CONCLUSION

In a drama the fact that something is ‘true’ is irrelevant.
The power of the dramatist resides in the ability to state the problem

David Alan Mamet

A Hollywood blockbuster commercial movie, *Mr & Mrs Smith* (2005), starts with a documentary-like scene, in which Mr and Mrs Smith (Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, the latest sex models of Hollywood) are seeing a marriage consultant and asked when and where they first met each other:

MR SMITH. Five years ago in Bogotá, Colombia.
MRS SMITH. Six years ago.

And there is a flashback with a subtitle: *BOGOTA, COLOMBIA, FIVE OR SIX YEARS AGO*. And their ‘(hi)story’ begins with “action, blood, a social theme, some girl” (*Speed-the-Plow* 13) and with many so-called ‘postmodern’ pastiching moments of the action films. The film ‘conveys’ that we know ‘there is no fixed reality. The reality is that which is always represented and may be not what we are being told,’ but ‘Hey, Enjoy’ the film. It was a box office hit. Whereas the twentieth-century dominant cultural and social forces, like Hollywood, were making reality and realism a surface and hollowed one, which is being inscribed and repudiated by postmodernists like David Mamet, they can, now, in the twenty-first century, do it with even postmodernism if it sells. Hollywood might easily make it serve the purpose of commerce. Those cultural forces are always fashionable and follow the latest trends and can now reproduce ‘postmodern’ films – ‘fashion-plate films’ putting the words of Fredric Jameson (Hutcheon, *Afterward* 200). It is the medium and not the postmodern that gives the illusion of a “perpetual present interminably recycled” (Friedberg 427). The dominant forces are popularising and naturalising it, and then hollowing its meaning, as they did it with American myths. They had been creating the fake reals, myths, they can now create fake myths, fake postmodernity. Nevertheless, it is again postmodernism because, as Fredric Jameson argues in “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” it mirrors the unending commodity circulation of an absolutely extensive capitalism.
The story of deception and fakery from that of Devil and Eve to today’s stories is all a part of what George Steiner in *After Babel* calls the anti-matter of language. By that he means its power of seduction and deception, of alternate inventions, and its ‘counter-factual pull.’ However, performative pleasures of language always lead us to submit willingly to that language, in whose “creative function non-truth or less-than-truth is [ . . . ] a primary device” (Steiner 229). We go to theatre and cinema to be deceived by the storytellers. And David Mamet knows all that and puts forward the world of theatre stripped and exposed. The world of his plays is that of story-telling; one is telling the story and the other is listening like Devil and Eve, Eve and Adam. Most of his plays always set two people on the stage, a set of speaker and listener. And they are performing the function of language: deception and manipulation. Teach and Don, Don and Bob in *American Buffalo*; John and Carol in *Oleanna*; Karol and Gould, Gould and Fox in *Speed-the-Plow*; Roma and Lingk, Levene and Williamson, Moss and Aaronow in *Glengarry Glen Ross*; Story-teller and Listener in *Prairie du Chien*; Nick and Ruth in *The Woods*; Bernie and Don, Joan and Debbie in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*; Fred and Dale, Joe and Stan, Joe and Dale in *Lakeboat*; Edmond and B-girl in *Edmond*, Gross and Lang in *The water Engine*, John and Miss A in *The Shawl*, Donny and John in *The Cryptogram* all are scheming the manipulative relationships, the relationship which never works and creates a world of estrangement, deceit, and self-concern. It becomes a world where the truth and reality are lost, because the language they are using is not for that purpose. Mamet’s characters deploy a language which does not carry literal meaning. It is all drained of its senses of reality. The language in Mamet’s plays is for the characters’ existence. They exist simply because their language lets them do. It creates their world, their fantasies, their dreams, their fear, their loss, their needs and their defensive aggression. It creates their ‘reality.’ There is no other way around. The audience has to accept what their language creates as the only ‘reality,’ while at the same time they do know that it must not be the ‘reality.’ That is why David Mamet is called a Postmodernist. As the playwright has himself observed, his “premise is that things do mean things, that there is a way that things are irrespective of the way we say things are, and if there isn’t, we might as well act as if there were” (Mamet, *WIR* 68). His plays inscribe the self-reflexive language of modernism and ‘reality’ of realism, and concomitantly overturn them.
work is the manifestation of what Hutcheon, describing one way of postmodern deconstruction, calls “clashing of various possible discourses of narrative representation” (Hutcheon 53). They do not try to give a prescription. They only exhibit them. The plays simply divulge the shortcomings of both representations in getting us to the ‘reality,’ if any. David Mamet lets us realise that what we are given is only the language, and the myth as a type of language, which is naturalised and mythologised as ‘reality,’ as ‘truth,’ using the potential capability of the signs. His realism is anti-realist insisting that knowledge is made valid not by its relation to its objects, but by its relations to our pragmatic interests, our communal perspectives, our needs, our rhetoric, and so no. Since there is no other way of representation, and its fakery, to represent what one has in mind but the representation itself, the artist and here the playwright employs a form of ironic representation – parody. The double-coded politics of the parody is the only way to stay honest in order to be able ‘to state the problem’, as Umberto Eco calls, in the era of the lost innocence: “it both legitimises and subverts that which it parodies” (Hutcheon 101).

What David Mamet parodies and in fact both legitimises and then subverts are popular American myths – he demythologises them. He considers them as cultural and linguistic constructs, not as the ‘natural’ reality of American society. His plays demythologise those myths naturalised by the realism of the era of late capitalism (as Lyotard puts it that way), the realism that constitutes a social universe ruled by the avarice, cruelty, betrayal, deception, manipulation and alienation of global markets, as Barthes observes, “look[ing] upon its values as universal” (Morris 32). That is why the characters in his plays think they are doing the ‘right’ thing. In Oleanna, John is ‘sure’ that he is doing his job as well as a ‘good’ teacher; Teach and Don in American Buffalo have no doubt that they have ‘right’ to do the ‘business’ and so do the characters of Glengarry Glen Ross; Nick in The Woods, Edmond in Edmond, Bernie and Danny in Sexual perversity of Chicago, crew in Lakeboat, and Gould in Speed-the-Plow are acting ‘naturally’ to ‘go for’ woman and sex: ‘after all, it’s a manly thing.’ His is a world of fictionality, full of petty criminals, dubious salesmen, gangsters, actors, urban cowboys. Mamet’s characters embrace the fictions which have been naturalised for them by the new priests of the Baudrillardian post-industrial society, the hyperreal society, who are selling them ‘reassurance,’ ‘forgiveness,’ ‘grace,’ and ‘truth,’ not to let them feel the
terror of the empty universe of the hyperreality, of the simulated world full of simulacrum.

On the other hand, the characters’ manipulative language conveys concurrently that they are looking for something in vain they do not possess and hiding something they inescapably have. The reckless abandonment of responsibility by so many of his characters is an acknowledgment of a demand refused. In the very denial of the ethics, there is a desire for that. There is a longing for trust in *The Woods, Glengarry Glen Ross, Prairie du Chien, Speed-the-Plow* and *American Buffalo*; for friendship and rapport in *Lakeboat, Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *The Duck Variations, Edmond, Oleanna, The Woods*, and *American Buffalo*; and the need to ‘believe,’ and desire for ‘order’ in all the plays of David Mamet. Their language also at the same time conceals, as the supposed psychic in *The Shawl* correctly identifies, the sense of ‘loss,’ and a feeling of ‘fear,’ which brings his victim to him and delivers her into his hands. However, he, too, feels the same things, knows the same needs, like the father to whom his daughter returns in *Reunion*, or the father who tells a story to his little daughter in *Dark Pony*, like a radio consultant with the name of the title, in *Mr Happiness*, who lives through the lives and fears and feelings of those who have sent him letters in which they have written about their problems. As an actor is tied to his audience, and derives not only his living but his meaning from that relationship, like the two actors of *A Life in Theatre*, so, too, are Mamet’s salesmen, confidence-men, tricksters, and lonely men. “They are wordsmiths,” Bigsby comments, “whose lies are transmuted into a kind of truth by those who need a story which will give meaning to their lives” (Bigsby 202). Yet David Mamet’s plays suggest something else as well.

Mamet’s strength lies in his ability to raise social questions on the nature of community and communication, to criticise the way modern society consider business as the sacred core of our life, to scrutinise betrayals in either personal or professional life, to enhance awareness of personal estrangement and bewilderment of the people, to motivate debate on the reciprocal relationship of social forces and the requirements of the individual, to critique our tendency to trade morality as goods, to expose gaps between what we say and what we do (Kane 316). He wants to express vividly, in his dramaturgy, the lethargy and depravity of modern American society and to show its devastating
effects upon his characters (Dean 222), as he thinks like Jung that “it really is not the individual who is sick but the society that is sick” (Schvey 68). However, he refuses to give any solution, “to tell us whom to trust and what to think” (Kane 317).

It is this postmodernist nature of contradiction in the subtexts of his plays that sometimes irritates some critics, and presumably some audiences, who find Mamet’s plays ‘unclear,’ which the playwright himself interprets as ‘provocative.’ “That rather than sending the audience out whistling over the tidy moral of the play,” he continues, “it leaves them unsettled. I’ve noticed over the past 30 years that a lot of what passes in the theatre is not drama but rather a morality tale. ‘Go thou now and do likewise.’ That’s very comforting, [. . . but] then you forget about the play” (Norman 125-26). He wants his audience to leave the hall ‘unsettled,’ to be provoked by his plays. And it is for sure that the unsettling matter is the unavailability of the reality and the plurality of the appearances of the reality, in the Deleuzian sense, that make the audience along with his characters yearn to continue, provide “the energy that fuels the journey” (Bigsby 38).

Once Napoleon Bonaparte went to visit the Austrian Emperor on his death bed, he told Napoleon: ‘Whereas we were always looking for dignity and being earnest, you are after worldly wealth and capital.’ Napoleon is told to have said: ‘You are right, Your Majesty. We all are searching that which we do not possess.’

That is true of all the plays of Mamet already discussed. The common point that links all of his work including those of this study is power. From George and Emil in The Duck Variations to the salesmen of Glengarry Glen Ross all hanker for dominance, either verbal supremacy or knowledge authority or financial ascendancy and primacy, and acquiring that status, they think, can provide them satisfaction, even though temporarily. While the violence is verbal in Glengarry Glen Ross, Sexual Perversity in Chicago and Lakeboat, physical violence in much of Mamet’s plays frequently occurs when misreadings accumulate and words begin to lose their force. Edmond attacks the B-girl with a knife when he cannot communicate with her with words in Edmond; in Oleanna, John assaults Carol in exasperation of inability to express his fury; it is the same scenario in Speed-the-Plow when Fox punches Gould on his face; and so does Teach in American Buffalo when he is infuriated by Bob’s ‘stories.’ Nick and Ruth, in The Woods, are also involved in violence as they cannot express themselves and hit each other in rage. The
wrath outbursts also in *Prairie du Chien* when the cardplayer shoots his partner and the farmer in the story of the storyteller kills his wife.

Moreover, the specific features presented in relation to the plays of each chapter can be extended to cover the other chapters too. Myth of sexuality is also addressed in plays such as *Oleanna*, *The Woods*, *Edmond*, and even in *Lakeboat* and palely in *Prairie du Chien*, in all of which the woman is treated as an object or possession by the men. The loneliness and alienation of the individual and the private myths are also illustrated in *Lakeboat*, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, and *Edmond* as the characters cannot communicate with the people in the society and create tension. And, in fact, all characters of Mamet are in a journey lost, either into the urban jungle of New York in *Edmond*, or the country in *The Woods*, or the voyeuristic journey of the male characters in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Many plays usually are enclosed in a circuitous end as if in-between nothing has happened. *American Buffalo* ends without the fulfilment of the plan, *Edmond* starts with an absurd dialogue between Edmond and his wife and ends with the same situation between Edmond and his cellmate lover. The two characters of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* are shown, at the beginning and the end of the play, alone fantasising about the women. Two film producers of *Speed-the-Plow* have decided to go for the Buddy film at the beginning of the play and so they decide at the end. The crew in *Lakeboat* are, at the end of the play, where they were at the beginning of it; it is their fate to be in a circular journey in the lake forever – “it’s like having a job, for crissakes.” It again emphasises the performative realism of the plays as if all characters are actors in Shakespearian sense on the stage of their life, who come, play their role and leave. The notion is well embodied in the playwright’s metadrama play, *A life in Theatre*, in which the two characters are theatre actors and it is their job to perform the roles. The play, being episodic like many of his early plays, “alternates offstage and onstage action” (Biggsby 274).

The other plays of the playwright could just as well be brought into the scope. His *Reunion* written and produced in Louisville in 1976 is a two-character play including a father and his daughter like the other play of Mamet written and produced in New Haven, Connecticut in 1977: *Dark Pony*. If the father and his daughter are joined together in *Reunion*, to avoid the fear of loneliness, the father in the latter tells his daughter a story to
dispel that fear. Both plays expose the need for companionship, for relationship and rapport. That is also the motif of the other play, *Mr. Happiness*, in which a radio anchor answers the letters of different people, the letters which reflect the suffering, the sense of incompleteness, loss, pain and desperation. The play was a brief companion piece to *The Water Engine: An American Fable* when the latter produced on Broadway in 1978. The play, set at the time of the ‘Century of Progress’ at the Chicago World Fair in 1933, was a very expressive concern of the playwright with the American myth of success and business, American dream. It is the story of an inventor who has invented an engine working with water, for whose patent he sees a lawyer who hand in hand with some industrial forces, tries to intimidate the inventor to sell his invention and his plans. On refusal, he and his sister are killed. Beyond this melodramatic story, there is ‘metatheatrical’ subtext. It is, in fact, written for radio to be heard in several voices simultaneously, one of which is the voice of a ‘Chainletter’ unfolding the destiny of the inventor, and when it is produced on stage by the actor performing the radio production, the metadramatic dimension of the play is reinforced where, indeed, different layers of ‘reality’ are established. An American fable has presented a dream of avarice which seems the only substantial reality available. The same notion of betrayal of trust is central in Mamet’s other play, *The Shawl*, produced in 1985 in Chicago and New York. It is the story of a medium, John, who tries to gain a woman’s trust in order to keep his male lover. He knows that all people who come to him have problems revolving around three main concerns: “It’s money–illness–love. . . That’s all it ever is” (Shawl 22). And he himself has the same problem. John and his lover Charles have money problem and John tries to persuade him to stay with him but he leaves him at the end of the play, and the woman, Miss A, finds out his trickery. However, David Mamet brings back Miss A to John as she thinks he must have seen her mother because he mentions her shawl nobody knows of. His powerful use of signs can still deceive as he had earlier “suppose[d] we all want ‘magic’” (Shawl 23).

The same deceptive language is used in Mamet’s *The Cryptogram* produced in 1995 in New York. It is considered a ‘family play’ (Schaub 328) with a mother, his ten-year-old son and the family’s gay friend. The boy’s father is absent and the other two do not want to let boy know that he will never come back. Perhaps more than any of
Mamet’s previous plays, *The Cryptogram* explores the slippery linguistic code spoken by adults in the presence of children. The conversations are fragmented, the characters never quite engaging with one another, each with his or her own unexpected fears. The play ends with each wrapped in his or her own privacies, unable to reach out. The male friend, an aging gay, is sent spinning back to the isolation of his hotel room home. The boy’s mother prepares to move on, still unable to make sense of what has happened. The boy himself, in some ways the true centre of the play, edges closer to psychosis. He looks for a consolation he is plainly not going to afford. That corrosion of communality which has characterised all Mamet’s work here moves beyond the ‘proto-families’ of *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* into the very family itself, the family about which he had, perhaps, been speaking all along (Bigsby *MAD* 257).

The classic notion of family, which is very significant in utopian society, is degraded in Mamet’s plays particularly those discussed in this study. David Mamet criticises the social upheaval towards the collapse of the family in American society. In *Lakeboat*, the crew consists either of old bachelors or divorcees. In *Prairie du Chien*, the story narrated is about the collapse of the family and the title-character in *Edmond* leaves his heterosexual life to make a homosexual family in the jail, emphasising on their rootlessness (Dean 148). George and Emil in *The Duck Variations* never speak about their family and hate going home. The characters in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* live with their friends and they never talk about the family. Neither do they in *The Woods*. In *Oleanna*, Carol implies she had a familial problem and John has to stay in the hotel for the problem he has at university. There is no family for the characters in *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* out of their professional mates. The absence of women in most of his plays somehow indicates that reason for all the problems the men are facing and creating and for the man’s deracination; the absence, which is, supplementary to the male/presence, deconstructed and is given vital existence. And if they are mentioned, they are mistreated and/or victimised by men. Mamet’s treatment of female characters in his plays, in fact, de-naturalises the way the women, he believes, are treated like an object without an identity in the American media, films and society.

Indeed, since 1990 there is a revision in the way characters are treated in Mamet’s plays. There are more female characters who take the leads in his plays and who know
how to manipulate the language and the power as well as their male opponents. It could be traced how he has developed his female characters chronologically during his career. If his plays in 1970s and 1980s generally witnessed characteristically unelaborated female characters, the 1990s and afterwards bear plays with remarkable female characters. The change in male characterisation can also be marked out. The more we get closer to the end of twentieth century, the more callous, the more self-concerned, and cannier the male characters become and surprisingly the more affinity we feel towards them. This is also reflected in the way he has used the language in his plays. Some of his plays have treated the language as a medium, used and abused by the people to create the reality like *The Duck Variation, Lakeboat* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* while some other consider the characters as the victims of the language, which constructs their world and its reality like *Oleanna, American Buffalo* and *Edmond*. The latter notion is remarkable in relation to the creation of the reality by a very powerful cultural force — mass media particularly the motion pictures.

It seems that in the last years of the twentieth-century and the current century, David Mamet has changed the way he writes. He focuses more on filmmaking and novel writing. In six years of the new century, he has only written two plays, *Boston Marriage* (2000) and *Faustus* (2004), but three novels and four or five films, the latest of which, the adaptation of *Edmond*, has been recently released. *Boston Marriage*, “a pastiche of Wildean parlour drama,” (Bigsby, CCDM 5) is a revolutionary one in Mamet’s career as all its three characters are female — two young Victorian lovers, Anna and Claire, and their maid, Catherine. It is also homage to Henry James’ *The Bostonian* (1886) in which the unmarried women are portrayed. The play was an answer to the feminist critics who were accusing Mamet of being misogynist and also that his female characters were always the males’ victims. The way Anna treats her maid illustrates the hierarchy in which she believes and the power she has. She is also abusing the power like the men. The maid’s character also reminds of the one in Ionesco’s *The Lesson*, who always attempts to be audible and corrects them.

David Mamet belongs to a generation that grew up after the cinema and television had decisively replaced the theatre as the dominant forms of public entertainment. That is why we can see his attraction to the cinema, especially in the recent years, and many
resemblances between his plays and motion pictures concerning, for instance, his plays’ episodic structures, the fragmented and fractured repetitive dialogues. His primary commitment may be to the stage, but since the early 1980s he has pursued “a parallel career in the movies matched by no more than a handful of dramatists of comparable distinction such as Sacha Guitry and Marcel Pagnol in France and American Robert E, Sherwood and two British Terence Rattigan and Harold Pinter,“ (French 171) whom Mamet admires. His range – as playwright, novelist, poet, essayist, adapter, author of original screenplays, director – has been greater than any of those mentioned and on a different scale from his near-contemporaries in Europe and America. After having directed his original screenplay, Spartan, in 2004, which was received successfully, he has recently done his adaptation of Edmond. He also premiered his latest play, Faustus, in February, 2004, at The Magic Theatre, San Francisco, in which he just took the story idea of Marlowe’s five-act epic and used it in a play of his own. Faustus has been written in something of a classical style, with considerable emphasis on the language of the characters. While consideration on language is always part of Mamet’s style, here it is much more formal and literate than the sort of dialogue readers and audience of Mamet are accustomed to.

To conclude we can say that David Mamet’s dramaturgy and its language is unique in contemporary American theatre. His plays, with their particular treatment of language as the creator of the world and its reality, undoubtedly, though indirectly, reflect his concerns about American society and its naturalised myths, which he has always, vividly, discussed in his essays, and some of which have been denaturalised and demythologised in the present thesis.