

A Suggested Guide for studying "*Glengarry Glen Ross*"

"The purpose of the theater is not primarily to deal with social issues . . . it's to deal with spiritual issues. I don't write plays to dump on people. I write plays about people whom I love and am fascinated by."

--David Mamet

The present audience for theater is for the most part made up of a society of individuals who wish to avoid the intense study of the production that is before them. We are all too willing to accept that which we are offered for its face value, and most often believe that is what is going to be offered to us. We would like only to be entertained, and so we will gladly accept a text that is totally free of any implications of subtext. It is necessary to caution you the viewer, by giving you an understanding of the danger that this causes with a play such as *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The danger comes in Mamet's unwillingness to offer you this play at face value. This requires the viewer to look beyond the text to the subtext.

Glengarry Glen Ross, written by David Mamet in 1983, was not written with the expressed purpose of either being political or moral. All implications of such issues should be considered a subconscious discharge of Mamet's personal feelings. These feelings are both bitter and contemptuous for what our society has become and for this reason they are often viewed as pessimistic. Mamet's perspective is the following:

"It has been suggested to me that the play concerns American cut-throat capitalism and the theme is the destructiveness of competition. I suppose this is a logical explanation and probably true into the bargain. All that I set out to do was to write about my experience in a real estate office, and I assure you that as bizarre as the behavior in the office may seem, the behavior in the office itself made it look tame."

The viewer should attempt to study and recognize several underlying qualities of the play that make Mamet's vision overwhelmingly vivid. He allows us to participate in his experience by creating for us a universe complete with its own

breed of people, accompanied with their own language, acting out of the constructs of their own moral ethical code.

The inhabitants of Mamet's universe are without a home. For the purposes of Mamet's story they live within a two room house that consists of a Chinese restaurant and another room which consists of an office. As we would upon the visitation of any house, we should subconsciously be aware of the fact that their house is in shambles. It's decorum sparks an intense feeling of chaos. The set is designed in such a way that it's chaotic feeling of displacement will make it's displaced inhabitants feel comfortable. Mamet does not provide for them a home such as you would find in plays written by Eugene O'Neill or Tennessee Williams, for to do this would be to also provide for them a sense of security that would consequently undermine their aggressive natures.

The aggressive nature of these men make them and everyone associated with them understand that they are masculine and void of any qualities that would make them seem otherwise. This is why it is essential that his play contain no women. For these men, the female gender embodies all that is weak. In the space of their home there is no room for feelings of compassion, understanding, and sympathy, such qualities do not allow them to reach the goal of their capitalistic society which is money. Therefore, such words expressly related to the female gender and anyone who embodies the female gender such as homosexuals will only be used in order to show an utter contempt and disdain for feelings often associated with them. If these words produce these same feelings within the hearts and minds of the audience then the language is successful. And while other words that may be associated with the male gender may not be thought of as especially appealing, they do exude a certain animalistic feeling of confidence that let's the viewer realize that the environment is strictly partial to those who are willing to exist in a "dog-eat-dog" world.

This is why the language Mamet uses is so very vital. What appears before you on stage are free thinking men who seem to be for the most part articulate and rational thinkers within their own distorted code of behavior. However, because their world is the result of a corrupted society they no longer have the understanding or the knowledge of these words. It is interesting to note here that Mamet's father was

considered to be an amateur semanticist who insisted that his children always find the appropriate words to express themselves. It seems that the world that Mamet has created is incapable of doing this. Mamet challenges the viewer to put aside the traditional use of language. The rational way of thinking in or hearing language such as this is to understand that behavior determines language. However, Mamet's use of language is to allow language to determine behavior. The language produces a constant sword fight in which one of the opponents could die at any moment. Mamet would like his audience to feel the mortality and possible destruction of language. There are many words that Mamet could have chosen that may have worked as well, but because the use of such language comes with its own moral and societal implications they prove to be the most effective. The language also has a certain rhythmic quality that demands attention. It draws us in with every beat that Mamet has strategically planned out. It pulls us in just as the capitalistic society that Mamet is warning us against does.

We need to understand this language as the language of criminals. These men are professional con artists who can improvise a scam as soon as their prey is spotted. It is a strategy that eliminates all possibility of an established relationship that would be based on trust, faith and honesty. It is perhaps no coincidence that the play uses such words as "leads." "Leads" are the addresses of the most likely buyers for the properties they are selling. "Leads" correspond to suspects in a trial in the same way that they correspond to prospective buyers in real estate.

These are but a few of the ways in which Mamet shows us his insight into a world that he has lost hope in. This will serve to challenge and motivate the viewer to determine why Mamet classifies this play as a prime example of "spiritual death."

"As the Stoics said, either gods exist or they don't exist, if they exist then surely things are unfolding as they should. If they do not exist, then why should we be so reluctant to depart a world in which there are no gods."

--David Mamet

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