CHAPTER THREE: HOLLYWOOD-PROMOTED MYTHS

"Anastasio, a Gentleman of the Family of the Honesti, by loving the Daughter to Signior Paulo Traversario, lavishly wasted a great part of his substance, without receiving any love from her againe. By persuasion of some of his kindred and friends, he went to a Countrey dwelling of his, called Chiasso, where he saw a Knight desperately pursue a young Damosell; whom he slew, and afterward gave her to be devoured by his Hounds. Anastasio invited his friends, and hers also whom he so dearely loved, to take part of a dinner with him, who likewise saw the same Damosell so torne in pieces: which his unkind Love perceiving, and fearing least the like ill fortune should happen to her; she accepted Anastasio to be her Husband."

The Fift Day, The Eighth Novell,
Giovanni Boccaccio’s The Decameron

Seeing is Believing.

A saying

“Now Everybody, Shoot Somebody.”

Will Smith,
the leading role in the film of Bad Boys II

The summary quoted above is that of a story narrated by the lady in the famous book of Giovanni Boccaccio, a fourteenth-century Italian writer and poet, known as the father of Italian prose. The narrator follows the summary and tells the story, with such horrendous details of violence “to punish this wicked woman as she has justly deserved” (Boccaccio 651) that “all the women of Ravenna (being admonished by her example) grew afterward more kind and tractable to men’s honest motions, then ever they showed themselves before” (Boccaccio 657). The story, which is “probably drawn from Anastagio Degli Unesti” (Cowie 317), has been, as an oft-used theme, either directly referred to or indirectly reflected in the film industry especially in Hollywood. For instance, in a film by Carl Theodor Dreyer, Gertrud (1965), based on a play by Hjalmar
Söderberg, which “deals with the growing awareness of a young woman betrayed in love” (Karney 576), the main character, Gertrud, talks to her lover about her dream night before, in which “… I ran naked through the streets, pursued by hounds. I woke up when they caught me” (Dreyer’s Gertrud). The story and the scene bring into focus one of the concerns of this chapter: the representation of women and their sexuality in Hollywood, and its role in reiterating “a classic paradigm of the convention of representing women – naked and subject to [...] masculine desire,” not subject of desire but “simply object of desire” (Cowie 2), reflected and demythologised in Mamet’s plays.

The keen interest of mass media in general, which includes cinema, television and TV advertisements, and Hollywood in particular – which stands solely as the representative of all, – in sexuality, especially female sexuality, and violence is perceived as historio-psychological one. According to Michel Foucault, the man’s desire to speak about sex is rooted in its repression and an attempt to regularise a discourse of sexuality in context of the western history. In his renowned book, The History of Sexuality, Foucault poses that during the Victorian era “[o]n the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (Foucault 3) and the model for the society became a married heterosexual couple who has the right to speak about the sex “retaining the principle of secrecy” (3). However, “sexual desire did not simply fall prey to secrecy and prohibition; it was aroused by prohibition and exploited by secrecy as a renewable resource for social management” (Valente 215). Therefore, what he suggests is that the “modern notion of sexuality – both the importance we assign to it, and the theoretical unification it implies – is an historical construct of the past few hundred years” (Weeks 6). The fundamental question, as posed by Foucault, is how is it that in our society sex is seen not just as a means of biological reproduction nor ‘a source of harmless pleasure,’ but, on the contrary, has come to be seen as the central part of our being, “the privileged site in which the truth of ourselves is to be found” (Weeks 6). The answer he argues, following Freud’s discourse, is ‘power’:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, non existence, and silence, then the mere fact one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such a language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets
established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. This explains the solemnity with which one speaks of sex nowadays. (Foucault 6)

Concerning the mechanism of repression, Freud “observes that it can often be intensified if it is denied or ‘negated’” (Cobley 124). Paul Cobley, reading Joseph Conrad’s _Heart of Darkness_, connects the western desire for the imperialist exploitation with that of sexuality. Quoting “the novel’s famous description of the French gunboat” (129), he concludes that its language “employs the kind of sexual imagery which was commonly associated with the voice of the imperialist venture” whose “local victories over the natives are illusory, like the dream of power” (130).

Lacanian psychological notion of the ‘mirror stage,’ however, justifies the existence of the desire, and also its repression, relating it to another sort of power. In his essays collected in a book called _Écrits: A Selection_, Jacques Lacan introduces two orders in the early period of a child’s life: the Imaginary and the Symbolic – two orders which, after infancy, are always co-present. The former order stands for a time the child glances at his reflection along his with mother and finds himself as unified part with his mother. The moment the child identifies the difference, which Lacan terms the last moment of the ‘mirror phase,’ the separation arrives, and the Oedipus complex pushes the child into the Symbolic order. By identification the difference with and the desire for the reunification with the mother, the child faces ‘the Name-of the- Father’ (Lacan 199). The male child is forbidden access to the mother by the father and the child will comply for fear of castration by the father. The female child’s desire for the father is also rejected by him. S/he represses his/her desire, a repression which forms the unconscious and is always with us. S/he conforms to the patriarchal law, upholds it and seeks to fulfill his/her desire by finding a (fe)male other.

Identifying itself in the mirror for the first time along with the mother, the child constructs an ‘I’ which “is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (Lacan 2). Lacan calls this form ‘the Ideal-I’ which is different from the one constructed after the father’s prohibition happens. The prohibition is a verbal form and based in language. Therefore, the Symbolic order is formed by the
language and, according to Lacan, the desire is repressed as something that cannot be spoken. By obeying 'the Law of the Father,' the child enters into the world of language, and obtains a new subjectivity, a social ‘I.’ It means that the signification of the child happens through language, which is outside from his self. It is what Lacan calls the ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’ (Lacan 264-5). In a complicated argument on the relation of Self/Other (conscious/unconscious; absence/presence) of an individual, he reasons that when the (conscious) subject tries to represent itself in the field of the Other and becomes present, the unconscious subject is already behind that ‘I’ and, therefore, the conscious I becomes absent. He uses the word ‘enunciation’ for the process, which was introduced by the French semiotician Emile Benveniste.

To illustrate his point about the process, Benveniste gives a paradoxical example of the ‘liar.’ If the enunciator says ‘I am lying’, to which subject he or she is referring? Either the subject in the phrase or the subject out of the phrase, who has uttered it, tells the truth. They cannot both be lying because they are not one and the same. Lacan reasons that this is where the subject confronts the divided notion of self. The image of the self is accurate but also delusory. It is the same and other. The subject (mis)recognizes itself both as itself and other. Toril Moi, in her book, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, explains this difficult idea in this way:

The speaking subject that says ‘I am’ is in fact saying ‘I am he (she) who has lost something’ – and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and the world. The sentence ‘I am’ could therefore best be translated as ‘I am that which I am not’ according to Lacan. [. . .] To speak as subject is therefore the same as to represent the existence of repressed desire: the speaking subject *is* lack, and this is how Lacan can say that the subject is that which it is not. (Moi 99-100)

Hence, entry into the language signifies both the birth of desire (the child recognizes it) and the repression of the desire. Entry into language means entry into social order, but it also means “experiencing lack even further because desire can never be fully satisfied. Thus [there appears] the unfulfillable search for the eternally lost object” (Hayward, 292), what Lacan calls *l'objet petit-a* (Lacan 320) – *a* stands for autre in French language, meaning ‘other’ with little ‘o’ which connotes the mother.
Before moving on to the subject of the overexposure of sexuality in Hollywood, let us discuss one more Lacanian point in relation to the female child. It theorises that since the female child cannot get the authorised speaking position of the father as ‘I’ as the male child does, she does not become the subject of the Symbolic order but the object of it (that is, of language). Hence, at least within heterosexual relationships, “she must also be the object rather than the subject of desire (she is fixed by language since it is not hers)” (Hayward 380).

Some may argue that cinema is not the only medium and literature and other artistic medium are also influential in mythologising social, cultural and historical constructions. However, while the other artistic media are using one kind of ‘sign’ to create their world: photography uses images, so does painting, and literature uses only words; film uses different signs and is directly ‘iconic.’ It uses sound, image, movement, time, space and word. “This aspect of filmic sign,” says Tom Gunning, “gives it a unique narrative status” (Gunning 464). The techniques of showing are also crucial here. Film can show more immediately than it can tell. Dress code, for instance can be described in literature to connote the class of people. However, “the specifically cinematic codes, are not neutral forms of expression of” (Cowie 26), for instance, dress code – a low angle or high angle shot, a close-up or long shot will each give you slightly different perception of the same dress code. That is why the cinema “mobilises a larger number of axes of perception [. . .] and has sometimes been presented as a ‘synthesis of all the arts’” (Metz, 800). In fact, “the cinema engages processes of the unconscious more than any other artistic medium” (Stam 139).

Therefore, the individual, having desire for the ideal of the unified being of the Imaginary order and the ‘mirror phase’ in the unconscious, watches a film and “upon first encountering a cinematic image” (Hayward 382) he finds the screen like the mirror image of his childhood feeling “much the same jubilation or jouissance as does the child in the mirror phase” (Hayward 382). With the same token, the screen makes the absence present. Because in addition to that what is watched is not ‘real’ or in the ‘real world,’ the screen acts as a mirror into which the spectator peers and identifies himself with that image which presents him/her as the presence of the ‘reality.’ This happens with some cinematic techniques such as ‘suture,’ ‘eyeline match,’ ‘shot/reverse-angle shot’ and
several others which cannot be documented here for want of space. Hollywood and its dream factory exemplify and exploit these cinematic strategies to present the unquestioning or ‘unruptured ideal reality’ of American way of life (Kaplan 132).

Furthermore, when watching a film, the spectator “is positioned as a voyeur” (Hayward 446) who enjoys ‘gazing’ at the people (especially the female one) on the screen while they are unaware of being watched. It is from this positioning that we derive pleasure. Accordingly, “over-investment in parts of the body, most commonly the female body” (Hayward 447), which is known as fetishism and very common in Hollywood, serves the same purpose. Considering these two psychological terms, it can be understood that the ‘spectating subject’ investigates the female body and as she is the object of his investigation, he safely (without the fear of the castration by the Father) owns her. The feeling can bring two outcomes: ‘scopophilia’ and ‘sadomasochistic’ violence. The former is the pleasure of viewing which is a Freudian concept related to the period when the child realises the difference between his mother and himself. Thus, as C. Metz states, when the spectator views a film having the concurrent re-enactment of his unconscious process related to the understanding of sexual difference and of his voyeuristic positioning (Metz 808-9), he enjoys watching the female characters and parts of their bodies. The latter explains the relation between the spectator as the subject of the ‘gaze’ and the female characters as its object. As the object of his look and surveillance, meaning is ascribed to her by him. He watches her, she does not know that he is looking at her, and therefore she cannot return the gaze. Cinema’s voyeuristic pleasures “are therefore both more sadistic and more fetishised” (Thornham 54). Ostensibly, “she is his victim and he the potential sadist who can violently attack her and even kill her” (Hayward, 447). This kind of behaviour is the source of suspense for most of the thrillers and films noir. The famous ‘classic’ examples are Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960) and Rear Window (1954), and Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining (1980). As Jane Gaines has mentioned in her essay, the dominant commercial/cultural paradigm “actually encourages us not to think [. . .] other than male dominance and female subordination” (Gaines, 294). This paradigm is the replication of what Kaplan calls “Hollywood’s patriarchal cinematic practices” (Kaplan, LOFFIG xii), which, hooks believes, “explicitly represent woman as object of a phallocentric gaze” (hooks 126). It, in turn, determiningly “projects its fantasy
on to the female figure which is styled accordingly [and affirms how] an active-passive heterosexual division of labour has [. . .] controlled narrative structure” (Mulvey 62-3) of Hollywood cinema. According to Laura Mulvey, it is the film’s male hero who advances the film narrative, controlling the story, the woman and the erotic gaze. On the contrary, it is the woman who, functioning as ‘erotic spectacle,’ interrupts the film narrative bringing the disruptive consequences, which will be handled by the male hero(s).

The above-mentioned relationship, therefore, deals as well with other myths of Hollywood and American society: violence and power. According to J. David Slocum, the professor of cinema at New York University, the legitimacy of violence in films is rooted in the Great Depression and World War II. He believes that the government’s ‘Production Code’ to regularise the sexuality in the film industry and the critical economic of the society and film industry:

finally helped to stabilise a new cultural role for sound movies and [. . .] provided filmmakers with the parameters through which to present images of physical force or psychic trauma that could, in years of Depression and war alike, emphasise for audiences the cultural negotiation between good, sanction actions and criminal or evil ones. (Slocum 4)

In addition, as film historian, Richard Maltby, suggests, contrasting the illegitimacy of violent action with the legitimacy of the government’s use of force in Howard Hawks’ film, Scarface (1931), a pioneer in violence on films, and throughout the gangster genre, criminal behaviour on film became a register for exploring the shifting role of violence and its impact in a turbulent age (Maltby, 126). Consequently, the exploitation of violence marks the cinema of the late 60s and early 70s (era of Vietnam war and Cold War’s Binary opposition of good and evil) with creating “scenes of increasing violence that culminated in [some] films that epitomise for many the era’s imaging of individual and social violence: [Arthur Penn’s] Bonnie and Clyde (1967), [Sam Peckinpah’s Western] The Wild Bunch (1969), and [Stanley Kubrick’s] A Clockwork Orange (1971)” (Slocum, 13), Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976) and Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather (1972), and Psycho (1960), in which violence against women was also conceptualised as immanent in classical Hollywood and across more recent popular cinema.
The classic Hollywood narrative’s iconography centres on the binary opposition of active-male/passive-female, which, according to Deleuzian philosophy of difference, is “not flat but hierarchical” (Currie, 60), and consequently on the female sexuality as the object of male’s desire. It is also based upon the triad ‘order/disorder/order-restored,’ and includes love triangle. By naturalising these features as myths, it is implied that “all else must (potentially) be read as deviancy” (Hayward 66) and “be punished or contained […] through death (or its equivalent) or marriage, respectively” (Hayward 327). Furthermore, within this world, “women must model themselves after men to get their attention [. . . while being displayed] always a threat, a potential danger” (Cowie 28), “a traumatic presence which must be negated” (Johnston 35), like Judith in Howard Hawks’s *Only Angels Have Wings* or his *Bringing Up Baby*, where Cary Grant must be rescued from her wimp fiancée. For instance, in *Psycho*, the order is present in the neighbourhood, but the secretary, Marion, betrays her (of course male) boss’s trust and steals his money to give her lover who needs it to get rid of his wife. According to the ‘norm’ of classic narrative, she has brought disorder into the society by subordinating the male authority and breaking a family ‘coupledom.’ She is, therefore, punished as she ends up in a motel owned by a psychotic voyeur who watches her through a hole in the wall of his office and subsequently kills her in the bathroom. If she has tried to subvert the binary of active/passive at the beginning of the film, it does not last long and she is dominated by a male. Her sister, however, marries her man and is not punished. The man’s power is reaffirmed and the order is restored. *Rear Window* is more prominent as the film, using all the paradigms of a classic cinema, parodies them as well. The protagonist, Jeff, is a photo-journalist who has broken his leg and has to rest at home on a wheel chair. He starts peering into the private lives of his neighbours with his camera and witnesses a man who kills his wife and chops her away in a suitcase. There is no report of a person missing and there is no corpse to help the journalist to prove his word to the police. He becomes a film spectator in front of his ‘rear window’ who is glued to his seat in the cinema, from where he cannot help the character of the ‘film,’ out of which she does not exist as well, and enjoys voyeurism and fetishism, which is associated with sadistic violence. In this sense, as Robin Wood, a film critic, says, “Jeff represents us, the audience, and his ‘projections’ are representative of ours and those of the filmmakers.
who try to give us what we want [. . . – our] ‘desires and fantasies’” (Wood 10). In fact, Alfred Hitchcock, the paramount figure of classic cinema, whom Norman Denzin reads as a modernist whose works serve to usher in the postmodern cinema (Denzin 119), has concurrently legitimised and subverted the myths fabricated by the very same cinema, intending “the film as a critique of our film watching habit” (Wood 11).

The French New Wave film-makers were the first avant-gardes who, admiring the cinema of Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock and Charles Chaplin, reacted to the conventional cinema and its filming methods. They used handheld cameras and made their films with improvisation, deconstructed narratives and quotes from literature or other films (see Kamey). They led the postmodern cinema, which has witnessed some handful films in America and which “exploits its ‘insider’ position in order to begin a subversion from within, to talk to consumers in a capitalistic society” (Hutcheon 114) and demythologises the myths of American society and Hollywood. Some of the most famous films are those of Quentin Tarantino, Steven Soderbergh, Woody Allen and, of course, David Mamet. Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003) and *Volume 2* (2004), with their “excessive violence” (Karney 848); Soderbergh’s *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), “a remarkably assured work, full of insight, humour, and eroticism” (ibid, 790), *Ocean’s Eleven* (2001) and *Ocean’s Twelve* (2004), pastiches of heist films with their ‘American myth of success’ [that Richard Weiss defines in his book as “The belief that all men, in accordance with certain rules, but exclusively by their own efforts, can make of their lives what they will has been widely popularized for well over a century. The cluster of ideas surrounding this conviction makes up the American myth of success” (Weiss 3)]; Allen’s *Zelig* (1983) and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) “with its many parodic intertexts” (Hutcheon 109) and Mamet’s *Spartan* (2004), are some films which can be read as postmodern cinema. All these films are either the remakes of older Hollywood classics like *Ocean’s Eleven* (2001) – remake and pastiche of *Ocean’s 11* (1960) starring Frank Sinatra – or full of ‘parodic’ intertextual elements and icons of sexuality, violence, power and success, like *Ocean’s Twelve* and *Kill Bill*. They are “constructed out of prefabricated images and even sounds” (Hayward 278), selected to be brutally overturned, and consequently de-legitimise the very same cinema with “its mythical and naturalising function” (Hayward 312).
The classic film industry as a part of mass media that produces ‘reality’ is a part of system in which, according to Jean Baudrillard, “modes of signification have taken the place of reality” (Rivkin 349) and which manipulate “the average American to feel moral even as he flirts, even when he spends, or when he buys a second or third car” (Dichter 84). Therefore, the society becomes what Baudrillard calls a ‘consumer society’ within which:

[T]he notion of status, as the criterion which defines social being, tends increasingly to simplify and to coincide with the notion of ‘social standing.’ Yet ‘social standing’ is also measured in relation to power, authority, and responsibility. (Baudrillard 415)

And in order to get that ‘social standing’ we are supposed to fight, to compete that is completely ‘natural’ when we get the recognition in the society by the advantage of the code of ‘social standing,’ which is ‘totalitarian’ and because of which the “other systems of recognition (reconnaissance) are progressively withdrawing” (Baudrillard 415). The hegemony mediated by mainstream or dominant cinema through the ‘universalisation’ and naturalisation of the codes collaborates with the myth of success, alongside the other hegemonic ‘values,’ to exercise “a major influence over American audiences” (Hayward 186). Indeed, in his book, America, Baudrillard analyses America and demonstrates that the real itself has become film-like; the image has replaced the real, “the whole country is cinematic” (Baudrillard 56). In a part of Quentin Tarantino’s renowned postmodern film, Pulp Fiction, a gang’s newly-joined member (John Travolta) takes his boss’s wife (Uma Truman) to a restaurant where the waiters and waitresses are Zorro, ‘James Dean,’ ‘Mae West,’ ‘Marilyn Monroe,’ and other stars of the Hollywood and the old classic American cars are used for the serving tables and seats. This phenomenon has also been dramatised by an American photographer, Cindy Sherman, by a series of photographs entitled Untitled Film Stills. The photos are of the Sherman herself in different locations and positions, but what we see ‘seems’ strangely familiar. We think that the photos are the images of different characters or scenes of old films we have seen. In fact, it is the film-like ‘reality’ in our mind’s eye about “kinds of visual clichés and roles women [like Brigitte Bardot and Sophia Loren] have played” (Powell 142) in films we have seen. That is also somehow what Deleuze argues when he treats the notion of difference in relation
to space and time and discusses cinema. Therefore, “The presence of meaning,” Mark Currie says explaining the ideas of Gilles Deleuze, “is an illusion constructed by the exclusion of spatial and temporal difference” (Currie 60-1).

The plays, studied in this chapter, *Speed-the-Plow, Sexual Perversity in Chicago, American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*, reflecting that hyperreal, film-like society, have business and sex in a cruel and rancorous world as their common features, and all are, as usual for David Mamet’s plays, male-dominated plays, in which the women are ‘objectified’ (Galens 201) and “are either conspicuous by their absence or struggle to find space in a male world” (Callens 48), and only money speaks. And accordingly they focus on the myths, in whose creation and promotion Hollywood has played an increasingly significant role and has palpably shaped and simulated the cultural paradigms of American society. David Mamet’s interest is in categorizing, denaturalising and demythologising some of these stereotypical cultural paradigms. It is a society in which certain manufactured myths are followed. The characters of *Speed-The-Plow* are challenged in a competition to win the deal of a film production and survive; and sex, love, and friendship just become the means for getting success. So is it in *American Buffalo* where characters believe that they have a right in a democracy to do everything to get what they want. It is again manifested in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, where some realtors rob, lie, and manipulate their friends and people to do business in order to survive and get better off. And *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*’s characters, losing their sense of any kind of humane myths, which Hollywood pretends to emphasise as ‘natural reality’: friendship, loyalty, heterosexual family – ‘life’s just like that,’ deduce the life to mere sexuality, and “think of women purely in sexual terms” (Schenker 1) as the ultimate object. In all these ‘cultural’ elements are the myths, generated by mass media in general and Hollywood in particular as ‘natural’ reality. Mamet believes that these ‘natural’ paradigms are not the real reality of America but the unreal one promoted by Hollywood and in fact, “movie ideals often clash with social realities” (Perrucci 1). This underlines the fact as to how far and in what different ways American society has become what Baudrillard has described as a ‘hyperreal’ society in which “‘reality’ has been completely pervaded by cinema, resulting in the apprehension of the real as film” (Constable 44), and everything is objectified to be consumed and ‘the consumption of object’ is a
phenomenon – “a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system” (Baudrillard, *The CS* vii).

In effect, all the four plays chosen in this chapter have been written during the 1970s and 1980s when “American society was consumed with the ideas of success and image, the bigger the better” (Galens 207). On the other hand, Robert Perrucci and Earl Wysong in their *The New Class Society: Goodbye American Dream?* conclude similarly, but with a different argument. They believe that it is the great inequality between the classes and ultimately being “cynical about the possibility for changes” that lead the people to consumerism:

> Escape may be the only way out, or so it seems. If we have the money, or credit cards, we can escape into consumerism. If not, there is television, booze, or drug. (Perrucci 6)

Whichever the reason is, many people, hyped by the mass media, wanted to buy as much as possible either to display their wealth or to escape. Therefore, as J.P. Mayer in his forward to Baudrillard’s *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structures*, affirms consumption, “as a new tribal myth, has become the morality of our present world” (Baudrillard vii). And in ‘the consumer package,’ Baudrillard addresses the body as object and its sexuality, which not only sells but is itself sold in “a capitalist society” (Baudrillard 129). The urban culture is as well reflected in the chosen plays in the chapter as all the plays’ settings are cities, modern and urban. Except *Speed-the-Plow*, whose setting is a film company’s headquarter and the producer’s apartment in Hollywood, Los Angles, the rest take place in Chicago – one in a junk shop, the other in real estate office and restaurant, and the third in different location such as office, restaurant, bar, home, etc – the conventional settings of Hollywood urban films, as “[c]ertain film movements are readily associated with a type of setting” (Hayward 325). Subsequently, all the plays take place in indoor places but one: *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, whose only outdoor setting is the last scene where two male characters “are on the beach” (SPC 61). While *American Buffalo* and *Speed-the-Plow*, like most of Mamet’s plays, have each three ‘present’ characters, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* have more characters: the former has four, two male and two female, and the latter seven, all male characters. The characters are, most of the time, more than the other plays of Mamet,
shown in the workplace, which is not generally represented pleasantly: a junk shop, a ransacked office, new office with “boxes and painting materials all around” (SP 3) and a boring office where they are always ‘filing;’ and the friendship between the people is a professionally-oriented one, from which the women are excluded. All men are friends because they work together. However, two female characters of Sexual Perversity in Chicago are just friends and they live together. The secretary in Speed-the-Plow is a temporary one whom the male superiors do not know. The women in Glengarry Glen Ross are a wife and a daughter, and Ruth and her friend, Grace, in American Buffalo are not trusted in the circle of men. An interesting point worth mentioning about the plays of this chapter is the role of the women in them. Either a woman is ‘present’ as a character, whose ‘presentness’ is, however, objectified and she, therefore becomes ‘absent,’ like Karen in Speed-the-Plow, and Deborah and Joan in Sexual Perversity in Chicago, or they are not present on the ‘stage’ as character but they, are authoritatively and negatively, present in their ‘absence,’ like wife of Lingk and Levene’s daughter in Glengarry Glen Ross, and Grace and Ruthie in American Buffalo. However, as already mentioned, all plays are like the Hollywood films, which, “like many other aspects of [American] society especially in the cultural milieu, [are] still very male-dominated (Galens 207), in which the story of the plot is centred on the male characters making pastiches of the Hollywood films. Gerald Weales simply puts the idea as follows:

Speed-the-Plow is a Mamet variation on the buddy movie. His best plays (American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross) are set in male enclaves, and Sexual Perversity in Chicago follows the buddy formula in its story. (Weales 371)

Furthermore, all the four plays of this chapter have enjoyed, one way or the other, concurrent commercial and critical popularity.

The première of Speed-the-Plow was itself phenomenal as the playwright chose cannily the icon of sexuality for the character of Karen in the play: Madonna. It was a conspicuous success in Broadway at the Royale Theater, opening on May 3, 1988. The in-advance sale of the tickets before the opening night was more than one million dollar. The following year, the National’s Lyttleton Theatre in London staged the play under the direction of Gregory Mosher.
If David Mamet was famous enough to choose Madonna for the cast and have his play straightaway in Broadway in 1988, it was mostly indebted to his earlier play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which brought him a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1984 and established his fame in American drama. However, interestingly its première opened not at home but “to much praise in London” (Bigsby 2004, 2) at The Cottesloe Theatre in September 1983, winning London’s Society of West End Theatre’s Best Play award for the 1982-1983 season. It was in February 1984 that The Goodman Theatre of the Arts Institute of Chicago produced the play in Chicago, and then it moved to Broadway stage in New York to win him the two American prestigious awards: New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the Best American Play and Pulitzer Prize. After that, it ran for 378 performances. The Play’s “1991 screen adaptation, with Al Pacino and the late Jack Lemmon in two of the major roles, went on to enjoy much critical and commercial success” (Piette 76).

It was also true with *American Buffalo*, which “is David Mamet’s breakthrough play” (Roudané 58) and was first produced by The Goodman Theatre Stage Two, Chicago in November 1975, when the playwright had not established his career as a renowned one. The play brought him the opportunity when he was just 27 years old. After a twelve-performance showcase, it moved to Chicago’s St. Nicholas Theatre Company where it received mixed reviews. Then it was staged in St. Clement’s in New York City in February 1976. The New York Broadway Production opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in February 1997, for which Mamet received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. It enjoyed positive critical reception, and in 1978 and 1980 it was produced respectively at the Cottesloe Theatre, National Theatre in London, and the Schiller-Theatre in Berlin. Its well-received film version was made in 1981 featuring Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman.

Nevertheless it was, in fact, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, which opened the doors of New York to a young playwright from Chicago. The play was, indeed, his student work when he was in Goddard College in 1965-9. The revised form was premiered by the Organic Theater Company in Chicago, in the summer of 1974. It won a Joseph Jefferson Award for the best play of the year in Chicago and then moved to Off-Off Broadway’s St. Clements Theatre, New York City, in December 1975. Six months
later, the play was at the Cherry Lane Theatre, Off-Broadway, “Where it won an Obie Award” (Callens 46). The latest revival of the play was at the Comedy Theatre in 2003. This play was also adapted for film as About Last Night (1986) by Tim Kazurinsky and Denise DeClue.

There was usual controversy on Mamet’s play after the first opening, while “some found [Sexual Perversity in Chicago] offensive and misogynistic” (CLC 245), others found it quite noteworthy. Robert Storey likens the play to its predecessor, The Duck Variations, in its language, and maintains that the characters’ inability to create communication is not attributed simply to ‘conventional psychological motives, but to their “language that forbids all real intimacy with women” (Storey 4). On the other hand, Steven H. Gale believes that the play “seems less mature than Variations. The language is certainly coarser, being filled with four-letter words and the sexual imagery that abounds is sophomoric in tone” (Gale 209). However, he asserts that sex acts in the play metaphorically to help Mamet discuss his underlying theme. According to Mr. Gale, the main focus of the playwright “is on the relationship between men and women” (Gale 209). Likewise, in his Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition, Michael Quinn insists that Sexual Perversity in Chicago reveals the “anxiety about honesty in relationship” (Quinn 245). He claims that love in the play is ‘a kind of contractual performance,’ which is thus “potentially transforming even in a situation in which both fear of commitment and emotional honesty are obviously ideological” (Quinn 245). Stephen Gale considers sex in the play as “an instrument of revenge” (Gale 210). While Jack Kroll calls it “a sleazy sonata of seduction” (Kroll 79), Ross Wetzsteon describes the play as “a series of fugue-like vignettes” (Wetzsteon 39). Stressing on the role of the language in Mamet’s plays, Anne Dean asserts that “the play gains its energetic pace not by any overt action but by the speed of the dialogue” (Dean). Affirming the ‘uncommon ability’ of David Mamet in language, Frank Rich states that “in plays like American Buffalo, Sexual Perversity in Chicago and The Water Engine, Mr. Mamet has demonstrated [. . .] the voices of inarticulate Americans and [. . .] limn[ed] the society that oppresses them” (Rich C20).

American Buffalo is, Robert Storey reckons, “arguably Mamet’s best play to date [1979]” (Storey 5) and in fact, as Roudané maintains, today it “is considered a classic of
Both the critics accept the play’s ‘ostensible American simplicity, which “however, expands into a parodic version of the American dream” (Roudané, 57), the flaws inherent in which, as William Demastes observes in his book, *Beyond Naturalism: A New Realism in American Theatre*, “are the cause of, first, the breakdown of language and, secondly, the inability to establish solid relationship in our culture” (Demastes 78). It is the American culture and its business ‘chaosmos’ that is reflected in the work, which “deals directly with capitalism and an ethical system perverted by greed” (Bruster 333). Making the same point and comparing Mamet to Dreiser, Frank Rich sees the play as “a violent vision of the dog-eat-dog jungle of urban American capitalism” (Rodriguez 13). By the same token, Ross Wetzsteon in *The Village Voice*, in addition to admiring the play’s language as both ‘idiosyncratic and universal’, examines *American Buffalo* as a work of art that deals with “the relationship between money and business and violence” (Wetzsteon 103) in an America which is, as Anne Dean regards, “one that is deeply troubled and divided” (Dean 87) where “the ‘businessmen’ are Veblen’s ‘delinquents’, crooks who are the denizens of a junk shop operated” (Carroll 33) in the “larger public context of American enterprise” (Demastes 78).

That the obverse of *American Buffalo* is *Glengarry Glen Ross* is mentioned by almost all the critics, emphasising the undeniable influence of Thorstein Veblen and his famous book, *Theory of the Leisure Class* on their major thematic concerns and their resemblance to the world of Arthur Miller’s plays. Elaborating the similarities, Dennis Carroll, nevertheless points out a difference. He asserts that unlike *American Buffalo*, in which “[t]he linkage of the action to American ‘business’ principles [. . .] is more metaphorical,” it is “direct and organic” (Carroll 33) in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mike Digou explains ‘MacGuffin’ in his essay, “Hitchcock’s MacGuffin In the Works of David Mamet,” as ‘a literary device’ used first by Rudyard Kipling and elaborated by Alfred Hitchcock in his films (Digou 270). Mamet himself has explained it as “that thing which the hero is chasing. The secret document [. . .] the secret message [. . .]. We, the audience, never really know what it is” (Mamet, *ODF* 102-3). As Digou states, Mamet has employed it in the two aforementioned plays: buffalo nickel in the former and Glengarry Highland’s leads in the latter. They are, in fact, those dreams the heroes of
Mamet’s play, like Miller’s Willy Loman, are chasing but never get. This also connotes what Baudrillard calls ‘hyperreality’: when the construction of the ‘real’ in the film happens, it marks the destruction of reality, and then that image of ‘the real’ in films “bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 12). Believing that, Anne Dean comments in a different way that “[f]or several generations of writers who have criticised the American Dream, the salesman has symbolised its shortcomings. (Dean 189)

The comparison between Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Mamet’s *Glengarry Glen Ross* is taken into more attention and in detail by Benedict Nightingale in his essay on the latter play. He believes that Willy Loman is still “at work in the 1980s: just as vulnerable but even more driven, even more compromised and distorted by the pressures of commerce and the harshness of American society” (Nightingale 89). Mamet’s salesman are not only, like Willy, symbolic, but “they are also parodic figures” (Piette 79) selling themselves as Mamet himself has once mentioned. Richard Brucher also stresses the same point and remarks:

> As American culture persists in defining life economically, dramatic responses to social problems (and earlier plays) become increasingly caustic, ironic, and parodic. (Brucher 213)

Writing of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Michael Billington notes that the play “presents its salesmen [who are classic figures in American drama – in O’Neill’s *Iceman Cometh*, and Miller’s] both as professional word-spinners trying to deprive gullible buyers of their savings and as victims themselves of a merciless cutthroat system” (Billington 19).

The same system is presented in a different location in the next play, *Speed-the-Plow*, in Hollywood that has become “an image of a debased American dream” (Bigsby, *MAD* 231) in the play as it had become in other books of American literature such as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Last Tycoon* and Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*. William Demastes reckons that the play criticises “America’s ‘dream factory’ even more acrimoniously than his predecessor, David Rabe. Nevertheless, concomitantly, David Mamet, as Frank Rich points out, “pitilessly implicates the society whose own fantasies about power and money keep the dream factory in business” (Rich 17). Richard Stayton also reads the play as “a scathing indictment of the way Hollywood does business”
Mamet has himself fuelled the fire of such interpretation when he characterised Hollywood as “a sinkhole of depraved venality” (Mamet, WIR 77). And evidently, Michael Quinn examines the play with the same spectacles and considers it as the one “about the appalling ethics and greed involved in behind-the-scenes manipulations of film producers” (Quinn 249).

The first Scene of *Speed-the-Plow* takes place in a film producer’s office in Hollywood, an urban setting. The producer has recently been promoted. He is the character who has the ‘partial’ power (the full power is on the hand of his boss, Richard Moss, who must ‘greenlight’ the film production over ten million dollars and we never see him in the play; he is the absent power, the common concept in Mamet’s ‘business’ plays), and whom the other characters need in order to fulfil their dreams. In fact the title of the play is homage to Thomas Morton’s *Speed the Plough* (1800), in which there is a character called Mrs. Grundy, though important, yet never appears at all. Furthermore, the title carries some connotation. ‘Speed’ can mean ‘to promote the success of something’ and ‘plow’ means, in addition to its agricultural sense, ‘to invest the capital’ and ‘to have sexual intercourse with.’ The whole concept underlines the fact that how much sexuality and fortune are catalysts for Hollywood. This point is fortified by the quotation Mamet has placed on the first page of the play from Thackeray’s *The History of Pendennis* (1848-50). The story “traces the development of a young gentleman by looking [. . .] at ‘his fortunes and misfortunes, his friends and his greatest enemy’” (Sanders 422). The protagonist is trapped between sticking to the morality the society dictates and answering his desire for the worldly pleasures; “between a maternal brunette and a seductive blonde” (Sanders 422). That is also how Gould’s situation is: he has to choose either his old friend and his classic ‘formula’ script or his ‘cute’ temporal secretary and her film. The same pattern of characters has been in another play of Mamet, *The Shawl*, in which, there is a woman and a homosexual couple.

The setting in the first and third scenes is Gould’s office and the second one takes place in his home. The total time of the play does not exceed more than two days: ‘morning,’ ‘that evening,’ and ‘the next morning’ (*SP* 2). Therefore, the setting is a classic one, which is also faithful to the Aristotelian unity. It follows and serves the classic formula of Hollywood cinema, which is linear and in which “cinematic style
serves to explain, and not obscure” (Hayward 64). The number of scenes and the timings also remind us of the narrative of this cinema which is based on the triad ‘order/disorder/order-restored,’ as well as the classic notion of triangle competition of love. There are three characters in the play: Bobby Gould and Charlie Fox, “two men around forty,” who are ‘Jewish’ (Kane 104), and Karen, “a woman in her twenties” (SP 2). Concerning the Jewishness of the characters, Leslie Kane refers to the allusive Jewish expressions that the characters use in the play such as when Fox tells Gould: “You’re staying to Hide the Afikomen,” which is a Yiddish saying. [Afikomen “is a piece of matzo broken off from the centre. One of the three matzoth set before the leader of a Seder: it is hidden by the leader and later searched for by the children, with the finder, usually the youngest, receiving a reward” (Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, CD-Rom)]. The reason why the characters of the play are chosen to be Jewish is that “[f]rom its origins,” Stephen J. Whitefield argues in his article, Our American Heritage: The Hollywood Version, “Hollywood has been stamped with a Jewish personality” (Whitefield 324). The point has been alluded more clearly in the 1982 play of David Mamet, The Disappearance of the Jews, where two men, Bobby and Joey, in ‘a hotel room’ are conversing about their past memories and romanticising their Jewish life in Eastern Europe, and then Bobby says:

BOBBY. You know what I would, I’ll tell you what I would have loved, to go, in the twenties, to be in Hollywood . . .

JOEY. Huh.

BOBBY. Jesus, I know they had a good time there. Here you got, I mean, five smart Jew boys from Russia, this whole industry . . .

JOEY. Who?


JOEY. Fox? Fox is Jewish?

BOBBY. Sure. (The Disappearance of the Jews 25-6)

In fact, the names of the male characters of Speed-the-Plow are the direct allusion to the famous Hollywood ‘film moguls:’ Samuel Goldwyn, and William Fox. They were among those people who established ‘the Five Majors’ studios in 1910s-20s: Fox, Paramount, Warner’s, MGM, and RKO, which ruled the film industry and Hollywood for
decades and they were all Jewish. Their names serve other features as well. In addition to the name of Mr. Gould which is homophone with 'gold,' the sign of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer is a roaring lion, the sultan of the jungle whose canny assistant is always a fox in the classic children stories and Hollywood animations, who is flattering and afraid of the lion. The relation between Bobby Gould and Charlie Fox is exactly like that of lion and fox in the jungle- the jungle of Hollywood, where whoever is more powerful governs. Even so the name of the female character, Karen, in its being flat and without historical allusion, alludes to Hollywood’s conventions about sexuality which reflect, as Claire Johnston argues, dominant patriarchal ideology that stereotypes men as active and therefore part of history, and the female characters as passive and therefore ‘ahistoric and eternal’ (Johnston 32). It also reminds us of Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina’s allusion to adultery in literature (Delahunty 6). There is another literary stereotype which has been naturalised as a ‘myth of women’ operating in the cinema: women in the classic cinema are either ‘vamp’ or ‘virgin’ (Johnston 31). They are “a sign of everything and anything but” themselves – “mother, virgin, whore, or just image” but not a woman (Cowie 16).

The first scene takes place in Gould’s office whose description implies the new movement of and new start for the owner: Gould’s office. Morning. Boxes and painting materials all around. Gould is sitting, reading. Fox enters (SP 3). The air of change is in the atmosphere. Gould has been promoted, Fox possesses the potential to alter his career, and Karen has the potential to promote herself. And the arrangement of the characters on the stage conveys the distribution of power. Gould is reading loudly some lines of a book while Fox tries to talk to her about a project of a film which has occupied his mind:

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

Fox. Bob...

Gould. I’m in the midst of the wilderness.

Fox. Bob...

Gould. If it’s not quite ‘Art’ and it’s not quite ‘Entertainment,’ it’s here on my desk. I have inherited a monster. (SP 3)

The dialogue reminds us of the beginning of Oleanna, where a similar arrangement takes place. While John is speaking on the phone, Carol enters his room and waits standing till
The aforementioned sentence in the dialogue uttered by Gould is a very bitter and brutal lampooning of Hollywood system which present, in Mamet’s view - neither ‘art’ nor ‘entertainment’ but a monster. In fact, it is told that the play is inspired after “the rejection of Mamet’s screenplay for About Last Night based on Sexual Perversity in Chicago” (Kane 334) and also after the conflict he had with director Brian De Palma, and producer Art Linson during the filming of The Untouchables in Hollywood. Mamet also spoofs his own work virulently as well as paying homage to two aforementioned famous
American classics with their ‘apocalypticism’ and sense of tragedy (Kane 105), which “used Hollywood for [their] satire on an America in the process of moral implosion” (Bigsby 231): *The Day of the Locust* and *The Last Tycoon*. The novel Gould reads is called *The Bridge: or Radiation and the Half-Life of Society. A Study of Decay*. Steven Price notes that David Mamet had written a short story in 1985 under the title of *The Bridge*, whose theme was like the one Gould reads (Price 55). It is an artsy work “on impending apocalypse” (Kane 110); “A novel. Written by a Very Famous Eastern Writer. What’s this book about? ‘The End of the World’” (SP 42), Gould describes the book to Karen. However, when telling Fox about the book, he labels the writer “An Eastern Sissy Writer” (SP 22). The book is supposed to compete against the story of the film scenario that Fox has brought to the studio. It is “Doug Brown, Buddy Film” (SP 17) whose story reminds us very clearly of the end of Mamet’s play *Edmond*, discussed in the second chapter, in which Edmond is sodomised by his black cellmate in the jail:

> FOX. Doug’s in prison.
> GOULD. . . . prison . . .
> FOX. Right. These guys, they want to get him.
> GOULD. Black guys . . .
> FOX. Black guys in the prison.

> [. . .] And the black guys going to rape his ass. [. . .] . . . they become friends, they teach him the . . .
> GOULD. . . . he learns the Prison ways . . .
> FOX. They blah blah, so on . . .
> GOULD. Uh huh . . . (SP 11-13)

Both works, palpably, as Bigsby argues, are bereft of any “redeeming features” (Bigsby, *MAD* 230). The former is written in a very pretentious manner about the world after a nuclear explosion, where the mankind is going to be changed by ‘radiation;’ and the latter is a formula ‘buddy movie’ whose “success is guaranteed by its adherence to formula” (231). Therefore, they are neither ‘art’ nor ‘entertainment.’ This ‘monster’ deals with one of the basic premises of postmodernism. Both the representatives of ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’ similarly and desperately wanted to be filmed and distributed by their owners. According to Fredric Jameson, [who argued in his famous book, *Postmodernism,*
or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, that ‘an inverted millenarianism’ in recent years – ‘end of this or that ideology or art’ – constitutes “what is increasingly called postmodernism” (Jameson 188), and interestingly the arty book is about the end of the world.] postmodernism has eroded the distinction between high and low culture by being “fascinated precisely by TV series, and Readers’ Digest culture, […] and the grade –B Hollywood film” (Jameson 190). When the erosion happens, the art is also easily replicated and follow the ‘formula’ in a mass-producing system to be consumed. Therefore, as stated by George Ritzer in his introduction to Baudrillard’s The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures:

> What this communicates is the idea that consumption has been extended to all of the culture. […] Art […] has increasingly become indistinguishable from any other commodity. A good example is the production and sale of a large number of numbered prints. These mass-produced works of art become commodities like all others and are therefore valued in the same way as other commodities, […] for example, Levi’s jeans or McDonald’s hamburgers. (Ritzer 15-16)

This inconsistent and self-contradictory posture is reflected everywhere in the play which makes it a comic play but in addition to that it pastiches the self-serving system, in which Hollywood pretends to stick to the virtues, as well as their contradictorily pretentious representation in the films. Sharon Smith observes that “[m]en in film are judged on courage in war, loyalty to friends, [and] faith in themselves” (Smith 15). Fox has brought the script of a star, Doug Brown, to his old friend instead of going “Across the Street” (SP 14), say, to other producers and Gould admits that it is “‘loyalty’ kept you with us . . . you stuck with your friends” (SP 14-15). Nevertheless, in the third scene, he simply betrays his friend and breaks his promise to make the buddy film. They wanted to make a ‘buddy film’ to display the friendship between the men and they do not follow the very same theme they insist on. Mamet, thus de-legitimises the ‘buddy films,’ in which “the narrative centres on the friendship between two male protagonists […] and this friendship is totally heterosexualised […] and a woman will be around” (Harward 52). The hero in the Fox’s script is sodomised to create a friendship, and of course there
is a girl in order to be faithful to the classic formula, and the play itself, in which there is Karen to heterosexualise the relationship between Fox and Gould, denaturalises the myth:

**FOX.** His Links to the Outside . . .

**GOULD.** A girl . . . ?

**FOX.** Ah. Now that’s the great part, I’m telling you, when I saw this script . . . […] when they got out of prison, the Head Convict’s Sister . . .

**GOULD.** . . . a buddy film, a prison film, Douggie Brown, blah, blah, Some girl . . .

**FOX.** Action, a social . . .

**GOULD.** Action, blood, a social theme . . . (SP 13)

Gould expresses social theme as an important element and “sentimentalises over the fact that theirs is a ‘People Business’, that ‘people . . . Are what it’s All About’ [SP 21]” (Bigsby 231) and just some seconds later:

**GOULD.** It’s full of fucken’ people . . .

**FOX.** And we’re gonna kick some ass, Bob. (SP 22)

The same attitude is displayed in the character of Karen, the temporary secretary of Gould who uses her sexuality to influence her boss, concomitant with her appeals to ‘principles’ and believing in ‘purity.’

Karen enters the ‘stage’ when she brings the coffee: “Karen, the secretary, comes in with a tray of coffee” (SP 24). Karen, in fact, is the temporal secretary who is replaced for one day or two because the main one, “Cathy is out sick” (SP 23). Primarily, she is perceived, and claiming herself as well, as a ‘naïve’ person since she does not know how to work with telephone, to make coffee and to reserve a table in a restaurant. The image of woman represented is that classic image of a ‘virgin,’ naturalised and mythologised in classic Hollywood films, whose job is taking care of men:

**KAREN.** I’m sorry, please, but how do you take your coffee . . . ?

**FOX.** He takes his coffee like he makes his movies: nothing in it.

**GOULD.** Very funny. (SP 25)

She is not considered very seriously and Fox starts flirting with her, just only after they have no more ‘serious’ business to do. Early in the play, they were both excited because
of the potential opportunity of getting a ‘good’ film script and wanted to meet Richard Ross, the boss to get the ‘greenlight’ immediately as Fox has to answer Doug Brown “to tie him to this thing by ten o’clock tomorrow morning” (SP 17). However, Ross tells Gould that he has to leave for New York and will be back tomorrow. Therefore, they have to wait; but Gould gives his word to Fox that it is a done deal. Then Gould asks her secretary to bring them coffee. Fox’s first reaction is that she is “cute broad, the new broad” (SP 23). It is a pastiche of Hollywood classic films in which woman’s role “always around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters” (Smith 14). He voyeuristically reduces her to a sexual object, ‘an object of his desire,’ by “commenting on her appearance” (Galens 210). Gould’s comment sharpens the view: “What? She’s cute? The broad out there is cute? Baby, she’s nothing. You wait ‘til we make this film” (SP 23). She is compared to those “things we want to buy” (SP 19) after making the film and becoming rich. As Baudrillard suggests, the beauty of a woman has become “a sign, at the level of the body, that one is a member of the elect, just as success is such a sign in business” (Baudrillard 132). The female body and beauty is fetishised and can be merchandised as their American dream is going to come true and they will become wealthy:

FOX. “I’m going to be rich and I can’t believe it.”
GOULD. Rich, are you kidding me? We’re going to have to hire someone just to figure out the things we want to buy . . .
FOX. I mean, I mean, you think about a concept, all your life . . .
GOULD. . . . I’m with you . . .
FOX. “Wealth.”
GOULD. Yes. Wealth.
FOX. Then it comes down to you . . . [. . .] I’m gonna be rich.
GOULD. “Buy” things with it. (SP 19-20)

The American myth of success presupposes that success is worth having. Most often, Richard Dyer suggests in his book, Stars, this is revealed in the form of conspicuous consumption (Dyer 42). The manner is propagandised by the mass media, creating stars in Hollywood blockbusters and then exposing their extravagant lifestyle as models to be followed. That is what Baudrillard, following Durkheimian theories, calls a ‘collective
phenomena’ of consumption, the idols of which are “movie stars, sporting or gambling heroes [. . .] – in a word the lives of _great wastrels_” who “fill the magazines and TV programmes” and carry out a very fixed function of “sumptuary, useless, inordinate expenditure” (Baudrillard 45-6). Different programmes like _E! News_ broadcasted frequently in different TV channels such as EXN, VH1, or Discovery’s Travel & Living, exhibit the extravagant and lavish lives of ‘stars’ such as Tom Cruise, Paula Abdul, Pamela Anderson, Paris Hilton, Madonna, etc. in one such a programme on VH1, Paris Hilton is described as a girl who ‘changes her boy friends more frequently than she changes her underwear.’ She is considered as someone who ‘is at ease in her body.’ Hence, the erotic comparison paradoxically fetishises the female body, “the body of that absolute model, the fashion mannequin, [which] constitutes itself as an object that is equivalent to the other sexless and functional objects,” (Baudrillard 134) – all surface, all simulation.

That is what Karen is considered by Fox and Gould, and by herself too. After Karen leaves the office to accomplish Gould’s order, Fox starts prodding him that he cannot persuade Karen ‘to go for him.’ Gould gambles on that “she likes me, and she’d go out with me” (SP 37) for five hundred dollars. The deal is done exactly the way they did it for the film business. Gould has promised to do both the deals, making the film and going to bed with her. The female body and her sexuality become Baudrillardian ‘object’ which can be negotiated. It reminds us of a poem by e. e. cummings, _The New Brand Car_, in which the car is a metaphor for a girl and whose driver is a man ‘accelerating in the high way.’ In her ‘object’-ness, she can have only two roles according to the Hollywood formulaic ‘reality’-like myth: vamp or virgin. David Mamet demythologises it when Karen ‘plays’ both of them and becomes none of them, a woman “neither saint nor whore” (Hall 157), and, in fact, Fox’s opinion about her ironically implies the double-standard image of Karen. Fox thinks that “she falls between two stools” (SP 35), and by that he means she is neither a ‘floozey’ nor “so ambitious she would schtup you just to get ahead” (35). He uses a lot of Yiddish and non Yiddish slang expressions which can have layers of meaning. ‘Floozey’ can mean a “good-time girl, a tart, an ‘enthusiastic amateur,’ or even a prostitute” (Partridge 164). She is both floozy and ambitious.
Gould asks Karen to read the book of ‘Radiation’ as a ‘courtesy read’ and to tell him the abstract in the same evening at his home, giving her hope for a future in the office. Indeed, Karen ‘plays’ a role and is perceived to be there as a temporary secretary “with the express purpose of getting her foot in the door” (Galens 212). In second scene, while persuading Gould to make the book’s film instead of Fox’s ‘prison film,’ she says, “I read the script. Mister Fox’s script, the prison film. That’s, that’s just degradation, that’s the same old . . . it’s despicable, it’s . . . It’s degrading to the human spirit” (SP 55). She pretends to be ‘ naïve’ and uses the words several times: “I’m sorry. It was naïve of me,” “I know it’s naïve,” “I don’t like to be naïve” (SP 39 & 44). She becomes what men want her to be in films and film-like society. She attracts Gould’s trust by playing the role of ‘ naïve virgin’ and then becomes ‘empowered’ vamp to influence him, because she knows “what the deal was. I know you wanted to sleep with me. You’re right, I came anyway, you’re right” (SP 57). Her awareness of her power of sexuality reminds us of the role of Mae West, an actress, “a woman who simply enjoyed sex, didn’t use it to hurt men, didn’t suffer about it herself” (Smith 16), in 1930s. She was famous to use her sexuality for her own enjoyment and changed the power relations in the bed. But the bottom line again was that her sexuality was the object of the spectators’ desire. As far as it brought profit for the film studios, there was no objection.

As a result, Karen becomes a double-coded image, a simulacrum with her simulated character, sexuality and relationship. Certainly, much has been made of Madonna, ‘the Material Girl’ playing the role of Karen in the premiere production of the play in Broadway. Madonna as an ‘icon of sex’ is “quite consciously all surface, all put-on, all dress-up, all make-over, all simulation, all simulacrum” (Powell 138). She becomes the simulation and appearance of what people consider as the ‘reality’ and ‘original,’ which itself does not exist. Madonna embodies the Baudrillardian hyperreal. Like the characters of ‘replicants’ in Blade Runner, a postmodern science-fiction film, in which genetically produced ‘humans’ are unable to say whether they are replicants or not. And the setting is a Los Angeles of the year 2019, “a dystopia, a decayed, post-industrial wasteland” (Powell 124). Bigsby also mentions that the characters in Mamet’s world, particularly this chapter’s plays, live in such a world (Bigsby, MAD 206).
The same setting can be seen in another cult film trilogy, *Matrix* (1999) directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski. The film is about some people who are fighting with some white men who just exist in the world of computer. The main characters are three: a black man, called Morpheus, a white woman called Trinity, and a white man, called Neo, the role played by an actor whose originality is Caucasian-Hawaiian (Keanu Reeves). The triad violates the white patriarchal triangle of Christian Holy Trinity, which “function to oust woman [and ‘others’] from a sanctioned place” (Geller 31), and replaces Lord with Morpheus, Son with Neo and Holy Ghost with Trinity as The Virgin Mary. Nonetheless, the classic notions of heterosexuality and male dominance are, again, faithfully guarded as Trinity and Neo develop ‘romantic relationship’ (Geller 1) and the director is more trapped in Hollywood classic narrative when making the second and third sequels of the trilogy, and at the end, not only the passive feminine heroine sacrifices herself for the life of the male hero and dies, but first the black hero dies. It affirms the established myths of white male dominance and triangle relationship in Hollywood films, which fabricate and naturalise “the national imaginary, that is, the way the state imagines itself as unified and coherent (thus always in terms that reflect only the socially dominant, or hegemonic, position: masculine, white, heterosexual, and the like)” (Geller 10-11).

That is what Mamet also subverts in *Speed-the-Plow*. Karen, played by Madonna, another name of the Virgin Mary, violates the myth of the patriarchal triumvirate by being an active female part of it. This violation also de-legitimises the traditional gender roles and the notion of heterosexual coupledom in the films. In a traditional triangle relationship, if there is a woman, she is passive and the object of the other two males’ desires; if there are two women, they are competing to win the man for himself. In Mamet’s triangle, a man, Fox, and a woman, Karen, are rivals to win the heart of a man, Gould; and Fox wins at last. The punishment of female character is a part of classic narrative cinema, the heterosexual, and not homosexual, coupledom is endorsed.

In order to win both Karen and Fox use her sexuality, in accordance with the given definition for her role in cinema, where “white masculinity can be defined as more than just ‘his sex’; femininity much less so” (Hayward 326) and fix her as an object of
male’s desire, but an object whose sexuality Fox perceives as dangerous since it is self-serving and therefore should be contained:

FOX. [...] A beautiful and an ambitious woman comes to town.

Why? Why does anyone come here . . .? You follow my argument?
(Pause) Everyone wants power. How do we get it? Work. How do they get it? Sex. The End. (SP 71)

Everyone is acting a role and is aware of the other’s role-playing, like the characters of A Life in the Theatre (1977): “[w]ithout exception, all of Mamet’s characters are storytellers or performers – or both” (Dean 119). They feel secure in their mask and do not want to face the ‘reality.’ “Reality is deconstructed” (Bigsby, MAD 202) and they are living in hyperreal world. Gould does not want to believe Fox and wants to film the book because he “was up all night thinking” (SP 67) and in fact sleeping with her and “she does understand me” (SP 71). He breaks his promise and is going to ‘ruin Fox’s fortune.’ Losing all his hope to make his movie, Fox has to put aside his mask and discloses his disguised self-serving purposes under the cover of loyalty and friendship, and (because of that) infuriates and hits Gould on his face. Then Gould asks him to leave the office. The violence bursts out because the interests of the men collide, and more importantly, they have to face the ‘reality.’ They know that even their conscious awareness of their emotions and sympathies is a part of the trade or the commerce. They are their own ‘replicants,’ simulating the human emotions. As Baudrillard comments in his Consumer Society: Myths and Structures, mass media simulates and puts everything on sale: human body, human services, humane relationship and emotions, intimacy and solicitude. When everybody is stripped from his/her disguised mask and “[g]reed and vulgarity triumph” (Weales 371), they are furious. They know that but they do not want someone to simply say that. Before leaving, Fox, knowing the rule, demands to ask Karen only one question to pull him into the trap and succeeds:

FOX. [...] you came to his house with the preconception, you wanted him to greenlight the book. (Pause.)

KAREN. Yes.

FOX. If he had said ‘No,’ would you have gone to bed with him?

KAREN (Pause). I don’t think that I’ll answer you.
[...]
GOULD. I would like to know the answer.
KAREN. You would.
GOULD. Yes. I would. (Pause.)
KAREN. Bob. Bob: the man I could respect...
GOULD. Without the bullshit. Just tell me. You’re living in a
   World of truth. Would you of gone to bed with me, I didn’t do your book.
   (Pause.)
KAREN. No. (Pause.) No. (SP 77)

Karen makes a mistake and wants to enter the world of masculinity, looking for the female subjectivity in the world of Hollywood; she wants power and equality, and therefore can’t be tolerated. While Fox plays his ‘role,’ making himself a ‘true’ beloved mistress to Gould; he knows the rules of, and the logic ruling, the Hollywood and its cinema:

KAREN. We decided last night.
GOULD. We what?
KAREN. We decided last night.
FOX. Bob: I need you.
GOULD. I have to think.
FOX. I need you to remember me.
GOULD. I have to stop. I have to think now.
KAREN. Bob... 
GOULD. . . . No.
KAREN. Bob, we have a meeting. (Pause.)
FOX. I rest my case. (Pause.)
KAREN. Did I say something wrong...?
FOX. No. We have a meeting, that’s true. Thank you, honey. (SP 79)

Gould asks Fox to ‘show her out’ and Fox, doing the mission triumphantly, threatens her to death: “Goodbye. You’ve said your piece. Now go away. (Pause.) You ever come on
the lot again, I’m going to have you killed. Goodbye” (SP 80-81). The order comes back to the office and Fox and Gould go to meet Ross for the buddy film.

Mamet offers a pastiche of the Hollywood cinema and its contradictory aspects. Considering the female sexuality as a danger in films, Hollywood, ambivalently, emphasises the heterosexual coupledom and uses the female sexuality to sell the films. David Bordwell, having examined a hundred randomly chosen films, concludes that ninety-five films involved heterosexual romance in part of action and eighty-five had romance as central to the action (Bordwell 16). The characters are supposed to be trapped in a circularity, as the triad of ‘order/disorder/restored order’ is denaturalised. Did it happen at all? Fox and Gould are back to the point from where they had started:

GOULD. We’re here to make a movie.
FOX. Whose name goes above the title?
GOULD. Fox and Gould. (SP 82)

And again they need Ross’s ‘greenlight,’ an absent powerful authority, whom we never saw and who has imposed his dominant through telephone.

Mamet also overturns the ‘closure’ in classic narrative cinema, in which “the narrative must come to a completion (whether a happy ending or not)” (Hayward 65). Closure mostly means marriage like the Victorian novels. Here, there is, however, a commercial marriage between two men, and the female is ousted as an intruder, a temporary one; she is Deleuzian ‘becoming-woman,’ who “has nothing to do with the real woman, or the entity of ‘woman’ in any biological, cultural or psychoanalytical definition of the term” (Kennedy 93). Karen tries to exist as a real woman out of the ‘screen,’ of that film-like ‘reality,’ but she is doomed to fail, because in the Hollywood system, there is no woman, but ‘a series of flows, particles’ on screen. That is why the ending is also temporal as Fox tells Karen that “everything’s temporary, ‘til it’s ‘not’” (SP 28). Mamet puts an end to his plays but without an unambiguous closure. His characters are always left in a kind of uncertainty, ‘indeterminacy’ (Roudané, BFDMAB 70) which is a part of that Deleuzian illusory world, in which there is no fixed meaning. It is forever a ‘becoming,’ a ‘difference.’

Similarly, the ending in American Buffalo is not a typical closure. In fact, there is no closure, so to speak. Like the world of the play discussed earlier, its “a world of
unreality” (Bigsby 262), an illusion, a ‘becoming’ in time and space and therefore, as Deleuze argues, because nothing is fixed, there appears no meaning in the world of the characters. That process of ‘becoming’ is also just formed by language and the characters “behave as their language directs them to behave” (Storey 1).

*American Buffalo* also has three characters, but all men, “three male rogues [who constitute] an ersatz family circle” (Hinden 36). Don Dubrow, ‘a man in his late forties’ is ‘the owner of Don’s Resale Shop; Walter Cole called Teach is a ‘friend and associate of Don, and Bob is ‘Don’s gopher.’ There are, as usual, four absent characters, three of whom are female: Ruthie, Grace, the coin buyer’s wife, and Fletcher, who are talked about but never seen. They form the patriarchal triumvirate in which there is no place for women. They parody the holy Trinity as well as subvert the myth of heterosexual triad of Hollywood. The relationship between Bob and Don is “like that of a father and son” (Galens 3) as Don cares about the health of Bob: “Never skip breakfast, Bob,” “it wouldn’t kill you to take a vitamin” (*AB* 8), and Teach has been described as Don’s associate – the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Gregory Mosher has described the play as a piece “about a parent, a friend, and a child” (Mosher 3) like *The Cryptogram* (1995), another play of Mamet. On the other hand, as Teach persuades Don to exclude Bob from the plan because he may ruin it, Bob also tries to please Don by doing well whatever he is told. They both are competing for being Don’s chosen one for doing the ‘business.’ However, firstly there is no female in the circle and secondly, there is no closure for the conflict inside the triad as it is usual in Hollywood films, in which there is always a solution for the conflict in the trio.

The names of the characters, furthermore, add some historical and conceptual backgrounds to the play. ‘Don’ refers to ‘Don Juan,’ ‘Don Quixote’ and ‘Donald Duck,’ who respectively, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Allusions*, allude to ‘male lovers;’ ‘illusion, insanity and friendship;’ and ‘speech.’ In the classic Hollywood love triangle, he is the male lover whom the two other ‘female’ characters try to please and win. They are replaced in Mamet’s triangle with Teach and Bob. In the play, like Don Quixote he also represents someone “who is unable to distinguish the fanciful from the
real and does not see things as they really are (Delahunty 128 & 201). He imagines the coin and its rarity in the play as Don Quixote elevates a village girl to the ideal of womanly beauty and virtue. The hero of Miguel de Cervantes’s masterpiece along with his companion, Sancho Panza (like Bob in the play who stays faithful to Don), alludes to friendship, a central notion in *American Buffalo*, which is “a play about failed relationship” (Bigsby, *MAD* 215). ‘Don’ is also a part of *Donald* Duck, a cartoon character who talks too much and as fast as does Teach, whose name reminds us of teaching, a profession which earns living only by talking. We will discuss this point later.

They come together in a ‘junkshop’ “located on the South Side of Chicago” (Roudané, *BFDMAB* 57) on ‘one Friday’ — “Act One takes place in the morning; Act Two starts around 11:00 that night” (*AB* xvi) to do some ‘business’ but fail. The place where the ‘action’ takes place, ‘Don’s Resale Shop,’ is considered unanimously by all critics as an ostensible metaphor of America itself with all its ‘bric-a-brac’ and folksy knick-knacks (Roudané 58; Kane 24; Bigsby 262; Harriott 67; Dean 87), ‘the milieu of capitalism,’ whose material progress has turned to some useless objects (Bigsby, *MAD* 212).

The first act starts when “*Don and Bob are sitting*” and talking. It is assumed we are in the middle of a conversation and Bob is ‘sorry’ for what he has done or in fact has not done and should have done. He is supposed to watch a man whose collection of coins they have planned to rob as Don thinks he might have them, but he has left the post and that is why Don is instructing him with ‘some fatherly advice’ (Galens 3):

DON. Well, Bob, I’m sorry, but this isn’t good enough. If you want to do Business . . . if we got a business deal, it isn’t good enough. I want you to remember this.

BOB. I do.

DON. Yeah, now . . . but later, what?

*Pause.*

Just one thing, Bob. Action counts.

*Pause.*

Action talks and bullshit walks. (*AB* 3-4)
The sentence is ironic and paradoxical particularly when uttered on stage. It deconstructs the traditional Aristotelian binary opposition of Action/Speech, in which “generally action is thought to be superior to talk whether in the theatre or elsewhere” (King 538). The play is acted out on the stage where there is action; but the actor’s job is displayed by the words. In this sense, the sentence implies action as talk and talk as action. On the other hand, they are supposed to do a robbery. They are talking about it but never act it out. They cannot fulfil it. The sentence becomes a dramatic irony as they fail to accomplish and walk away like ‘bullshit’ at the end of the play. Therefore, as many critics, consciously or not, complained that it was all talk and no action, the play insists that “talk is action” (King 539). Moreover, they do not or cannot even practice what they preach. Teach and Don are all the time talking about the value of friendship and asking Bob for that; Teach says, “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” (AB 15). However, they easily betray their own faith and Bob – “all I mean,” and persuading Don to cut Bob out of the plan, Teach says, “a guy can be too loyal, Don. Don’t be dense on this. What are we saying here? Business” (AB 34). Similarly, they even cannot do the ‘business.’ They both have lost at card playing the other night while feeling they have been cheated. They think they have the knowledge, “an important motif in the play (Barbera 274), to do the ‘business’ – “This is what I’m saying to you. One thing. Makes all the difference in the world,” says Teach, “Knowing what the fuck you’re talking about. And it’s so rare, Don. So rare” (AB, 48). So is it concerning both of them who even do not know anything about the coins and their value, and even cannot plan a robbery. That is why Don wants “some depth” with bringing in Fletcher, who “probably is streetwise – consider the pig-iron deal [with Ruthie] or the fact that he won at cards in the game in which Don and Teach lost” (Barbera 274). The only action they do is talk. Christopher Bigsby considers them incompetent and coward, whose talking is:

it seems, simply a way to pass the time for three desperate people, the plot of whose lives is no more substantial than that of the play in which they appear. (Bigsby 265)

In fact, unlike the classic narrative cinema, in which the plot is of the most importance, the play has no plot. “Nothing really happens in the play,” says Watt in the
revival of the play at Circle-in-the-Square in 1981 (King 347). Three petty criminals in a shop talk about and plan to rob a man of his collection of coins they assume he has. They plan a Hollywood plot but never ‘realise’ it. It reminds us of a classic Western film, Good, Bad and the Ugly, in which there are three men planning to get to a treasure that is in a graveyard. The Bad is killed, the Ugly is punished as he is always made to remember the importance of friendship and loyalty and the Good wins. The film is full of action. As a matter of fact, the first official Western was about burglary: Edwin S. Porter’s ‘silent’ Great Train Robbery (1903). The Western films, indeed, were the first in the cinema that justified outlaws, with whom the audience sympathised, and urbanised with gangster films (Hayward, 464). They were the continuation of the manifestation of myth of American dream on screen, according to which “success meant material wealth and, implicit within that, the assertion of the individual” (Hayward 154) in a democratic and classless society within the reach of everyone. The cinema, because of the aforementioned power, has mythologised the dream, making the audience believe that it is accessible.

Don has an example for such a success in his world: Fletcher, another petty criminal who, though being awaited, never appears. Don represents him as a model for Bob to follow:

DON. Now lookit Fletcher.

BOB. Fletch?

DON. Now, Fletcher is a standup guy.

BOB. Yeah.

DON. I don’t give a shit. He is a fellow stands for something –

BOB. Yeah.

DON. You take him and you put him down in some strange town

with just a nickel in his pocket, and by nightfall he’ll have that
town by the balls. This is not talk, Bob, this is action. (AB 4)

The example given by Don about Fletcher is one of the man who fulfils the myth of success in America, as David Mamet has utterly explained, it is “[t]hat American myth: the idea of something out of nothing” (Roudané 46). Don has also decided to follow the same route and advices Bob to do so. And that is, as Bob truly understands the lesson, to
be a skilful thief, like Fletcher who is a card shark and cheats “like when he jewed Ruthie out that pig iron” (*BA* 6). Bob gets his lesson well and learns that he can also get something out of nothing. “[L]earning that fabrication plays better than the truth” (*Kane* 35), as Hollywood movies provide “one way to escape from the reality and afford […] the means of adopting the fantasy as one’s own” (*Dean* 89), of taking “refuge in […] escapism” (*Mamet* 67), Bob fabricates a story about seeing the man and earns Don’s enthusiastic commendation – “Now you’re talking” (*AB* 23). His fabricated story becomes the base for Teach and Don to imagine the plan of the burglary.

Later, Don explains Teach that they are ‘keeping an eye on’ a man who has bought a ‘buffalo-head nickel’ for ‘ninety bucks,’ and the man has come again for some other stuff like that nickel and Don thinks he must have a collection of rare nickels and he wants to break into house that night. In the second act, cutting Bob out of the deal and bringing Fletcher in, Don and Teach imagine and ‘rehearse’ the robbery while waiting for Fletcher. As Steven Gale has tellingly called the second act of the play ‘Waiting for Fletcher’ (*Gale* 212), and Bigsby compares *American Buffalo* to the world of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (*Bigsby* 268), Fletcher becomes Godot, who never appears and the plan is never executed. They are waiting for, investing their dreams on, imagining about and planning the ‘business’ for something which does not exist.

The buffalo coin and the coins Don assumes the man might have and in fact all the ‘junks’ in his shop are what Baudrillard calls Kitsch. He defines it as “one of the other major category of modern object […]: that gallery of cheap junk – accessories, folksy knick-knacks, ‘souvenirs’, lampshades or African masks – which proliferate everywhere” (*Baudrillard* 110) thanks to the development of a mass-production market and society. They are not ‘real’ objects, but rather, ‘pseudo-objects’ which lack any real signification. They are simulations, imitations, copies, which do not represent any ‘real’ things. So is the buffalo coin, which is a simulacrum, like the extinct ‘American buffalo’ (*Harriott* 67).

Furthermore, when they imagine and plan how to break in, it becomes again the pastiche of Hollywood heist films, in which the scenes of the robbery are shown expansively in detail. Indeed, Teach describes the scene and the plan in the continuous present tense, which reminds us of the postmodern film *Ocean’s 11* in which the robbery is shown through what the robbed man thinks not what we ‘see’ directly after the crime
Reza Yavarian

happens. Here, the heist films and their myths of film-like ‘reality’ are demythologised, as in the play the crime never happens, it is only fantasised, “for these characters do, indeed, inhabit fantasies shaped in part by media. They try to live mythologically and end up hardly living at all” (Bigsby 268):

TEACH. All right, we got a guy knows coins. Where does he keep his coin collection?

DON. Hidden.

TEACH. The man hides his coin collection, we’re probably looking the guy has a study . . . I mean, he’s not the kind of guy to keep it in the basement . . .

DON. No.

TEACH. So we’re looking, for, he hasn’t got a safe . . .

DON. Yeah . . . ?

TEACH. . . . he’s probably going to keep’em . . . where?

DON. I don’t know. His desk drawer.

TEACH. (You open the middle, the rest of’em pop out?

DON. (Yeah.)

TEACH. (Maybe.) Which brings up a point.

DON. What?

TEACH. As we’re moving the stuff tonight, we can go like Gangbusters, huh? We don’t care we wreck the joint up. So what else? We take it, or leave it?

DON. . . . well . . .

TEACH. I’m not talking cash, all I mean, what other stuff do we take . . . For our trouble . . .

Pause.

DON. I don’t know.

TEACH. It’s hard to make up roles about this staff. (AB 46-7)

More parodic and ironic is the reason Don brings for robbing the man. He wants to rob him not because of the rarity and the value of the nickels but because the man has treated him “like I’m his fucking doorman” (AB 31).
The anger is rooted in what Thorstein Veblen called in 1899 as ‘class difference’ which led to the ‘Robber Barons,’ “who often ignored the most fundamental ethical principles of fairness and civil conduct in their maniacal pursuit of the American Dream” (Roudané, BFDMAB 60). This is where Willy Loman of Death of Salesman and the characters of American Buffalo, despite sharing the dream, differ from each other. The latter think they are doing right when they steal rich people. It is candidly implied in the American capitalist system, which, as Harry N. Rosenfield maintains, “is pictured as a swashbuckling, no-holds-barred, uninhibited private-profit economy based wholly on unbridled free competition and a completely free market” (Rosenfield 352):

TEACH. 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-huh . . .
TEACH. In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit.

Am I so out of line on this?
DON. No.
TEACH. Does this make me a Commie?
DON. No.
TEACH. The country’s founded on this, Don. You know this. (AB 72-3)

It is this deep-rooted belief that Susan Hayward associates with the gangster movie, and its myth, demythologised by the play. She argues that the Depression exposed the social problems and the differences between ‘the haves and have-nots.’ It is clearly referred to in the play when Teach takes some objects and ask what they are:

DON. Those?
TEACH. Yeah.
DON. They are from 1933.
The ‘thing’ is the first World Fair, called The Century of Progress Exposition, held in Chicago in 1933 during the Great Depression “in celebration of the city’s 100th anniversary” (Barbera 271). The word ‘thing’ sounds the disaffection of Teach towards the event, and connotes ostensibly that they do not belong to that group of “people every year they’re buying everything they can lay their hands on” (AB 18). Hayward continues that those have-nots are the ‘proletarian class,’ with whom the gangster was associated. Hence, there is only one way that the new ‘Willy Loman’s class’ could provide themselves “the wealth and thereby self-assertion” (Hayward 154): stealing. However, it contradicts the very American dream; when you steal you become rich only at the expense of others, and embodies what Mamet calls in an interview as “hurray for me and to hell with you” (Roudané 47). The contradiction is apparently solved in gangster films at the end of which the ‘hero’ dies in accordance with the “ideological necessity” (Hayward 154). The gangster must fail to conceal the contradiction. The solution, however, creates another: Darwinism, the richer and the more powerful survive, and the poor can never become rich. Mamet has ‘put’ an object in the junk shop to exactly serve this purpose: “‘the dead-pig leg-spreader’ – a device used in the slaughter houses of Chicago” (Roudané, BFDMAB 60):

TEACH. [...] All I’m saying, the job is beyond him. Where’s the shame in this? This is not jacks, we get up to go home we give everything back. Huh? You want this fucked up?
Pause.

All that I’m saying, there’s the least chance something might fuck up, you’d get the law down, you would take the shot, and couldn’t find the coins whatever: if you see the least chance, you cannot afford to take that chance! Don? Where is the shame in this? You take care of him, fine.
(Now this is loyalty.) But Bobby’s got his own best interests, too. And you cannot afford (and simply as a business proposition) you cannot afford to take the chance.
(Pause. TEACH picks up a strange object.) What is this?
DON. That?

TEACH. Yes.

DON. It’s a thing that they stick in dead pigs keep their legs apart all the blood runs out. (AB 35)

The speech Teach gives about the ‘business’ to dissuade Don from Bob’s participation in the plan followed by the definition of the prop with “the allusions to killing, blood, violence, death, slaughter, dominance, and control” (Roudané, 61) is what makes up the Darwinian world of America and its films.

Gangster films like *Scarface* (1931), *Good Fellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), *Once Upon A Time in the West* (1968), *Once upon A Time in America* (1984), and trilogy of *The Godfather* (1970s), nonetheless, concurrently and paradoxically justifying and condemning the crime, are very popular and empathised, for generally people have “pleasure in identifying with the lawlessness of the ‘hero’” (Hayward 155) and for the discourse of the large “field of cultural representations that includes television, Hollywood movies, and commercial advertising [. . .] are effective precisely because they are loaded with pre-existing meaning” (Hutcheon 44), and because “the terrain of Hollywood cinema as a space of knowledge production has enormous power” (hooks 317). Consequently, violence and crime including the right to heist are naturalised and mythologised. In his book, *Writing in Restaurants*, Mamet says “we are so ruled by magic [that] we have ceased to believe in logic” (Mamet 67).

The play has, indeed, demythologised this aspect of the gangster genre through “simultaneously destabilis[ing] and inscrib[ing] the dominant ideology” (Hutcheon 108), of its “world in which the Mafia had appropriated the American iconography of the family” (Bigsby, 263), exposing its contradiction. The characters in *The Godfather* always “speak of ‘business’ when referring to murder” (Dean 88). So do the characters in *American Buffalo* where the ‘business’ means crime. There are obvious similarities between the language in the play and that heard in the gangster movies, “with their veiled manner of expressing violence and hostility” (Dean 88). Like the characters of the films *Once Upon A Time in the West*, and *Once upon A Time in America*, who turn to violence and betray their friends when their ‘business’ and interests, particularly financial one, are in danger, Teach, being angry over his friends’ treatment of him, suggests that “the only
way to teach these people is to kill them” (AB 11), and when the plan fails because whatever Bob had told about the guy with the coin was revealed to be his fabricated ‘story,’ and obviously Teach and Don don’t buy his news about Fletcher who has not come because he has been mugged and hospitalised, the violence is unravelled and Teach “grabs a nearby object and hits Bob viciously on the side of the head” (AB 94). Teach carries a gun for ‘protection,’ as “it makes me comfortable” (AB 84), although it is his possession of the weapon that creates the danger of violence. The violence, as well as the American ethic of ‘businesses,’ and woman and female sexuality, is naturalised by the very same media which claims to condemn it.

Though an all-male cast play, it parodies the representation of female sexuality in Hollywood cinema as well as the gangster movie with “its naked exposure of male heroics” (Hayward 155). Ruthie and her friend Grace are Don and Teach’s friends and associates, and are considered potential danger for them as Bob is “close with them” (AB 11) and can ‘buffalo’ them in the robbery plan. As women’s presence in cinema is a passive one and in fact absent, their critical absence in Mamet’s play demythologises their role in the classic cinema. If they can win card playing, because, Teach believes, they are “not a good card player[s],” but cheaters – Ruthie “is a mooch and she is a locksmith and she plays like a woman. She fucking plays . . . always with that cunt [Grace] on her shoulder” (AB 15). The description given about the way they cooperate to cheat during the matches in the card-playing scenes in Michael Cristofer’s film, Original Sin (2001) Starring Antonio Banderas, and Angelina Jolie, in which they earn living by card playing and the character of Jolie moves around the table and helps her husband, to whom she is not also faithful, with reading the others’ card and gesturing special sensual codes, and when they are caught cheating, he is punished by the losers assaulting his wife. Therefore, in addition to overturning the heterosexual love triangle by having three male characters, Mamet also spoofs the heterosexual coupledom in the Hollywood cinema, having a sort of lesbian friendship between Ruthie and Grace and also the motif of deception. In the second act, although having been told not to get involved in the plan, Bob appears in the shop and wants to sell a buffalo-head nickel, and the reader, “the viewer (like the characters) becomes suspicious” (Galens 8). The tension grows when Fletcher does not appear and cannot be reached by phone. Teach believes that Ruthie,
Grace, Fletcher and Bob have stolen the coins themselves. Bob’s story about Fletcher’s hospitalisation is not believed as he does not know the name of the hospital:

TEACH. Now, don’t get smart with me, Bob, don’t get smart with me, you young fuck, we’ve been sweating blood all day on this and I don’t want your smart mouth on it fuck around with Grace and Ruthie, and you come in here . . . , so all we want some answers. Do you understand?

Pause.

I told you. Do you understand this?

DON. You better answer him.

BOB. I understand. (AB 93)

When Ruthie telephones and tells the ‘truth,’ Teach and Don are left at the end of the play, as speechless fools. They, as well as the audience, are “deceived by their own attitudes” (Galens 8) “associate[ing] cheating and lack of trust [with the women who] are not in any way involved” (Dean 116) in the plan. There was no real danger from the women. It was just the illusions and delusions of the male characters (and the audience, because of the aforementioned pre-existing myths of female characters in the cinema and the concept of the suspicion and deception in Hollywood gangster and detective movies).

Moreover, the absent women in the play are referred with their sexuality: they call Grace and Ruthie as ‘cunt’ (AB 14 & 15), Ruthie as “from the mouth of a Southern bulldyke asshole ingrate of a vicious nowhere cunt” (11), and the coin buyer’s ‘wife’ as “the chick” (32). The dialogue between Teach and Don about the ‘chick,’ about whose marriage to the man they are not sure but “we think he is married” because it is ‘natural’ to be a heterosexual couple, is a visualisation of sexualised images of female characters on the screen:

DON. Oh yeah. The guy, he’s married. I mean I don’t know we think he’s married. They got two names on the bell . . . . Anyway, he’s living with this chick, you know . . .

TEACH. What the hell.

DON. . . . and you should see this chick.

TEACH. Yeah, huh?
DON. She is a knockout. I mean, she is real nice-lookin’, Teach.

TEAHC. (Fuck him . . .)

DON. The other day, last Friday like a week ago, Bob runs in, lugs me out to look at’em, they’re going out on bicycles. The ass on this board, un-be-fucking-lievable in these bicycling shorts sticking up in the air with these short handlebars.

DON. (Fuckin’ fruits . . .) (AB 32)

The expressions they use to describe the woman are the “terminology gleaned from films and television” (Dean 104). Mamet has used the terms to describe a woman who is absent and she does not even have a name. She becomes the ‘sign-woman’ who “has acquired meaning within a sexist, or patriarchal, ideology” (Thorndham 12). She is an illusory beauty whose sexuality is a ‘sign’ in a representational system “which appears to us to be ‘universal’ or ‘natural’” (Thorndham 12), a sign which does not stand for any ‘reality.’ It becomes the simulacrum in the hyperreality ‘produced’ by mass media including cinema.

The world of Glengarry Glen Ross, “pursues the implications of American Buffalo to a logical conclusion” (Bigsby 286). The most famous play of Mamet, is also illusory, whose inhabitants are always looking for something which does not exist: American Dream like Willy Loman. They are also deceived. Indeed, the characters of Glengarry Glen Ross are all salesmen, but more modern — they are realtors, as Americans call them, who are “always be closing” (GGR 13), always ‘becoming.’ It is a ‘practical sales maxim’ which means the realtor is always making a business contract; that is selling a property. It is in fact a practical lie to persuade the client to believe that the realtor is very active and successful and can be trusted, and “to give themselves importance and substance.” It conveys that the realtors are all the time performing, acting in order “to exist, to make a mark in space” (Dean 119), like all characters of Mamet.

The similarities between Glengarry Glen Ross and American Buffalo, as most critics have elaborated, are strikingly remarkable. Both have a ‘trashed workplace’ as their setting. They have all-male cast with some absent characters; in case of Glengarry Glen Ross, there are seven male characters: four ‘men in their early forties’ and three ‘men in their fifties.’ The absent characters are two female ones, a wife and a daughter, and two powerful bosses. In both the plays ‘business’ refers to what the characters do.
And the characters of both plays are after something which is in fact ‘worthless.’ Both plays are about the American society with its dream and myth of success, a society, as Mamet has told, “with only one bottom line: how much money you make” (Gussow C19) – the theme of capitalism (Dean 190), “a world in which success breeds success” (Bigsby, MAD 219). In both the criminality and business are mixed up. The characters of the two plays use the language whose terminology has “a close link with the criminal world (Dean 196). Glengarry Glen Ross, like its predecessor, is satirising the gangster genre and as Mosher, the director of most of Mamet’s plays says, becomes “a gang comedy” (Mosher 3). They all are storytellers, a device Mamet has used in many plays “exploring the pervasiveness of betrayal and illuminating narrative as a means of enhancing self-image, escaping reality, and linking the past and present” (Kane 65) to disclose that both his salesmen and petty criminals “are empowered by the vitality of their imagination” (Kane 65). The characters in American Buffalo are a group of ‘small-time crooks’ (Dean 195) who think of themselves as businessmen while the characters of Glengarry Glen Ross are businessmen who act like crooks. In fact, there are momentous differences too. If the petty criminals of American Buffalo believe in ‘action’ and their ‘job’ requires that but only talk, the profession of the realtors is ‘talking’ and nothing else. And it is the realtors who ‘act’ and do the ‘business.’ The real estate agents in Glengarry Glen Ross plan the crime and execute it during the night. The former’s characters do plan but never execute. However, the action takes place during the night and nothing is described. It is concluded out of the ransacked office and the lost ‘leads.’ We never surely know how and even whether such a robbery has taken place. It is ‘written’ on the page and ‘shown’ on the stage the way the writer and his characters ‘imagine’ and want us to believe through the classic plot of cause and effect, the language of the classic storytelling and classic narrative cinema. “The matter of fact is that,” Edward Sapir, an American linguist, asserts in his book, Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality, “the ‘real world’ is to a large extent built up on the language habit of the group” (Sapir 162). A very famous postmodern film of the sort is Ocean’s Twelve (2004). It is a pastiche of Hollywood cinema in general and gangster films in particular, in which the gang robbery is always planned in detail, but the action is never shown. When it is shown, it is a fake one. It is imagined by the police officer or other
people only after it has already happened. It emphasises on the illusory aspect of the images on the screen. They create and naturalise the ‘reality’ for us, a ‘reality’ which is, itself, the imagination of someone, of the writer, of the director, of the artist. That is what takes place in the play. We never ‘see’ the theft. We, the readers, the audience, believe in what the artist ‘shows’ us and is created by the words – the words we listen. The ‘hearing’ logicality of the postmodern narrative discussed in chapter two is repeated here in “a typically Mametian trick of language” (Piette 80) when Aaronow does not want to participate in Moss’s plan in Act One, Scene Two:

MOSS. . . . If you don’t do this, then I have to come in here . . . and

   rob the place . . .

AARONOW. . . . I thought that we were only talking . . .

MOSS. . . . they take me, then. They’re going to ask me who were my accomplices.

AARONOW. Me?

MOSS. Absolutely.

AARONOW. That’s ridiculous.

MOSS. Well, to the law, you’re an accessory. Before the fact.

AARONOW. I didn’t ask to be.

MOSS. Then tough luck, George, because you are.

AARONOW. Why? Why, because you only told me about it?

MOSS. That’s right. [. . .] In or out. You tell me, you’re out you take the Consequences.

AARONOW. I do?

MOSS. Yes. (Pause.)

AARONOW. And why is that?

MOSS. Because you listened. (GGR 44-46)

Similarly but more outstandingly are the objects of the burglary treated. They are, in fact, nothing. They are just some ‘leads,’ i.e. the names of some ‘potential’ buyers of some worthless lands! – “worthless plots of swamp with grandiloquent names that give the play its title” (Piette 77). They are just some words. The agents are, indeed, selling what Clive Barnes calls: “unreal real estate” (Barnes 336). They are exactly
Baudrillardian simulacrum. So is the ‘golden egg’ in an Italian museum in *Ocean’s Twelve* (2004). It has already been stolen in a very simple operation and replaced with a replica. The replica, assumed to be the ‘real’ one, is again stolen by a French rival criminal and replaced by a second replica. The replica is consciously stolen and is replaced by its hologram replica in the previously planned and comprehensive operation, in the middle of the day, but they are caught by the police.

Umberto Eco, in his book, *Faith in Fakes: Travel in Hyperreality*, speaks about holography as a hyperreality and its ‘real’ representation, and believes that Americans, “obsessed with realism” will be fascinated by the new technology because it is “a real copy of the reality being represented” (Eco 4) more ‘real’ than the cinema. In the film, Julia Roberts, the actress, cannot play to be the ‘real,’ ‘original’ Julia Roberts and is arrested. She cannot play and pretend to be herself well! Neither can Levene and the other characters in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

The setting is, like the previous one, but concludes at two different places – “a Chinese restaurant” in the three scenes of act one, which “establishes a cultural and ethnic frame” (Kane 59), and the second act “takes place in a real estate office” (GGR 11). Having Chinese restaurant as a setting, which “serves as surrogate headquarters” (Piette 77), where the real estate salesmen discuss their business is a spoof of American films, in which the characters are either eating Chinese noodles in their work place or they are shown in the restaurants [the favourite food of 39 percent of American teenagers is Chinese food (Brooks 1)]. The famous instance is TV popular film series of *Sex and the City*, whose four female characters are either in bed or in restaurants. In case they are strolling on the streets, they are surely having something: ice cream, coffee, sweet corn, etc. The time is also two days, and in-between night, the climax, the robbery has taken place. The climax is absent. That is postmodern denaturalising of gangster, thriller and action genres in which the main part of the plot fascination is the burglary, the criminal act and its elaborated details with its organised presentation of ‘reality’ through selection and exclusion of the frames. What Mamet does is the reversal of cinematic editing. He shows what they exclude and deconstructs the film-like reality, for he knows that “what is invisible, omitted, concealed, gains particular power, as does the gap between what things appear to be and what they perhaps are” (Bigsby, *MAD* 24). He denaturalises the
motifs of deception and suspense in the classic narrative. When some part of the information is avoided or omitted and some others are ‘shown’ by different cinematic techniques, the deception occurs and the suspense is ‘created.’ Mamet consciously uses and de-legitimises the classic narrative plot, deceives the audiences by omitting some parts and creates suspense. He knows that the reality is constructed. It is all surface, all bound to ‘signs,’ language being one of them, if not all, which are ‘illusory,’ ‘pervasive,’ ‘persuasive,’ and ‘unreliable’ (Dean 193). So is the language of the characters in Glengarry Glen Ross. Like his other play concerned with the ‘surface of the American dream,’ The Water Engine (1977), he is interested in “expos[ing] the gulf between appearance and reality” (Bigsby 275).

The first scene of the first act begins when, like American Buffalo, two characters, “Williamson and Levene are seated at the booth” (GGR 15) at a Chinese restaurant, and are talking. The way the dialogue goes on, we perceive that Williamson, one of the ‘men in their early forties’ is the manager of the real estate agency whose “job is to marshal the leads” (GGR 18) and give them to the four realtors, one of whom is Levene, one of the ‘men in their fifties’ “struggling for his future” (Barnes 336). He is trying to bribe Williamson to give him the best ‘leads,’ but fails. During their conversation, we realise that Murray and Mitch, the owner of the company, the powerful absent authorities, have decided to organise ‘a contest,’ during which “the hot leads are assigned [. . . to] anyone who beats” (GGR 21) the highest profit by selling the lands. The rest ‘are out’ that means they lose their jobs and one of them is going to be Levene. The following scene sees two of the potential losers who are talking about their miserable condition: Aaronow and Moss ‘in their fifties.’ We learn that the winner of the ‘contest’ will be given a Cadillac and the second one on the ‘board’ will get ‘a set of steak knives’ and the rest will be fired. This hierarchy is another example of the capitalist system in which they are destined to be those ‘have-nots’ and have no choice but steal, associated with the gangster movies. In such a genre, everybody struggles to survive even by “beat[ing] their colleagues at any cost” (Dean 193) – to persuade Williamson, Levene does not hesitate to betray his friends and colleagues: “you’re sending Roma out. Fine. He’s a good man. [. . .] All I’m saying, he’s throwing . . . wait, wait, wait, he’s throwing them away, he’s throwing the leads away. [. . .] It’s me. It’s not fucking Moss. Due
respect, he’s an order taker, John. He talks, he talks a good game (GGR 15 & 17); or they decide to steal what they want – leads, as Moss tries to manipulate Aaronow, his colleague to break into the office to get the best leads, because the way they are treated is “medieval . . . it’s wrong,” says Moss, “And you know who’s responsible? [. . .] It’s Mitch. And Murray. ‘Cause it doesn’t have to be this way” (GGR 32-3). The two are those absent Godfathers who control the system from the back of the scene, and the ‘lumpen proletariat,’ an unsatisfied class of the hierarchal capitalist society being the origin of gangsters and its genre (Hayward 154) and what Mamet calls his characters of American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross (Gottlieb D4), find robbing them the only solution to get their rights:

MOSS. Why take ten percent? A ten percent comm . . . why are
we giving the rest away? What are we giving ninety per . . . for
nothing. For some jerk sit in the office tell you ‘Get out there and
close.” “Go win the Cadillac.” (GGR 33)

Martin Scorsese’s famous gangster film, Good Fellas (1990) is dealing with the same notion. There are three friend gangsters who do ‘business’ together and get rich, but one gets richer and obviously more powerful, whose hierarchal power the other two cannot stand. David Mamet has also mentioned the relationship between the world of his characters and that of the criminals when explaining the term of ‘lead’; the appointment with a potential customer is “called a lead – in the same way that a clue in a criminal case is called a lead” (Mamet 6). In the same way, as the audience identifies with the heroes of gangster movies and Mamet asserts that “[a]nyone who has ever been around gangsters knows that they are extremely charming. They speak colourfully; they’re sentimental. Generous” (Norman 131), “Mamet’s characters [in Glengarry Glen Ross] engage and retain our sympathies” (Dean 196).

The plot of the play follows parodically and subverts exactly that of a stereotypical classic crime story of Hollywood, in which the situation is settled and the plan of the crime is revealed in a cause and effect series of event and the crime happens in dramatic climax over a night and then the falling actions are followed to the demise of the (anti)hero(es). The actors and actresses perform their roles as ‘realistically’ as possible and are identified by the audience as the ‘real.’ So do the characters of the play
perform, but not their roles on screen but their own lives. Performance consciously is a part of their life for survival. It is their life. As truly Alain Piette, a Belgian drama scholar, has mentioned, it “is a play as much about performance as about selling property” (Piette 78). The first act of the play consisting of three scenes each of which involving a pair of characters is all story of manipulation. Levene tries to manipulate his boss to give him some top leads by bribing him; Moss tries to prevail upon his honest colleague, Aaronow [who does not lie easily and thinks that what Moss is ‘talking’ about is a crime and that is why he is not successful at the job he hates: “Oh God, I hate this job (GGR 108)] to break into the office to steel the top leads and then intimidates him not to tell anybody about the plan; and Roma, the top agent traps a potential client, James Lingk, to sell a land. In the second act, we are first deceived by the ‘signs.’ Real estate office is ‘ransacked’ and we think that Aaronow has done it and is doing his ‘performance,’ and in fact he is the only one who is not ‘performing;’ Roma has ‘closed’ James Lingk and is therefore “over the fucking top and you owe me a Cadillac” (GGR 54); then Levene comes in and announces happily that he “closed ‘em” (63). However, it is later revealed that none has been successful. Levene has broken into the office and his contract is ‘nut’ as those buyers “just like talking to salesman” (104), and Lingk comes to cancel the contract because his wife wants. The dreams are gone. As a matter of fact, the wife becomes, in a series of cause and effect, situation responsible for the whole ‘catastrophe’ of the salesman. She becomes the deconstruction of that present, but passive, female dangerous object in the cinema. Mrs. Lingk is that powerful absent whose husband does not “have the power to negotiate the deal” (GGR, 92) because “she wants her money back ‘right now’” (90). The other overturning reference to female absent subjectivity for men’s purpose in cinema is Levene’s daughter. She is mentioned two times when Levene feels danger and pleads Williamson to help her. She is only an object, even a word which is used to sentimentalise the atmosphere to get the purpose, and when it does not help, it is easily put aside:

LEVENE. I'm asking you. As a favour to me? (Pause.) John.
(Long pause.) John: my daughter . . .

WILLIAMSON. I can’t do it, Shelly.
LEVENE. Well, I want to tell you something, fella, [...] (GGR 26)
And once more, when Williamson is going to tell the police he has broken in the office:

LEVENE. Don’t.

WILLIMSON. I’m sorry.

LEVENE. Why?

WILLIAMSON. Because I don’t like you.

LEVENE. John: John: ... my daughter ... 

WILLIMSON. Fuck you. (GGR 104)

And there is only one more reference to women in the play which is completely objectified only sexually to orient his purpose when, in the Chinese Restaurant in Act One, Scene Three, Roma philosophises about food and woman (both ‘keep us going’) and in fact is executing his pre-planned role to trap a client, Mr. Lingk, to ‘close’ a contract:

ROMA. Or a piss ... ? A great meal fades in reflection.

   Everything else gains. You know why? ‘Cause it’s only food. This shit we eat, it keeps us going. But it’s only food. The great fucks that you may have had. What do you remember about them?

LINGK. What do I ...?

ROMA. Yes.

LINGK. Mmmm ... .

ROMA. I don’t know. For me, I’m saying, what it is, it’s probably not the Orgasm. Some broads, 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 the bed; the next day she brought me café au lait. She gives me cigarette, my balls feel like concrete. Eh?

What I’m saying, what is our life? (Pause) It’s looking forward or it’s looking backward. And that’s our life. That’s it. Where is the moment? (GGR 48)

His fantasy, like that of all storytelling characters of Mamet’s plays whose motto is “I speak, therefore I am” (Eder 42), allows him to create “a temporary ‘reality’” (Dean 193), “the processual of the real in time” as a Nietzschian term (Kennedy 104), within which he wants to live, because “the artificiality of the represented world is said to be concealed”
by narration, which in case of film is the “use of continuity editing” (Constable 51), and in this ‘reality,’ like the film-like reality, the woman and even her sexuality are ‘desubjectified’ in Deleuzian term (Kennedy 93). Roma’s stress on her eyes and sound is denaturalisation of female body in films, according to the new film theory, offered by Gilles Deleuze, in relation to the new definition of body as not “just corporal, flesh, and blood bodies, but [. . .] as a technologised and assemblaged notion” (Kennedy 98). It is mentioned as a ‘becoming-woman,’ which “is tracking of woman as a ‘function’ of series of processes, with no referent to the transcendent or the agency” (Kennedy 95). Associated with Baudrillardian simulacrum, the female body becomes ‘a process,’ a moment, ‘a becoming’ for (male) desire which is not ‘subjectified’ even in the constructed ‘reality’, in unreal reality. Mamet demythologises the hyperreality of the cinema in which even the female body and its sexuality are no more present. It is not an ‘object,’ but only a ‘concept.’ As Baudrillard had already mentioned more than twenty years ago, in a capitalistic consumer society, the sexuality is dead, it “is once and for all part of the unlimited process of production and marginal differentiation” (Baudrillard 144).

The same “look at gender delineation as well as sexuality [. . .] through the content of male fantasies as well as through social construction [. . .] pervade his work” (McNaughton 428) like The Woods, Oleanna, Speed-the-Plow, and Sexual Perversity in Chicago, which, considered one of the early plays of David Mamet and “a late twentieth-century comedy of manners” (Callens 46), “reflects the characters’ inability to sustain an interest in anything beyond the ‘present moment’” (Dean 15). It has been written and produced successfully in 1970s when the women’s movement about the representation of women started and the American journal of Women and Film was published, in which different writers criticised the presentation of the female characters in films (Thomham 1). That is why “sex, as reality and fantasy, becomes a central image” (Bigsby 260) in Sexual Perversity in Chicago.

There are four young urban characters: two male and two female. Dan Shapiro, ‘in his late twenties,’ is ‘a friend and associate’ of Bernard Litko. Deborah Soloman is ‘a woman in her late twenties’ whose ‘friend and roommate’ is Joan Webber. The play takes place in “various spots around the North Side of Chicago, a Big City on a Lake” in about
“nine weeks [of] one summer” (SPC 8). The setting includes “bars, offices, dwellings and a beach. These nominal locales are sounding boards of sexuality” (Cohn 43). The play, like The Duck Variations with fourteen scenes, consists of thirty-four brief scenes, the longest of which are the first and the last, in which Dan and Bernie are together and speak of male fantasies about women. In the first scene, they have not met the female characters and in the last one, they are left again without female friends. The whole play can be interpreted as fantasy of its male characters – a film. The “‘episodic’ structure” (Carroll 52) of the play with its “fragmented nature of the construction, the rapid, almost cinematic, cutting from scene to scene” (Bigsby 257), follows the pattern of ‘chronological editing’ of films, in which the scenes “follow the logic of a chronological narrative [and which] is most readily associated with classic Hollywood cinema, [and] produces a very linear text” (Hayward 94).

Indeed, the plot is very Hollywoodian and linear. Two friend men do not have any girl friends. They coincidentally meet two women friends separately in different situations. Bernard fails to pick Jean up and Dan succeeds in befriending Deborah. After some ‘lovely’ time, their relationship also ends in despair. At the end, two men are again alone with their fantasies.

The first scene takes place in ‘a singles bar’ where Bernard Litko and Dan Shapirpo are conversing. We learn that Bernard is fantasising about his affair with an imaginary woman the way he wishes to be: her age decreases to an “underage stuff” (SPC 10) and then increases to an age of “a pro [. . . who] knew all the pro moves” (SPC 18) as his story proceeds; she is ‘aggressive,’ “draw[s] blood” (SPC 15) by hitting, and makes love violently. The details of his fantasy are full of “his obsession with sadomasochistic sex” (Carroll 55), of “spin-offs from pornographic films,” which are “[his] models for sexual behaviour” (Callens 47). His view of a woman is ‘reductive,’ ‘fetishised’ (Bigsby, MAD 211) Hollywood-made objectified pieces of body:

BERNIE. So into the old shower. And does this broad have a
body?

DANNY. Yeah?

BERNIE. Are you kidding me?

DANNY. So tell me.
BERNIE. The *tits* . . .
DANNY. Yeah?
BERNIE. The *legs* . . .
DANNY. The *ass*?
BERNIE. Are you fucking fooling me? The *ass* on this broad . . .

This scene, along with the second one, establishes Bernie and Joan as the characters with knowledge, who are teaching the other two. But they again cannot practice what they preach. Bernie, using his ‘self-claimed experiences,’ fails to befriend Joan in the third scene. Moreover, while two men tell story about women in the longest scene of the play, the second scene, in which Joan and Deborah are speaking about men, is the shortest. The longevity of the two consecutive scenes is parodying the cinema’s representation of women and their sexuality as separate concepts. If there are many things to be ‘shown’ about the female ‘sexuality’, the woman as a speaking human is suffering “lack of importance” (Herman 135) unlike men:

JOAN. Men.
DEBORAH. Yup.
JOAN. They’re all after only one thing.
DEBORAH. Yes. I know. (*Pause.*)
JOAN. But it’s never the *same* thing. (*SPC 18*)

Furthermore, the settings of two first scenes are another instance of Hollywood naturalisation about men and women. The men are ‘shown’ out in a bar on a late Saturday night “when the males gather to total up the night’s score” (Herman 134), while the women are speaking “at their apartment that they share” (*SPC 18*).

Showing four characters in different positions encountering each other, using and subverting the conventions of the Hollywood, the following scenes criticise the Hollywood role in mythologising the fantasies as ‘reality,’ which Bernie as well as the other characters consume and start to believe as their own ‘real’ life. In the first scene Bernie becomes so involved in “the sheer force of his narrative that he appears to believe it itself” (Dean 56). Bernie, as well as the audience and the reader of the play, are placed as a film viewer, a voyeur, who identifies himself with the characters ‘created’ in the
story and believe what they are ‘creating.’ Bernie has become the ‘character,’ he himself, inspired by the Hollywood films, has created in the ‘real’ world which is created by that cinema. When he meets Joan in the third scene, he makes up a cinematic ‘character’ of himself with a ‘filmic’ name and an ‘incredibly interesting’ job in an airline:

BERNIE. So hold on. So I see you seated at this table and I say to myself, “Doug Mckenzie, there is young woman,” I say to myself, “what is she doing here?”, and I think she is here for the same reasons as I. To enjoy herself, and perhaps, to meet provocative people. (Pause.) I’m a meteorologist for TWA. It’s an incredibly interesting, but lonely job. . . . Stuck in the cockpit of some jumbo jet hours at a time . . . nothing to look at but charts . . . (SPC 19)

Bernie “has been acting all the time” (Dean 60). According to those ‘codes,’ fantasies and “the myths that men go through” (Fraser L7) “borrowed from the media” (Callens 47), he expects her to be like those women in his fantasy, in the films and when she does not behave the way he wants – to surrender herself easily – and does “not find you sexually attractive” (SPC 20) he outrages and starts insulting her:

BERNIE. What is that, some new kind of line? Huh? [. . .] So just who the fuck do you think you are? I mean where do you fucking get off with this shit. You don’t want to get come on to, go enrol in a convent. You think I don’t have better things to do? I don’t have better ways to spend my off hours than to listen to some nowhere cunt try out cute bits on me? I mean why don’t you just clean our fucking act up, missy. You’re living in a city in 1976. (pause.) Am I getting through to you? (SPC 21)

Violence and sex, during the seventies, became the mainstream in Hollywood cinema. Violence and sex are “featured prominently (and quite startlingly) in Stanley Kubrick’s frightening adaptation of Anthony Burgess’ novel, A Clockwork Orange (1971, Michael Ritchie’s Prime Cut (1972), John Boorman’s Deliverance(1972)” (Karney, 651). More examples are Tobe Hooper’s ‘influential’ The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974), John Schlesinger’s Marathon Man (1976), and Alan Parker’s ‘disturbing’ Midnight Express (1978). During the same decade, “for the first time in
Hollywood’s checkered history there was also an outspoken approach to sex demonstrated in Mike Nichol’s *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), Hal Ashby’s *Shampoo* (1975), and Louis Malle’s *Pretty Baby* (1978)” (Karney 652).

The play, in fact, “with its many parodic intertexts,” as Hutcheon terms it, from Hollywood films, “points at once to and beyond cinematic textuality to the ideological formation of the subject by various cultural representations” (Hutcheon 109) including mass media, and above all Hollywood cinema. *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, particularly, parodies *Carnal Knowledge* starring Jack Nicholson and Art Garfunkel, as Jonathan and Sandy (Bernie and Danny) who think of woman in only sexual terms. Jonathan, like Bernie, as Stinton Colin, the actor, mentions it in an interview, is a ‘Teach-like character,’ the character of *American Buffalo*. They are “full of hot air and have very little genuine knowledge to impart, but they nonetheless see themselves as instructors and mentors” (Dean 63). Like Bernie, Jonathan resents the relationship beyond sex and ignores any emotional involvement that may exist, reducing it always to a sexual level. The parodic similarity is striking. Early in the film the two characters are discussing their ideal woman, like the first scene of the play, and objectify the woman, giving her a ‘commodity value’:

SANDY. You want perfection.

JONATHAN. What do you want, wise guy?

SANDY. She just has to be nice. That’s all.

JONATHAN. You don’t want her beautiful?

SANDY. She doesn’t have to be beautiful. I’d like her built, though.

JONATHAN. I’d want mine sexy-looking.

SANDY. I wouldn’t want her to like a tramp.

JONATHAN. Sexy doesn’t mean, she has to look like a tramp.

There’s a middle ground. . . . big tits.

SANDY. Yeah. But still a virgin.

JONATHAN. I don’t care about that. . . . I wouldn’t mind if she was just a little ahead of me – with those big tits – and knew hundreds of different ways . . .

*(Carnal Knowledge)*
Mamet uses and abuses the objectified image of woman in the film by having a girl in the fantasy of Bernie, “torn between two tantalising images, that of a young inexperienced girl and an experienced woman” – ‘a pro’ (Bigsby 258). It is that classic treatment of the woman in the cinema as John Simon puts “today’s American actresses in mainly two categories”: virgins and vamps (Simon 297). The scenes in the play are simultaneously enacting and demythologising the ‘creation,’ the ‘promotion,’ and consequently naturalisation of the sexual images, “sexual voyeurism, sexual fantasies and sexual possession being [...] correlative of a vapid materialism” (Bigsby 257) as the ‘reality’ by the cinema and the mass media. They enact as Norman Denzin argues, “the onset of the hyperreal because the voyeur’s gaze is seen to eradicate objective reality” (Denzin 119). That is why Bernie fails in creating a relationship and Danny is afraid of making any commitment beyond the sexual relationship. They are living in a hyperreal world which does not match with the real one:

DANNY. I love making love with you.
DEBORAH. I love making love with you. (Pause.)
DANNY. I love you.
DEBORAH. Does it frighten you to say that?
DANNY. Yes.
DEBORAH. It’s only words. I don’t think you should be frightened by words. (SPC 41)

And it is, in fact, word that counts. There is nothing beyond that. As discussed earlier, it is the word, like any other ‘signs,’ that creates the ‘reality’ and that reality, which has already been created by the mass media, puts him off any commitment. Prior to the mentioned conversation, they had “[s]ome archly self-conscious bedroom chit-chat, in which sex organs and their functions are equated with TV commercials” (Carroll 57-8), and which leads to the ‘declaration of love.’

Even the war experience, which Bernie is supposed to have had and is asked about, is vicarious and derived from the 1972 television version of Robert Altman’s M*A*S*H, which is about Korean war:

DANNY. Bernie was in Korea.
DEBORAH. Really?
BERNIE. Yeah. You see M*A*S*H on TV? (Pause.) It all looks like that. There isn’t one square inch of Korea that doesn’t look like that. (Pause.) I’m not kidding. (Pause.) (SPC 29)

The film itself, ironically, was not filmed at all in Korea but “at the Twentieth-Century Fox ranch in the Lake Malibu area and on a football playground in Griffith Park” (Callens 47) in USA. The ‘real’ produced by the films, it seems, is no more suspect in American society at large.

Their language, especially that of Bernie, also takes on the coldness of a character like Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer (Dean 60); the male characters’ terminology owes more to fictional cops and robbers than to real life. Bernie evidently sees himself as the “cool-headed, although rather misogynistic, stud” (Dean 60) who has been represented by countless film and television heroes. Ostensibly they pose, therefore, their existence in hyperreality that becomes problematic when encountering the real reality. Their world becomes like that of George and Emil in The Duck Variations, who create film-like ‘reality,’ and who cannot communicate with the other individuals, especially the female individuals, since in their world they do not recognise them as individuals apart from sexuality. The characters can just conceive the female ones only as sexual beings, and even harsher, sexual fetishised objects or invisible concepts. The play ends as it started; “Bernie and Danny are on the beach. They are looking at attractive women” (SPC 61). They just recognise the women with their body parts: “Lookit her boobs;” “Those legs” “will you look at the chick in the two piece wet-look jobbie?” “all the way up to her ass!” “Look at that suit;” and at last Delezian ‘becoming-woman’ in the cinema is demythologised:

A long pause. They watch an imaginary woman pass in front of them.

BERNIE. Hi.

DANNY. Hello there.

Pause. She walks by.

BERNIE. She’s probably deaf.

DANNY. She did look deaf, didn’t she.

BERNIE. Yeah. (Pause.)
DANNY. Deaf bitch.

That is the way Hollywood always mythologises the woman. She doesn’t exist. She is passive, invisible, absent, and subject to the male desire. Ironically the film version of *Sexual Perversity of Chicago*, called *About Last Night* (1986), directed by Edward Zwick even serves the cause of Hollywood’s naturalisation of female sexuality. The film concentrates “almost exclusively upon the ‘romantic’ aspects of Danny and Deborah’s affair, which completely distort[s] the meaning and alter[s] the balance of” (Dean 67) the play. The Studio’s ‘perversion of the intention of the original play’ caused Mamet’s ‘disenchantment with Hollywood (Kane 335) and was the principal inspiration for *Speed-the-Plow*.

Cinema, particularly Hollywood, has played a crucial role in promoting, shaping and in fact naturalising popular myths, especially those of success, sexuality and violence, which have been demythologised by David Mamet in most of his plays and particularly in four plays discussed in this chapter.