

unites scatological language with lyricism, and connects the frenzied pace of urban³ life with scrupulous attention to form.

Mamet's American Buffalo which won him an Obie Award, and Glengarry Glen Ross, his great success, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in May 1984, best represent his vision and work. These two major plays deal with similar thematic concerns. Critic C.W.E. Bigsby rightly believes that Glengarry Glen Ross "is in some senses, intellectually, a companion piece to American Buffalo."⁴ Leslie Kane remarks on this fact thus : "American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross are brilliant plays about corruption in American business."⁵

The objectives of this paper is to study Mamet's symbolism in American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross in order to see how far it carries his moral vision of life and drama. Most critics like to deal with his plays as launching a severe attack on Mamet's society and country alone. Yet the study of symbolism in these two plays could deal with the wider implications of their themes. Mamet's symbolism in these two plays is not given enough attention by the critics who would concentrate on some other aspects of the plays, such as the language, or the themes. Robert Asahina, for example, does not see any symbolic associations of the theme of Americ

Buffalo. He observes : "It is obvious that American Buffalo is nothing but another variation on the tiresome theme of thieves falling out. You can tell it is a realistic play because every other word is undeleted expletive."⁶ Anne Dean refers here to Mamet's symbolism as a dramatic formal element which is buried in his realism : "Mamet's symbolism is never heavy-handed or obvious; each symbolic image can be quite painlessly offset with one of absolute realism"⁷ As this paper planned to trace Mamet's symbolism in these two plays and analyse its role in transcending the surface reality of the plays' actions, we hope to be able to trace the plays' real themes and Mamet's basic concerns.

The characters of American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross are all urban people who are small, vulgar, dirty, stupid, corrupt, envious, deceptive and marginal. In American Buffalo, the three would-be-thieves, Teach, Donny and Bobby are planning to rob a buffalo-head nickel and other valuable possessions of a coin collector. But the robbery has never been done because Fletch, an off-stage character who will help in the robbery, has never showed up. Out of his impatience and frustration Teach hits Bobby and finally destroys Donny's junkshop where the action of the play takes place, leaving the place a heap of mess.

Teach who forces himself in the world of Donny, and his junkie boy Bobby who were planning the robbery before Teach's arrival to the shop, could persuade Donny to exclude his young friend Bobby from the robbery. Teach, the symbol of corruption and exploitation, thinks of the robbery as business : "I am a businessman, I am here to do business, I am here to face facts."⁸ He keeps lecturing Donny on the meaning of free enterprise and the difference between friendship and business : "All that I'm saying, don't confuse business with pleasure." (p.34) There is also a deadly competition between Teach and Fletch who is stronger and more successful than Teach. According to Teach, Fletch is "a card player," (p. 15) who is both admired and hated by Teach who keeps telling Donny : "We don't need this guy. Don. We don't need him." (p.51) Yet finally Teach has to submit to Donny's desire to include Fletch in the robbery. The word "theft" is symbolic of "business" which according to the ideals of Mamet's modern American society refers to all dubious dealings.

The characters of Glengarry Glen Ross are not thieves but legitimate salesmen whose business is lawful, yet it entails much deception. The salesmen, Richard Roma, Shelly Levene, Dave Moss and George Aaranow depend for their living on

much "sale talk" through which they trick their clients into buying their commodities. They do belong to the class of robbers seen in American Buffalo. In this context the word "salesman" stands for a robber, and the system of salesmanship stands for theft. They are petty and marginal citizens who move in a space which is drawn for them by the business system. This system is symbolized in the play by two off-stage characters, Mitch and Murray, who, according to Williamson, the office boss, will see that Levene, the old failing salesman, "go to jail. Believe me they will."⁹ Roma tops all the salesmen in the play in his sales because he shows sincerity in deceiving his clients. Douglas Bruster comments on Roma's salesmanship traits thus : "One finds oneself entranced by Roma's line of philosophy, yet there is no sense there. The form of his rhetoric, the force of his argument and the strength of his self-confidence are the real elements of attraction."¹⁰ The improvisation scene in which both Roma and Levene try to swindle a land-buyer, James Lingk, symbolizes the modern man's readiness and capacity for deception and affectation. Roma in this scene acts lies easily :

Roma : You're a client. I just
sold you five waterfront
Glengarry Farms. I rub
my head, throw me the
cue "Kenilworth".

Levene : What is it ?

Roma : Kenilw ...

Ling enters the office.

Roma (To Levene) : I own the property, my mother owns the property. I put her into it. I'm going to show you on the plats...
(p.78)

The scene is symbolic also of a society which is full of thieves, cheats and impostors in the form of businessmen. The symbol could also suggest that all kinds of business are there. The image could poetically portray that the whole class of businessmen who think of business in terms of theft are self-deluding people.

The competition among the salesmen in Glengarry Glen Ross is more brutal than it is in American Buffalo. They spare no effort to destroy each other; observing no human bonds. If Roma sympathizes with his master and colleague salesman, Levene, he does so only to employ him in time of need. For example, he asks Levene to improvise the role of a wealthy buyer to swindle his client Ling. Roma cannot sustain a friendship which will not assist his own personal interests. Thus he turned into a shark destroying friends and foes alike. Roma thus commands Williamson, his boss, threateningly :

Williamson : listen to me : when

the leads come in ...
Listen to me : when the leads
come in I want my top two off
the list. For me. My usual two.
Anything you give Levene ...
I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is
mine. whatever he gets for himself,
I'm taking half, You put me in
with him.(p.107)

Robert Cushman remarks on these salesmen as follows : "The fact that the land-sharks in Glengarry, though their job consists of swindling their customers, are not actually breaking any law gives their play ... a greater resonance. They are part of society, and so function more aptly as a comment on it."¹¹ These salesmen are left waiting for the "Leads" which mean the list of names of prospective buyers. The "leads" are in the possession of more powerful people who control both the business and the fate of these entrepreneurs. The final scene paints a symbolic image of a jungle/society where "might is always right."

Both the characters of American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross are losers. They stand powerless in front of a world in which they feel lost, confused and perplexed, a world which is only dominated by whoever can easily and quickly adjust to it. In American Buffalo, Fletch is that man whom Teach describes thus to Don:

(you're coming in here all the time that "He's so good at cards...")
The man is a cheat, Don. He cheats at cards- Fletcher, the guy that you're waiting for.(p.80)

In Glengarry Glen Ross, the people who can cope with the business world are Mitch and Murray who control the sales in the play.

The characters of the two plays end in deep distress. Teach in American Buffalo is so frustrated because Fletch has not arrived and because the robbery is left undone that he resorts to violent actions such as hitting Bobby and destroying Donny's junkshop leaving it in a terrible mess. He says despairingly :

The Whole Entire World.
There Is No Law.
There Is No Right and Wrong.
The World Is Lies.
There Is No Friendship.(p.103)

Before leaving Donny's shop, Teach made a paper hat to replace his missing one. This paper hat is symbolic of his defeat and vulnerability. Anne Dean sees that the paper hat is "very much at odds with one who wishes to pass himself as a hardened gangster."¹² Teach's name itself is symbolically-used in this play. He stands for teaching Donny and Bobby. He tries to impress them as a knowledgeable person : "... here's

a helpful hint. Fifty percent of some money is better than ninety percent of some broken toaster... (p.37), or "Man is a creature of habits. Man does not change his habits overnight."(p.78), or "I am a businessman, I am here to face facts." (p.83) Teach is teaching Donny his unethical values. The name symbolizes other teachers in the modern age as having no message to teach except corruption and theft. Pascal Hubert-Leibler comments perceptively on this point :

The teachers in Mamet's plays all aim at teaching about life. Yet, if there are no longer any fixed values in this corrupt world, there remains little knowledge to pass on to future generations.¹³

Teach's gospel is cheating. At the end of the play it leads to destruction and violence. The symbol could be extended to imply a mad and violent world which is dominated by utter corruption.

In Glengarry Glen Ross, the salesman's fate is not happier than that of the characters of American Buffalo. They all end as losers and failures. Their condition at the end of the play is one of loss, desperation and resentment. Aarawon is shown at the end cursing the job of a salesman: "Oh, God, I hate this job."(p.108) Levene, the old salesman, is left in utter despair; he will

lose his living, and nobody, even the seeming-friendly Roma, will come to his rescue. Instead, Roma viciously lets him down. Roma, himself ends as he began, though he seems to be better off than the others, because he is hopelessly corrupt. Roma says at the end of the play that he will be at the Chinese restaurant where he used to swindle his clients before.

Even the buyers are to end sadly. Lingk as a buyer could be full of greed and hope of wealth through the enterprise of buying lands. The irony at the end of the play is raised because the greed, villainy and swindling avail none anything. The symbolic image is that of total loss and defeat for both salesmen and buyers. They are victims of their greed, and also victims of a more powerful and merciless hidden system. Sympathy might be stirred for them. This symbolic image portrays them as victims of forces which exploit them and paralyse their power for resistance. The failure of these people presents a powerful image symbolizing the failure of the individual in the highly technical, highly complex, and highly competitive urban societies. Another implication of the symbolic image is that these societies have failed to satisfy the needs of all its citizens, thus a large percentage of their citizens emerge as losers and failures.

The end of each play is symbolic of a society which moves in cycles and accordingly lacks real progress. The inference is that of a backward movement in human societies. The symbolic image here gives another implication which portrays a fearful abyss which people are prone to fall in unless they become cautious enough to prevent such a pitfall. The image could also portray a symbolic windmill to which people are tied blind-fold, moving wherever the air shoots them; or, the image might suggest a compulsory race which they are running unable to stop for a while to ask themselves about the reason for their running. The endings of the two plays also reveal a powerful symbolic image of a world getting mad, a world inhabited by dehumanized people racing one after the other and running speedily towards their destruction. That symbol could again transcend the present reality to suggest a picture of the approaching destruction of a world void of logic, sense or reason.

The characters of the two plays symbolize the destructive and dehumanizing effect of the materialistic societies at large. The citizen is turned into a mechanical object with obsolete responses. Teach, Donny Bobby, and even Fletch who ends in hospital, in American Buffalo, on the one hand, and Roma, Levene, Moss and Aaranow

in Glengarry Glen Ross on the other, are all, petty, violent, helpless and psychologically sick. They represent a powerful symbol of a merciless society turned into a jungle which is inhabited by beasts of prey. This symbol could also suggest an image of people who negate their humanity in imitation of the jungle beasts only to attain worldly gains. An evidence is in Act I scene three in Glengarry Glen Ross where Roma, in a serpent-like manner, tricks James Lingk into buying a piece of land; he is a disgusting example of man's debasement :

I'm glad to meet you, James.
(Pause.) I want to show you something. (Pause.) It might mean nothing to you ... and I might not. I don't know. I don't know anymore. (Pause. He takes out a small map and spreads it on a table,) What is that ? Florida. Glengarry Highlands. Florida. "Florida, Bullshit." And maybe that's true; and that's what I said : but look here : what is this ? This is a piece of land. Listen to what I'm going to tell you now : (pp.50-51)

The problem of communication is a major obstacle which faces these people who live in a world dominated by deceit, falsity, affectation and corruption where no one keeps his word and where words have lost their meanings. The language

which is uttered by Teach or Richard Roma is the vulgar street language which is reduced to shouts, curses, obscenities, profanity and swear-words. It becomes creative, vigorous, short and unfinished so as to produce the desired effect on their hearers. This language is indicative of their low birth, disturbed and troubled psyche, resentment, inadequacy, confusion, weakness and defeat. Teach is trying to force Don to believe in his argument : "I don't fuck with my friends, Don. I don't fuck with my business associates." (p.83) Moss in Glengarry Glen Ross tries his best to steal the leads from the office in order to get the highest sales to be able to get the first prize: a "Cadillac." He tries to get his fellow salesman Aaranow involved in the theft :

I lied. (Pause.) Alright ? My end is my business. Your end's tewnty-five, In or out. You tell me, you're out you take the consequences.(p.46)

Their language is symbolic of the degradation and deterioration of the modern culture of which they are part. The image is again interpreted to suggest the link between them and beasts which resort to producing sounds to frighten their enemies, especially that their words are emptied of any sense. Teach resorts to swearing when he gets frustrated : "They treat me like an

asshole, they are an asshole. Pause. The only way to teach these people is to kill them." (p.11) June Schlueter and Elizabeth Forsyth comment on the transparency of the language of the characters in American Buffalo :

Teach's impatience and the nervousness that characterizes the junkshop trio betray the would-be thieves as men with personal insecurities they hope to conceal beneath the rhetoric of business.¹⁴

In Glengarry Glen Ross, Shelly Levene rushes into the office, in Act II, shouting and repeating some words, so as to hide his lies and defeat:

Get the chalk ... get the chalk
I closed ... Get the chalk and
put me on the board. I'm going
to Hawaii ! Put me on the cadillac
board, Williamson ! Pick up the
fuckin' chalk. Eight units. Mountain
View ... (p.63)

This language produces recognizable sounds but yields no meaning. Douglas Bruster here well describes the language of modern people in Mamet's plays :

Indeed, the number of verbal non-sequiturs in Mamet is astounding: one could say, in fact, that the dramatic world is built on them. Language is no longer communal, but a frightening reflection of the self.¹⁵

Mamet resorts to the technique of the monologue to get his characters portrayed. It is a sign of the speaker's supremacy over his listeners, that is why he monopolizes the conversation. Teach in American Buffalo launches into a long speech so as to convince Donny to exclude his friend Bobby from the robbery. The fact that he gets hold of the conversation shows his supremacy over others. In Glengarry Glen Ross we see long passages which are usually uttered by a particular character whose argument dominates the scene. Roma, Levene and Moss usually give long passages or rather monologues. The following is a speech delivered by Levene in Act I, scene one, where he makes a deal with Williamson :

John. (Pause.) I want to talk to you. Permit me to do this a second. I'm older than you. A man acquires reputation. On the street. What he does when he's up. what he does otherwise. ... I said "ten" you said "not". you said "twenty". I said "fine," ... how I can beat that, you tell me ? ... Okay. Okay. We'll ... Okey. Fine. We'll Alright, twenty percent, and fifty bucks a lead. A month or two we'll talk. A month from now, Next month. After the thirtieth. (Pause.) We'll talk.(p.24)

The image which is portrayed of people doing their utmost to protect themselves, or to defeat

others through solo speeches is symbolic of fighters in a battlefield who are ready to slaughter their opponents verbally. The fiercer the fighter and the sharper his verbal weapon, the more victorious he emerges from the field. Their weapons which are made of words are sharpened by deceit, falsity and viciousness. The symbolic image can also suggest a world in which people are preying on themselves. The symbol could be extended to indicate the moral crisis of the modern world at large.

The settings of the two plays portray powerful symbolic images. The action of American Buffalo takes place in Donny's junkshop in which he sells all sorts of old things, things which were once valued but now they are left-overs, such as the "buffalo-head nickel."(p.29) The junkshop is deeply symbolic as it stirs many associations which surmount the seeming realism. Gregory Mosher, who gave American Buffalo its first production in Chicago in 1975, speaks here in an interview with Leslie Kane, about his experience of producing the play unrealistically :

I never thought of American Buffalo as being realistic. ... I thought we'll build the set out of chairs- hundreds of metal chairs- and that will be the back wall. So it was probably, in fact, the

most abstract set that Michael Merritt and I ever created together. I have the drawing here somewhere which shows the chairs sort of hanging in the air. hanging in a sort of terrific pattern ... I knew very specifically that it shouldn't be realistic, and that it shouldn't look a set that you'd have in a television show. I did do a realistic set in New York... in 1976, that had actual walls and a real doorway, and I thought that it was horrible, really, really bad. It hurt the play terribly.¹⁶

One way of understanding the symbolic setting of the junkshop is that whatever was valued in the past is treated as worthless and as junk now. The researcher is supportive of June Schlueter and Elizabeth Forsyth's view of the strong associations of this symbolic image here :

The junkshop, with its piles of once treasured, now rejected cultural artifacts, proves to be a powerful image for an America in which the business ethic has so infiltrated the national consciousness and language that traditional human values have become buried under current values of power and greed.¹⁷

Another interpretation of this symbolic image presented by the setting is that the junkshop represents a shapeless mass which lacks unity, organization, order or sense of beauty. The implication of the symbol could be that of an

America made up of many races and many colours with the concomitant inference that great differences should exist among them. Thus Teach, Donny and Bobby could stand for the Americans who are as different from one another as these three characters are. The junkshop could also stand for the whole world which is inhabited by the human race with all its physical and mental differences which is again represented by the inhabitants of the junkshop. The cord which plays the note of discord among the peoples of the whole world is a superficial one, because it belongs to their exterior. The confusion, discord and disharmony which prevail in the universe occur because man stifled the voice of his humanity and checked its free play. Thus the image indicates that no matter how different people are, they would appear in good shape if they are well arranged, that is, if they play their basic role as human beings.

The image of the junkshop can also be symbolic of a place where junk is thrown. Teach, Donny and Bobby can be associated with the junk in the shop as they represent the left-overs and the refuse of their society. Their beliefs and ideals are thought of as the junk which their society can easily discard with because they are superficial ideals and beliefs void of real values. The image could be also applied to people at

large, their junk ideals and even their junk food. There is a reference in the play to the junk food. Donny in the role of an instructor to his young ward, lectures Bobby about the harmful effect of junk food on one's health :

You know how much nutritive benefits they got in coffee ? Zero. Not one thing. The stuff eats you up. You cannot live on coffee, Bobby. ... You cannot live on cigarettes. You may feel good, you may feel fine, but something getting overworked, and you are going to pay for it.(p.8)

The same symbol could also portary an image of a junk culture as it sticks to superficial ideals such as salesmanship and commercialism, and ignores real human values.

If the setting of American Buffalo is rich in its symbolic associations, the setting of Glengarry Glen Ross is not less indicative of poetic images which enrich the play's themes. The action of the play takes place in two localities. The first act is set in a Chinese restaurant where the salesmen usually close their dealings . The second act is set in the real-estate office where the salesmen are actually employed. Act I is divided into three scenes, each of which deals with two characters talking alone at a booth.

These characters go to the restaurant not to eat and drink but to finish transactions. In it, closed meetings are held. The booth represents a closed locality where a secret dealing takes place. The image may raise the associations of a dubious transaction which is done in secrecy. It gives the sense of conspiring, and plotting. In the first scene Levene talks to Williamson, the office boss, about enabling him to have the best leads sharing the profit with him. In Scene Two we see salesman Moss sitting at another booth with salesman Aaraw trying to let him steal the leads from the office in return for a sum of money. In the third and last scene in Act I, Richard Roma, the salesman is sitting at a third booth where he is talking to the buyer Link who is being tricked into buying a worthless piece of land. The Chinese restaurant is symbolic of a place where people administer meals, unhealthy or poisonous not only for their stomachs but also for their souls and minds. The image of the restaurant with its booths is symbolic of a whole society in which there are different secret places like booths or cells, where certain people gather to conspire against others. The final association which might be stirred by the image of the restaurant is that society has been turned into a big prison where people are locked up inside different cells in which man is caged by his

obsessions of unlawful success. Man is compelled to remain in such a prison, if he wants to get successful and prosperous, therefore it is an imposed as well as self-inflicted imprisonment.

The second act in Glengarry Glen Ross takes place in the real-estate office where all the salesmen's dubious dealings are supposed to take place. This office stands for any office where employees do their jobs. It also stands for the whole society where business people try to swindle other people. Another powerful symbol which is suggested by the real-estate office is that of an America being invaded by the views of salesmanship and commercialism. The image which could be finally raised by this office is that of a jungle inhabited by beasts; not human beings. Roma, the most corrupt salesman describes such a world, which he himself was partly responsible for its existence thus :

I swear ... It's not a world of men ... it's world of clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders... there's no adventure to it ... Dying breed. Yes it is. (Pause.) We are the members of a dying breed. That's... that's ... that's why we have to stick together.(p.105)

The titles of the two plays, American Buffalo and Glengarry Glen Ross are symbolically and

poetically posed. The word buffalo of the former title refers to the verb "buffalo" which means to frighten or to exercise pressure on someone. The American citizen is suggested to be buffaloes in his highly materialistic society where the reversal of values is the norm. Teach is buffaloes himself by the conduct of his rival, Fletch, who knows how to deal with the social forces around him better than Teach does, Yet Teach tries to buffalo Donny into forcing him to exclude Bobby from the robbery. He plays the same game from which he suffered before, on Donny. In the following speech. Teach is intimidating Donny:

All I'm saying, the job is beyond him. Where's the shame in this? this is no jacks...

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 tame that chance! Don? I want to go in there and gut this ... 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.(p.35)

The symbol which relates to the word buffalo could

be associated with the job of salesmen, in Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross, to speak about their swindling and intimidating the clients. By extension, the symbol associates with all businessmen as swindlers and cheats. Once more the jungle is symbolically recalled to one's mind with its beasts' law; the more heartless people are, the more prosperous they become, and the quicker they are adjusted to it.

The title of Glengarry Glen Ross also suggests a powerful symbolic image of those people who are attached to appearances. The title refers to the names of attractive areas where the buyers or clients would like to own pieces of land. The brightness of the names, "Glengarry" and "Glen Ross" act as an allurement to those who dream of riches and prosperity. These names act like the net which entangles them into their bankruptcy. The image is symbolic of the greed of these people who think in terms of money which prevents them from seeing the reality of the salesmen who play the very tune that these buyers, like Lingk in the play, would like to hear. They would never have let themselves be tricked by a less dazzling and less attractive tune. The symbol could be understood as suggesting the kind of people whose greed would lead them to their destruction. This image could be applied, too, to Teach and

Don in American Buffalo, or to the people living in modern societies, or to man in general. The final image in this respect is symbolic of self-delusion and short-sightedness which lead to man's total destruction.

The American-buffalo nickel of the title of the play is symbolic of man's greed and his craze for possession and acquisition. The nickel coin appears to Donny as a small worthless thing until the coin collector came and bought it for 90 dollars. Donny tells Teach that it must be "some rarity."(p.31) although he "didn't even know it's there,"(p.29) in his junkshop. Yet, after the coin had been sold he came to the belief that "It's worth five times that,"(p.31) The point that troubles Donny now is the fact that the coin buyer "takes me off my coin";(p.31) he plans to rob the nickel along with the buyer's other coins. The urge to possess the coin lets himself be buffaloes by Teach into sacrificing Bobby's trust and friendship. The symbolic image is that of people being identified with objects rather than with human bonds and human dealings. The symbol could refer to an eternal human trait which could be shown in Abel and Cain whose betrayal led to violence and destruction. The nickel could also stand for worthless and neglected beings like Bobby, Donny's forsaken friend

whom he cast off because of his greed, and because he followed Teach's following advice :

We're talking about money for chrissake, huh ? ... Friendship is friendship. and a wonderful thing. and I am all for it ...

Okay

But let's just keep it separate huh, let's just keep the two apart, and maybe we can deal with each other like some human beings.
(Act I, p.15)

Long after Donny's loss of Bobby, he discovers his worth. Bobby is symbolic of human values as opposed to the worldly values. Bobby's humanity, which is cast off for a while, is captured upon by Donny who realized its worth. The symbol suggests that man's sublimation could be reached only through his recognition of the valuable yet long-neglected spiritual and human bonds. The final image imparted by the play's end which shows Donny and Bobby's reconciliation is indicated in these lines :

Don : Get up.

Pause.

Bob. I'm sorry.

Bob : What ?

Don : I'm sorry ...

Bob : No.

Don : Yeah. You did real good.

Pause.

Bob : Thank you.

Don : That's all right!

Pause.

Bob : I'm sorry, Donny.

Don : That's all right.

Lights dim. (Act II, p.106)

The image portrayed here is symbolic of man's unity, peace, harmony and self-denial which is juxtaposed by another concomitant image of disunity, discord, disharmony and selfishness which is suggested by the massive heap of mess to which the junkshop amounts after the destruction. Both images are vital here. The reconciliation scene strikes an optimistic note of the possibility of friendship and genuine human values to prevail among people in general to replace destruction and violence which will lead nowhere. The image is also symbolic of a human urge towards friendship and love. The final image suggested by this scene is that of a whole world where people unite, and love and friendship prevail.

This glimpse of a harmonious world is not equally suggested by the end of Glengarry Glen Ross, because, ironically enough, the world of salesmen has a sharper tooth and more viciousness than that of the robbers of American Buffalo, as they mercilessly discard friendship and all human dealings from both work and personal life. The friendship which Roma showed to his buyer, Link, is short-lived and false. The

optimistic tune which Mamet plays in the play comes near its end when Lingk is shown to be yearning for friendship. He leaves the office quite unhappy because he mistakenly believes that he failed his friend, Roma :

Oh Christ (Pause. To Roma:) I know I've let you down. I'm sorry. For .. forgive ... for.... I don't know anymore. (Pause.) Forgive me. (Lingk exits. Pause.) (p.95)

Roma once more affects friendship at the end of the play, a friendship which is aspired for by Shelly Levene, and which is aspired for even by Roma himself :

Shel : I want to talk to you. I've wanted to talk to you for some time. for a long time, actually. I said, "The Machine, there's a man I would work with. there's a man ..." You know ? I never said a thing, I should have, don't know why I didn't ... There's things that I could learn from you.(p.105)

The audience could have believed him but for his last words to Williamson that show his spirit of salesmanship to be controlling him to the end:

My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours, I'm taking half his commissions- now, you work it out.(p.107)

The symbolic image, which is evoked by Roma's refutation of Levene's friendship suggests the harmony, and peace which might have prevailed had Roma kept his word of standing by the side of his friends. This image would keep the promise to our hearts if not to our eyes.

Mamet's use of symbolism in these two plays shows the wide range of his themes and its rich associations. Through symbolism he transcends his immediate concerns to comment on the modern culture and on humanity at large. As a moral dramatist, Mamet hopes for stability, harmony and concord to prevail in the whole world. This is part of what he sees to be the function of the theatre :

The purpose of the theatre is not primarily to deal with social issues; it's to deal with spiritual issues ... I think the purpose of the theatre is not to deepen the mysteries of life, but to celebrate the mysteries of life. That's what a good play does, and that's what a good play has done for ten thousand years. The only person who can get what he wants is the individual man. You can't do it as a race; you can't do it as a culture. In the theatre an individual has to come to terms with what he wants and how capable he is getting it. Making peace with the gods- that's what drama's about.¹⁸

Mamet's idea of the function of the theatre is to step beyond the immediate reality into something which concerns humanity at large. For this reason, Anne Dean sees Mamet as reactionary. In Dean's words :

The anarchy that would result from an entire society's decision to ignore the constraints of morality is something that clearly terrifies Mamet. He is a staunch supporter of old-fashioned, middle-class values : good education, a home, and a job as rewards for hard work, money in the bank, a comfortable standard of living, and so on.¹⁹

The hope for a better and kinder world where human and moral dealings rule supreme is not one of the imperatives that make one old-fashioned or reactionary. To be a real dramatist is to show some concern for whichever gets him inspired, be it his birthplace, his own country, or the whole world. Mamet cannot think of himself as political, even though part of his insightful criticism goes to the political system of his own country. He remarks :

I don't think I am a political playwright. ... Tearing down the icons of American business and some of the myths about this country. This is one of the jobs of the writer.²⁰

NOTES

- 1 - Leslie Kane, "Introduction," David Mamet: A Casebook, ed. Leslie Kane (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1992), p. XIV.
- 2 - William Herman, Understanding Contemporary Drama (South Carolina : Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1987), p. 130.
- 3 - Leslie Kane, "Introduction," p. XIII.
- 4 - C.W.E. Bigsby, Modern American Drama : 1945-1990 (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 214.
- 5 - Leslie Kane, "Introduction," p. XIX.
- 6 - Robert Asahina. "The Real Stuff," The Hudson Review, Vol. 37 (Spring 1984), p. 102.
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