CHAPTER FOUR

Language: The Tool for Manipulation

Language, which is a complex system of signs, comprises a variety of cadences, tones, linguistic components, meanings and purposes. In drama, language performs such significant functions as strengthening or weakening character relationships, conveying rational, verbal and non-verbal message units and enhancing the audience's grasp of the stage actions unfolding before them. Essential literary and linguistic techniques adopted by the dramatists serve to heighten the dimensions of language used in drama.

The emergence of various literary and artistic movements like realism, naturalism, symbolism, expressionsim, surrealism, absurdism and the like have considerably affected the nature of the dramatic language. The latter half of the twentieth century has witnessed a greater emphasis on the non-verbal aspects of the theatre. Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski have all dealt in important ways with the nonverbal. "Artaud seemed almost to do away with language entirely," observes P.N. Campbell (438).

With the emergence of naturalism in the theatre the earlier style of declamatory acting started losing relevance. Naturalism attempted to show
people using speech on stage, as they would do in real life. Strindberg in his preface to *Miss Julie* explains:

I have avoided the symmetrical, mathematically-constructed dialogue of the type favoured in France and have allowed their (the characters') minds to work irregularly, as people's do in real life, when in conversation, no subject is fully exhausted, but one mind discovers in another a cog which it has a chance to engage. (qtd. in Martin 28)

The Theatre of the Absurd, generally criticised as being anti-literary, questions the efficacy of language as an effective medium of communication, in a universe which itself is absurd. The Absurdists believe that in the absurd universe language becomes an absurd structure. There is no way to communicate meaningfully with other human beings and each one becomes isolated and forever alienated from others. Quite often language is reduced to meaningless patter and nonsense. Martin Esslin comments on the absurd theatre:

A theatre of situation as against a theatre of events in sequence, and therefore it uses a language based on patterns of concrete images rather than argument or discursive speech and since it is trying to present a sense of being, it can neither investigate nor
solve problems of conduct or morals. *(Theatre of the Absurd*

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In certain post-modern plays speech has no function except to show its failure as a medium of communication. In the performances of Robert Wilson, everyone plays his own "word games," talking past each other in nonsense language. The works of Heiner Miller and Richard Foreman, likewise, make use of text fragments. The playwrights of the post Second World War era have altered their vocabulary and even the linguistic structure to meet the need of the times. For a dramatist keen on communicating the atrocities and brutalities of the War and the accompanying sense of entrapment and disorientation a conventional language is unfit and inadequate. He is compelled to choose an elliptical, hesitant, dissonant and disruptive linguistic structure. As Leslie Kane puts it.

. . . Counter pointing non eloquent speech with the silent response of expectation, helplessness, immobility and menace, the dramatist responds to alienation and isolation, to vulnerability and mortality, to survival and complicity, to bestiality and culpability, to metaphysical absolute and the relativity of historical fact. (103)

Samuel Beckett's experimentations with form, content, language and silence in drama have greatly influenced the playwrights belonging to the
generation of Shepard and Mamet. Beckett's drama is characterized by features that are central to the writers of this generation. These include a "retreat from the word, physical, emotional and linguistic entrapment, stasis as dramatic structure, evocation of evanescence, the motif of waiting, and the centrality of time" (qtd. in Kane 108). According to Esslin, language in Beckett's plays serves to "express the breakdown, the disintegration of language" (Theatre of the Absurd 86). In most of Beckett's plays the dramatic tension derives from the interdependence of speech and silence. Indirect, disjunctive speech that expresses imperceptible fluctuations, both within the mind of the speaker and between speakers has been used by Beckett to convey emotional stress, exhaustion, disorientation and doubt. Beckett, remarks Kane, "exploits halting and groping speech pattern to reflect detachment both within the character and between characters" (113). For example, Winnie's fragmented speech punctuated with pauses in Happy Days exposes the anxiety and isolation that she experiences even in Willie's presence. Quite often her questions are left unanswered by him.

Word fail. there are times when even they fail. [Turning a little towards Willie]. Is that not so, Willie? [pause. Turning a little further]. Is not that so, Willie that even words fail. at times? [pause.
Back front]. What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done . . . (147).

While Beckett demonstrates the inadequacy of language as a means of communication. Harold Pinter, his British counterpart, however denies any failure of communication in his plays and claims to deal with the “deliberate evasion of communication by people” (“Writing for the Theatre” 15). In his plays, quite often the characters speak minimally amid frequent pauses, and therefore their language is dominated by unanswered questions that lead to repeated questions, awkward pauses, silences and repetitions. Quite frequently they try to conceal their thoughts by relying on colloquialisms, professional jargons and convoluted word patterns. This sort of disjunctive speech pattern reflects the mind and emotions of the speaker. “Words become barriers between the very persons they are meant to join together. They stand between persons and become part of the hard, disarranged furniture making our passage through the world more difficult” (Killinger 102). Pinter has commented on the ulterior motives that speech has in his plays: “When true silence falls, we are still left with echo, but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness” (“Writing for the Theatre” 15). Stressing the significance of silence in his plays, Pinter remarks:
We communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and ... what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempt to keep ourselves to ourselves. (qtd. in Kane 132)

Pinter has also identified two distinct forms of silence employed in his plays:

There are two silences. One is when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished, or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. ("Between the Lines" 25)

It is this "silence" of the second kind that Mamet too has explored in The Woods, a play that portrays the complexity of man-woman relationships. Mamet has remarked that "it is a play about heterosexual love, one which raises the question, 'why don't men and women get along?' It is "about the yearning to commit yourself to become less deracinated or more racinated" (qtd. in Gussow, "The Daring Visions" 13).

Nick and Ruth, the young lovers have decided to spend a few days together in an isolated house in the woods. Their love for one another is an assumed fact, but gradually the tensions and apprehensions lurking behind their
relationship begin to get revealed through their language. Ruth’s language deliberately assumes a poetic search for details, and evokes the feeling that she is unnecessarily stretching her conversation. Nick quite often responds in monosyllables or at the most in a line at a time. This stylistic dissonance exposes the diversity in the needs and expectations of the two lovers. Ruth’s talk, with her over- concern with details, and Nick’s obsession with precision seem to imply some trauma, some sense of emptiness and fear, that has to be concealed with words. Ruth’s careless spilling of language interspersed with pauses is an effort to hide the “silence” that has crept into their relationship:

Ruth: You could live up here. Why not?

(Pause)

People could.

You could live right out in the country.

I slept so good yesterday.

All the crickets. You know?

With the rhythm.

You wait.

And you hear it.

Chirp.

Chirp chirp.
Not "chirping".

(Pause).

Not "chirping" really.

Birds chirp.

Birds chirp. don't they Nick?

Birds?

Nick: Crickets too. I think.

Ruth: Yes?

Nick (to self): "I heard crickets chirp".

"The crickets chirped".

(Aloud) Yes.

Ruth: I thought so. What do frogs do?

Nick: They croak.

(Pause).

Ruth: I listened. All night long. They get soft at dawn.

.....

who knows what's happening?

Down by the Lake there is a rotten boat.

A big green row boat.

It might be from here to here.
It’s rotten and the back is gone, but I’ll bet it was pretty big.

I sat in it.

Inside the front was pointed up. It smelled real dry.

I mooshed around and this is how it sounded on the sand.

Swssshh. Chhhsssssh. Swwwssshhh. *(The Woods 3-4)*

Ruth’s growing alarm is revealed through her language, and through her practice of constantly changing the topic of conversation. She speaks of birds that will abandon their habitats, of bears deprived of their lairs, about a decayed boat by a lake and about women who have been left behind by mariners and adventurers. Throughout the play, Mamer examines how language which itself is a means of communication asserts or aggravates the feeling of alienation and non-communication.

Mamer is seriously concerned with the powers of the verbal medium in drama. He believes that the teachings of Stanislavski helped him to understand certain crucial aspects of language and that his exposure to them has deeply influenced his writings. Acknowledging his debt to Stanislavski, Mamer states:

My main emphasis . . . is on the rhythm of language — the way action and rhythm are identical. Our rhythms describe our action; no, our rhythms prescribe our actions. I am fascinated by the way, the way the language we use, its rhythms, actually determines the
way we behave rather than the other way around. (qtd. in Dean 16).

Robert Storey holds the opinion that “Mamet’s characters, . . . are their language: they exist insofar as – and to the extent that – their language allows them to exist” (3). For Mamet, observes Bigsby, “Action is character; action is also a language whose rhythms, tonalities, intensities and silences generate and reveal crucial anxieties” (*David Mamet* 13 -14). According to Lahr, through the “hilarious brutal sludge of his characters’ speech, Mamet makes us hear exhaustion and panic” (qtd. in Dean 15).

“If the response to the void for most of modern drama is silence, for Shepard’s characters it is talking as a way of coping with emotional stress”, says Marranca (“Alphabetical Shepard” 22). Ren Frutkin also holds a similar opinion regarding Shepard’s use of the verbal elements in the theatre:

Shepard is engaged in a project of theatrically rescuing the imagination from total theatricalization . . . . He has brought the word back into a theatre where, since the canonization of Artaud, the world and all that it implies – literary, literature, imaginative connection has been silted up with nonverbal sensory overloads. (Frutkin 110).
Shepard is keenly aware of the infinite potentialities of language and its functions in drama. He observes:

Language . . . seems to be the only ingredient . . . that retains the potential of making leaps into the unknown . . . Language can explode from the tiniest impulse. If I'm right inside the character in the moment I can catch what he smells, sees, feels, and touches. In a sudden flash, he opens his eyes and the words follow. In these lightning like eruptions, words are not thought. they're felt. They cut through space and make perfect sense, without having to hesitate for the "meaning". ("Language, Visualization" 217).

The dramatic pieces of Mamet and Shepard are superb demonstrations of their concern with language and with what can be achieved through its careful manipulation. The reason for their using a debased and attenuated language is mainly to expose the iniquitous social system and dramatise the injustices inherent in the contemporary urban, American society. Their characters are drawn mainly from the working class or from those who live on the fringes of society, the outcasts, the misfits and the petty criminals. Their plays thus become highly articulate vituperations on the materialistic values of American society.
Both Shepard and Mamet have brought forth a unique interaction between word and non-word in their plays. At times inarticulate voices become more expressive than any available form of articulate speech. Inarticulate speech is probably linked psychologically with the energies sometimes released by the breakdown or loss of communication experienced by human beings. Look, for example, how in Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, the character Lucky’s mental breakdown is revealed through the breakdown of his language, that is, through the breakdown of communication itself. The total lack of interaction between speakers is expressed through fast flowing fragments of speech that never interlock.

Lucky: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside sime without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athamibia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda . . . (42-43).

Lucky here “shouts” his text uninterruptedly, totally forgetting where to stop and where to begin the sentences.
The real trouble with language and communication is quite often the misuse of it, the social abuse of it, the indecorous use of it. As Emerson has elsewhere remarked, “the corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language” (qtd. in Weathers 24). There are many instances in our day-to-day life of language getting so thoroughly manipulated to the extent that it loses its warmth and tenderness and transforms itself into a weapon of violence and exertion of power. The playwrights under study work out the manipulation of language through the use of a variety of linguistic strategies. Both Shepard and Mamel share with their predecessors Beckett and Albee and their British counterpart Pinter, an inclination towards the use of the elliptical, incomplete, fragmented linguistic structure, interspersed with pauses, silences, repetitions and monological speeches. The repetitive use of gaps in the dialogues of their plays reinforces an impression of incompleteness, emptiness, isolation and failure of communication. These “gaps” intimate that more is left unstated than is confessed. The problem of communication becomes a matter of serious concern in the plays of Mamel and Shepard who through their subtle handling of the issues raised by the manifestation of power, and its use and misuse in human interaction, interrogate how it interrupts as well as hinders the process of effective communication between individuals belonging to a group or society.
The politics of power and its tragic consequences in the social existence of individuals are discussed with grave concern in Shepard's play *The Tooth of Crime*. The trauma of old age and the fear of death confronted by the senior citizens of the society often tend to alienate them from the hub of social activity. In their efforts to catch up with the lifestyles of the highly competitive society, their life becomes a consistent struggle for survival. This is what equally torments Shepard's Hoss, the aging rock-n-roll star (*The Tooth of Crime*), and Dodge (*The Buried Child*) and Mamet's elderly salesmen (*Glengarry Glen Ross*), Robert (*A Life in the Theatre*) and Emil and George (*Duck Variations*). In *The Tooth of Crime* Shepard exposes this confrontation between generations with all its bitterness and tragic gravity. The play unfolds itself in the form of a rock-n-roll tragedy where the characters fight for power, usurp other's territory, steal their turf and stake their claims. Their language often becomes a signal of danger and of mysterious energies of power.

In the world of pop bricolage each individual speaks in his own private code or ideolect and builds up his own linguistic island separated from that of everyone else. At one level *The Tooth of Crime*, through its abundant use of music and rock rhythms mingled with colours and flash lights, appears to be a "carnivalesque celebration of pop culture" (Wilcox 562). But behind this magnificent exterior are the dark realms of the play whose "black thrusts of
desire and power” carve out a “grim narrative of struggle and displacement . . . whose consonants act directly on the body, penetrating and bruising it” (Wilcox 562).

Hoss, an Elvis Presley rock-n-roll star, once young and energetic, “a fast gun” who drew his materials from the rich tradition of the blues, is now “stuck” with his image and has become a “fucking industry.” “In the premature twilight of his fame he needs a fix before each move, a narcotic raising of his act, an artificial spur to performance” (Orr. Tragicomedy 119). He is surrounded by his old time funkies, friends and a woman named Becky Lou who constantly keeps watch on the ups and downs in his career. Like a gunfighter out of the Old West, young upstarts are stalking Hoss. His position as a rock star is being threatened by a “Gypsy mark” that operates outside the code that provided a grounded set of values for the performers of Hoss’s generation. The aging star laments the passing of an era:

There’s no sense of tradition in the game no more. There’s no game. It’s back just to how it was. Rolling night clubs. Strip joints. Bustin’ up poker games. Zip guns in the junk yard. Rock fights. Dirt clods, bustin’ windows. Vandals juvies, West Side Story, can’t they see where they’re goin’! Without a code it’s just crime. No art
involved. No technique, finesse. No sense of mastery. The touch is gone. *(The Tooth of Crime 218)*

The First Act opens with Hoss’s song where he defines himself as a cold-blooded professional hit man. Constantly threatened by the fear of being usurped from his glory, Hoss tries hard to keep up his fading status. His songs abound with images of blood and violence. His words, harsh and assertive, are in fact defensive mechanisms that his mind constantly puts forth to overcome the latent fear of aging and being dispossessed. Hoss is surrounded by his admirers who strive hard to keep him on the track. He too assumes a kind of false courage:

I’m a cold killer Mama – I got blood
on my jeans
I got a scorpion star hanging over me.
I got snakes in my pockets and a razor
In my boot.
You better watch it don’t get you – it’s faster’n
You can shoot
Now watch me slide into power glide super
Charged down the line
There ain’t no way for you to hide from the killer’s eye.
My silver studs, my black kid gloves make you
Cry inside
But there ain’t no way for you to hide from the latter’s eye. (211)
Hoss constantly endeavours to evade his own fears by putting on an aggressive and formidable disposition:

I need a kill, I haven’t had a kill for months now. You know what that’s like. I gotta kill. It’s my whole life. If I don’t kill. I get crazy. I start eating away at myself. It’s not good. I was born to kill. (208)

Hoss either refers to himself as a killer or alludes to making a kill, or threats to kill a particular person no less than thirty four times during the First Act alone. He has even earned the right to sit on “that evil looking black chair with silver studs,” the symbol of power that dominates the stage.

Surrounded by his entourage, Hoss still feels his power ebbing away. Becky Lou the woman can no longer convince him of his manhood. Galatic Jack the D.J. can no longer assure him that the charts are in his favour. Even the doctor cannot completely cure him of his ailments but can only shoot him up at regular intervals.

Hoss is concerned about the changes that have overtaken the music industry, which in a sense are threatening to ruin his own career. A gifted genuine artist of the old school of rock and roll, Hoss’s style is his own, moulded out of the experiences and emotions that have shaped his being. The new generation is corrupt and fails to adhere to a common code or tradition. This
itself has resulted in the loss of mutual communication and interdependence between the young and elderly musicians. Hoss observes with pain:

\[\ldots\] I think the whole system is getting shot to shit. I think the whole code is going down the tubes. These are gonna be the last days of honour. (217)

Having worked his way up, Hoss finds no way back; he feels trapped inside the game. An extreme sense of paranoia encloses him. The thought of not being watched or admired anymore tortures him. Indifference is unbearable to the ravaged narcissist who thinks bluntly that his game is the only one that counts.

Shepard works out the slow fragmentation and deterioration of Hoss's personality, by the gradual change in his language. As the play opens we find Hoss, assertive and authoritative in his behaviour towards Becky and the Starman. He is impatient with the Starman who has been assigned the duty of reading his charts. When the Starman fails to arrive in time, Hoss rails mercilessly:

\begin{quote}
Hoss: Get that fucker down here! I wanna see him. I gave him thirteen grand to get this chart in time. Tell him to get his ass down here!
\end{quote}

Becky: OK. OK.
Hoss: That fuckin’ Scorpion’s gonna crawl if this gets turned around now. Now is right. I can feel it’s right. I need the points. Can’t they see that! I’m winning in three fuckin’ states. I’m controlling more borders than any of them punk markers. The El Canino boys. Bunch a’ fuckin’ punks. GET THAT FUCKER DOWN HERE!!!. (207)

When the Starman and Becky inform him about his fading popularity, Hoss feels thoroughly dejected and wounded. Becky says: “you’re in a tough racket. The toughest. But now ‘aint’ the time to crack. You’re knocking the door, you gotta hold on. Once you get the gold then you can back off. But not now” (210).

This makes Hoss conscious of his old age:

She’s right! She’s right goddamit! I’m so fucking close. Knockin’ at the door. I can’t chicken out of it now. This is my last chance. I’m getting old. I can’t do a Lee Marvin in the late sixties . . .

(210)

It is Becky again who observes the true nature of all human relationships:

Power. That’s all there is. The power of the machine. The Killer Machine. That’s what you live and die for. That’s what you wake
up for. Every breath you take, you breathe the power. You live the
power. You are the power. (220)

One can survive in this world only if one has the power. It is the survival
of the fittest, of the powerful. Hoss had once experienced the taste of this
“power”, which has now begun to ebb away from him. “Then why do you feel
so weak?” (220), he mutters to himself. The initial aggressiveness and violence
gradually gives way to helplessness and agony:

Becky: You’re talking loser now, baby.

Hoss: May be so. May be I am a loser. May be we’re all fucking
losers. I don’t care no more. (220)

Hoss realizes that the time has now come for the final, inevitable
confrontation with his rival, the gypsy marker, who drives a “58 Impala, with a
vet underneath” (229). In a paranoid frenzy. He performs a macabre act of
violence, as Shepard’s stage directions indicate: “Hoss picks up the knives and
stalks a dummy. He circles it and talks to the dummy and himself. As he talks he
stabs the dummy with sudden violent lunges, then backs away again. Blood
pours from the dummy on to the floor” (223). He continues stabbing the
dummy on its heart and at the neck and the stomach with malicious revenge.
Thus, completely worn out and displaced, Hoss talks in a totally deranged manner about his past adventurous days when he was daring and courageous. He laments on his present state:

Yeah. Look at me now. Impotent Can’t strike a kill unless the charts are right. Stuck in my image. Stuck in a mansion. Waiting . . . Suicide, man . . . Blow your fuckin’ brains out. The whole thing’s a joke. Stick a gun in your fuckin’ mouth and pull the trigger. That’s what it’s all about. That’s what we’re doin’. He’s my brother and I gotta kill him. He’s gotta kill me. Jimmy Dean was right. Drive the fuckin’ Spider till it stings ya’ to death. Crack up your soul! Jackson Pollock! Duane All man! Break it open! Pull the trigger! Trigger me! Trigger you! Drive it off the cliff! It’s all an open highway. Long and clean and deadly beautiful. Deadly and lonesome as a jukebox. (226)

His lengthy monologue brims with images of death and violence. Like a schizophrenic, Hoss begins to talk to himself, sometimes shifting voices from his own into an older man’s. “All right. Hoss this is me talking. Yer Old Dad. Yer old fishing buddy” (227). For Hoss, the confrontation with his rival never calls for a compromise. It is a question of life or death. “Tomorrow you live or die” (228).
Crow, Hoss’s usurper is a thoroughgoing manipulator. He is young and has perfected the art of deception. All he needs is a prey to pounce upon and it is Hoss who becomes the victim. The next step is the capturing of the prey and finally devouring it. The predator Crow starts with feigning Hoss’s gestures and actions, and after practicing different styles, finally manages to become his true copy. Realizing that Crow has usurped his chair, the symbol of power, Hoss challenges him for a fight with the help of a referee.

The confrontation between Hoss and Crow assumes the manner of a verbal duel, an exchange of words and phrases that they brandish like deadly weapons. The character of Crow, in Shepard’s own words,

... came from a yearning toward violence. A totally lethal human with no way or reason for tracing how he got that way. He just appeared. He spit words that became his weapons. He doesn’t mean anything. He’s simply following his most savage instincts. He speaks in an unheard of tongue. He needed a victim so I gave him one. He devoured him just like he was supposed to.

(Marranca, ed. Animations 217)

Hoss finds it intolerable when he sees Crow slowly usurping his music territory by practicing his walking style.
Hoss: You were fish tailing all over the track meathead! I had you tagged!

Crow: Posi-tration rear end. No pit stops the whole route. May be you got a warp in your mirror.

Hoss: There’s no fucking warp. You were down!

Crow: Sounds like a bad condenser. Points and plugs.

Hoss: Suck ass! I had you clean! And stop walkin’ like that!

That’s not the way you walk! That’s the way I walk. (234)

Hoss at first threatens to defeat Crow by resorting to violence: “I’m gonna beat you Gypsy. I’m gonna whip you so bad you’ll wish we had done the shivs. And I’m gonna send you back with a mark on your forehead. Just a mark that won’t never heal” (234). Crow also is not prepared to yield. In the lengthy verbal tiff that follows, Crow tactfully overpowers Hoss, using a language through which he dehumanizes Hoss and even questions his honour. Here Shepard judiciously employs a disjunctive speech pattern that dramatizes the imperceptible flow of consciousness within the speakers as well as between them. Shepard achieves this through an apparently irrational subconscious choice and arrangement of words that expose the efforts of the characters to express what they wish to express or wish to leave unsaid. In the verbal duel,
Crow's forceful manner of speech and Hoss's submission to it are well juxtaposed:


Crow: Catch you out a breath by the rail road track.

Hoss: Never got caught!

Crow: Catch you with yer pants down. Whip ya' with a belt. Whip ya' up one side and down to the other. Whip ya' all night long. Whip ya' crying for Ma. All through the night. All through the night long. Shame on the kid. Little dumb kid with a lisp in his mouth. Bleedin' up one side and down to the other.

Hoss: No! Moved to a hard town. Moved in the midnight

Crow imputes homosexual desire to Hoss in order to break him down. In the most startling round. Crow spins out a prison fantasy of Hoss the “fag” who must fellatio with the jail warden to gain freedom. Crow's sharp words have the energetic rhythm of a fast rock lyric:

Crow: In the slammer he's a useless . . . Turns into a candy - cock just to get a reprieve . . . Gotta pay his dues back. Fakin' like a guru. Finally gets his big chance and sucks the warden's dinger. Gotta be a good boy. Put away the stinger. Put away the gun boy. I'll take away your time. Just gimme some head boy. Just get down, on your knees. Gimme some blow boy . . . Just get down on my thing, boy! Just get down! Get on down! Get on down! Get down! Get down! Get down! Come on! (238)
Crow exploits the erotic advantage he has over his opponent and seduces him into submission. He rereads Hoss's history in terms of fear, sexual frustration and regressive masturbatory activity. Hoss's self-defense, articulated in a weak and hesitant voice, is indicative of his physical and emotional enfeeblement. He tries hard to counter Crow's mean verbal attacks through an encapsulated history of jazz rhythms and blues, the beginnings of rock and roll, all of which Crow is ignorant of. He speaks of tradition, depth and order, as for him the early blues and jazz constitute "the music of something inside that no boss man could touch" (239). Harold Pinter in his play The Birthday Party works out a similar situation of confrontation between Stanley, the "fragmented" musician and Goldberg and McCann, two strangers who become his victimizers. They confront him with a barrage of questions and accusations just as Crow confronts Hoss. Even though Stanley straightforwardly tries to answer the questions, they are ignored. Accusations are flung at him to break down his resistance. He is accused of killing his wife, of neglecting his old mother by abandoning her to a sanatorium and even deserting his fiancée just before the wedding. Stanley is again accused of lechery, gluttony, promiscuity, non-payment of rent, incest, breach of social etiquette. "Why do you prick your nose" (51) and so on. Stanley's brain is confused and muddled by their unanswerable questions:
Goldberg: Which came first?

Mc Cann: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

Goldberg and Mc Cann: Which came first?

Which came first? Which came first? (Pinter, *The Birthday Party* 51-52)

While Stanley gropes for words and finally ends up in an agonized scream at his own speechlessness. Hoss tries pathetically to establish his claim of having an original language and an authentic identity in the field of music:


I’ll wear you to the bone. (240)

Crow powerfully retaliates by mocking at Hoss’s ancestry and roots. “Collectin’ the south Collectin’ the blues. Flat busted in Chicago and payin’ your dues” (240). Using the force of violent language Crow depicts Hoss as a fragmented figure, whose body is “split”, “cracked” and “burst.” The verbal duel ends with Hoss being declared knocked out and in the end in a fit of frenzy and frustration. Hoss shoots the referee.
Crow thus manipulates and exerts his superiority and power over Hoss through his language. Hoss finally succumbs to frustration and failure and finds himself totally dispossessed and lacking an identity:

Hoss: Everything was going so good. I had everything at my finger tips. Now I'm out a control. I'm pulled and pushed around from one image to another. Nothin' takes a solid form. Nothin' sure and final. Where do I stand! Where the fuck do I stand! (243)

Crow mockingly advises Hoss to become a master adapter if at all he wants to survive, to give up his notions of origin and style. Hoss, gradually submits himself to Crow's lessons on style: "Sexman. Tighten your ass. Tighten one cheek and loosen the other. Play off yer thighs to yer calves. Get it all talking a language" (244). Hoss who has totally lost his power of communication, collapses screaming "It Ain't me! It Ain't me!" (244). As a critic has observed, "Crow's language becomes 'monological' to use Bakthin's terminology. It recognizes no voice but its own, it treats other discourses as objects to be appropriated in its quest for power, it is finally totalitarian in nature" (Wilcox 570).
Totally deprived of an identity and an existence, Hoss commits the last act of violence in the play in a blind attempt to mark out his mask as unique, to assert an identity that would be his and his alone.

Hoss: Now stand back and watch some true style. The mark of a life-time. A true gesture that won’t never cheat on itself. ’cause it’s the last of its kind. It can’t be taught or copied or stolen or sold. It’s mine. An original. It’s my life and death in one clean shot. (Hoss turns his back to the audience. And puts the gun in his mouth. He raises one hand higher in the air and pulls the trigger with the other). (251)

While Hoss expresses his strong resentment against his victimization through self-destruction, that is, through suicide. Pinter’s Stanley pathetically yields to the power of his oppressors. Using forceful and violent language they turn him into a living corpse.

Mc Cann: Who are you Webber?

Goldberg: What makes you think, you exist?

Mc Cann: You are dead.

Goldberg: You’re dead. You can’t live. You can’t think.
You can’t love. You’re dead. You’re a plague gone bad. There’s no juice in you. You are nothing but and odour. (Pinter *The Birthday Party* 52)

In the final scene of the play, Stanley is dressed in a dark well-cut suit and white collar resembling a funeral dress. When they speak to him, Stanley responds by emitting weird, unintelligible sounds. “uh gug . . . uh. gug . . . eee hhhh-gag . . . (on the breath: Caahh . . . Caahh . . . “(84).

Ren Frutkin observes that in Shepard’s plays “the main dynamism . . . is not that of union- the dynamism of love- but of displacement- the dynamism of power” (111). Shepard’s characters are “nothing less than virtuosos of power who use words as their primary weapons” (Wilcox 562). Crow’s language displays the language of power which ensnares and engulfs, something that consumes and devours. It is root less, insincere, cold and hard-edged. “Very razor. Polished” (*Truth of Crime* 229).

According to Bonnie Marranca, “in the meta-language world of *Tooth*, two different (musical) languages confront each other in a fusillade of metaphors. *Tooth* is about making up language and using it to manipulate reality. Hoss eventually commits suicide because he can’t adopt Crow’s ‘language’ (verbal or gestural) – in Shepard conception of character too imitate someone else and
transform his way of speaking (i.e. his way of thinking) is to give up his identity” (“Alphabetical Shepard” 25).

In the highly competitive and materialistic society that Shepard and Mamet portray, the principle of Social Darwinism demands serious attention. Since success and survival are always meant for the fittest, the weaklings are ever the losers. And in the event of a confrontation between generations, it is quite likely that the young have every chance of winning. As Mamet observes, the disintegration of the contemporary American society is extending itself to the domain of human relationships. “Every one tries to establish over others an alien power in order to find there the satisfaction of his own egoistic need. As a result, one individual approaches another with a tainted bargain, an offer of the relationship now corrupted by the values of the market” (Bigsby, David Mamet 50). Language can no longer be trusted as a means of straightforward communication. Frederic Jameson in his foreword to Jean Francois Lyotard’s *The Post Modern Condition* remarks:

Utterances are now seen less as a process of transmission of information or messages, or in terms of some network of signs or even signifying systems, than as ... the taking of tricks, the trumping of a communicational adversary, an essentially conflictual relationship between tricksters. (Lyotard XI)
Rock Garden by Shepard also explores the communication crisis experienced inside a typical American family. Set in three short scenes, the action centres upon the generational and sexual vacuum experienced by the members of a family. The first scene speaks completely through the language of gesture, where a man, a teenaged boy and a girl are at the dinner table. The man seated at the head of the table symbolizes power and absolute control. The girl and boy sit across the table facing each other passing a glass of milk back and forth and exchanging glances. The monotonous silence is broken when the girl suddenly drops the glass and spills the milk. A black out follows. The dropping of the glass of milk can be interpreted as an extreme reaction to the tension lurking unspoken between the father and children. In the scene that follows, a women supposed to be the mother, is seen inside the bedroom lying covered over by several blankets. She seems to be engrossed in the memories of her past, youthful days, which she narrates to her young son, to which the boy responds uninterestedly through short clipped sentences and monosyllables. She vividly describes her father, as one who kept an attic full of cats and spent days alone with them totally alienated from the rest of his family. She also compares the boy to her father and then to his father, identifying, common physical characteristics. The conversation between the woman and the boy stops abruptly as the man enters the room, and takes the boy's place in the rocking
chair. The communication crisis reaches its peak in the final scene. Much of the
conversation takes place as monologues, with the father talking about the lawn, the
descriptions are tediously repetitive and the boy occasionally nods off from boredom and falls off his chair. When the man almost finishes his talk, the boy shockingly lounges into an outright description of his sexual preferences and practices, at the end of which the man falls off the couch. The boy’s monologue becomes an aggressive response where he exerts his protest and violence through a vulgar speech to create some kind of effect on his father. This is his last effort to break up the tedium of incommunicable relationship inside the family.

Earlier, throughout the conversation it was the father who took up an assertive and authoritative tone with his frequent interjections of “you know?” and “You know what I mean?” Look, for example, at his remarks regarding the painting of the garden fence:

Man: Sure. May be a kind of off white. You know. What about a kind of off-white? You know what I mean. A kind of different white. You know? Just a little different. Not too much different from the way it is now. What do you think? A different kind of white. You
know? So it won’t be too much the same. I could be almost the
same but still a little different you know? (A long pause. The boy
falls off his chair).

The man continues his speech.

It would be fun. I think. Did you notice the rock garden? That’s a
new idea. It’s by the driveway. You may have seen it when you
pass by there in the mornings. It’s... it keeps me busy. (A long
pause. The boy falls of his chair.) (Rock Garden 224)

The boy in his teens really needs a little security and some one to share
his problems and worries. His parents are of no help. They are self-centered and
fully absorbed in their own personal preoccupations. The boy feels totally
alienated and frustrated inside the family circle. His violent verbal attack is his
own way of responding to the crisis that he encounters:

When I come its’ like a river - It’s all over the bed and the sheets
and every thing . . . You know? I mean a short vagina gives me
security. I can’t help it. I like to feel like I’m really turning a girl on.
It’s a much better screw is what it amounts to. I mean you can sit
facing her. You know? but that’s different. It’s a different kind of
ting. You can do it standing. You know? Just by backing her up.
You know? . . . You know what I mean? (226)
The boy uses the same phrases 'you know?' and 'you know what I mean?' that the father used throughout his lengthy monologues. The only means that the boy finds to assert his power over his father is through vulgar forbidden language, which he uses profusely and uninterruptedly until the man is subdued. “He falls off the couch and the lights black out” (226).

Shepard’s plays as we have seen deal with the question of the use and misuse of power. They deal with situations in which all human communication is seen as a contest for control, rather than an attempt to establish human connections. Shepard explores how language exercises its own power over its victims and subordinates. Manipulation of language is a conscious and deliberate exercise that makes use of a variety of linguistic strategies. Both Shepard and Marnet, like Beckett, Pinter and Albee, resort to certain common practices like the use of repetitions and obscene vocabulary. Esslin observes that repetitions are mainly used by the playwrights “to indicate the boredom of existence, the inarticulate man’s struggle to find the correct word, the hysterical irritation of an obsessed man and the slow digestion of an unpalatable fact” (Pinter 216). Pinter quite often employs repetitions “to intensify mood, primarily that of spiraling anxiety, to reveal compulsive behaviour, to reinforce the impression of fixity, to effectively block the free flow of other thoughts and to convey a struggle to find a word and the fascination with it once found” (qtd. in Kane 143).
Mamet also shares similar concerns about language and its implications with questions of power. Mamet, like Pinter has invented a drama of “human relations at the level of language itself” (Vannier 182). Through his characters’ talks, he subtly portrays the violence with which language is twisted and tilted in the hands of power seekers. In America, the capitalistic ethos has been the governing factor behind all sorts of human relationships, especially in the post-Second World War era. Arthur Miller, who emerged as a powerful social playwright of this period, has sternly criticized the danger and pathos inherent in the capitalist system, through his portrayal of the tragedy of Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*. Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo* are plays set deeply in this milieu of capitalism. The playwright observes that “American capitalism comes down to one thing . . . The operative axiom is Hurrah for me and fuck you. Anything else is a lie.” (qtd. in Dean 190). Conditioned by the false ideals of the success dream that has become part of the American consciousness, every common man in America is urged to live falsely, to seek financial success by any means open to him. Individual morality has become worthless and human relationships have become corrupted. Mamet in a talk broadcast on the B.B.C has expressed his discontent on the American business ethos:
... the American ethic of business, of boosterism never made anybody happy. It has made a lot of people rich but it never made anybody happy. So we live in a very very unhappy country here. I have always considered it to be part of my job to talk about the things that I see, and certainly the most pervasive aspect of America is that we are so damned unhappy over here, but we are smiling all the time. (qtd. in Dean 191)

The disintegration of the social bond is clearly expressed in Mamet’s New York-Drama-Critic’s-Award-winning play American Buffalo. He deals with relationships that are often exploitative and manipulative by nature. His characters are the products of a culture that has sacrificed spirituality to materialism. Anne Dean says:

In the godless world he dramatizes, success and prosperity have become a religion in themselves in that they offer his lost deracinated characters some illusion and comfort. Their’s is a violent and entropic society in which everything is uncertain, adrift and frightening and the possession of material goods and money at least affords the appearance of stability and power. (85)

In American Buffalo, Donny Dubrow, the owner of a small resale shop, resorts to petty crimes in the name of business along with his associates. They
plan to rob a coin collection from a man who had walked into Don's junk shop
and bought a buffalo nickel for the astronomical price of ninety dollars. The idea
of the robbery sprouts up in a conversation that occurs between Don and his
young employee Bobby. They are interrupted by the arrival of Teach, Don's
friend and associate, who holds a special interest in carrying out any sort of
crooked activities in the name of business. Teach convinces Donny that Bobby
the "kid" is too much of a risk to be associated in a break-in. Donny thus agrees
to Teach's proposal and betrays the young man upon whom he has recently
lavished his paternal protection. Donny also insists on involving a mutual friend
by name Fletcher in the operation. In the Second Act, Donny and Teach wait
anxiously for Fletcher to arrive. But as midnight approaches, it is Bobby who
arrives with the news that Fletcher has been mugged and taken to the hospital.
Bobby also produces a buffalo nickel, which he intends to sell for ready cash.
Teach and Donny become suspicious of Bob's actions. They begin to cross
question him, and when Bobby fails to respond satisfactorily, Teach hits Bobby
in the head. The boy begins to bleed from his ear. Soon a phone call that arrives
corroborates that the boy was telling the truth. Teach leaves the scene while
Don tries to reconcile with Bobby. With such a loose plot, much of the play's
action is brought forth through language capturing the conversational idioms of
a group of "fringe characters" that live at the very edges of society. Mamet
believes that it is through these characters that he can best illustrate the ways of a corrupt and venal culture.

The more closely the language used in *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* is examined the more evident it becomes that the primary purpose of utterance is not to communicate but to claim or withhold power. The petty crooks that yearn to become businessmen believe that “talk is an active agent in shaping the world and the terms of human relationships” (King, “Talk and Dramatic Action” 539). They use language to cajole, intimidate and trick their audience into complicity. The speakers contrive to appear candid and forthright but underneath their apparent candor, their language is tentative, sly and manipulative, interspersed with long pauses. As Mamet himself remarked on *American Buffalo*.

. . . the play is about the American ethic of business . . . on how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business (qtd. in Gottlieb 4).

Right from the beginning of the play, a power relationship is revealed through the conversation between Don and Bobby. Don assumes the role of a teacher or instructor, and their conversation often takes a question – answer form. Bobby, submissive and timid, provides answers in all obedience.
Don: ... Now. What do you see me eat when I come in here every day?

Bob: Coffee.

Don: Come on Bob don't fuck with me. I drink a little coffee . . . but what do I eat?

Bob: Yogurt.

Don: Why?

Bob: Because it's good for you. (American Buffalo 7-8)

Throughout the conversation, Bobby is made to feel submissive and dependent.

Don: ... And it won't kill you to take a vitamin.

Bob: They're too expensive.

Don: Don't worry about it. You should take 'em.

Bob: I can't afford them.

Don: Don't worry about it.

Bob: You'll buy some for me.

Don: Do you need 'em?

Bob: yeah.

Don: Well, then I'll get you some. What do you think?

Bob: Thanks, Donny.

Don: It's for your own good. Don't thank me...
Bob: Okay.

Don: I just can’t use you in here like a zombie. (8)

Bob is also taught the ‘contemporary’ meaning of business and friendship. Discussing their friend Fletcher having bought pig iron from his friend Ruthie, Don comments.

Don: He didn’t steal it Bob.

Bob: No?

Don: No.

Bob: She was mad at him...

Don: Well, that very well may be, Bob, but that fact remains that it was business. That’s what business is.

Bob: What?

Don: People taking care of themselves. Huh? (7)

On friendship too Don has his own observations. He remarks: “cause there's business and there's friendship, Bobby . . . there are many things and when you walk around you hear a lot of things and what you got to do is keep clear who your friends are and who treated you like what. Or else the rest is garbage, Bob . . .” (8)

Usually during a business talk or any sort of communication process, the more proficient participant commands authority. This happens in the play when
Teach enters the scene and disrupts the conversation between Don and Bob. He tactfully persuades Don to keep off Bobby from their “business plan” by offering his own definitions on friendship:

Friendship is friendship and a wonderful thing, and I am all for it. I have never said different, and you know me on this point. Okay. But let’s just keep it separate, huh. let’s just keep the two apart and may be we can deal with each other like some human beings.

(15)

Teach’s language of persuasion readily affects Don’s attitude towards Bob and he plots along with Teach to exclude Bob from their robbery. Both Don and Teach exchange polite and apologetic talks and show haste in paying him off.

Bob: You said you were giving me fifty.

Don: I’m sorry, I’m sorry Bob. You’re absolutely right.

Bob: Thank you (Pause) I’ll see you later huh, Teach?

Teach: I’ll see you later Bobby.

Don: I’ll see you later Bob.

Bob: I’ll come back later.

Don: Okay (Bob starts to exit).

Teach: See you. (45)
Under the guise of elaborate good manners, both Don and Teach become deceptive and calculating in their attitude towards Bob. Teach also disposes of Don's intention to include their friend Fletcher in the robbery. Teach whose sole intention is to become rich through cheap business, gives his own definition of free enterprise.

Teach: Do you know what is free enterprise?

Don: No. What?

Teach: The Freedom . . .

Don: . . . Yeah?

Teach: Of the individual . . .

Don: . . . Yeah?

Teach: To embark on Any fucking course that he sees fit.

Don: Uh . . . Uh . . .

Teach: In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. Am I so out of line on this.

Don: No . . .

Teach: The country's founded on this Don. You know this without this we're just savage shit heads in the wilderness.

Don: yeah.

Teach: Sitting around some vicious campfire . . . (73)
Having verbally agreed to the business pact, both Don and Teach plan to meet again at midnight. Mamet captures the language of business-oriented Americans, at the point when Don and Teach get ready to say goodbye.

Teach: Anybody wants to get in touch with me, I’m over the hotel.

Don: Okay.

Teach: I’m not the hotel. I stepped out for coffee. I’ll be back one minute.

Don: Okay.

Teach: And I’ll see you around eleven.

Don: O’clock.

Teach: Here.

Don: Right.

Teach: And don’t worry about anything.

Don: I won’t.

Teach: I don’t want to hear you’re worrying about a good damned thing.

Don: You won’t Teach . . .

Teach: Then I’m going to see you tonight.

Don: Goddamn right you are.

Teach: I’m seeing you later.
Don: I know.

Teach: Good bye.

Don: Good bye.

Teach: I want to make one thing plain before I go Don I'm not mad at you.

Don: I know.

Teach: All right then.

Don: You have a good nap.

Teach: I will (Teach exits).

Don: Fuckin' business. (54-55)

Business talks are always highly hypocritical and quite often the dialogues abound in glib and oily words and phrases used to cajole and persuade the partner. Mamet himself states in an interview:

That's exactly the kind of thing I'm trying to capture in my plays. Have you listened to two people trying to say goodbye on phone? Especially in a business situation. They just cannot say goodbye. And their language is so revealing of their relationship. All those quid pros quos. Who owes what to whom? They can end up saying okay, okay, okay for half an hour. (Wetzsteon 101)
Mamet’s *American Buffalo* can thus be viewed as providing ‘an expose’ of the decline of communication in urban society. Besides exposing a culture that has sacrificed spiritualism to materialism, it laments the debasement of the lofty American dream in the contemporary world.

*Glengarry Glen Ross* also deals with similar issues. As Mamet remarks it is about “those guys you see on planes. They all sit together and you can never understand what they’re talking about, and they have all these papers filled with columns and figures. They are all named Bob. And when they laugh it’s Ha-Ha-this limitation laugh” (Allen 41).

Roma, one of the ambitious yet depressed salesmen in the play remarks on the contemporary situation:

I swear . . . it’s not a world of men . . . Its not a world of men, Machine . . . it’s a world of clock. watchers. bureaucrats. office holders . . . what it is. its’ a fucked- up world . . . there’s no adventure to it (pause) dying breed. Yes it is (Pause) we are the members of a dying breed. (64)

Business in the modern world has become an end in itself. Anne Dean observes that “there are very few moments in the play when the characters use any language that is not expressly concerned with business and even when they
do. it quickly becomes apparent that it is a ploy designed to coerce a colleague or cheat a client" (192). Gerald Weales remarks:

The language Mamet uses grows out of an American context in which prepositions about success push men compulsively toward unfulfilling rewards and in which failure begets desperation. The relentless flow of words – complaints, boasts, bids, for pity all wrapped in obscenity – depicts a world in which greed is the central motivation, there is no firm line which separates legitimate from illegitimate activity. ("American Theatre Watch" 595)

All salesmen in the play are keen on concocting survival strategies and hence become expert manipulators. They cajole and confuse their opponents with their unbeatable and calculated verbal onslaughts. Loyalty and trust have no place in their hearts, and language ceases to exist as a means of straightforward communication. Language becomes totally deceptive and unreliable. This is expressed through the characters' intoxicating mixture of evasions, pleadings, brow beatings, stone walling and spiel. A salesman who wants to be a success, who wants to survive in the contemporary world must become an expert in linguistic techniques. His existence depends upon how long he can keep his narrative flowing and uninterrupted. He has to rise to the occasion, with his keen sense of perception.
In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Mamet's salesmen exhaust themselves by engaging in endless chatter with anyone who is willing to listen. "Behind the foulmouthed, incessantly macho bravado lies a desperate bluster, a braggadocio show of power by men who are only too aware of their own powerlessness" (Dean 194). They form a vicious circle and around themselves, victimizing their colleagues and clients and simultaneously becoming the victims of their trade.

Mamet recalls his experiences at a real estate office in which he worked:

> The men I was working with could sell cancer . . . They were amazing. They were a force of nature. These men . . . were people who had spent their whole life in sales, always working for a commission never working for a salary, dependent for their living on their wits, on their ability to charm. They sold themselves. (qtd. in Dean 196)

The First Act of the play demonstrates how a complex network of domination and submission underlies any kind of encounter. It consists of three short scenes, each of which is structured around an encounter between two characters. Mamet exposes the fleeting nature of relationships, which exist only to facilitate commercial and economic success. In the first scene, Shelly Levene, a salesman in his fifties, facing a decline in his career appeals for help from
Williamson, the office manager, who holds the potential of “breaking” or “making” the salesmen in business.

Levene in his desperate struggle to stick on to his career converses using carefully chosen words and tries to convince Williamson that he is still able and efficient. His nervousness and latent uncertainty are explicit in his constant repetition of the phrase. “All I’m saying . . .”


(Pause The Glengarry Highland’s leads you’re sending Roma out. Fine. He’s a good man. We know that he is. He’s fine. All I’m saying you look, at the board, he’s throwing . . . wait, wait, wait he’s throwing them away, he’s throwing the leads away. All that I’m saying, that you’re wasting leads. I don’t want to tell you your job. All that I’m saying, things get set. I know they do. you get a certain mindset . . . A guy gets a reputation. We know how this . . . all I’m saying put a closer on the job. There’s more than one man for the . . . Put a . . . wait a second, put a proven man out . . . and you watch now wait a second and you watch your dollar volumes . . . You start closing them
for fifty fifty 'stead of twenty five . . . you put a closer on

Williamson. Shelly, you blew the last . . .

Levene. No John. No Let's wait Let's back up. Here, I did . . . will
you please? Wait a second. Please. I didn't blow them. No.

One kicked out, one I closed. (Glengarry Glen Ross 3)

Levene is so anxious to preserve his position that he tries to persuade by
boasting of past prowess, insulting, propitiating, begging as well as bribing.
Williamson's talk is marked by his cold and superior tone whereas Levene who
feels submissive and desperate speaks out his terror and insecurity in short
incomplete sentence and repetitions. The second scene is also business-oriented
where again Aaronow and Moss, two apparently unsuccessful salesmen, discuss
their plans. Aaronow is afraid that he would lose his job unless he gets "on the
board" which can be achieved only by improving his sales figures. Moss his
colleague, too faces similar threats and problems and plans to break into the
office in order to steal the important leads. Moss discusses the plans with
Aaronow and suggests that they could sell the stolen leads to their boss's rival,
Jerry Graff.

Usually in business talks, important issues are not revealed
straightforwardly but through hints and suggestions. Aaronow expresses a
feeling of doubt when Moss diplomatically weaves his plans. He wonders whether Moss is actually “talking” about the possibility of a robbery or merely “speaking” about it.

Aaronow: ... I mean are you actually talking about this or are we just ...

Moss: No, we're just.

Aaronow: We're just ‘talking’ about it.

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

Aaronow: As an idea.

Moss: Yes.

Aaronow: We're not actually talking about it.

Moss: No.

Aaronow: Talking about it as a ... 

Moss: No

Aaronow: As a robbery

Moss: As a ‘robbery'?! No

Aaronow: Well. Well ...

Moss: Hey (Pause).

Aaronow: So all this, um, you didn't actually, you didn't actually go talk to Graff.
Moss: Not actually, no. (Pause)

Aaronow: You didn’t?

Moss: No. Not actually.

Aaronow: Did you?

Moss: What did I say?

Aaronow: What did you say?

Moss: Yes (pause) I said, “Not actually”. The fuck you care.

George? We’re just talking . . .

Aaronow: We are?

Moss: Yes. [Pause] (22-23)

Throughout the conversation Moss uses a superior tone and makes Aaronow feel his submissiveness. Moss answers Aaronow’s innocent excited queries in monosyllables or short sentences quite often expressing his impatience towards him. Finally, Moss decides that Aaronow should break into the office and steal the leads since he had listened to the whole plan. Moss even threatens him by saying that Aaronow is as guilty as he would be had he actually committed the crime.

Moss . . . My end is my business. Your end’s twenty five. In or out. You tell. You’re out you take the consequences.

Aaronow: I do?
Moss: Yes (Pause)

Aaronow: And why is that?

Moss: Because you listened. (27)

The third scene displays another encounter between a successful salesman named Roma and one of his customers named Lingk. Lingk is a gullible, easily swayed individual with few opinions of his own. Roma completely dominates the scene with his lengthy, monological and incessant speech with Lingk responding infrequently and hesitantly. Throughout his speech he goes on asking rhetorical questions answering them before Lingk can reply. It is only towards the end of the “long talk” that we realize that Roma and Lingk are strangers meeting for the first time.

Roma . . . when you die you’re going to regret the things you don’t do. You think you’re queer . . . ? I’m going to tell you something. We’re all queer. You think that you’re a thief? So what? You get befuddled by middle class morality . . . ? . . . You fuck little girls, so be it. There’s an absolute morality? May be . . . Bad people go to hell? I don’t think so. A hell exists on earth? Yes. I won’t live in it. That’s me. You ever take a dump made you feel you’d just slept for twelve hours?
Lingk: Did I . . .?

Roma: Yes.

Lingk: I don’t know.

Roma: On a piss . . .? A great meal fades in reflection . . . The great fucks that you may have had. What do you remember about them?

Lingk: What do I . . .?

Roma: Yes

Lingk: Mmmmm . . .?

Roma: . . . For me, I’m saying what it is, its probably not the orgasm. Some boards, forearms on your neck, something her eyes did. There was a sound she made . . . or me, lying in the. I’ll tell you, me lying in bed; the next day she brought: me ‘café an lait’ what I’m saying, what is our life (pause) it’s looking forward or it’s looking back. And that’s life. That’s it . . . (27-28)

Lingk is totally bewildered and is unsure how he should respond to his “new friend’s” verbal splendor. It is only towards the end that we realize that Roma’s relentless patter was not a sincere piece of conversation but was intended for purely business purpose and nothing else. His only aim is to
persuade Lingk to buy some piece of land, in which he succeeds at last. The tone he assumes is one of camaraderie and sincerity:

Roma: . . . I want to show you something (pause) It might mean nothing to you . . . and it might not. I don’t know. I don’t know any more (Pause. He takes out a small map and spreads it on the table) What is that? Florida. Glengarry Highlands. Florida. “Florida. Bullshit”. And may be that’s true. and that’s what I said: but look here. What is this? This is a piece of land. Listen to what I’m going to tell you now. (30)

In *Glengarry Glen Ross* nearly all the salesmen use affective language and Mamet observes:

Their language has been forced to serve their terms, which is why the dialogue in most of my plays is affective, the dialogue absolutely serves the turn of the speaker – In the drama, the character if well written is going to use all of the tools at his disposal to get his ends. (qtd. in Dean 212)

For Roma. conversation becomes a claim to power—verbal, sexual as well as economical. Insistence upon speaking and calling attention to one’s own speech is a tactful way to assert one’s power. If “utterance” is power, then
controlling the utterance of another is stripping all power away from him. Again, forcing a person to speak and making him realize his inability to speak is another way of humiliating him. And this is exactly what Roma does in his second encounter with Lingk. Browbeaten by his wife to renege on the business deal which Roma had persuaded him to sign earlier, Lingk arrives at the real estate office in person, apologetic over the failure of trust which his action implies. Apprehended by the consequences of losing the deal, Roma resorts to another span of lengthy talk, the only weapon at his disposal to keep his position secure.

Roma . . . Something ‘upset’ you. Sit down, now sit down. You tell me what it is. (Pause) Am I going to help you fix it? You’re godamned right. I am. Sit down. Tell you something . . . ? Sometimes we need someone from outside. It’s . . . no, sit down . . . Now ‘talk’ to me.

Lingk : I can’t negotiate.

Roma : What does that mean?

Lingk : That . . .

Roma : . . . what, what, say it. Say it to me . . .

Lingk : I . . .

Roma : What . . .?
Lingk: I . . .


Lingk: I don't have the power. (pause) I said it.

Roma: What power?

Lingk: The power to negotiate.

Roma: To negotiate what? (pause) To negotiate what?

Lingk: This.

Roma: What, “this”? (pause)

Lingk: The deal.

Roma: The “deal” forget the deal. Forget the deal, you’ve got something in your mind, Jim, what is it?

Lingk: (rising) I can’t talk to you. met my wife. I . . . (Pause)


Mamet’s salesmen have thoroughly plundered the language for private needs and self-fulfillment and deployed it for the purpose of deceit and betrayal. The language of business interferes in their attitude towards private relationships too. Roma tries hard to prevent Lingk from yielding to his wife’s demands to drop the business deal:
Roma: Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife.

You have certain things you do jointly, you have a bond there... and there are other things. Those things are yours. (56)

In another context Roma converses with his colleague Aaronow, a less fortunate salesman. The conversation begins with a superficial tone, with Roma casually asking “How are you?” and the latter responding politely until he realizes that Roma’s question had nothing to do with his health, but rather with his position in the sales competition for winning the cadillac.

Roma... How are you?

Aaronow: I’m fine. You mean the board. You mean the board...?

Roma: I don’t... yes. Okay the board. (33)

Pascale Hubert Leibler, a critic of Mamet has noticed a pattern of teacher-student relationship in some of Mamet’s plays. According to her this pattern of relationship “not only sets up a hierarchy of power, it also motivates the very establishment of the relationship” (73).

In Mamet’s world the characters are often trapped, as it were, together, and the conflict is likely to develop as a struggle for domination—a struggle for an empowering position within the relationship. Language quite often is used in such power-oriented relationships as a weapon to strike at the weaker rival.
Obscene and vulgar language serves to demoralize the opponent. Such a situation arises when Roma in a fit of fury rages at Williamson, the office manager, when he realizes that he has blown one of his business deals:

Roma: You stupid fucking cunt. You Williamson... I'm talking to you, shithead... You just cost me six thousand dollars (Pause) Six thousand dollars. And one cadillac... You fucking shit. Where did you learn your trade? You fucking cunt. You don't who ever told you would work with men?

(58)

*A Life in the Theatre* is another significant Mamet play, which examines the contingencies evoked by the day to day use and abuse of power in human relationships. It explains how the communicative bond between fellow human beings collapses through disingenuous and deceitful use of language. Here Mamet’s characters are literally actors, professional players, who make a career out of public performances. Robert, the older actor, in many ways resembles Hoss, the aging rock musician in Shepard’s *Tooth of Crime*. Like Hoss, Robert too is facing a decline in his career, his existence being threatened by young rivals. John, the young actor has already started gaining more attention and applause, which has in fact made Robert feel deeply insecure and lonely. The
play progresses in the form of a dialogue between Robert and John, the action mainly centering upon their onstage and backstage activities.

The play gradually sheds light on the nature of their relationship, their changing attitudes and patterns of behaviour. In the beginning John seems to be aware of his subordinate position and appears keen on making contacts. He speaks less, almost in monosyllables and seems very much eager to please Robert. He lights Robert's cigarette for him, and even wipes off the make-up from Robert's face with tissue paper moistened with his saliva. Robert's initial enthusiasm and self-confidence gradually seems to give way to a feeling of discomfort and uncertainty. Apprehensive of the destructive effects that old age might bring upon him, Robert tries to formulate strategies for survival. He adopts an authoritative attitude towards John through his speech and actions. He begins to sense John as a dangerous rival, capable of relegating him to an inferior position. Smitten with professional jealousy he shamelessly asks John to modify his acting, "to do less" so that his role may not interrupt Robert's performance.

Robert: Could you do me a favour?

John: What? (pause)

Robert: In our scene tonight . . .

John: Yes?
Robert: Mmmm . . .

John: What?

Robert: Could you . . . perhaps . . . do less?

John: Do less?

Robert: Yes.

John: Do less ???

Robert: Yes . . . (Pause)

John: Do less what ???

Robert: You know.

John: You mean . . . what do you mean? (Pause)

Robert: You know

John: Do you mean I'm walking on your scene (Pause) what do you mean?

Robert: Nothing, It's a thought I had. An aesthetic consideration.

John: Mmm.

Robert: I thought may be if you did less . . .

John: Yes?

Robert: You know

John: If I did less.

Robert: Yes
John: Well, thank you for the thought.

Robert: I don’t think you have to be like that.

John: I'm sorry.

Robert: Are you? (A Life in the Theatre 42)

Robert begins politely and deferentially delaying the moment by pauses and contemplative noises, until he feels that he can safely make his request. But John feels outraged and indignant that he should be asked to modify his acting technique. When John’s tone takes a hint of menace, Robert quickly negates the request by pretending that it was an “aesthetic consideration”.

Robert again manipulates language to confront the threat imposed by John. He diminishes the value of John’s achievements by dismissing the young man’s good reviews as undeserved.

Robert: They’ll praise you for the things you never did and pan you for a split second of godliness. What do they know? They create nothing. They come in the front door. They don’t even buy a ticket.

John: No.

Robert: They’ve praised you too much. I do not mean to detract from your reviews - you deserve praise; John, much praise.

John: Thank you.
Robert: Not however for the things which they have praised you for. (77)

Fed up with the pestering of the older actor, John can no longer serve as a docile and submissive creature under the power play of Robert. He too begins to question authority. His language becomes curt and tense and his responses take on a rather brutal impatience. He spits out words that are sarcastic and starts practicing selective deafness, in relation to Robert.

Occasionally he begins to interrupt Robert’s dull and boring talk with remarks such as “please pass the bread” and “How’s your duck” (Scene 14) and “May I use your brush.” John feels that he need not tolerate Robert’s endless rhetoric and this is expressed through the monosyllabic quality of most of the lines he speaks, a brevity that demonstrates his growing impatience and exasperation.

Pauses and repetitions are the principal components of Mamet’s language of manipulation. They are often employed in conversations by his characters to indicate a groping for words, an attempt to conceal information and an unfinished thought. Leslie Kane’s observations on the function of pauses seems relevant here:
Static and non progressional, pauses are used variously to allow for meditation on the spoken dialogue, to convey continuing thought processes, to contribute to the developing tension and forestall saying something. In pauses the characters hide, judge, redefine, rearm or hesitate momentarily to receive needed confirmation. (144).

In Mamet's *Edmond* the conversation between Edmond and his wife when she comes to visit him in the jail is interspersed with pauses and incomplete sentences. This clearly serves to intensify the mental states of both the husband and the wife:

Edmond: How's everything?
Wife: Fine (Pause)
Edmond: I'm alright, too.
Wife: Good (Pause)

... 

Wife: Did you kill that girl in her apartment?

Edmond: Yes. But I want to tell you something... I didn't mean to. But do you want to hear something funny? ... (Now, don't laugh ...) I think I'd just had too much coffee (Pause) I'll something else. I think there are just too many people in the world. I think that's why we kill each other (Pause)
. . . I suppose you’re mad at me for leaving you (Pause). I don’t suppose you’re uh inclined (or, nor do I think you should be) to stand by me. I understand that (Pause) I’m sure that there are marriages where the wife would or the husband would go that way (pause). Bu I know that you wished at one point it would be. I wished that too. At one point (Pause). I know at certain times we wished we could be... closer to each other . . . you never said things you wanted desperately to say. It would have been too simple to say then (Pause). But you never did (55).

Commenting on the inarticulateness experienced by Mamet’s characters, Ditsky observes that it becomes the “direct theatrical representation of interior stress, of psychic missed – connections . . . . the theatre of inarticulation may prove significant because ironically it lets us better understand, in other words, because it lets us see the thought there” (25).

Other than repetitions and pauses, obscene expletives also find place the vocabulary of Mamet’s characters. The playwright is in fact pointing to the spiritual malaise that has infected the contemporary American consciousness. Compulsively foul mouthed, Mamet’s characters revel in using obscene words,
that have become meaningless through endless repetitions. The frustration experienced by the characters is clearly felt in their dirty talk. Bernie, a character in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* uses obscene language to conceal his insecurity and his inability to maintain a sincere and regular relationship with women. In order to assuage his fears he constantly reduces women to the most basic physical level:


Similarly in *Glen Garry Glen Ross* the word “fuck” frequently occurs in the conversation between the salesmen. It is a violent term, which implies dominance and submission as well. The term seems to stand as a metaphor for the salesmen’s fears and desires. In *Lakeboat*, one of the older sailors in the boat tells a younger one that the “men on the boat say ‘fuck’ in direct proportion to how bored they are” (52). At the moments of the greatest sense of powerlessness or betrayal, Teach in Mamet’s *American Buffalo* resorts to an almost mechanical repetition of this word. The frustration that results in his encounter with a woman named Ruthie is expressed in his swearing: “Fuckin’ Ruthie. fuckin Ruthie. fuckin Ruthie. fuckin Ruthie. fuckin Ruthie.” (9).
Shepard and Marnet have attempted to portray the fecund venality that exists at all levels of the contemporary American society. Their works criticize all forms of devalued emotional and sexual relationships, spurious business negotiations and arrogant selfishness and greed rampant in that society. One basic theme they both strive to highlight through their plays is their grave and sincere concern for a loss of intimacy, a failure of effective and essential communication between human beings.