real in the sense that it is based on actual speech with all of its repetitions, silences and pauses, the slips in language which reveal ignorance and lack of thought. (Gelderman 359-60)
The plays of Shepard and Mamet seem to make use of similar language patterns, where their characters find it unable to express their emotional turmoil, or to understand how they are being manipulated. Sometimes the characters are even robbed of their ability to speak.

William Demastes in *Beyond Naturalism: A New Realism in American Theatre* discusses Mamet’s use of new realism and remarks that for him, plot, understood with its Aristotelian emphasis on action is almost “dis-integrated” (67). Instead greater stress is given to dialogue and other language gestures because language, more vividly than plot, conveys by its very inability to articulate subjective reality the helpless state of indeterminacy and alienation experienced by the characters of contemporary realist drama.