Chapter II

Hidden Realities

Souls in Search of Harmony

David Mamet's earliest plays are stories of desperate Americans whose egotistic language hides the sense of nothingness that governs their psyche and whose inner spirit strives for the harmony it deeply needs. The linguistic method Mamet adopts in his dramas to portray inner realities is akin to the scientific methods of psychology and the spiritual discernment of Hindu Vedic philosophy. In all of them the manifest realities are only gateways to hidden realities. In Freudian psychoanalysis, dreams are discovered as disguised revelations of inner repressions of the individual psyche; in Jungian psychology, myths and communal rituals are perceived as externalizations of the archetypes of the collective unconscious of humankind; in the Vedic spiritual vision, the objective universe is discerned as the projection of the Cosmic Psyche that is called Atman or the Universal Soul. Both in psychology and in Vedic philosophy, thus, manifested realities are concrete, transformed revelations of internal, hidden realities. David Mamet's plays, in tune with similar principles, are attempts to project the inner realities of the god-forsaken American psyche through a language that conceals them. In his plays, nothing is what it appears to be or is said to be. All the verbal pyrotechnics displayed by the characters are charades that desperately attempt to conceal some inner truth.

The early plays present marginal characters who, lost in a spiritual void, are engaged in a search for truth. Denying themselves the inner reality of the soul which is the source of all truths, they seek to fill their inner vacuum with
fictions. Failing to fulfil the demands of the inner spirit and substituting lies and illusions for truth, they only destroy it. Cut off from the light within, they confront a nihilistic void in which all life seems purposeless and meaningless. This is the existential condition depicted in Mamet's early plays. The five plays of Mamet which this chapter takes up for scrutiny—Lakeboat (1970), The Duck Variations (1972), Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974), Reunion (1976), and Edmond (1982)—sympathetically delineate the tragic destiny of the lie-ridden postwar American civilization that has denied its soul and its faith in God.

**Importance of Religious Faith**

The realization of the importance of religious faith as the means to salvation from the American's inner emptiness is an experience that Mamet consistently seeks to communicate through his plays. Mamet's earliest characters find themselves, like Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot, in a world that is out of joint and drained of meaning, but they reveal their capacity to bring harmony and order into their world with their renewal of religious faith and revival of interpersonal connections. The Sanctity of Marriage, Reunion, A Life in the Theatre (the Lifeboat Scene), and Edmond are some of Mamet's early plays which emphasize the role of religious faith in human life to attain peace.

The hope for the restoration of peace in one’s life, presumably, stemmed from Mamet's own growing religious faith at the time. In an interview Mamet has suggested that it is in the nature of the human soul to live in “religious awe,” and humans cannot do without it. If in the postmodern world humans cannot feel this awe toward a cosmic God, “[they] need to put their religious awe somewhere else, for example on the imperial presidency, or on Princess
Diana. They need some place to their need to be in awe of a demigod” (qtd. in Roudane, ""Interview”). It is the spiritual connections with God that imparts meaning and wisdom to human existence. The void that prevails in American culture is the direct outcome of the people’s denial of the umbilical relationship between the human spirit and God, the spiritual reality of the universe. Therefore, in an interview with John Koch, Mamet deplores the futile attempts of the despiritualized Americans to discover the meaning of the universe that they have lost: "'[Ul occurs to me that the amount of energy that most of us put into denying spiritual content, to our lives while desperately trying to reinvent a meaningful cosmology is vast” (qtd. in Koch).

**Spiritual Issues Underlying Social Issues**

Mamet's central concern in his drama, in the light of the above observations, is as metaphysical as it is ethical. In fact, the two aspects go together in his plays. On the surface, of course, his plays deal with social realities: the dreary life of workmen in a lakeboat; two old men observing duck-life from a park bench; young American singles trying to start a relationship with the opposite sex; a father and his daughter trying to reestablish a parent-child relationship; a middle class business man setting out on a journey in search of pleasure and fulfilment, and so on. But beneath these surface realities there always flows an undercurrent of spiritual and metaphysical realities which need to be perceived in order to seek solutions for the social or ethical issues presented on the surface. Mamet’s plays urge the audiences to penetrate the surface realities by asking the right questions about them, for their salvation lies in their capacity to perceive truths. As Stephen
Moss points out, making the audience face the right questions is David Mamet's supreme concern as an artist.

Above all, he is what all great writers are—a searcher for the real, an exposir of the artificial or corrupt, a truth-teller. The closing words of his pithy and provocative book on acting, *True And False: Heresy And Common Sense For The Actor*, could be taken as an epigraph for his entire literary undertaking: "What is true, what is false, what is finally important? It is not a sign of ignorance not to know the answers. But there is great merit in feeing the questions." (Moss)

From a metaphysical perspective, perhaps the questions Mamet expects his audience to face may be summed up as follows: Can humankind live a sane life denying the life of the human soul? Is God dead simply because man in his arrogance or extreme despair proclaims him so? Can a self-blind society find meaning in a universe from which Divinity and the spiritual values associated with It have been eliminated? Does man truly possess the omnipotence and omniscience he assumes in a godless universe? Is man truly capable of shaping his own destiny by creating his own self-made values independent of divine and natural laws?

The dialogues of Mamet's characters seem to answer these questions with an emphatic "no." Bernie Cary’s apology for the debauched life he has lived in “the fucking jungle out there” (REIJ 24), Bernie Litko’s shameful mention about a woman’s sodomy with her fox terrier in an all-night inn—“A woman blowing a man’s natural. A woman blowing a dog is disgusting” (SPIC 56), Edmond’s proud proclamation of the Nietzschean amoral individualism that denies all values—“This world is a piece of shit. [. . .] There is NO LAW
there is no history . . . there is just now” (ED 71)—all exhibit the “sinkhole of slime and depravity” (to use an apt phrase from Speed-the-Plow) into which the entire American culture has been transformed. Viewed in a historical perspective, this moral crisis has stemmed from the spirit-negating scientific and philosophical theories—the purely materialistic theories of capitalism and communism, the Darwinian theory of evolution, the psychoanalytical theories of instinctual gratification, the existential doctrine of absolute freedom and absolute subjectivity—which have been translated into action in the West during the last century.

The early episodic glimpses of Mamet present a panoramic view of the abysmal moral depravity that overwhelms present-day American culture. They mimic American social realities through the playwright’s “poetic” or creative use of everyday American language—language that meticulously captures the rhythms and resonance of real-life speeches, yet imaginatively invented to suit the author’s dramatic purposes. The audience is expected, not to merely watch the external realities brought haphazardly to the stage, but always to be on the watch for the internal realities—the loss of spiritual and moral values and the psychic disintegration—that drive the characters to speak in a broken, chaotic and profanity-ridden language that images the disconnections in their psyche. The linguistic anarchy of the characters is the means by which the audience is enabled to perceive the mental and moral anarchy of the speakers.

**Dynamism of the Human Spirit**

David Mamet’s unique dramatic achievement is that, even as he presents the apparent chaos and stasis that seems to govern the entire dramatic action, he can portray the progress of a harmonious relationship or a declining one. The
Will of the Spirit is always in dynamic progress in Mamet's plays. It is not a static “situation” but a forward movement that is presented on Mamet's stage. Even when the plot is episodic or devoid of causal connection, this progression is always present. And the audience as well as the critic who misses this ubiquitous character of Mamet's plays must inevitably be alienated from the moral urgency that drives Mamet's art to bring out the crying human need for spiritually fulfilling relationships between men, women, Nature and God. What bring this fulfilment, in Mamet's moral vision, is the exercise of the spiritual will to make moral choices, and effect an inner movement from Lie to Truth.

Remarkably, this progressive character of the dramatic action has been introduced from the earliest plays onwards, the initial stasis giving place to the dynamism of the human soul that, always connects with other souls to make whole.

Mamet's first play, which was publicly produced in 1980 ten years after its creation, was written and produced at the beginning of the author's dramatic career to turn an untruth into truth. When Mamet obtained a position as drama instructor in Goddard College in 1970, one of the requirements was that he should have authored a play for staging. 'The play that the young playwright claimed to have already written—Lakeboat—was in truth written in haste soon after his appointment to make his claim true. Based on Mamet's experiences in a merchant boat, the play at first sight appears to make a naturalistic presentation of the monotonous lives of the crewmen on a lakeboat. With its ostensible lack of conventional theatrical action and with its dialogues replete with low-life obscenities, the play conceals the “first principles” which Mamet
always seeks to employ consciously. Most noteworthy are the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. Us “action”—characters engaged in conversation—covers the period from one afternoon to early morning the next day; it is limited to the single locale of the T Harrison a commercial freighter plying on the Great Lakes; and, despite the absence of causal connection, it centres on the probable misfortunes of one character—the nightcook missing on the lakeboat.

**Spiritual Issues Primary Concern**

However, the surface of the play's action seems so chaotic, purposeless and senseless that it naturally invites the most adverse criticism of Mamet's worth as a playwright. The first impression the play creates is best represented by Frank P. Calabiano's review of it in *World Literature Today* in 1982. Calabiano considers it “an uninteresting play” that presents “no real vision for raising the sights or bettering the plight of the ordinary guy caught, in the wake of the dissolving American dream” (518). In contrast to such unfavourable criticism, Michael Hinden writes in an essay on *Lakeboat* that Mamet's first play, which is “still one of his best, provides the most fully articulated perspective of his altitude toward community” (“Intimate Voices" 38). In Hinden’s view,

Life on board [the Harrison] is repetitive, irritating, boring: yet it is close, providing the men with a substitute family structure. I-Lere in the raw are Mamet’s essential Chicagoans, sharing experiences in close quarters, And here at the margin of the city, on a board hugging the shore, are the makings of a true community” (3f”-39)
These "makings of a true community-'' towards which all the dialogues of Mamet's Chicagoans are directed, are not merely the exhibitions of the longings of a segment of American society; they are verily the ceaseless drives of the human spirit whose inherent nature is to connect and to belong. Since Mamet holds the view that the purpose of the theater is not primarily to deal with social issues but to deal with spiritual issues, it would be proper to consider him a spiritualist rather than a realist. One may venture a reinvestigation of Lakeboat on the premise that if a serious artist sets out to unfold his spiritual vision in his drama, the vision must be present in its germinal form from the beginning of his career.

"There are many things in this world [. . .] the true meaning of which we will never know" (78), says Stan, an "able-bodied seaman" in this play to his coworker Joe. Quite true, "we will never know," the play seems to urge the audience to believe, so long as we are cut off from our spiritual roots. Lakeboat, apparently a montage of the dreary life of eight crewmen on the T. Harrison devoid of any transcendence, lends itself to deeper meanings if one meets Mamet on the plane of his consistent spiritual beliefs. In his essay "Decay: Some Thoughts for Actors" Mamet calls attention to our need to form a relationship to the cosmos for our spiritual fulfilment: "The problems which beset us are an attempt of the universe to, by natural selection, if you will, discover that: one thing which will bring about a state of rest . . ." (WR 113).

"That one thing" Mamet, implies is man's umbilical relationship with the Cosmos, with God. Most notable is the ironic twist he gives to the Darwinian theory of natural selection that was chiefly responsible for severing man's relations with the universe. Mamet's emphasis is on the "selection" done by the "universe." The human species, according to this view, has failed to form a
worthy image of itself and stands drained of its natural powers of the mind to coordinate and synthesize the experiences of life into a whole—into a comprehensive vision. Its survival with all its powers of perception and rational synthesis depends on the restoration of its bonds with its source, God. Thus the central theme that underlies Lakeboat is the psychological fragmentation of human lives that have been disconnected from the universe, with an emphasis on the need for spiritually fulfilling human relations in such a universe.

Fictions Replacing Truths

While depicting on the surface the daily dull routine of the crewmen on the steamer, the play becomes the image of a human universe devoid of meaning and purpose. Metaphysically cut off from a universe that seems drained of meaning, and having imbibed the scientific philosophies that treat the Truth of the universe as fiction, the crewmen have no other alternative than creating, with their misdirected mental energies, fictions that pass for truths. Theirs is a universe where probabilities invented by their mind are the only realities, and where humans, severed from vitally spiritual relationships, speak a language that is out of joint with their intention and meaning. Lakeboat, in brief, seeks to communicate the spiritual chaos of a civilization through a corresponding chaos of language.

The characters indulge in banalities devoid of any connections whatsoever, merely to while away the time that hangs heavily on them amidst their insipid chores on the boat. Casual allusions to razor blades, the alcoholic habits of parents and their own divorces, making sandwiches, loving things Italian, offloading, watching gauges, horseracing and lots more of the disparate “events” that take place on land and aboard the boat fill the conversations of
the characters. At the centre of all these is the boatmates’ preoccupation with
the missing nightook, which unleashes a number of probabilities or tales about
his fate: was his name, first of all, Guigliani, Guiglialli. Guliami. Gulini or
Guiliani? No one is certain. Was lie seduced by a whore and mugged and put in
a hosnital? Was he fired by Skippy for insubordination and supercilious talk?
Was he taken prisoner by the cops for carrying a big revolver at the bar? Did he
miss the boat because his aunt had died? Or simply., as it finally turns out, he
had just overslept? Whatever the “inventions” of the crewmen about the fate of
the missing cook, they reveal the fate of their own lives in which, alienated
from all reality, they trade on mere fantasies to fill their psychic vacuum.

Inner Vulnerabilities Revealed

Non-sequiturs, self-contradictions, inappropriate words, obscenities, and
a tendency to get lost in the clouds in the midst of a conversation reveal the
aphasic vulnerabilities to which the characters’ despiritualized minds have
succumbed. In Scene 15, for instance. Fred discusses “The Cook Story” with
Joe with elaborate fantasies about the missing cook, which cannot be sustained
for long, and which lead to mental obfuscation in no time: "Me was married
once” (65) is very soon contradicted with "Well, he's not married. I know that
much” (67). “I was married once” is contradicted by the realization in the next
line: “I’m still married. To im second wife” (67). Fred cannot even tell for
sure, at first, whether he has ”'kids" or "just one kid.” In Scene 17 Fred and
Stan, arguing over the comparative strengths of their movie stars, make
utterances that are completely at odds with their thoughts or beliefs. When Fred
claims that “Johnny Fast is the .strongest guy in ten years.” Stan differs with
him vehemently: “Only you could make so stupid a statement,” but only to
contradict himself a few lines later with “I agree with you one hundred percent. [. . .] He’s probably the strongest guy I’ve ever seen” (72-73).

Likewise, the illogical conclusions the muddleheaded Fred draws from his own premises make a travesty of deductive reasoning. Thus, when Stan rejects Johnny Fast as "the fucking jaekoff of all time," Fred immediately agrees with him. only to conclude with utterances that disagree with him: "Yeah. I see your point. Stan. I agree with you. The man is not stark. He's no fucking good. Thai's why he didn't take five fucking guys in that bar-room using only one pool cue. I sec your point" (73). At times, when emotionally unbalanced, characters use words that are at variance with their meaning. An example is Stan's defense of Joe's seniority to Fireman as an able-bodied seaman that he “has done more shit in his life than you'll ever forget [for "'remember"] (46). And an overabundance of scatological vocabulary in their verbal exchanges becomes the means by which the characters release their unbearable existential ennui. As Fred remarks about it. “They say 'fuck' in direct proportion to how' bored they are" (52).

Thus, one can see that in Lakeboat Mamet has employed the linguistic strategy that he was to develop distinctly in his later plays. Dramatic “actions,” presented with dialogues characterized by semantic disconnections and disorders, parallel the distortions of desperate human minds out of tune with their own intentions and purposes. Mamet's real purpose in this play, however, does not seem merely to present the stasis of a human situation in which nothing can be done. The law of the universe, as Mamet sees it with a spiritual vision not distorted by an overwhelming sense of absurdity, is not stasis, but dynamism. Man’s ability to make sense of the universe and put order in any temporary chaos in it always rests with him. The possibility always remains so
long as the human spirit is in tune with the Universal Spirit and the laws of the universe.

**A Truthful Relationship**

Mamet’s *Lakeboat*, through its dramatic action, suggests the possibilities of finding peace on earth—tun the basis of the spiritual value of truth. Ostensibly, the play is a series of 28 disconnected vignettes depicting the crews’ humdrum boatlife and their speculations on a missing nighteook. As the play draws towards the end, however, the progression of “events” clearly leads to a soul-to-soul connection between two of the crew members—Joe Litko the senior seaman, and Dale Katzman, the young nighteook who has just replaced the missing one. Notably in the final eight scenes (21- 28), perhaps driven from his unconscious, Mamet constructs the Lie-to-Truth theme that was to pervade his later full-length plays.

The Joe-Dale relationship is unfolded from Scene 21, which is metaphorically titled “The Bridge.” For the first time in the whole play two characters discuss their inner realities rather than, as the other characters do, vacuous probabilities about other people. In the earlier scenes bred, the experienced “able-bodied seaman” has exposed the young Dale only to the fantasies he trades on and his obsession with sex and money. Joe Litko, on the other hand, exhibits to him the benevolent side and spiritual reality of the boat’s crew. What immediately “bridges” Joe and Dale at the very outset is their genuine inter-subjective concern. Their conversations in the scene and the ensuing ones reveal the possibilities of a human relationship based on mutual honesty, trust, care, comfort and support—qualities that are shared, not with
any ulterior motive or self-indulgence, but for their own sake. In brief, theirs is a senorous duet whose harmony is (bunded on their inward spiritual integrity.

Though Joe has been working on the steamer for twenty-three years, he puts on no airs as Fred does earlier in his narration of his teenage sexual adventures. Joe and Dale open their conversation on the implicit principles of good friendship—frankness, readiness to listen and reach out to the other, and respect for the other's views and feelings. As a senior friend, however, Joe initiates the relationship by asking Dale about his school, his future plans and how long he would stay in service on (he steamer. Very quickly the cordial sharing leads the senior member to open out the depths of his heart to Dale: his sense of ageing, his problems with his health, his frustrated boyhood desire to blossom into a ballet dancer; finally, he brings to light the deep anguish, boredom and loneliness of his soul that once drove him to an attempt at suicide with a gun.

The most attractive feature of his revelations to Dale is his commitment to truth in his new relationship. At one point Joe clearly expresses his aversion for lying, especially to a young friend with whom he is sharing the despair of his soul. He falsely lies to Dale, probably due to his geriatric faltering memory, that the gun with which he had tried to kill himself was won "in a poker game." But in a trice he corrects himself: "Aaaaaaali, I fucking bought it off the bumboat in Duluth. Why lie? Forty bucks. A revolver. .32 revolver. Six shots, you know?" (27) [emphasis added].

Dale, for his part, is all com fori and solace for Joe. He gives the support, reassurance and strength that Joe, who is "so fucking sick of being sick," needs: "Just try to think it won't be til ways like this. Joe. It's just a temporary illness, in a day or two or a week it'll all be over. j. . .] Well. You can see a
doctor next time we tie up. [. . .] It's probably nothing serious. Joe. A virus, a little flu, or some inflammation, you know?" (28).

Mamet adroitly brings the truth of their relationship in sharp relief by juxtaposing, back and forth, the hollowness of the preoccupations of the other crew on the *T. Harrison*. In Scene 2.2 Stan is in raptures over the marvellous dexterity exhibited by Jonnie Fast, his cellular idol, in a fight scene in a movie. In the next scene Fred and Fireman, keep fantasizing about the gun which Guigliani, the missing nighteook, had carried with him before getting arrested. And in his discussion with Dale about how a boatmate lost two fingers and got $ 3600 as compensation (Scene 25), Fred betrays his cupidity which puts the gain of huge money above the loss of human limbs.

**Harmony Established**

In the Joe-Dale relationship there is no trace of the deception, exploitation and the all-consuming avarice which characterize the conmen of Mamet’s later plays and films. All that one finds is a spontaneous, emotional relationship founded on truth, and free from shams and illusions. The eight concluding episodes of *Lakeboat* are apparently disconnected; but clearly perceptible through them is a line line of true companionship, that of Joe and Dale, developing in the midst of the lies or illusions that surround it. All the meaningless and purposeless “actions” of the boat’s crew—their fictions and fantasies conveyed by their dialogues and monologues—finally converge into the story of two human souls connecting with each other truthfully. Presumably, the young Mamet’s own unconscious spiritual quest for harmony had been at work as he wrote these scenes. All the fictions prevailing on the lakeboat are dispelled when the real reason for the absence of the nighteook—
that the boy had simply "overslept" and has caught the train to Duluth—conies
to light. That truth about Guigliani lass all the lies on the T. Harrison to rest.
Subjectively, in the last half hour of the boat's trip. Joe has shed his
"ontological weakness" and gained strength. And the play ends with the boat's
soul mates sharing (he peace that a true relationship brings.

_The Duck Variations_

_Rational Inquiry into a Mysterious Universe_

The cadences of loneliness and pain mark the exchanges of the
characters in Mamet's one-act play _The Duck triations_ (1972), but once again
the possibilities of shaping meaning out of a chaotic existence are demonstrated
through the actions on the stage. _The Duck Variations_ presents the existential
ennui experienced by Emil Varec and George Aronovitz, two old men in their
sixties, as they explore and attempt to make sense of an external universe that
puzzles them. The men sit on a park bench facing a lake and engage in a series
of conversations on the eternal struggle of ducks for their survival. What
appear at first glance to be reflections on ducks are gradually unfolded as the
existential strife, in disguise, of the old men.

_Critical Views_

Critics who miss or ignore the philosophical significance of the
exchanges virtually find nothing in the play. In her review of the Shadwell
Society's productions of _The Duck Variations_ and _Sexual Perversity in
Chicago_ in 1999, Laura Davidson remarked:

Unfortunately it was somewhat difficult to surmise any deeper
meaning beyond the fact that nature lives, procreates and dies.
The odd amusing line works, such as the redefinition of the Ancient Greeks; and, certainly, the couple's contrariness is beautifully evoked by Robin Holden and Jon Carroll in their constant, low-level sparring—but on the whole any greater significance eluded me.' (Davidson)

In his essay on David Mamet Steven H. Gale points out how the early productions of the play were appreciated for "the accuracy of Mamet's language and the reality of the play's situation" (9). In his book *David Mamet* Dennis Carroll observes that the two old men are not merely conversing, but each is "exercising [his] will to contact, then away, then back again, in a dynamic bond of friendship" (76). In Bigsby's view, "'The two old men are on the edge of more than a city and a lake; they are faced with their own irrelevance, and their potential cud. Their only source lies in conversation, in the world as they re-create it' (David Maine I 28). If one takes into account, the codgers' obsessive discussion of ducks, one understands that *The Duck Variations* is about the futility of man's attempt to order the universe into a comprehensible form through the intellectual investigation of external phenomena.

**Ducks a Pretext for Discussing Human Condition**

Of the two men, George is the source of much geriatric hilarity in the play. Mis observations on ducks are all based simply on feeble remembrances of what he has read "somewhere." yet he attempts to sound highly philosophical and ascertain (hem as gospel truths. Emil, equally lacking in authentic knowledge about anything, either chimes in with George's views or vehemently refutes them. The one factor common to both is their predominant
ratiocination that turns all their discussions and arguments into metaphorical analyses of human existence. At the very first sight of the ducks passing along before them, their reason relates the phenomena of the birds to human life:

Ducks like to go . . . Where it’s nice . . . Like humans, they don’t like cold . . . There they go . . . They come back . . . They got a leader . . . He dies . . . [Another] duck moves up . . . He is now the leader. It is he who guides them from one home to the next . . . He dies . . . And another duck moves up . . . (79-81)

The exchanges between George and Emil reveal from the beginning that their theme is not ducks but humans. “It’s boring just to think about it” (81). says Emil as he concludes their opening exchange, and gives the audience to understand the real subject of the Variations—man’s anguished, lonely existence in a purposeless universe.

The subsequent Variations, apparently examining the lives of ducks, only extend the investigation of the human condition: the Second Variation is about the timeless battle between the Blue Heron and the ducks which, reduced to its principle, is to be understood in terms of “symbiosis” and the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. The Third Variation discusses the fate of the barnyard ducks kept in captivity, with their wings clipped, which becomes a metaphor for the “vandalism” perpetrated on man, robbing him of his ‘honour”; the fifth Variation, outwardly depicting a heavily polluted stratosphere that afflicts ducks with lung cancer, coughing and sneezing, and runny noses, directly reflects more on the environmental menace to human existence than on the ducks themselves; the Tenth Variation draws attention to the havoc on bio-diversity ant1 The extinction of wildlife on land and sea, which •s both a threat to, and “a crying shame” on, mankind; the theme of the “Law of
life” contemplated in the Twelfth Variation—...that some must die so others can live though a platitude, holds good for both birds and humans; and so is the final Law of Life—the ultimate death of all. (Thirteenth Variation).

Apart from such similarities, the play suggests that ducks and men are related by contrast as well. In the Sixth Variation, for instance, a casual allusion to the instinctual life of ducks provides the basis of a contrast that upsets Emil. George, referring to ducks, attempts to bring out the simplicity of their lives: he is born. He learns his trade: to fly. He hies, he eats, finds a mate, he has young, he flies some more, he dies. A simple, straightforward, easy-to-handle life” (95). If one reduces human life to the basics, only one word—“work”—is needed to replace "fly." But human life is not as simple as that. What is more striking than the superficial similarity is the contrast between humans and ducks in their relation to nature.

A duck, being a part of nature, can be “in tune with nature” and can live or die without remorse or guilt or “other bad feelings” (96). Man, on the other hand, is distinct from the other creatures in that he must live and die in a void, abandoned by and alienated from nature. This existential despair quite upsets Emil: “With your talk of nature and the duck and death. Morbid useless talk. You know, it is a good thing to be perceptive, but you shouldn't let it get in the way” (96). The thought of death terrifies Emil because living is meaningless and painful, and life has lost its direction. The pain of existence is so unbearable that the very thought, of loneliness frustrates him. When George points out the “proven fact” that, the cactus lives alone. Emil quickly rejects the idea: “I don’t want to hear it. If it's false, don’t waste my time and if it's true I don’t want to know.” He only wants to take refuge in the solacing thought that "Nothing that lives can live alone” (99).
Post-war man finds it impossible to connect with the universe because spiritually he has divorced himself from it. “To her fair works did nature link / The human soul that through me ran; / And much it grieved my heart to think / What man has made of man,” William Wordsworth wrote in “Lines Written in Early Spring” in the pre-Darwinian era. His pantheism and belief in the human soul enabled him to perceive the spiritual relationship between him and nature and fostered his conception of a universe of which man is an indivisible and inseparable part. In the post-Darwinian era, having destroyed his soul with absolute faith in “scientific truths,” man stands alienated from the universe. He considers himself only biologically related to previous species, the immediate environment, and the visible phenomena around and above him. But the knowledge of scientific truths never gives him the fulfilment his inner spirit longs for, and he cannot put an end to his quest for truth and meaning in the universe.

Futile Rational Search for Meaning

Mamet’s central concern in The Duck Variations is this human predicament of having to pursue a rational search for meaning and purpose in existence while spiritually cut off from one's metaphysical roots. All the discussions and arguments of George and Emil in the play pivot on this subject: the possibility of finding meaning in human life in relation to a seemingly absurd universe. The play suggests that the possibility lies in humans' acceptance of the worthlessness of reason, their liberation from the mind-boggling maze of scientific facts, and the restoration of a healthy spiritual relationship with both their fellow-beings and the universe.
Intellectual inquiries, by their very process of analysis, comparison and contrast, naturally leave men in uncertainties and lead to disharmony between humans. One instance of this may be cited from the Second Variation, in which George and Emil argue the question of why different species fight with one another for ages. The Darwinian interpretation of what happens in nature is no answer to the further question why it goes on happening. As George says, “Survival of the fittest. The never-ending struggle between heredity and environment. [. . .] Instilled in us all. Who can say to what purpose? [. . .] We do not know” (83). What man’s pure reason is capable of knowing is, as Immanuel Kant said, what tilings appear to be as they pass through man’s senses and his percipient mind, and nothing more than that. Yet the irony is, these very interpretations of appearances or surface realities become the battleground for conflicting ideas and set humans themselves in conflict.

All the intellectual sparring in which George and Emil engage themselves leads to no conclusion. What appears to be, for instance, an earnest inquiry into the purpose for which ducks have beaks (the entire topic of ducks is a pretext for discussing human existence) gradually dwindles into a mockery of such investigation itself: "A purpose and a reason. Even those we, at this time, do not clearly understand. [. . .] It's all got a purpose. The very fact that you are sitting here right now on this bench has got a purpose. And so, by process of elimination, does the bench”” (86). Emil caps all this ‘investigation’ with his inconclusive conclusion that “the law of the universe is a law unto itself.”

All that the old men converse about ducks is gathered from the print media and hearsay accounts. “Did you know what I was reading Somewhere?” is George’s persistent refrain. However, both the codgers argue over each point
as if they were absolute (truths, in a spirit of triumphant self-assertion: “Nobody
knows that better than me” (87); “You are wrong. Nothing else flies” (89);
“No. All my knowledge of nature tells me I must say no” (89). As both men
treat mere probabilities as certainties, they often disagree with each other or
squabble over worthless topics—when ducks learn to fly (88); the difference
between a duck and a pigeon (111); whether human societies are modeled on
“animal friends”; the season when it is legal to shoot ducks (118), and so on.

**Fulfilment in Harmonious Relationship**

*The Duck Variations,* in short, deals with the theme of man's
metaphysical quest for (truth and meaning in the universe. It dramatizes man's
failure to connect with the universe through rational inquiry and analysis.
William Herman rightly points out in his essay “Theatrical Diversity from
Chicago: David Mamet” that the real focus of the play is not on ducks but
somewhere else: “[It] hardly matters that the knowledge of ducks is unreliable.
Truth or falsity are not the issues here [sic] and all the talk about ducks and
associated matters only occasions for dramatic action with other focuses”
(138). Mamet’s chief concern in this play is man’s desperate need to redeem
himself from his metaphysical alienation through emotional synthesis with
fellow humans. It may not be possible for the human spirit to connect
meaningfully with cold, concrete, lifeless apartments in the town or with the
externally fascinating countryside or with the tame animals in the park. But the
possibility always exists to connect with another human being and find an
emotionally fulfilling relationship. This possibility is questionable only if one
persists in the absolute metaphysical deracination that Samuel Beckett and
Eugene Ionesco staged in the 1950s.
C. W. E. Bigsby, in his criticism of Mamet's early plays, finds little space for redemptive action in them precisely because of his emphasis on the absurdism of the early plays. He conceives of George and Emil as men inescapably trapped in an absurd universe '...st as Beckett's Vladimir and Estrogen are, though Mamet "chooses to locate his characters in a recognizable social environment." Unlike the characters in Edward Aibee's *The Zoo Story*, Bigsby remarks, the aged men in *The Duck Variations* are not capable of "abstracting themselves from their situation in order to identify the necessity for change" (*David Mamet* 27). But the keynote of Mamet’s early plays is the successful attempt of alienated characters to always accomplish this “change” at the end. They always connect. themselves in a mutually fulfilling relationship—through harmonious communication.

George and Emil might have argued and quarrelled earlier over several aspects of duck-life and their relations with the world, but the last three Variations reveal that their relationship is one of increasing harmony. The ninth and the tenth Variations portray the two men as self-absorbed with their individual thoughts, or with faltering memories of some animal—"cantaloupe," "mantalope," "palapope"—or with nostalgic memories of clean lawns and happy springtime. The Eleventh Variation as Emil remarks, finds the "grownups squabbling about birds" (112). From the Twelfth Variation onwards this intellectual discord gives way to an emotional concord as their communication itself turns complementary to each other’s thought. Whether their thought is about "wild flying things" caught in storms or about ducks shot dead by hunters, they share one view and arrive at one conclusion:

GEORGE. Ducks. Flying wild.

EMIL. Wild over boundaries.
GEORGE. Lakes, rivers.

...........................................

EMIL. High above unmanned terrain.

GEORGE. Barren

EMIL. Unexplored North Country.

GEORGE. Naked. Strange.

EMIL. Sleeping oil the fly.

GEORGE. Blown by storms.

EMIL. Another countless danger for the duck.

GEORGE. Frost too,

EMIL. Hail.

GEORGE. Uh. (114-115)

William Herman rightly points out that “[the] play takes its effect through the medium of these exchanges” (139). What he describes as the linguistic technique of the whole play is especially true of the communication that reveals their final spiritual harmony:

They finish each other's sentences, helping each other toward satisfying wholeness of thought; they act as a kind of amen chorus for each other, affirming with strings of interwoven yeses the speculations of the other on any given subject; they behave ultimately with immensely moving courtesy toward each other, and even when one is heatedly certain that the other is wrong this attitude prevails. (139)
It is the way the characters harmoniously communicate, as Mamet always says, that “prescribes” their spiritual integration. Discord or concord, it is language that must effect it. In the final Variation. George's views about the ancient Greeks as a “crumbling civilization” that would often have been “out in the Park looking at birds” from dawn to dusk may be arguable; however, in the emotionally stable relationship they have established by their frequent meetings and conversations at the park, it is not the factuality of the view's that is significant. Most vital to their lonely existence is their sense of belonging to the whole—the human race whose old men, like the Greeks, have always sought to make their lives meaningful in this way. Starting from vacuous speculations about an external universe that yields no certainties, George and Emil finally anchor themselves in the palpable truth of a fulfilling human relationship—the only certainty in the universe for them.

**Sexual Perversity in Chicago**

**Singles in Heterosexual Relationships**

The two plays discussed above thus bring out the dynamism of the human spirit making attempts to connect with a fellow being, progressing, and establishing harmony at the end. In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, Mamet's next play written in 1974 (and often produced as a doublebill with *Duck Variations*), the progression in a newly fanned relationship is all the more pronounced, even though it is disrupted and broken by the “perverse” intervention of friends. The play presents four “swinging singles” of Chicago—two men and two women in their twenties—of whom the younger pair attempts to leap out of its homosexual bonding into a natural heterosexual relationship. Bernie Litko, the senior “associate” of Dan Shapiro, is given to a great deal of
fantastic inventions or lies about his sexual exploits with women—a macho
posturing that contradicts his real potentialities for an authentic relationship
with them. Dan acquiesces with his senior mate in his misogynistic tales, yet
feels the natural urge to connect with the opposite sex. He succeeds in forming
a relationship with Deborah Soloman, an illustrator and roommate of
kindergarten teacher Joan Webber. Bernie also attempts to pair off with Joan,
and despite his claims about his success with women, fails. Frightened of
losing their former partners, the senior friends dissuade the younger pair and
break their new relationship.

Absence of Natural Man--Woman Relationships

The play's sexist exterior, in accordance with Mamet's consistent
dramatic technique, conceals its serious moral intent. It consists of thirty four
disconnected episodes which depict, through the characters' monologues and
dialogues, the sexual perversions that pervade contemporary Chicago—
voyeurism, lesbianism, homosexuality, sodomy, sex-related crimes such as
rape and child-abuse and what not. Bernie's speeches, especially, contain loads
of misogynistic and sexist vocabulary that invite virulent critical attacks on the
playwright's intention in the play. However, as Julius Novick pointed out while
reviewing the play in The Village Voice, such “fantastic crudities” are not to be
taken as “the play's statement.” The subtext reveals that it is "a compassionate,
rueful comedy about how difficult it is . . . for men to give themselves to
women, and for women to give themselves to men" (95). In Henry I. Schvey's
view, "the play carries with it, for all its humor, an undercurrent of profound
despair for the ugliness and sterility of what human relationships have become
in our society of quick, casual sex without feeling" (92). Like Novick and
Schvey, Steven Gale too is admirably sensitive the real theme that underlies the coarse language "filled with four-letter words" and "sexual imagery" in the play. According to him, the play is more subtle than a simple plot summary suggests, for the sex is not important per se as it really functions metaphorically to carry the author’s meaning.

[. . .] The relationship between the sexes, Mamet says, is not natural. It may be that this stems from the very setting of modern urban society, something implied in the drama’s title. [. . .] Whatever the reason, male and female bonding have replaced heterosexual relationships and understandings. (Gale 247-48)

The four singles of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*—Bernie, Dan, Joan and Deborah—are victims of a perverted society whose sexual freedom allows all sorts of unnatural sexual practices, interferes with natural man-woman relationships, and in consequence makes stable heterosexual relationships rare if not impossible. Both men in the play yearn to connect with the opposite sex: Bernic attempts to connect with Joan, but (ails; Danny and Deborah succeed for a while, but cannot sustain the relation. External and internal forces drive them to part from each other. Both Bernie and Joan, anxious and frightened of their loneliness if cut off from their companions, dissuade the younger pair and snap their budding relationship. What drives these urban men and women to relapse into homosexual bonding is the crucial question the play seeks to address.

For Mamet a heterosexual relationship, even when it is transient, loveless, frustrating and a failure, is still natural. What deeply disturbs him is the unnatural (and so, “perverse”) homosexuality that pervades the city of
Chicago. Mamet makes subtle distinctions between natural and unnatural sexuality in the Toy Department Scene [42-4^ where Bernie discusses with Dan his experience of perversity as a six-year boy, which has left an indelible impression in his consciousness. While watching cartoons in a moviehouse, a “faggot” grabbed his genital and gave him the shock of his life. This brings Dan to refer to the normal incidents of children “fooling around” with each other’s genitals. Retrospectively, Dan suggests, such childhood acts are explorations of their being, and a vital part of their natural growth. If tampered with by elders and admonished, as Joan does with the toddlers in her school, kids are put to a sense of shame and guilt which lasts long and distorts their natural growth into complete beings.

Dan’s observation is quite true: when kids of the same age explore themselves sexually, they are in a process of learning; and their knowledge of sex, a vital part of their future sexuality, is quite natural. On the contrary, when an elderly ‘fairy,’ who is a stranger in the life of a kid, grabs him in the darkness of a moviehouse, the shock of it and its scar on his tender soul turns him into a pervert. As the Doctor says in Macbeth, “Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles” (Mac.V. i. 66-67). Bernie regretfully traces his homosexuality to his moviehouse experience: “What difference how he grabbed me? I mean lie’s a guy.[. . .] And I’m a guy. [. . .] “You don’t learn right when you’re young, those cocksuckers ruin your life” (43- 44).

Bernie’s boyhood experience has damaged his inner spirit, and as Dan remarks, hampered his growth into "a total Human Being” (45). The distortion in his psychic development has filled him with fear of the opposite sex. His afflicted and diseased mind creates bizarre fictions about women that only reveal his alienation from them. In the opening scene he can only revel in
fantasies about his sexual escapades with a woman in a flak suit, finally leading
the listener Dan to conclude that "[n]obody does it normally any more" (17).
Whatever tall claims he makes, his only meeting with Joan in a singles bar
reveals the hollowness of his swagger about his success with women. He
accosts Joan with a characteristic megalomaniacal macho posture. He lies to
her that he is a meteorologist for TWA where he is constantly faced with the
idea of death; that he learns a lot about life in his profession; and that his life
consists of having to make “split-second decisions. Life or death fucking
decisions” (20).

But Joan is too accustomed to the falsities of men to be taken in by such
postures. Her heart is already stilled by her knowledge of the innumerable sex-
related crimes against women. Probably her own bitter experiences of betrayal
by men have robbed her of all trust in men. She tells Deborah in frustration and
bitterness: “They’re all after only one thing. [. . .] But it’s never the same
thing” (18). Driven by hostile and vindictive feelings, she revenges herself on
the Achilles’ heel of men—t:lu- kind of aggressive masculinity Bernie flaunts
before her. She plainly tells him that she does not find him sexually attractive,
an insolent remark that hurts his male ego tr ;iie quick and plunges him in a
tirade: “that is a fucking rotten thing to say. [. . .] You don’t want to get come
on to, go enroll in a convent. You think I don’t have better things to do? [. . .]
What the fuck do you think society is, just a bunch of rules strung together for
your personal pleasure?” (21). Bernie intends to attract Joan, but his unnatural
behavior only hurts her and repels her. She leaves the singles bar, telling a lie
that she has to attend to her sick little boy at home.
Growth into Total Human Beings Hampered

Mamet leaves clear hints in the course of the play as to why a heterogeneous relationship, however transitory, is possible between Dan and Deb. Dan’s early sexual growth has been quite natural, though his adult sexuality is mere carnality devoid of emotional content. His first approach to Deb, with traits of care and courtesy, helps establish a connection between the two. Deborah, too, has been weaned on the elixir of natural, maternal love. In her lonely moments, sweet childhood memories of her loving mother surface. She remembers how once, mishearing Deborah's wish for a "cookie" as a wish for "hug," the mother gave her a hug. after which the child "didn't want a cookie after all" (58). However, societal forces have stunted their natural development into “total Human Beings.” Only transient realities—the contours and curves of the flesh, the Heeling titillation of sex, physical titivation with cosmetics and shampoos whose large-scale consumption is promoted by print media like Tribune and Cosmopolitan—govern their psyche.

Bernie and Joan do play a significant role in parting the newly formed pair, out they are not wholly responsible for it. Their friends’ influence apart, the young ‘lovers’ themselves cannot establish any lasting relationship, for they build their affair on the shaky foundation of a mere surface reality the body. Danny exhibits an interest only in Joan’s attractive parts (“I love your breasts”); he is keen on his own instinctual gratification, almost considering Joan, as she herself puts it, his "toaster" that should get him hot with lust (57). When Deborah asks him whether he would love her when she is old, he answers, “If you could manage to look eighteen, yes” (51).

Deborah also has little concern for love as a feeling. Verbal expressions of love (“I love you”) are empty words for her. Love itself is mere physical
sensation. “Dan, I love the taste of come. I smell like chlorox. It tastes like the Junior Prom” (40). Her obsession with bodycare products irks Danny, who discovers it after a brief co-habitation with her: “Shampoo is a staple item of your existence. [. . .] You wash yourself too much anyway. [. . .] Pouring derivatives on yourself all day long” (51). An affair of this kind, in which mere physicality predominates, is bound to collapse, as Bernie rightly predicts to his imaginary buddies in Dan’s absence: “But mark my words: one, two more weeks, he’ll do the right thing by the broad. (Pause) And drop her like a fucking hot potato” (46). Joan also declares to Deborah, before the latter moves in with Danny, that their ‘love’ would not last longer than two months (48).

As the friends presage, the new relationship between Dan and Deborah collapses. Socially conditioned only for brief business relations, they can pay scant regard for the spiritual traits of true love: emotional intimacy and compatibility, mutual regard, carc. comfort, trust and appreciation. In other words, their “love” does not endure because it is characterized by lies and fantasies. No wonder, unable to stand Deb’s “emotional violence” and the sleepless nights during their brief co-luubitation, Dan swings back to Bernie, who has never perpetrated such violence on him. Estranged from the reality of fulfilling love, both male companions rejoin only to watch pornographic movies.

**Final Emergence of Truth**

Beneath its deceptive sexist surface, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* is a grim portrayal of the psychic dislocations and emotional tantrums handed down from generation to generation by elders whose concerns are purely carnal and materialistic. Its subtext suggests that a lascivious and loveless generation
bequeaths the succeeding one only despair, violence, and criminality as its legacy. Viewed as a whole, the play, though apparently a disconnected series of vignettes on sexual perversity, is a story of attempts and failures of the country’s youth to enter into healthy heterosexual relationships. In the same strain as *Lakeboat*, earlier, the play begins with Lie and ends with Truth. It opens with Bernie’s lies about the abnormal sexuality of women and his grandiose masculinity, and ends with the truth that the desperate and passive watching of women’s anatomy is all the "destiny" he can forge as a youth. What come out at the end are his enduring fantasies of the opposite sex and his incapacity to form healthy relations with them. The psychic tragedy of Bernie is projected in unmistakable terms as he draws Dan too in the vortex of his illusions and both, cut off from all reality, desperately comment on imaginary women passing in front of them on the beach.

**Emphasis on Natural Relationships**

In short, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* is the tragedy of young American singles who cannot commit themselves to “natural” relationships and can only deplore their inability to connect with the opposite sex. Bringing to the stage the perverse sexual practices in American metropolitan cities, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* stresses the Stoic doctrine of the human need to "live in accordance with nature" in order to make life wholesome and peaceful. Dramatizing the psychic fragmentation of urban singles who are ruined by abnormal sexual relations, Mamet drives home the natural, and hence deep, human need for stable heterosexual relations.
Reunion

Loss of Vital Parent-Child Relationships

In *Reunion*, produced by Mamet’s ensemble group in 1976, the author’s moral vision turns to the dysfunctional American family in which the failure of spouses to commit themselves to honest and steadfast relationships determines the destiny of their progeny. The play deals with the loss of vital parent-child relationships that results when a whole culture embraces the philosophy of amoral individualism and hedonism and when its denizens lead a life of dissipation regardless of its disastrous consequences. Presented in fourteen blackout episodes, this play on the theme of domestic disintegration brings out the miseries of a broken home, which is described as “The most important institution in America” (REU 29). Carol Mindler, twenty four years old, meets her father Bernie Cary in his apartment: on a Sunday afternoon after twenty years of separation. As their conversations alternate between woeful references to their past and present, they unfold a spiritual vacuum that cries for a vital father-daughter relationship that they have missed all along. The play finally brings out the possibilities of a reunion between them formed on the basis of religious faith.

Search for Ontological Connection

The title suggests Carol's yearning to reunite with her father after the failure of her married life. The only child of her divorced parents, she has lived a rootless life since the age of four. She has been given to smoking “too much.” She has seen her mother remarried to “a hell of a man,” and hardly knows what happened to her father. She has earned her livelihood serving as a schoolteacher for a year and a half. She has got married to Gerry Mindler, a
divorcée with two boys twelve and eight years old, presumably to ensure social protection and to fulfil her material needs. She takes good care of herself and looks beautiful. She has a fairly comfortable home, and is hopeful of building another house. She has toured several countries with her husband and by herself. However, for all her material comforts, life with Gerry has been lonely. He is “a lousy fuck,” they have not been "sleeping together much," and the possibility of having kids of her own by this marriage seems remote. Gerry loves Carol, but as man and wife they merely get along. Memories of Bernie have persisted in Carol’s mind all along her life since her childhood. Her unconscious filial wishes drive her to connect with her loveable father at last. Her husband, assisted by the Alcoholics Anonymous, finds Bernie in a restaurant, and Carol seeks her emotional fulfilment in her reunion with her father.

Bernie Cary, fifty-three years old, has led an aimless life with addictions of various sorts. He describes himself as an “Ex-alcoholic, Ex-this, Ex-that” (12), which suggests the debauchery that has characterized the major portion of his life. Alcoholism, chiefly, has led him to lose his driving license, his wife and daughter, and his brother’s family. He has lost his direction since his divorce from his first wife. He has shifted from job to job, taking chances as they fell in his way. Once, while working in a telephone company in the 1950s as lineman, he knocked down a telephone pole as he was driving drunk after a New Year’s party. It was an accident that earned him 90 dollars the next day for repairs from his own Line Supervisor who did not know about the culprit. But a police enquiry soon forced him out of the job. Then he worked in a body shop in San Francisco. Later he worked in American Van Lines handling furniture, and his latest job in a restaurant has been quite satisfactory. His
marriage to his second wife Ruth, by whom he had a son, proved a fiasco, as she "understood" that he was too reckless to mend his ways. He left her and their son, and consoled himself that "these things happen" (19). Now, lonely at fifty-three, lie still feels the need for "companionship" and is thinking of marrying Leslie, his forty-year old coworker who "was married once." In short, his life has been reckless and rather callous to the fate of his wife and children. By presenting a host of such details Mamet brings out the gravity of the moral chaos into which American families have degenerated.

Reunion at the End

The moral action of the play is presented in the final scene. Bernie, who realizes that feelings must be communicated through actions, presents Carol with a bracelet before they go out for dinner. The inscription on it contains a numerical error, but on a token of love that is insignificant. "It’s the thought that counts," Bernie remarks aptly. Every word Either and daughter speak in the scene breathes an air of harmony. The play ends with the suggestion that Carol, at twenty four, has regained her father whom she lost at four. Their reunion is the culmination of a heartfelt, communication throughout the play. “It is fitting,” Steven Gale writes in his review, “that the time of the play is early March, the beginning of the season of renewal, for the relationship between father and daughter has been reestablished" (Gale 216).

The title Mamet has given to the play is quite appropriate in view of the ending. But strangely, C. W. E. Bigsby considers that there is hardly any real reunion in the play. In his critique of the play he writes:

This is a union only in the sense that they re-encounter one another. The intimate relationship of father and daughter is no
longer recoverable; they come together out of simple need. [. . .]
Time has opened a gulf between them which seems unbridgeable;
they are strangers trying to recreate a relationship they fear, for it
tells them of their own decline (David Mamet 36).

About the final scene Bigsby further remarks:

“Though the play ends with an apparent reconciliation, that union
seems no more likely to transform them than the suggestion that
they should visit a church and renew a faith they never had. A
reunion implies a former union; of that there is scant evidence”
(David Mamet 39).

Bigsby finds the action of the play so nihilistic because he misses the
moments of intimacy Bernie and his child have enjoyed together for four years
until their separation. Bernie nostalgically recalls their weekly visits to the
Science Museum and the memorable moments of family photographs (REU
19). Carol also cherishes the memories of Bernie as “Tonto, the Indian”—“the
handsomest man” she had ever seen in her childhood and recalls a very
personal secret between them which she has carefully kept to herself (24-25).
Carol is driven to seek a reunion precisely because she is intensely alive to the
intimate moments of her impressionable childhood which she has missed in her
later life. Bigsby’s observation that “there is scant evidence” for a former union
ignores not only the strong filial bonds these early impressions create but also
the possibilities Mamet invariably suggests in his plays for forming and
renewing relationships. “Contact ripening into communion is the salvation that
Mamet hints at,” Dennis Carroll has remarked (David Mamet 21). That general
observation, made on Mamet’s early plays, is most applicable to Reunion. It is
Carol’s will to connect—with faith in the possibility of a reunion—that sends
her husband in search of her father. With their hearty exchanges of the events of twenty years, they re-establish a communion rather than a mere connection.

**Role of Religious Faith**

One may hope that this "reunion" will be lasting since, characteristically, Mamet relates it with Carol's faith in God. After witnessing as well as suffering the transient and fickle relationships in her life and around her, she has grown in her sense of the reality of God, who is the symbol of constancy and permanence. She feels that the rapidly increasing disintegration of human relationships is in direct proportion to humanity’s alienation from God. “Nobody goes to church anymore,” she says wistfully, in a few moments of her re-encounter with her father.

Bernie’s attitude to religious faith is different from his daughter’s. His assertion that he has never gone to church since he was a kid suggests the reason why American families in general, and his own family in particular, have turned into amoral wrecks. His is a generation that has totally lost faith in God. The atrocities of the Second World War in which he had been a machine gunner and the loss of religious faith he shared with millions in the post-war world have instilled in him a sense of nihilism. Bernie has ultimately adopted the philosophy of "absolute subjectivity which is powerfully satirized by Mamet later in Edmond. It is the nihilistic philosophy that in "the fucking jungle out there"—the post-war world in which all social, political and moral systems and standards have been subverted and rendered meaningless—man is the maker of his destiny. He says he has chosen his own rules of living “because nobody’s going to learn [i.e., teach] them for you. You wanna drink? Go drink. You wanna do (his? Pay the price. Always the price. Whatever it is”
This “I don’t care” attitude has governed Bernie’s life for twenty years (“1950, 1970”) since he broke with his family. He does not realize that the price he has paid for his egoistic indulgence is rather heavy. He does not regret the disaster he has wrought upon his child by leaving her in the lurch.

**Hedonism and Debauchery Deplored**

It is Carol who, towards the end of the play, brings her father round to realize his folly. As a victim of divorced parents, Carol can hardly acquiesce in Bernie’s self-exaltation about his uninhibited way of life. When Bernie exults in his hedonistic lifestyle—“I am what I am and that’s what happiness comes from. [. . .] And the way you’re brought up, though all very well and good . . . is not basically my life. | [. . .] I hope it brings you a lot of happiness”—Carol cannot tolerate her father’s self-justification of his irresponsibility. She tells him plainly not to be “silly” (26). She has suffered too much to live a life cut off from the sources of her life...her parents at home and God in the universe. She feels the need to recover her spiritual roots precisely because she believes it will help form stable familial relationships. She urges her father to reconnect with the God of his ancestors so that they could themselves remain constantly connected as humans. “We should both go / Renew our faith.” she tells Bernie at the very beginning of her reunion (7). That is the way to turn a mere contact, or contract, or connection, into a covenant. It is Carol’s faith. Such emphasis on the need for religious faith to augment one’s sense of belonging to a larger sphere of relationships—familial or racial—is the hallmark of Mamet’s one-act plays such as *The Sanctity of Marriage, The Disappearance of the Jews* and *Jolly*. Such allusions to faith are significant in Mamet’s oeuvre because, as his
dramatic art matures, his creations take on metaphysical dimensions and seek to explore man's relationship to God and the universe.

Edmond

A Human in Search of Truth

*Edmond* (1982) is a play in which Mamet’s metaphysical concerns—with the questions it raises about the mysteries of life and the existence of supernatural realities—blend unobtrusively into the harsh social realities depicted on the surface. At first sight, only the surface reality draws our utmost attention, and its metaphysics mystifies us. Ever since the play was produced, critics have focused on its bleak portrayal of the New York underworld. Robert Brustein wrote in *Reimagining American Theatre* that “*Edmond* is a remarkably cruel play—ruthless, remorseless and unremittingly ugly. [. . .] He has pushed our faces into a world which most of us spend our waking hours trying to avoid, finding a kind of redemption in the bleakest, most severe alternatives” (“Edmond” 51-52). The play’s metaphysics, Brustein observed, was “primitive [and] oddly affecting” (5 1). Reviewing the play in the *Georgia Review*, Gerald Weales wrote that “its view of contemporary society is darker, more savage than anything else Mamet has written” and that “[the] playwright’s concern is with the ways in which we become part of our destructive surroundings” (“American Theatre Watch: 1982-83” 604). About the final scene he remarked that he could find “nothing but irony. [. . .] both in its coziness and its anchorless philosophical discussion of Hell and Heaven” (605).

The “unremitting ugliness” of urban life is certainly prominent in *Edmond*, and the play owes this feature, as Mamet has acknowledged, to Georg
Buchner's Woyzeck and especially to Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy. However, the playwright has also said that the main thrust of the play is spiritual rather than social: "There are moments of real beauty in the play, and I think that rather than being about violence, it’s a play about someone searching for the truth, for (rod, for release” (qtd. in “David Mamet Puts a Dark New Urban Drama on Stage”). He pointed out that the play was about the sacrilege committed by a soulless society by renouncing all faith in God and morality: Edmond presents the tragic view of a man who doesn’t think faith exists. He is committing the modern New York heresy of denying the life of the soul” (qtd. in “David Mamet Puts a Dark New Urban Drama on Stage”).

To possess faith, in Mamet’s artistic vision, is to be organically and ontologically related to God, the Soul of the universe. Once man is cut off from his metaphysical roots in God, he is lost. He becomes an abandoned and anxious being, and his actions become unethical, capricious, self-centred and self-destructive. In Edmond Mamet dramatizes the ultimate self-realization of a thirty-four year middieclass businessman who finds his marital life frustrating and leaves his wife in order to find himself. Devoid of religious faith and saturated with materialistic and hedonistic values, he embarks upon an existential journey in the squalid streets of New York in search of "release” and fulfilment, only to end up in prison after killing a waitress in a fit of wild fury and despair. The sense of fearlessness and peace that Edmond feels in prison, after his black cellmate forces him to perform an act of fellatio, makes him ponder the forces that have shaped his destiny.
man and His Destiny

The metaphysical vision Edmond attempts to present to the audience is diametrically opposed to the absolutely humanistic vision embedded in the doctrine of atheistic existentialism propounded by Jean Paul Sartre. The philosophical discussion that concludes the play is not “anchorless” as Gerald Weales has remarked. To see its connection with the whole play, one needs to examine Edmond’s fatalistic “philosophy” in juxtaposition to the philosophy of absolute individualism, in his lecture Existentialism and Humanism (1945).

Sartre posited the cornerstone of his doctrine that “existence precedes essence,” i.e., man first of all exists, and with his given freedom chooses what he is to be, his “essence.” There are no values that determine him; it is he that determines values and makes his destiny—not for himself alone, but for the entire “human universe. This is how Sartre explicates “existential humanism”:

Man is all the time outside of himself; it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist, and on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist. Since man is thus self-surpassing, and grasps objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. [. . .] This is humanism, because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; [it is] shvays by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realize himself as truly human. (55-56)

Mamet’s Edmond seriously questions whether “there is no other universe except the human universe.” It brings out the limitations of a reductive
philosophical vision that seeks to "grasp objects" only in relation to human "self-surpassing" and fails to see human existence in relation to the total organism of the universe that include: both the objective and the subjective universes. Phenomenologists like Husserl and Heidegger, who posit that all external objects (phenomena) can have their existence only in human consciousness through the mind’s perceptive faculties, reject the objective universe as non-existent. The essential character of the phenomenological vision is that there is no objectivity. Subjectivity is the only truth. This "ontological difference" between "beings" (objective universe devoid of consciousness) and "being" (human consciousness with percipient activity) constitutes the basis of Heidegger’s phenomenology. Man alone, in Heidegger’s phenomenological vision, actively perceives all phenomena and makes them exist in his consciousness. Sartre translates this vision of man into a doctrine of action in human affairs. Man, divorced from the objective universe that has nothing to do with the "human universe," becomes the chooser of his own destiny. "Man is what, he wills"; he is “nothing else but that which he makes of himself,” Sartre asserts (28). On the contrary, "you can’t control what you make of your life [. . .] There is a destiny that shapes our ends," says the eponymous hero in Mamet’s Edmond, after a series of adventures in the sleazy city of New York (100). The play illustrates how Edmond naturally arrives at this fatalistic philosophy.

In the brief opening scene a Fortune Teller "predicts" Edmond's destiny in very general terms—how fatalists often see, in retrospect, the “signs" that have led them to their final predestined position. She talks about the general condition of uncertainty and anxiety with which modern existence is beleaguered: “The world seems to be crumbling around us. You look and
wonder if what you perceive is accurate. And you are unsure what your place is. To what extent you are cause and to what an effect” (16). If one studies her words closely, there is no “prediction” about Edmond's future at all, but only a statement of the state of her client’s mind as she reads it. on his anxiety-ridden face. She seems to be a confidence-trickster like John in Mamet’s 1985 play *The Shawl*, yet her prediction takes effect. Her ambiguous words drive Edmond to take his “fatal” decision. In the next scene the audience is given to understand that the sexually and spiritually frustrated man has decided “long ago” to leave his incompatible wife. The bickering about a broken lamp that occurs as soon as he enters the house becomes the pretext for leaving her for good—into the depraved streets of New York in search of self-fulfilment.

**Keynote at the Beginning**

“To have the end buried at the beginning [. . .] is the utmost accomplishment of drama,” Mamet says in *3 Uses of the Knife*, revealing how consciously and meticulously he constructs his plays (37). The scene in which he is engaged in a conversation with “Man” after deserting his wife exemplifies Mamet’s architectonic expertise. Adroitly employing the expressionistic technique, Mamet brings out the inner urges that have driven the protagonist out of home and toward his destiny. “Man” in this scene is only the inner mind of Edmond externalized, as we can see from his remarks on what makes a man ‘Teel like a man”: the aggressiveness of a fearsome “nigger” and the sexual urge that must find its “release” (25). This is what Edmond too presumes to be the marks of true masculinity---an identity which he has lost, he regrets, on account of societal sophistication (the way “we’re bred”) and “too much pressure” of work. “Man’s” suggestions about the ways in which a male needs
I seek his liberation are just the drives within Edmond that seek fulfilment:

-What are the things to do? What are the tilings anyone does? [. . .] Pussy . . . money [. . .] adventure [. . .] destruction [. . .] religion [. . .]

release (23-24). Remarkably, Mamet “buries” the entire spiritual odyssey of Edmond up to its destination in this brief outline of Man regarding the needs of a "masculine" man. Edmond starts from "pussy" (peep-shows and "health-clubs"), goes through the streets looking for quick "money" (Three Card Monte), seeks to establish "power" (over Glenna), "destroys" himself (ending up in prison) and finally finds his peace in "religion" (faith in destiny and God). The scenes that follow are perfectly sequenced, leading the protagonist toward his final sense of destiny.

Frustrations in New York Underworld

The bar, the peep-show, and the "health club" (brothel) that Edmond visits in search of sexual gratification only serve to initiate in him a deepening sense of frustration. Despite his delusions about masculinity, he is presented as a naive and honest businessman who wants to have his money’s worth wherever he goes. What he finds, on the other hand, is pervasive rapacity and deception. All his "transactions" for instinctual gratification in the peep-shows and whorehouses only end up in despair. His attempt to make quick money by playing Three Card Monte ends up in violence when, losing the game and sensing deception, Edmond demands checking the cards anti both Sharper and Shill answer him by raining blows on him. Torn and battered, and having lost his wallet, he goes to a hotel where the desk clerk is impatient of listening to any talk about credit card. The clerk is too callous to even answer a simple question Edmond puts to him. which drives the victim desperate: “Do you want
Are you blind'? Would you appreciate if if I acted this way to you?’” (51).

At the pawnshop where he pledges his ring he chances upon a "survival knife" mind buys it despite its high cost. The Cardplayers attack on him is alive in his mind and the need to protect himself from violent gangs seems vital to him.

All the deceptions, violence, and humiliations to which he has been subjected now make him touchy, aggressive and violent. Mis harmless remark about a woman’s hat at the subway—“my mother had a hat like that”—again meets with total indifference on the woman’s part. As she starts to leave the place in (ear and mistrust, and perhaps contempt, of men, his male ego is hurt. Grabbing her, he flares at her: “I’m talking to you . . . What am I? A stone? [... ,] You cunt. . . what am I? A dog? I’d like to slash your lucking face . .

(58). Edmond’s verbal threat to “slash” the woman at this point reveals the psychic tendency he has just developed toward using the instrument he has bought, and might actually use at the next opportunity. The woman, terrified by his tirade, shrieks for help, and breaks free of him. Edmond is chagrined at the paranoia that grips the entire town making even a casual communication between men and women impossible. Me is annoyed that, despite working hard all his life, he can get only humiliation as his reward. “Is everybody in this town insane?” he cries, and the torrent of invectives that he directs at the entire society signifies the insanity coming over him (59). He gives vent to his pent-up fury when, in the next scene, lie enters into a bargain with a black pimp for sex with a woman, and the pimp attempts to rob him of his money with a knife at his neck. Edmond cannot tolerate being victimized anymore. He impulsively turns on the pimp, and, throwing him to the ground, madly kicks at him and spits on him, venting his racial and elitist hatred of the “coon.”
Passion for Mastery

Edmond's physical victory over the black pimp—a member of a race he has scorned and feared all his life—transforms him immensely, as it is evidenced in the subsequent scenes. The two scenes that portray his brief relationship with Glenna are the most crucial ones in the play. The play’s climax occurs when the complete psychic change he undergoes in these scenes leads to the killing that determines his destiny. Referring to the influence of Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* on him, Mamet once said: “I’ve read that book 10 times since I was a little kid, and it's always struck me what a great achievement it would be if I could one day write a scene to make people understand why someone killed somebody” (qtd. in “David Mamet Puts a Dark New Urban Drama on Stage”). The scene in which Edmond completely loses control over himself and kills the waitress can be considered Mamet’s “great achievement.” It is riddled with ironies, and raises the single all-important question of the play—Is man the chooser, the maker and the master of his destiny? The circumstances that lead to the climax need to be scrutinized to comprehend this central issue.

In Edmond’s first encounter with Glenna at the coffeehouse we hear nothing less than the Nietzschean philosophy of the “Superman.” The omnipotent Superman in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is contemptuous of the “slave morality” of conventional society and wants to substitute it with the new “master morality” characterized by the human will to power and by absolute freedom of choice. Edmond, breaking himself free of the forces he has feared so far, wants to realize his full potentialities as a man. The conquest of the black pimp has given him this sense of liberation. He feels himself newly born and fully “alive.” In his elation he turns into the Nietzschean Superman that
cannot tolerate any social or religious system that enslaves him. At the coffeehouse he tells Gienna that humans are "alive" just "two minutes out of the year" (66). He can easily explain, with his newfound vision, why Gienna cannot sit with him during her working hours—she is too meek to question the law that enslaves her. He is all out to break away from the societal upbringing that has virtually "killed" him: "We've bred the life out of ourselves. And we Live in a fog. We live in a dream. Our life is a school house, and we're dead" (67). Mamet's dramatization of this self-liberated man at this point is pungently satirical. Edmond's diatribe against the life-denying society gradually turns into an affirmation of his need "to live," which he wants to fulfil by sex with Gienna that night. Mamet powerfully brings out the degradation Edmond is undergoing as a self-liberated man, by contrasting him with the well-bred man of propriety that he had been earlier. In the "health-club," when he needed sex with a whore, Edmond employed the polite language of good breeding: "I’d like to have intercourse with you" (42). In the coffeehouse, as a "free man," he feels too free to observe any decency to a Working woman. With his newly acquired sense of masculine master), he can now tell Gienna. quite brashly: 'I want to fuck you. (Pause.) It’s as simple as that’" (67). Edmond's sexual affair with the waitress liberates the "man" in him further. He exults in this release. He proudly narrates how, despite what lie had been taught to "Hinders! and" abot il the rugged blacks...their superior muscular strength, their ruthless criminality and their daredevil attitude to life—he spoke back" to the pimp and exhibited his own masculine power: "I. wanted to MIL him. (Pause.) In that moment thirty years of prejudice came out of me [• • •] for the first time I saw: THEY'RE PEOPLE TOO’" (69-70). Edmond now passionately feels that if he must surpass himself and gain mastery over the
world he has to break out of the 'slave morality' and (he life-denying traditions that have enslaved and enfeebled him all these years. With the megalomaniacal assumptions of omniscience and omnipotence characteristic of Mamet’s tragic protagonists, he urges the waitress to join him in his new world of liberation: “Glenna. This world is a piece of shit. [. . .] There is NO LAW . . . there is no history . . . there is just, now . . . and if there is a god he may love the weak. Glenna[j. . .] but he respects the strong [. . .] And if you are a man you should be feared” (71).

The ensuing conversation reveals Edmond’s passion for gaining mastery over the waitress, and the latter's profound concern for self-respect and for her aspirations in the Theatre where she feels (here is “nothing to hound you but your soul” (72). Edmond's passion for “commanding respect” seeks control over the waitress, whereas Glenna’s passion for freedom resists all control over her. Here are two ‘free’ beings, then, whose passions run along antithetical lines. Edmond finds that Glenna is not a professional actress but has only acted in some scenes “in class or workshop” (74). He considers her only as a waitress, and insists on Glenna too calling herself so. This is a scene, where Mamet presents the commonest fundamental conflict between men and women in society that causes irreparable' damage to their relationships. It is a situation in which one being's will to power is set in conflict with another’s will to freedom. This is the ontological conflict that leads to the final violence of the scene. When Edmond insists that Glenna should say "I am a waitress" (75), she senses it as an onslaught on the integrity of her total being. A man who has slept with her for a night cannot choose what she should choose to say or do. As Edmond's domineering attitude toward her mounts, she gets nervous, and the “liberated” man cannot even allow her the freedom to take her pills for
relief. He knocks them off her hand, and really makes himself “feared.” The rude act scares her, and she hursts out in a crescendo: “Get out. GET OUT GET OUT! LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!!! WHAT DID I DO. PLEDGE MY LIFE TO YOU? I LET YOU FUCK ME. GO AWAY” (77).

Edmond cannot tolerate this offence to his newly developed megalomania. In words that ring with irony, Edmond reveals the literal madness rapidly gripping his being. He feels that the “rare” opportunity of a relationship with a beautiful woman is slipping away from him: “You know what madness is?” he asks her twice, and taunts her for her “self-indulgence,” blissfully oblivious of his own attitude towards Gienna that is driving him to madness (77). As Gienna shrieks for help in consternation, Edmond, himself possessed by uncontrollable forces within him, still attempts to possess the cowering woman like a devil. Gienna utters her last words only with such a ghastly vision of him: “you are the devil. I know who you are. I know what you want me to do. j . . . | get away from me Em good’ (78). Edmond stabs her with his survival knife in extreme desperation, like a devil “possessed.”

**Destiny-Driven**

The rest of the play depicts the rapid downhill journey of Edmond towards his final destiny and the protagonist's powerlessness in the face of the forces outside of him. The choice of destiny is not in man’s hands. Edmond certainly has not killed Gienna by choice but by an absolute reversal of his earnest intentions. The consequences of this deed also absolutely leave him no choice. Edmond has earlier rejected all law, history and the god who loves the weak as “shit,” but his late is determined by these very forces that he denied. Lie goes to “testify” before a Preacher in a church and absolve himself of his
sin, but “the god of the weak” wills it otherwise. Before he enters the church
"history" confronts him as the Woman in the Subway, who falsely charges him
with a rape attempt: and "law" sweeps on him on her evidence and on the
evidence of the knife with which he killed “the girl.” Despite his frantic
attempts to escape the grip of law by telling one lie after another, ultimately lie
has no choice but to tell all the I ruth and succumb to these objective realities.

Arrested and shut up in an all-male prison, Edmond's soul ruminates
over all the circumstances in which he was consistently prevented from
fulfilling anything of his choice, Now he feels he is where he "belongs," and all
his anxieties are gone. Philosophically he contemplates that, perhaps. "Every
fear hides a wish"(89). His meaning, as we derive it from the circumstances of
the play, is this: all beings of different hues, habits and characteristics whom
the society teaches people to “scorn and fear" are really beings that are desired
in a soul-to-soul relationship. To understand this realization of Edmond we
need to recall the intense hatred with which he kicks and spits on the black
pimp calling such names as cunt, coon, cocksucker and so on. These are the
ways in which human societies with ideas divided on the bases of sex, class,
color and race have imposed a jaundiced vision of a human as a total being. In
his narration of the attack on the pimp to (.Henna, Edmond describes how his
consciousness had been colored by the leaching of society and by the way he
had been “bred” to look and shudder at the blacks: “Eh? That’s what Em fitted
to do. Ei a mess of intellectuality to wet my pants while this coon cuts my dick
off. • • eh? Because I’m taught to hale" (69). Only in the moment of reacting as
a whole man (“Something spoke to me") instinctively and devoid of
‘intellectuality’ did Edmond see the blacks as “people too.”
The Ultimate Peace: A Vision of Destiny

Once he has reached his life's destination in prison, Edmond feels it strange that his fears and anxieties have come to an end and he is at peace with his fate. He attributes this to the presence of the black prisoner who is his only mate in the cell. He expresses the view that in all justice the "white people should be in prison" (90) for the cruel treatment meted out to these (black) people. Society might, have taught the white people to hate them and shrink away from them, but Edmond, in his present state of peace, wishes "to be with the black people." With this wish fulfilled, lie proclaims: “In my whole adult, life I don’t feel fearful since I came in here” (90). The African American Student Union, an Otterbein student: group who viewed this play, deeply regretted that Edmond discovers his own spirituality finally at. the cost of “a positive representation” of their community. The truth is, as he spiritually evolves and his “unconscious” is unfettered, Edmond is free of all discriminations against their community. Their artistic director Dennis Romer was right when he said: “We believe strongly that the play also contains a journey of individual redemption and a spiritual awakening that includes . . . the subsequent shedding of past narrow-minded belief systems” (qtd. in Grossbcrg). Henry I. Schvey also expressed a similar view in his essay "Power Plays: David Mamet’s Theatre of Manipulation”:

Inherent in Edmond's downward spiral through the circles of hell that is New York City is an internal quest to be part of a human community which counsels only sexual abuse to women, fear of homosexuals, and racial hatred. In the final scene of the play, having fallen about as far as a man can, Mamet's Everyman finally begins to discern a meaning in life beyond violence and
agaression. It is at this point of self-discovery that, real existence begins" (102).

The act of fellatio Edmond is forced to perform on his black cellmate is come under heavy fire precisely because critics take the act too literally. Admittedly, it is a rather crude way of suggesting a moral at the play's end. But viewed as metaphor, this is the retribution Nemesis inflicts on Edmond the Nietzschean white man for his hubris—by transforming the "master" into a "slave." The black prisoner stands for all that Edmond has hated and feared all his life. The homosexual, the "coon," the black race, the asocial criminal—all converge and are condensed in this one prisoner. The prisoner's sexual "mastery" over Edmond "the man," by turning him into a cocksucker, only signifies the annihilation of the white man's prejudice and hubris. Edmond might have considered himself socially and racially superior to the blacks in the society that psychologically conditioned him, but in the closed society of the criminals' cell the worst humiliation has to be taken lying down. The victim cannot even complain about this because the prison authorities themselves admit it: "that happens" (04). With all his hide experiences releasing his soul the final perception of the protagonist is bound to be metaphysical: "You can't control what you make of your life" (100). And this leads to the further perception that echoes the vision of divinity in Shakespeare's Hamlet. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (Ant. 5.2.1 O').

The play ends with the two prisoners rambling on man's relations with an incomprehensible universe. All their missings centre on one theme: the inadequacy of the power of human perception in understanding the meaning of the universe. There are more ways in which the Presence of something beyond being (in the Heideggerian sense) is felt—as "memories" or "intuitions" in
children, birds and animals. The objective universe with its inner realities will be a mystery forever, and it cannot be dispensed with by a purely subjective philosophy. The final perception of man's "essence," as Edmond's "existence" bears evidence, could perhaps be that of an ever-living God governing the objective and human universe alike, "[t]here are more things in heaven and earth," as Hamlet, tells Horatio. "[t]han are dreamt of in [subjective] philosophy" (Ham. 1.5.166-67).

**Summing-Up**

A comprehensive view of Mamet's early "glimpses of humanity" reveals that the author's artistic purpose is to give his audience an insight into the inner realities that are concealed by the play's exterior—realities that constantly struggle to surface. The journey to the interior often includes, as Mamet's artistic vision widens, a recognition of the mysteries of the universe that, defy rational comprehension. In the final analysis, the episodic plays are demonstrations of the unconscious human quest for self-knowledge. As Henry I. Schvey observes,

> without ever preaching to his audience, or losing their power to move us. Mamet's plays are highly articulate expressions of an attack on the materialistic values of American society. Yet the vision they present is never wholly dark, but it is either illuminated by the pursuit of self-knowledge or by the extraordinary "wisdom" with which his characters cloak their empty, banal lives. ("Power Plays" 106)

In *Lakeboat*, the first play Mamet staged, the author portrays the spiritual anguish of the crewmen on a merchant mariner suffering from loneliness and
boredom only to underscore their true inner longing—their quest for community. In the next play, *The Duck Variations*, he starts to explore the existential predicament of two old men who unconsciously desire to be connected to an objective universe that is always out of the reach of human reason. *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* powerfully delineates the paranoiac fear, distrust and hostility between the sexes that result in unnatural and frustrating sexual relations. Mamet deplores the absence of a metaphysical vision among American youth by depicting their frustration over “the highest man can wish for” in this prurient, society—the girl-watch that is their “destiny” (73). *Reunion*, along with its curtain-raiser *Dark Pony*, emphasizes the need for faith and the saving grace of God for the continuance of healthy familial relations. In *Edmond* Mamet directly plunges into an investigation of the potentialities of man to “control what he makes of his life” and comes out with the moral vision that man's attempt at mastery over the world with his free will is nullified in the face of an invincible fate.

In all these one-acters, Mamet's linguistic technique is congruent with his realistic vision of the American society out of joint. The brevity of the scenes in each play is suggestive of the transience of the relationships among the characters. The language of his characters, with its pauses, syntactic distortions, fragmented lines, ellipses, tautology and misused words, reflects the aphasia, paranoia, bored on) and the profound sense of the meaninglessness of life experienced by them. The characters, despite their attempts to overthrow each other with their shifting positions of power, invariably succeed in forming a close albeit transient interpersonal relationship as their only means available to make sense of the absurdity of their existence.
The episodes in these plays (with the exception of *Edmond*) are loosely structured and lack a causal connection, yet there is always a subtext that flows beneath the external action of the plays. Beneath the swagger and charades of the protagonists lies the truth about their desperate spiritual condition—an inner void which they endeavour to fill by exercising their will toward harmony and by establishing meaningful, fulfilling interrelationships. With *Edmond* Mamet's artistry marked a transition towards “classically structured plays” which presented the destiny of a single protagonist through a sequence of causally-connected events. The choice of the classical structure was quite congruent with the progression of the dramatic action toward the final affirmation of Truth, which was to be the motif of his subsequent plays. The ensuing chapter will study how Mamet's classically structured plays, conforming to Aristotelian principles of tragedy, not only accentuate the progressive action that was becoming the hallmark of his plays but also present the conflicts between the protagonist and the antagonist—the True and the False—as forming the basis of his moral vision.