

T.C.
İSTANBUL BEYKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
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**A STUDY OF THREATENED MASCULINITY AND
TRAGIC FLAW IN DAVID MAMET'S *EDMOND*,
GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS, AND *OLEANNA***

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Tezi Hazırlayan:
OĞUZHAN ÖKSÜZ

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Oğuzhan ÖKSÜZ

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ÖZ

DAVID MAMET’İN *EDMOND*, *GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS* VE *OLEANNA* ESERLERİNDE TEHDİT EDİLMİŞ ERKEK KİMLİĞİ VE TRAJİK KUSUR İNCELEMESİ

David Mamet’in *Edmond*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* ve *Oleanna* eserlerinde ana karakterler, erkekliklerine meydan okunduğu için tehdit altında olduklarına inanan ve bu durumdan rahatsızlık duyan erkekler olarak tasvir edilir. Bu erkek karakterler, erkekliklerini farklı yollara başvurarak kanıtlamaya çalışırlar. Edmond cinsel zaferlerle, Levene iş yaşamındaki başarısıyla ve John akademik dili ile erkekliklerini kanıtlamak için çabalarlar. Bu tez, üç oyunu ve baş karakterlerini analiz ederek, bu karakterlerin ortak trajik kusuru olan kibri tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu karakterlerin kibirleri, ölümcül hatalar yapmalarına neden olur ve bu da trajik bir çöküşe yol açar. Trajik çöküşlerinin sonucunda, bu ana karakterler başlangıçta sahip oldukları erkeklik kavramlarının zıttı olan bir gerçekliği tecrübe ederler.

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THREATENED MASCULINITY AND TRAGIC FLAW IN DAVID MAMET'S *EDMOND*, *GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS*, AND *OLEANNA*

In David Mamet's *Edmond*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Oleanna*, the protagonists are portrayed as men who are plagued by the belief that their masculinity is being challenged and threatened. These men seek to overcome these challenges and claim their masculinity through various means: Edmond through sexual conquest, Levene through business success, and John through academic discourse. By analysing the three plays and their protagonists, this thesis aims to discuss that these men have a common tragic flaw: hubris. Their hubris causes them to make fatal mistakes, which in turn lead to their tragic downfall. As a consequence of their tragic downfall, the protagonists experience a reality that contradicts their initial conceptions of masculinity.

CONTENTS

	Page No.
ÖZ	
ABSTRACT	
GLOSSARY	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
1. A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-DESTRUCTION: EDMOND	5
CHAPTER TWO	
1. IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE BUSINESS WORLD: GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS	21
CHAPTER THREE	
1. DESTRUCTIVE LANGUAGE: OLEANNA	35
CONCLUSION	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	54

GLOSSARY

Anagnorisis: The point in the plot especially of a tragedy at which the protagonist recognizes his or her or some other character's true identity or discovers the true nature of his or her own situation.

Catharsis: Purification or purgation of the emotions (such as pity and fear) primarily through art.

Femininity: The quality or nature of the female sex: the quality, state, or degree of being feminine or womanly.

Hubris: Exaggerated pride or self-confidence.

Masculinity: The quality or nature of the male sex: the quality, state, or degree of being masculine or manly.

Peripeteia: A sudden or unexpected reversal of circumstances or situation especially in a literary work.

Tragedy: A serious drama typically describing a conflict between the protagonist and a superior force (such as destiny) and having a sorrowful or disastrous conclusion that elicits pity or terror.

Tragic Flaw: A flaw in character that brings about the downfall of the hero of a tragedy.

INTRODUCTION

David Mamet was born on November 30, 1947, in Chicago, where he also lived in his early years. After moving to Vermont for college, he primarily pursued theatre studies. Mamet started writing plays for his students to perform after becoming an actor in college. He then got a job teaching acting at Marlboro College. This is where *Lakeboat* was initially made. Following that, he relocated to Goddard College. Mamet's prominence started receiving worldwide recognition in the 1980s. *American Buffalo*, *The Woods*, *Edmond*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Oleanna* are a few of his notable dramas from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Mamet considers himself a student of Aristotle's teachings; he follows and practices the structures and elements of tragedy Aristotle put forward in *Poetics* centuries ago. Aristotelian tragedy involves a tragic hero who must experience a downfall that is caused by his/her own tragic flaw. The tragic flaw must be an unintentional flaw in the protagonist's character; it must be relatable to any human being. Hubris is one of the most common tragic flaws. It causes the tragic hero to act with ambition and overconfidence and make fatal mistakes that lead him/her to experience a tragic downfall at the end of the play.

Mamet believes that Aristotelian elements of anagnorisis and peripeteia are among the key parts of a perfect tragedy, and he structures his plays according to these two important elements. Mamet also believes that the tragic hero must experience a chain of unfortunate events and a reversal of the situation. This element of the story, which Aristotle calls "peripeteia" (Reversal of the Situation), appears when the tragic hero fails to accomplish his/her intended goals and finds him/herself accomplishing the opposite. After the reversal, the tragic hero must be in a recognition state in which he/she fully comprehends the mistakes he/she has made throughout her/his reversal period. And at the end of the play, the audience must experience catharsis, which is the cleansing emotion that arouses by witnessing the pain and struggles of the tragic hero and the emotion of relief from fear and pity that follows it. Aristotle defines the stage in which catharsis takes place as "pathos." Pathos is one of the most distinctive features of tragedy. It is the stage where the resolution of the play occurs, and the final condition of the protagonist is projected.

Throughout his playwriting, Mamet has been exclusively obsessed with male characters; he has dealt with their desires, ambitions, problems, and conflicts. Mamet's male protagonists feel confused and lost because their masculinity and authority are under threat. They are obsessed with their identities as masculine men. They feel powerless and emasculated under different circumstances, and they aim to overcome these feelings by establishing new identities. They also seek to defend their authority and claim their masculinity. These characters' longing, desire, and search for their dominant and masculine identity causes their tragic flaw to emerge, and their tragic flaw leads them to make fatal mistakes that eventually pave the way for their tragic downfall.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses *Edmond*. The protagonist, Edmond, feels lost, confused, and alienated in modern society. He believes that the modern society he lives in is collapsing because he sees a breakdown in conventional values and a reduction in moral standards. In order to survive in the collapsing society, he seeks to find his true identity, assert his authority, and claim his masculinity. Edmond experiences an identity crisis since he is confused about his place in modern society. The causes of Edmond's identity crisis include his disenchantment with society, his sense of inadequacy as a masculine man, his contacts with people who question his authority and masculinity, and his need for power and control. Edmond sees the challenges to his ability to maintain authority and power over his relationships in the modern world as threats to his own sense of masculinity. He grows more agitated and irritated with those who question his authority and masculinity. He embraces sex as the primary means to claim his masculine identity, and he leaves his wife to start his journey. In an effort to assert his authority and claim his masculinity, Edmond acts aggressively and impulsively due to his incapacity to relate to other people. Edmond's attempts to assert his power and claim his masculinity causes his tragic flaw, his hubris, to take control over his actions and decisions. Edmond's hubris can be seen as a defence mechanism against his sentiments of powerlessness and emasculation in a changing society. His tragic flaw drives him to make catastrophic mistakes that ultimately pave the way for his tragic downfall.

The second chapter deals with *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mamet's Shelley Levene feels like he loses his identity as a masculine man because he is unsuccessful in the

business world. Levene correlates being successful in business with being masculine, and he asserts that being unsuccessful in business puts a man in a feminine position. He aims to find his true identity and claim his masculinity by being successful at his work. Throughout the play, Levene desperately aims to achieve success in the business world in order to claim his masculinity which is under threat; however, his ambitions pave the way for his tragic flaw, his hubris, to emerge. His hubris leads him to search for unethical and illegal ways to achieve success in his work, and these become the mistakes that lead him to his tragic downfall.

In the third chapter, *Oleanna* is analysed. Professor John is a representative of the traditional patriarchal custom that has long dominated the academic world. When his student, Carol, comes into his office to talk about a low grade she has received in his class, John sees Carol's attempts to assert herself as a threat to his own sense of authority, masculinity, and identity. John hopes to establish his authority over Carol and assert his dominance in their interactions using his academic and complex language. He aims to protect his authority and claim his masculinity, which are under threat, by defeating Carol in their battle of language. However, Carol fights back against his attempts at domination through the usage of language. John's tragic flaw, his hubris, starts to take control over his actions, as he realizes that his language fails him; he cannot assert his dominance over Carol and fails to protect his masculinity. John has excessive pride and confidence in his own abilities. Due to his hubris, which nurtures his sense of entitlement, he lacks awareness of the true nature of the power dynamics at play, and he is unconscious of the harm he does to Carol. John's tragic flaw leads him to make fatal mistakes that eventually lead him to his tragic downfall.

The conclusion part offers a comparison of Mamet's three male protagonists' endeavours to claim their masculinity and the processes of their tragic downfalls. All three protagonists believe that their authority and masculinity are challenged and threatened. These men seek to overcome these challenges and claim their masculinity through various means. For Edmond, sexual conquest becomes the ideal way to claim his authority and masculinity. Levene seeks to claim his masculinity and authority through business success, and for John, the usage of academic and complex discourse occurs as the way to claim his authority and masculinity. As a result of their hubris, these characters are prone to make grave mistakes that ultimately lead them to their

inevitable tragic downfalls. The protagonists inadvertently adopt a condition of reality that is completely at odds with their preconceived notions of masculinity after experiencing their catastrophic downfalls.



CHAPTER ONE

1. A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF-DESTRUCTION: *EDMOND*

Edmond is a one-act play which was written by the playwright David Mamet. On June 4, 1982, it had its debut at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. A New York businessman's, Edmond's, transition from a respectable white-collar employee to a murderer in prison is the focus of Mamet's play. Edmond decides to leave his wife after he visits a fortune teller. He then sets off on a journey through the sleazy side of New York. *Edmond* tells the story of a man's search for his identity and masculinity, and how he is unsuccessful in finding it through conventional mediums.

Edmond is the tragic hero of Mamet's play. He displays the essential elements of Aristotelian tragic heroes. Marjorie Barstow portrays Aristotle's perfect tragic hero "as not eminently good and just, not completely under the guidance of true reason, but as falling through some great error or flaw of character, rather than through vice or depravity" (Barstow, 1912, p. 2). Edmond is a middle-aged, respectable lawyer, and he appears as a normal person who is not eminently good or eminently bad; however, his tragic flaw causes him to make mistakes that lead him to his tragic end. He is already going through an identity crisis when he first appears in the play, and this identity crisis leads him to consult a fortune teller for advice. The fortune teller addresses Edmond:

You are not where you belong. It is perhaps true none of us are, but in your case, this is more true than in most. We all like to believe we are special. In your case this is true. The world seems to be crumbling around us. You look and you wonder if what you perceive is accurate. And you are unsure what your place is. To what extent you are cause and to what an effect. (Mamet, 1987, p. 221)

The fortune teller informs Edmond that he is not fitted correctly in this collapsing modern world, and he deserves a better place for himself. Edmond believes that he lives in a society that is collapsing because he witnesses a collapse in traditional values and a decline in moral standards. He observes selfish and immoral behaviour from people, and he believes that society has lost its sense of stability and order; he tells the clerk who acts impolitely toward him: "Do you want to live in this kind of world?"

(Mamet, 1987, p. 249). Edmond experiences a sense of alienation and disorientation as he makes his way through this new modern society. Mamet talks about Edmond's alienation in the modern society and says that "sometimes society, not the individual, is sick" (Brucher, 2001, p. 68). As a result of failing to connect to others, Edmond acts violently and impulsively to establish his powerful dominance and claim his masculinity. Edmond demonstrates his aggressive reaction to his alienation from the collapsed modern society when he says, "Is everybody in this town insane? . . . Fuck you . . . fuck you . . . fuck you . . . fuck the lot of you . . . fuck you all . . . I don't need you . . . I worked all of my life!" (Mamet, 1987, p. 256).

The play's portrayal of the criminal underworld also reflects the breakdown of social order. The ways in which social conventions and values have been distorted in the modern society are highlighted by Edmond's interactions with diverse characters, such as pimps, prostitutes, and drug dealers. These individuals are presented as being merciless and immoral, prepared to do whatever it takes to survive in a society that has abandoned them. Edmond finds himself lost and confused in a modern world of conflicting ideals and contradictory identities because of his voyage into the urban wilderness of the night. Anne Dean proposes that Mamet illustrates the confusion and panic of modern society through Edmond's experience. Edmond is the perfect representative for the "alienated" person. He feels alienated from his sexuality, history, and traditions. As he has been schizophrenically divided into a wide range of roles and a number of sexual and social functions that make it difficult for him to live in complete harmony, he has lost his sense of uniqueness. Edmond's life is disjointed, and he does not really feel like he belongs anywhere (Dean, 1990, p. 231). The play demonstrates a modern world in which societal norms and traditional values have been overturned, and people try to fit into this strange and unfriendly environment. These elements that set up Mamet's modern world give Edmond a sense of dislocation and alienation.

As the fortune teller exposes Edmond's vulnerabilities and lack of control over his own life early in the play, he feels emasculated and defenceless. The contacts Edmond has with people thereafter are full of discomfort and hostility because of this event. Imtiaz Habib proposes that "It is a female fortune teller at the play's very beginning who (presumably instead of announcing his successes in life)

conceptualizes Edmond's failures for him and starts him off on his self-expurgating journey" (Habib, 2001, p. 81). Edmond experiences an identity crisis, and he wants to redefine himself and find his true identity because he is not sure about where he stands in the modern society at the moment. The identity crisis that Edmond experiences is caused by several different factors, including his disillusionment with society, his feelings of inadequacy as a masculine man, and his desire for power and control. Victor Seidler argues that men "are brought up to identify masculinity with asserting control in relationships" (Seidler, 2003, p. 59). Seidler's argument emphasises the societal expectation that men believe that masculinity is related with asserting power and control in their relationships. Edmond is also a product of this social expectation, as he sees the challenges to his ability to maintain authority and power over his relationships in this modern world as threats to his own sense of masculinity. He becomes increasingly frustrated and angry with people that he cannot establish his authority over, and these emotions stem from feelings of inadequacy as a man. Edmond's wife becomes the first victim of his actions because he feels that his authority and masculinity are under threat. Affected by the words of the fortune teller, Edmond returns to his house in order to leave his wife. He tells her, "you don't interest me spiritually or sexually" (Mamet, 1987, p. 224).

Edmond leaves his wife and sets out for a journey to find his identity. Arthur Holmberg suggests that the fortune teller's "assertion that he is not where he belongs sets Edmond off on a journey to discover where he does belong" (Holmberg, 2014, p. 189). At this stage of the play, Edmond's tragic flaw, his hubris, emerges. Edmond's hubris may be considered a defence mechanism against his feelings of powerlessness and emasculation in a changing world. Sarah DiMuccio and Eric Knowles argue that men who feel they fail to live up to societal expectations of masculinity can become anxious because of the precarious nature of masculinity. Men are urged to actively pursue and protect their highly valued status as men, making manhood "precarious." Men run the risk of losing their position as "real men" if they fail to demonstrate that they are masculine (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020, p. 25). Edmond believes that his authority and masculinity as a man are under threat; he says, "I don't feel like a man" (Mamet, 1987, p. 228). Edmond's hubris is rooted in his need to assert his power and claim his masculinity in a changing world. Edmond's sense of himself as a masculine

and powerful man is threatened by the changes in societal norms, and his hubris causes an attempt to reassert his masculinity in a world where it is no longer valued in the same way. Edmond's hubris is a response to his belief that his authority and masculinity are under threat. Seidler proposes that "often it is the fear of losing control that accounts for the instrumental character of men's actions as well as the power of theories which marginalize emotional life. So it is that men also often need to control relationships" (Seidler, 2003, p. 44). Edmond seeks to control his interactions with the world as he realizes that he cannot establish his authority over the relationships he has with people, including his wife. He tells her, "I don't want to live this kind of life" (Mamet, 1987, p. 223). Edmond's tragic flaw, his hubris, gives birth to a fatal mistake, causing him to leave his wife and embark on a journey to establish his authority and claim his masculine identity. This mistake is the initial action which sets him on the road for his tragic downfall.

After leaving his home and his wife, Edmond finds himself having a conversation with an older man in a bar. He quickly discovers a common relationship with the stranger because of the resemblances of their gender and social status. Soon after, Edmond starts a sympathetic conversation with this stranger in which they both express the discomfort that brought them to this bar on that day. Edmond and the stranger talk about how a man can set himself free from the positions and roles that are given to him by the collapsed society of the modern world, and the stranger informs Edmond about how he can reclaim his masculinity. The conversation continues as follows:

EDMOND: . . . I feel . . .

MAN: I know. Like your balls were cut off

EDMOND: Yes. A long, long time ago.

MAN: Mm-hm.

EDMOND: And I don't feel like a man.

MAN: DO you know what you need?

EDMOND: No.

MAN: You need to get laid.

EDMOND: I do. I know I do. (Mamet, 1987, p. 228)

Edmond accepts sex as the primary means to construct his new masculine identity. He leaves his wife and embarks on his journey to find his masculine identity by having a sexual intercourse. Seidler proposes that sex is how men prove their masculinity, and it is the only time they are shielded from other people's challenges. Therefore, their sexual interactions become a stage where they have to prove themselves and their masculinity (Seidler, 2003, p. 23). This is also the case for Edmond; he no longer feels like a man, so he leaves his wife in order to prove his manhood, and he believes that the only way to do this is to have sex. By performing a sexual intercourse, he will claim his masculinity, and he will be protected from the challenges and threats he faces about his power, authority, and masculinity.

The stranger starts Edmond's journey, as he gives him the card for Allegro. Edmond starts his journey to claim his masculinity when he visits the bar which the stranger recommends to him at the end of their conversation. He wishes to pay one of the girls working at the bar in order to have sex with her. Mamet explains Edmond's preference of a paid sexual intercourse and suggests that American men are intimidated by sex, but since they must score to prove their masculinity, they are more than willing to pay for the "trappings of sex" (Holmberg, 2014, p. 193). Edmond prefers to pay a woman for sex because of his desires to feel like a masculine, powerful, and dominant man. Since he pays money to have the intercourse, he thinks that the girl must do whatever he tells her to do and fully surrender herself to him, and by this way he can prove his manhood to himself. However, Edmond cannot agree on the financial aspect of the sexual intercourse with the woman, and he gets kicked out from the bar. After this experience, Edmond continues his journey and enters a peep show booth; however, the girls working there are behind a plexiglass which keeps Edmond away from them. He has a conversation with a booth girl:

EDMOND (of the plexiglass): How does this thing come down?

GIRL: It doesn't come down.

EDMOND: It doesn't come down?

GIRL: No.

EDMOND: Then what the fuck am I giving you ten bucks for?

GIRL: Look: You can touch me. Stick your finger in this you can touch me.

EDMOND: I don't want to touch you. . . . I want you to touch me. . . (Mamet, 1987, p. 235)

Edmond gets frustrated with this conversation because the glass has a hole which only allows him to touch the booth girl; the booth girl does not touch him. Maria-Virginia Tsikopoulou states that "the plexiglass intensifies the realization that this sexual encounter is merely a simulacrum of the "real" human contact" (Tsikopoulou, 2018, p. 26). Edmond loses his temper, as he realizes that the whole thing is just an illusion. The plexiglass will not come down, and he will not be able to have sex with the girl; thus, he leaves the place. This event projects Edmond's lust for masculinity and authority because he does not want to be the one who pleases; he wants to be the one who is pleased. He fails to establish his authority over the girl.

After experiencing two unsuccessful attempts to have sex with a paid woman, this time Edmond tries his luck at a brothel. He has a conversation with the manager about the prices, and then he enters a cubicle with a prostitute:

WHORE: You've got a good body.

EDMOND: Thank you.

WHORE: Do you work out? (Pause.) EDMOND: I jog.

WHORE: Mmm. (Pause.)

EDMOND: And I used to play football in high school.

WHORE: You've kept yourself in good shape. (Mamet, 1987, p. 241)

After entering the third club in a row, Edmond seems like he is finally close to achieve his goal of getting laid. He gets compliments from the prostitute about his masculinity, and these compliments attract him to her more because he feels that after all those years of being emasculated, someone finally treats him like a strong and masculine man. Yet again, the financial aspects get into his way of sleeping with the prostitute. Even though he agrees on a price with the manager, the prostitute asks for more money when they are about to have sex. He does not have enough money to have sex with

her; thus, he leaves the club to get cash. Holmberg discusses Edmond's failure to find paid sex and points out that "Manhattan at night turns out be a city that never has sex, a Puritan strong hold dedicated not to flesh but to Mammon. What these women want is money, what they sell is a simulacrum of sex" (Holmberg, 2014, p. 193). It seems the women of Manhattan, as Holmberg points out, are only selling the illusion of sex, not the real act. Jean Baudrillard proposes that "what society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it" (Lodge and Wood, 2014, p. 428). Edmond experiences the condition Baudrillard's argument suggests; he wanders around the streets and attempts to make a real connection with someone from society, physical and sexual, but he fails to achieve that connection over and over again. Edmond tries and fails to purchase the service of sexual intercourse three times in a row, and he becomes frustrated with this situation because, throughout his journey in the suburbs of New York, his aim is to have sex in order to prove his masculinity and reclaim his manhood. However, he fails to accomplish his mission, and this frustrates him.

While walking down the street on his way to get cash, Edmond sees a three-card-monte game, and the sharper calls out to Edmond to play the game with him. The aim of the game is simple: find the correct card and win the money. If you find the incorrect card, you lose. It is obvious that the card game is fixed, but even though he knows that the game is a scam, Edmond joins in. The reason for his involvement in the game is his need to build a genuine connection with a person, since he has failed to do so in his prior attempts to build this connection with the prostitutes and booth girls. Tsikopoulou refers to this situation and claims that "Edmond attempts numerous times to connect with someone, either through his attempts toward physical contact, several sexual encounters, or while conversing for just a few minutes with disparate individuals, such as a Cardsharp and a Leafleteer" (Tsikopoulou, 2018, p. 27). After he loses the card game and gets tricked, Edmond gets angry and argues with the sharper. The sharper and the shill beat Edmond and put him on the ground. They also steal his wallet which has his identity card. The loss of Edmond's identity card suggests that Edmond loses his previous identity, while a new type of identity begins to emerge in him. After he gets beaten by the sharper, Edmond enters a hotel to stay

the night, but he does not have any cash. He tells the clerk to call the credit card company, but the clerk acts impolitely towards him:

CLERK: Call them yourself. Right across the hall.

EDMOND: I have no money.

CLERK: I'm sure it's a free call.

EDMOND: DO those phones require a dime?

CLERK (Pause): I'm sure I don't know.

EDMOND: You know if they need a dime or not. To get a dial tone . . . You know if they need a dime, for christsake. Do you want to live in this kind of world? Do you want to live in a world like that? I've been hurt? Are you blind? Would you appreciate it if I acted this way to you? (Pause.) I asked you one simple thing. Do they need a dime? (Mamet, 1987, pp. 248-249)

Edmond goes mad as he witnesses the clerk's rudeness. He expresses his subdued criticisms about the modern society structures. His criticisms display how he feels lost in this modern world, where he is not respected or treated kindly, and how he does not get the genuine human connection he seeks, even from men. Edmond gets beaten by the sharper and experiences the rudeness of the hotel clerk, and "these last two encounters constitute the liminal point that seals Edmond's choices. Edmond is abused and rejected by the city and the individuals that inhabit it" (Tsikopoulou, 2018, p. 30). These two experiences, which make Edmond feel abused and mistreated, bring about his feelings of hatred and insecurity; therefore, he decides to purchase a survival knife.

Edmond leaves the hotel and visits a pawnshop in order to pawn his ring so that he can return to the club and have the intercourse with the prostitute. While he talks to the clerk about pawning his ring, he sees a survival knife from the World War II. He buys it. Edmond's purchase of the survival knife represents his aim to survive in this modern world. Also, the survival knife represents masculinity and dominance since it is a deadly weapon that can hurt people, and it provides Edmond with power, dominance, and masculinity. Tsikopoulou describes Edmond's feelings after he buys the survival knife and states that "The moment Edmond possesses the "survival knife" not only does the way he speaks and expresses himself alter, but also his psychological

state changes. He chooses to continue roaming around the city's streets, but his attitude starts adjusting to the environment he inhabits" (Tsikopoulou, 2018, p. 30). After purchasing the survival knife, Edmond's subdued toxic masculine feelings and the outcomes of the frustrations he experiences throughout the night start to emerge. He leaves the pawnshop, gets into the subway, and has an interaction with an old woman who, Edmond thinks, wears a hat similar to his mother's:

EDMOND (Pause): My mother had a hat like that. (Pause.) My mother had a hat like that. (Pause.) I . . . I'm not making conversation. She wore it for years. She had it when I was a child.

(The WOMAN starts to walk away. EDMOND grabs her.) I wasn't just making it up. It happened. . . .

WOMAN (detaching herself from his grip): Excuse me. . . .

EDMOND: . . . who the fuck do you think you are? . . . I'm talking to you . . . What am I? A stone? . . . Did I say, "I want to lick your pussy"? . . . I said, "My mother had that same hat. . . ." You cunt . . . What am I? A dog? I'd like to slash your fucking face . . . I'd like to slash your motherfucking face apart. . . .

WOMAN: . . . WILL SOMEBODY HELP ME. . . .

EDMOND: You don't know who I am. . . . (She breaks free.) Is everybody in this town insane? . . . Fuck you . . . fuck you . . . fuck you . . . fuck the lot of you . . . fuck you all . . . I don't need you . . . I worked all of my life! (Mamet, 1987, pp. 255-256)

Through Edmond's interaction with the old woman, it is clear that Edmond feels like he is out of place and society; he feels like a ghost because the old woman gets spooky, pretends like he does not exist and does not reply to his sentences. To explain the old woman's behaviour toward Edmond, Richard Brucher argues that "Her refusal to be drawn into his nostalgia replays the rebuff he received from the Hotel Clerk. She regards Edmond as strange, perhaps demented, and certainly dangerous, especially after he grabs her and threatens her with his survival knife" (Brucher, 2001, p. 68). Edmond starts to shout and threaten the old woman in the subway. After Edmond frees

all his frustrations about his mistreatment in the modern society, his anger and rage emerge, and these feelings begin to dominate the rest of the play.

In scene 14, outside the Peep show on the street, a pimp approaches Edmond to persuade him to find a woman for him to have sex with. Edmond accepts the deal; however, it turns out that, just like the sharper, the pimp is also a scammer. Edmond beats the pimp and kills him. This is a critical point in the play because Edmond's masculine feelings start to take over his train of thought in this scene; "he approaches a black pimp, whom he kills, his violence giving him a new sense of his own identity" (Bigsby, 2004, p. 19). Edmond experiences a problem and deals with it in a masculine way. Munsch and Gruys argue that "threatened masculinity is associated with physical aggression" (Munsch & Gruys, 2018, p. 1). In order to protect his masculinity that is under threat, Edmond demonstrates physical violence, and by demonstrating physical aggression, Edmond believes that he proves his masculinity to himself. The physical violence that Edmond demonstrates as he kills the pimp provides him with a new kind of identity, and in the rest of the play, Edmond's new identity effects his actions and decisions. Brucher proposes that beating the pimp "frees Edmond to eschew coffee for Irish whiskey and beer, to resee his previous life as fog-bound, and to proposition the white waitress boldly" (Brucher, 2001, p. 69). After he kills the pimp, Edmond decides to enter a café to have a drink. In the café, he has a lively conversation with a waitress named Glenna:

EDMOND: I've lived in a fog for thirty-four years. Most of the life I have to live. It's gone. It's gone. I wasted it. Because I didn't know. And you know what the answer is? To live. (Pause.) I want to go home with you tonight.

GLENNA: Why?

EDMOND: Why do you think? I want to fuck you. (Mamet, 1987, p. 263)

Edmond demonstrates his newly found masculine and dominant identity, which gets stronger after killing the pimp, to the waitress in the café. He lectures Glenna about how the system nowadays is inefficient and inaccurate. He explains that his life has been empty and wasted up until this point, the point where he discovers his new identity, which is filled with masculine traits. Edmond becomes overconfident with pride, and he directly tells the waitress his aim to take her home and have sexual

intercourse with her. Throughout the play, Mamet displays Edmond's unsuccessful attempts to buy a woman; however, Edmond does not feel strong and masculine enough to grab a woman's attention until he triumphs in a street brawl with a pimp (McDonough, 1992, p. 199).

At Glenna's apartment, Edmond starts to lecture Glenna about life after they have sex. He clearly tries to change Glenna's mind into his own standards, and he wants to convince her to share the same perspective that he has towards life. In his persuasions, Edmond starts to get aggressive and oppressive towards Glenna:

EDMOND: I've made that discovery. Now: I want you to change your life with me. Right now, for whatever that we can be. I don't know what that is, you don't know. Speak with me. Right now. Say it. (Mamet, 1987, p. 270)

Glenna gives consent to Edmond's efforts to have sex with her, but when he tries to control her or redefine her in accordance with his own standards, she fights him. Edmond perceives Glenna as a reward for his character improvement; "he objectifies her as his prize for beating the Pimp" (Brucher, 2001, p. 70). Glenna's resistance to Edmond's attempts to objectify her shatters the equilibrium he has constructed for himself based on his conception of her. Glenna clearly distinguishes between their sex act and the actual subject position:

GLENNA: Get out! GET OUT GET OUT! LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!!! WHAT DID I DO, PLEDGE MY LIFE TO YOU? I LET YOU FUCK ME. GO AWAY. (Mamet, 1987, p. 271)

Glenna's reluctance to be subdued, controlled, and renamed causes Edmond to lose his composure and attack her; "she refuses to accept the label that Edmond gives her ("Say it: I am a waitress") he stabs her in a fit of confused, insane rage" (Schvey, 1988, p. 84). Edmond calls her mad and ends her life with the survival knife he purchased from the pawn shop:

GLENNA: Will somebody help, you are the, get away from me! You are the devil. I know who you are. I know what you want me to do. Get away from me I curse you, you can't kill me, get away from me I'm good.

EDMOND: WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP? You fucking bitch. You're nuts. . .

(He stabs her with the knife.) Are you insane? Are you insane, you fucking idiot? . . You stupid fucking bitch . . You stupid fucking . . . now look what you've done. (Pause.) Now look what you've bloody fucking done. (Mamet, 1987, pp. 272-273)

Edmond projects all the abuses and mistreatment he experiences throughout his journey through the night on Glenna. Tskiopoulou argues that Edmond, who has witnessed extreme violence and mistreatment in the city's streets, aims his hatred towards a stranger who, in the current situation, does not seem to be able to protect herself against Edmond and his knife, which he uses as a murder weapon (Tskiopoulou, 2018, p. 33). Glenna's murder is Edmond's second fatal mistake that is caused by his tragic flaw and leads him to his tragic downfall. Edmond's hubris and his need for control are closely related. Seidler argues that "as men, we are brought up feeling a very deep need to control the relationships we are in. We want things done in our way. We fear losing control. This is equally true in our sexualities, in which there remains a deep connection between our inherited masculinity and the issue of control" (Seidler, 2003, p. 56). Edmond has a control obsession, and his hubris is the cause of his belief that he can exert control over people. Edmond's hubris gives birth to his irrational desire to rule, manipulate, and dominate Glenna, which is motivated by his own feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and emasculation. Jeff Hearn proposes that men's attempts to establish dominance are typically accompanied by violence and preponderant forms of violence involve violence by men to women (Hearn, 2007, p. 618). Edmond's hubris makes him unable to accept the fact that his opinions and ideas are not adapted by Glenna; she does not embrace the labels and definitions that he forces her to accept, and her actions threaten Edmond's sense of power, dominance, and masculinity. Thus, he rages with anger and stabs her to death. Edmond's ambition to control and dominate Glenna turns into physical violence, as he fails to accomplish his goal.

Edmond's Aristotelian recognition of flaw and his desire to find redemption emerges when he hears the words of a preacher. Habib asserts that Glenna's murder

“prompts in him a self-effacing impulse to state publicly his personal insufficiency and need for redemption” (Habib, 2001, p. 88). Because of the psychological effects of Glenna’s murder, Edmond develops a need to confess his mistakes when he hears a preacher’s speech, and the speech compels him to admit his own inadequacies and need for forgiveness and redemption. The preacher gives a speech on the street about being saved and forgiven:

PREACHER: HE DIED FOR YOU AND YOU ARE SAVED. Praise God, my friends. Praise God and testify. Who will come up and testify with me, my friends? (Pause.)

(WOMAN from subway walks by. She sees EDMOND and stares at him.)

EDMOND (speaks up): I will testify. (Mamet, 1987, pp. 274-275)

Edmond approaches the preacher, and he wants to enter the church to ask for forgiveness for his sins and mistakes, but he is interrupted by the police that the woman from the subway has alerted to arrest Edmond. Edmond’s path to forgiveness falls apart as the police take him to the police station to interrogate him, and they know he killed Glenna. At the end of the interrogation, Edmond shows the first sign of Aristotelian anagnorisis, the state of recognition, when he accepts his first mistake, which is leaving his wife. He becomes aware that leaving his wife and going on a journey to find his true identity was a mistake. He confesses, “I’ve learned my lesson, and I’m ready to go home” (Mamet, 1987, p. 281). Edmond realizes that his hubris, which led him to leave his wife and home in order to have sexual intercourse with another woman to prove his dominance and claim his masculinity, has caused his self-destruction. He accepts his mistakes and regrets his decisions, and he wants to undo all the things that occurred after leaving his wife. However, his efforts become pointless, and he goes into jail. His wife visits him, and they start to have a conversation:

EDMOND: I don’t suppose you’re, uh, inclined (or, nor do I think you should be) to stand by me. I understand that. (Pause.) I’m sure that there are marriages where the wife would. Or the husband if it would go that way. (Pause.) But I know ours is not one of that type. (Mamet, 1987, pp. 282-283)

Even though Edmond recognizes his mistakes and flaws and wants redemption, he is still influenced by the ideas of masculinity and dominance as one can interpret from the way he talks to his wife about how she could have reacted differently to his situation. Deep down, he still has the ideal patriarchal marriage in his mind, in which the wife would still stand up for the man and support him no matter what in a situation like this.

Glenna's murder puts Edmond on the road to prison, and on his first day in prison, Edmond's black cellmate rapes him. Susan Marine describes rape as a manifestation of patriarchal dominance that causes both physical and mental harm to the victim (Marine, 2007, p. 533). Edmond is sexually dominated by his cell mate, and since he correlates sexual domination with masculinity, by experiencing the opposite and being the dominated one in a sexual intercourse, he finds himself in a feminine position. This scene in the play is also where Aristotle's peripeteia, the reversal of the situation, occurs. Peripeteia is the situation in which the tragic hero aims for one thing, however, finds himself accomplishing a different thing, just like Edmond's experience. Throughout the play, Edmond desires and seeks to be masculine, dominant, and powerful. He overcomes challenges and experiences situations to find himself a new identity which consists of these three elements; however, he finds himself in a feminine, dominated, and powerless situation instead. Lawson asserts that masculinity is defined as "not femininity" (Lawson, 2020, p. 415). Edmond tries to assert his manhood by dominating women sexually; however, after being placed in a prison, he loses all control, gets feminized, and is sexually dominated by his cellmate. Brucher points out that "Edmond— misogynist, racist, and homophobe—becomes "wife" to his black cellmate" (Brucher, 2001, p. 71). Edmond perceives masculinity as being dominant and femininity as being submissive. Thus, throughout the play, he seeks to achieve being masculine and dominant, and he fears becoming feminine and submissive. However, at the end of the play, he finds himself positioned as the feminine. Edmond pays the price for his sins, in this case, his tragic flaw.

Edmond's second anagnorisis occurs when he recognizes his second mistake, which is killing Glenna with the survival knife. He realizes that his hubris, which drove him to kill Glenna in order to establish his masculinity and assert his dominance and control over her, has led to his self-destruction. Edmond once again becomes aware of

his mistakes, and he regrets having made them. He expresses his true feelings about the murder of Glenna to the chaplain in the prison:

CHAPLAIN: Are you sorry that you killed that girl? (Pause.) Edmond?

EDMOND: Yes. (Pause.) CHAPLAIN: Are you sorry that you killed that girl?

EDMOND: I'm sorry about everything. (Mamet, 1987, p. 290)

At the end of the play, at the stage which Aristotle refers to as the pathos, catharsis occurs. Mamet displays a tragic ending which is “parodic, a travesty of the sort of recognition we expect to experience in moralities and tragedies” (Brucher, 2001, p. 64). Mamet provides the audience with an emotional cleansing as he projects the downfall of the tragic hero, Edmond, and relieves the audience from the emotions of pity and fear that they experience during the process. The resolution of the play occurs, and the audience witness the final condition which Edmond’s actions lead him into.

Mamet’s Edmond feels confused, lost, and alienated in the modern society. He tries to survive in the collapsing society by finding his place and claiming his authoritative masculine identity. Since he observes a breakdown in traditional values and a decline in moral standards, Edmond thinks that the modern society in which he lives is in danger of collapsing. He sees people acting selfishly and immorally, and he thinks society has lost its sense of safety and stability. Edmond experiences an identity crisis because he is unsure of his current place in contemporary society. He wants to redefine himself and discover his masculine identity. Edmond’s disillusionment with society, his feelings of inadequacy as a man, his interactions with women who challenge his authority and masculinity, and his desire for power and control are among some of the causes of his identity crisis. Due to feelings of inadequacy as a man, he becomes more and more frustrated and angry with the people who challenge his authority and masculinity. Edmond feels alienated and lost as he navigates this modern civilization, and he experiences self-destruction under a collapsing society. Henry Schvey proposes that “it reveals with a frightening explicitness Mamet’s apocalyptic vision of a society bent upon self-destruction” (Schvey, 1988, p. 84). Edmond’s inability to relate to others causes him to act violently and impulsively so

that he can establish his authority and claim his masculinity. However, his tragic flaw causes him to make fatal mistakes that lead him to his tragic downfall.



CHAPTER TWO

1. IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE BUSINESS WORLD: *GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS*

Glengarry Glenn Ross is a Pulitzer winning drama that was written by David Mamet in 1984. The play tells the story of real estate agents who are willing to commit unethical and illegal acts in order to sell property to unwitting potential buyers. The play depicts two days in the lives of these salesmen. It is based upon Mamet's knowledge from his prior employment at a similar office. The play discusses a pair of real estate properties, which are referenced in the title. Glen Ross Farms is a plot of land that characters refer to as having been very successful for real estate brokers a few years in the past, while Glengarry Highlands is a property that everyone is attempting to sell.

John Williamson, the manager of the office, oversees Levene, Roma, Moss, and Aaronow, four salesmen. The beginning of the action comes about at the end of the month, and Mitch and Murray, the company's upper management, have made the decision to have a sales competition. One of the salesmen will receive a Cadillac if he meets a particular monetary sales goal. The two salesmen who generate the least revenue will be fired. The revenues they reach are marked on a chalkboard. Roma is at the top of the list while the other three salesmen struggle to increase their revenue. Robert Vorlicky proposes that the male protagonists in *Glengarry Glen Ross* "confront the overwhelming context of the American masculine ethos and its male mythologies on their journey to individualization and self-identity" (Vorlicky, 1996, p. 103). This masculine ethos shapes the interactions and relationships between the salesmen, who are on a journey to find their identities based upon the masculine ethos that find representment in the business world.

Shelley "The Machine" Levene is the tragic hero of the play. His nickname, "The Machine," derives from his prior success, as he was one of the most successful salesmen of the company in the past. Andrea Greenbaum asserts that Levene's nickname, "The Machine," is "replete with masculine, sexual, and industrial imagery" (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 41). Mamet's preference of using "The Machine" as Levene's nickname highlights the notion that in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the business world is

correlated with the concepts of masculinity and domination. Shelley “The Machine” Levene believes that what defines his identity as a man is his job; he tells his boss, “A man’s his job” (Mamet, 1982, p. 75). Since business and masculinity are associated in the play, Levene pursues to find his masculine identity by being successful at his business. He clearly implies that accomplishing successful business transactions provides him with an identity as a man. David Collinson proposes that workplace plays a significant role in the perpetuation of masculine authority and status (Collinson, 2007, p.69). The masculinity of a man derives from his success in his business; thus, Mamet’s men want to be successful in their businesses in order to protect their masculine identities. In Mamet’s masculine business world, a salesman’s identity is based on how he does business or on whether he succeeds or fails at his profession (Vorlicky, 1996, p. 86). If a man is successful in his business, he claims his masculinity. Mamet dramatizes the unethical behaviours that the masculine ethos causes the protagonists of the play to perform; the masculine ethos promotes “corruption, exploitation, prejudice, and violence” (Vorlicky, 1996, p. 85). These men are willing to commit unethical and illegal acts so that they can thrive in the business world.

Since Mamet sets up a business world in which being successful equals being defined as masculine, the question arising in mind is about what definition is appropriate for the salesmen who are unsuccessful in the business world, which is a situation that will eventually be experienced by the three salesmen since the one who will be the top salesman will be able to define himself as masculine. Carla McDonough argues that if a man’s identity is defined by his success in his job, then failure in business is what defines the not-man, the woman. Any sense of identity is provided by the distinction between these two positions (McDonough, 1992, p. 202). Therefore, being unsuccessful in business gives birth to not being masculine, which also means being feminine. Mamet places the feminine in a negative position, just as he does in *Edmond*. In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the feminine position portrays the salesmen’s failure, and it projects an obstacle that the salesmen must overcome to claim and maintain their identities as masculine men. Seidler argues that men constantly aspire to achieve the ideal of masculinity. Their gender is not something they can be at ease with and lenient about. It is something they must continually prove and assert, and this

is part of the deeper significance of work in men's lives, as men can only feel secure in their identity by working at a "man's job" (Seidler, 2003, p. 151). Levene was one of the most successful salesmen in the company in the past, and he considers his track record to be the most important determinant of his manhood, as being successful in business correlates with being masculine and dominant. Despite his prior success, Levene is not successful in his work now, and this failure causes the feeling of being emasculated and the fear of being positioned as feminine. Masculinity depends on sales, and Levene has trouble keeping his respect for himself as a man. He is no longer "The Machine," and his masculinity is under threat. Levene himself relates being unsuccessful in the business world with femininity; he tells his boss, "A man's his job and you're fucked at yours.... You can't run an office.... You don't have the balls" (Mamet, 1982, pp. 75-76). He continues his argument by associating his unsuccessful boss with a feminine position: "you're a secretary" (Mamet, 1982, p. 77). Levene uses his language to demonstrate that he considers men who are unsuccessful in their businesses as feminine; in this example, he calls his unsuccessful male boss a secretary, a job traditionally related to women.

Mamet establishes an atmosphere in which the only salesman who can assure his masculinity is the top seller, since only the salesman who finishes the revenue competition at the top will win the prize, a Cadillac car. McDonough finds similarity between the worlds of *Glengarry* and *Edmond* in terms of how Mamet creates an atmosphere in which the limited structure of the definitions that the protagonists have fail them; she proposes that "the system of patriarchal capitalism that promises to define them, to position them in a place of power, is precisely what disempowers them by setting up a competition which always positions the majority of players as losers and, therefore, as not-men" (McDonough, 1992, p. 202). Mamet uses the sales competition to ensure that the majority of the characters, the three salesmen who are not at the top, will not be able to claim a masculine identity because only the top salesman can obtain and maintain the masculine position. However, the competition that men constantly engage in jeopardizes their fragile male identity because these men are unable to relate themselves to anything outside the business world. They are trapped in the competitiveness of their jobs in part because the constrained construction of identity they are trying to enact depends as much on the placement of

women, or more specifically, of the feminine, as it does on their labour (McDonough, 1992, p. 201).

Therefore, Levene aims to achieve success in his business once again to claim his masculine identity which is under threat and avoid being identified as feminine. The play focuses on the need for men to claim and preserve a masculine identity through or within the framework of business (Lublin, 2001, p. 49). Levene is in desperate need to close a business deal with a customer, as he seeks to be the top seller at the office again. He longs for his successful days in the past when he was one of the best salesmen, and he had his masculine position secured in the business world and society. However, Levene does not accept his failure as a state that is everlasting; he believes that his situation will change, he will thrive in the business world again, and he will claim his masculine identity. Levene believes that his identity that is formed by his prior success and the masculine power it provides him with is not lost; it has the possibility to emerge again. Thus, he tells his boss:

Things can change. You see? This is where you fuck up, because this is something you don't know. You can't look down the road. And see what's coming. Might be someone else, John. It might be someone new, eh? Someone new. And you can't look back. 'Cause you don't know history. You ask them. When we were at Rio Rancho, who was top man? (Mamet, 1982, p. 76)

Levene's blind faith in his ability to rise like a phoenix from the ashes in the business world and claim his masculinity introduces the audience to Levene's tragic flaw, his hubris. Because of his hubris, Levene believes that he is entitled to achieve success and that the ends justify the means. Amy Marin and Nancy Russo propose that masculine gender role conflict might directly generate expectations of entitlement and privilege (Marin & Russo, 1999, pp. 18-35). Levene's masculinity is under threat, and this situation causes him to develop a sense of entitlement; he believes that he is entitled to be successful in business and claim his masculinity again. Levene's sense of entitlement can be defined as "narcissistic entitlement." The defining characteristic of narcissistic entitlement is an inflated sense of one's own rights without consideration for the rights of others, which leads to selfish and demanding attitudes. The promotion of irrationally high self-esteem and the externalization of criticism

(e.g., blaming the assessor or the assessment methods) are two traits associated with narcissistic entitlement (Schwartz & Tylka, 2008, p. 69). Levene demonstrates the fundamental elements of narcissistic entitlement. Even though he is aware that he is currently unsuccessful in the business world, he does not consider evaluating his approach to business deals, and he does not consider the fact that his failure may be correlated with his poor skills as a salesman. On the contrary, his hubris causes him to believe that he still has the skills to thrive in the business world, “you think that was luck. My stats for those years? Bullshit . . . over that period of time . . . ? Bullshit. It wasn’t luck. It was skill” (Mamet, 1982, p. 18). Levene’s hubris also causes him to believe that his current failure is not his fault; the reasons for his failure are the poor leads that are provided to him; therefore, he tells his boss, “I can’t close these leads, John. No one can. It’s a joke” (Mamet, 1982, p. 23). Levene constantly contradicts himself when discussing whether being successful in sales requires skills or having good leads. When he succeeds in closing a business deal, he attributes it to his remarkable skills. However, when he fails, he attributes his failure to receiving poor leads. He knows his masculinity is under threat; therefore, his hubris leads him to look for unethical ways to achieve success. This sense of entitlement caused by his hubris blinds Levene to the consequences of his unethical and illegal actions that he commits in order to achieve success, and they eventually lead him to his tragic downfall.

Levene’s first attempt to commit unethical and illegal actions occurs when he tries to buy a few promising leads from his boss, Williamson, who is in charge of distributing them. They come to an agreement whereby Williamson will get paid fifty dollars for every lead he provides, and if Levene successfully accomplishes a business deal, Williamson will also get some percentage from Levene’s commissions. Williamson announces his willingness to receive the amount in advance, while Levene intends to obtain the two leads without paying any advance:

Williamson: A hundred bucks. (Pause.)

Levene: Now? (Pause.) Now?

Williamson: Now. (Pause.) Yes . . . When?

Levene: Ah, shit, John. (Pause.)

Williamson: I wish I could.

Levene: You fucking asshole. (Pause.) I haven't got it. (Pause.) I haven't got it, John. (Pause.) I'll pay you tomorrow. (Mamet, 1982, p. 25)

Levene does not have enough amount money to pay for the advance that Williamson demands. Thus, he demonstrates an aggressive behaviour and tries to abuse Williamson using insulting words. He explains his financial inadequacy to Williamson, which prevents him from paying for the advance, and he promises to pay him the next day. However, Williamson refuses Levene's request:

Williamson: I can't do it, Shelly.

Levene: Well, I want to tell you something, fella, wasn't long I could pick up the phone, call Murray and I'd have your job. You know that? Not too long ago. For what? For nothing. "Mur, this new kid burns my ass." "Shelly, he's out." You're gone before I'm back from lunch. (Mamet, 1982, pp. 25-26)

Levene cannot reach an agreement about the payment with Williamson; thus, the feeling of rejection and the threat of being unsuccessful in his work cause him to display a sense of entitlement that is caused by his hubris. William Meyer argues that "Entitlement can be defined as what one feels he or she has a right to expect from others as an individual and as a member of a society" (Meyer, 1991, pp. 223-235). Levene believes that he has the privilege and entitlement to expect his needs to be provided by others, even when the opposition does not benefit from the situation because the only thing that matters to Levene is his desires. However, he fails to have his needs provided by his boss.

Levene fails to achieve success by committing unethical and illegal actions in his first attempt. Thus, his hubris, which provides him with the ambition to claim his masculine identity, paves the way for another unethical and illegal action, one of his fatal mistakes, and he steals the classified leads about potential purchasing customers from the office. He burgles the office and sells the tips he steals to another company; this mistake, caused by his hubris, starts his tragic downfall. Jon Tuttle analyses Levene's burglary as follows: "Stealing the leads amounts to essentially the same sort of rebellion Edmond mounted in killing the Pimp: Perceiving in the sales contest, and the threat of being fired, a constraining fate, Levene performs that act which he believes will free him" (Tuttle, 1999, p. 166). Just like Edmond in *Edmond*, Levene

commits an illegal act with the purpose of claiming his masculinity. He unleashes all the pressure and obstacles he has endured throughout his journey by rebelling against the business world.

Levene is no longer the masculine and powerful salesman he once was, and his tragic flaw causes him to commit another unethical and illegal action. This time, his mistake is trying to manipulate an old couple and selling them an amount of land. Levene's attempt to manipulate the old couple out of their life savings is something he must do in order to claim his masculinity. When he talks about his manipulation of the old couple, he says:

That's what I'm saying. The old ways. The old ways . . . convert the motherfucker . . . sell him . . . sell him . . . make him sign the check. (Pause.) The . . . Bruce, Harriett . . . the kitchen, blah: they got their money in government bonds. . . . I say fuck it, we're going to go the whole route. I plat it out eight units. Eighty-two grand. (Mamet, 1982, p. 72)

The language Levene uses while recounting his successful sale to his male colleagues demonstrates the key elements of masculine discourse that are used between individuals in a homosocial environment. Robert Lawson describes homosociality as the non-sexual allures that men (or women) have for other individuals of the same sex. A homosocial environment is established and maintained when individuals compete with one another in insults, boasts, and other competitive talk, and when they glorify their stories of risk, peril, or arrogance to praise themselves and prove they are the superior. These elements seem similar across a variety of cultural settings because of the pervasive elements of competition, risk-taking, rivalry, and other aspects of cultural discourses of hegemonic masculinity (Lawson, 2020, p. 422). Levene's constant need to assert his masculinity and dominance within competitive and high-pressure world of real estate sales aligns with the competitive discourse of homosocial environments. In an attempt to assert his dominance and masculinity over his colleagues, he tries to establish a homosocial habitat by using insults and boasts in his narrative of the story, such as "motherfucker" and "fuck" (Mamet, 1982, p. 72). As a means to construct a homosocial bond between himself and his colleagues, Levene uses a masculine discourse that promotes sexual dominance, and by doing so, he also

excludes and marginalizes women. Sharon Bird argues that “homosociality is predicated on the marginalization, relegation, and sexual objectification of women” (Bird, 1996, p. 121). This is what exactly Levene tries to accomplish. Another word he uses that excludes women from the business world is “the kitchen.” Jacobs argues that “the female should be securely placed at home, preferably in the kitchen, precisely where Levene positions Harriett Nyborg” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 110). Levene believes that the only way he can establish a homosocial environment and assert his dominance and masculinity is by excluding women from the business world, by placing them in the kitchen, where they are traditionally placed by the structures and roles of the patriarchy. When Ann Rosalind Jones discusses women’s negative position in language, she asserts that “woman is a gap or silence, the invisible and unheard sex” (Jones, 1985, p. 83). Levene uses Harriett’s silence as a way to establish his masculine dominance in the discourse, and her kitchen becomes the place where he successfully closes a business deal. His aim to establish a homosocial environment, an important element of patriarchy, is on full display.

Mamet excludes women from the play, as he constructs a business world in which only masculine traits are useful for achieving success. Hersh Zeifman analyses the catching phrase of the play, “Always be closing,” and he asserts that Mamet closes the masculine environment of the play, also the American business, to women (Zeifman, 1992, p. 124). The exclusion of women also equals to the exclusion of the feminine. Mamet uses this male-based perspective to further specific thematic goals: a theatrical setting in which women are disadvantaged to the point of real exclusion serves as the most blistering critique of the venality and corruption of American business that can be imagined (Zeifman, 1992, p. 124). Mamet uses the play to project a polarity that is strengthened by the exclusion of women, the polarity between culturally defined characteristics of masculine and feminine behaviour and merits. Greenbaum analyses this polarity, and she asserts that the play’s binary oppositions between culturally defined concepts of masculinity and femininity (from both trait and normative viewpoints) are emphasized by the misogynist discourse and the vilification of women (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 42). Mamet prefers his characters to use a language that contains the conventional traits of masculinity, and he excludes women from his play, also from the business world, as a means to demonstrate the polarity between the

masculine and the feminine. The reason for the exclusion of women from the play is Mamet's protagonists' fear of becoming feminine, and *Glengarry Glen Ross* is, in this sense, "a dramatization of how necessary the marginalization of women is to the maintenance of patriarchal ideologies" (Jacobs, 1996, p. 112). Mamet creates an environment in which the exclusion of women from the business world is a necessity for the men of the play to claim their masculinity.

Levene successfully manages to close the business deal with the old couple, and he sells an enormous amount of unites which might get him the top spot on the revenue list of the month. Levene's successful business transaction enables him to feel masculine and powerful once again: "I closed the cocksucker. Get the chalk and put me on the board. . . . I got my balls back . . . I'm going to be . . . Number One" (Mamet, 1982, pp. 63, 102–03). "Having balls" becomes a demonstration of dominance and masculinity. Robert Stoller proposes that "The first order of business in being a man is don't be a woman" (Stoller, 1985, p. 183). Therefore, when Levene successfully closes a business deal, he avoids the threat of becoming feminine, and this relief gives birth to his confidence in his masculinity. He feels like he returns to his glorious old days when he had the position of the ultimate masculine salesman at the office. Levene's derogatory discourse is a plain reflection of the predominant homosocial sentiments.

Levene's desire to find his true identity and claim his masculinity resembles Edmond's experience. Tuttle provides his point of view on the resemblance of the experiences of these two protagonists, and he asserts that "At stake in each play is the soul of its protagonist, Edmond Burke, and Shelly Levene. Both seek to discover the key not only to survival but gratification in their respective urban jungles (New York, Chicago), and along the way cast off the socialized behavioural constraints that Mamet has called "the veil of the world"" (Tuttle, 1999, p. 158). Both Levene and Edmond find themselves in a search for a new masculine identity. Levene perceives success in business as the primary means to discover his identity, while Edmond perceives sexual intercourse as his primary means to discover his identity. Even though these characters' means to find their identities are different, Mamet connects these two different means. Mamet uses the business transactions in *Glengarry Glen Ross* as metaphors for sexual interactions. Edmond's lust for sexual intercourse to claim his

masculinity resembles Levene's lust for successful business transactions to establish his masculinity (McDonough, 1992, pp. 201-202). The language Levene uses while recounting his successful sale provides a solid example of the underlying notion of sex in his perception of a successful business deal:

They signed, Ricky. It was great. It was fucking great. It was like they wilted all at once. No gesture . . . nothing. Like together. They, I swear to God, they both kind of imperceptibly slumped. And he reaches and takes the pen and signs, he passes it to her, she signs. It was so fucking solemn. I just let it sit. I nod like this. I nod again. I grasp his hands. I shake his hands. I grasp her hands. (Mamet, 1982, p. 74)

When Levene describes his successful business transaction to Roma, he uses a variety of moods, tone, words, and allusions that turn his storytelling into an erotic seduction tale. Anne Dean provides a similar analysis while studying Levene's language; she argues that Levene demonstrates "almost sexual excitement as he details the moment when his clients signed," and she asserts that his depiction of the story's climax "seems almost orgasmic" (Jacobs, 1996, p. 109). Levene recounts the tale of his sale victory, his successful business transaction, as if it was a sexual intercourse that provided him with a fulfilling and pleasing orgasm. The constant usage of "fucking" while describing his successful sale is another important element in Levene's language. "Fuck," a sexually violent word with connotations of dominance and submission, is metaphorically employed to denote a variety of Levene's interpersonal interactions. It appears to serve as an overarching metaphor for his desires and anxieties. He does not want to be the one who gets fucked; he wants to fuck his customers (McDonough, 1992, p. 204). Anjuli Fahlberg and Mollie Pepper assert that sexual violence "was viewed as one strategy for men to assert power and control over women" (Fahlberg & Pepper, 2016, p. 673). Thus, in the sexual interaction, the feminine stance relates with being submissive, and it occurs as the side that is affected by the action, whereas the dominant, masculine position is the side that performs the action. This perspective is also shared by Levene, as he frequently wants to "fuck" someone or something so that he asserts his dominance and claims his masculinity. However, Mamet displays Levene's emasculation as a result of his inability to consider anything other than being

dominant and violent towards those around him by the constant repetition of this word, as he fails to accomplish his goals.

Levene's short return as the masculine man he once was causes his tragic flaw, his hubris, to emerge again, and it paves the way for his overconfident actions. These overconfident actions lead him to make another fatal mistake. Levene's hubris reaches its climax when he returns to the office and brags about how he has closed the deal with the old couple. Brad Barber and Terrance Odean argue that men become overconfident with themselves because of their proneness to take too much credit for their success (Barber & Odean, 2001, p. 265). Levene experiences a similar situation when his hubris causes him to become overconfident with himself over his successful sale, and he brags about his victory to his colleagues at the office. He starts to talk too much. He talks to Williamson, his boss, about Roma's customer's documents, and he reveals the fact that he saw the documents while nobody knows that the documents were at the office except Williamson. Williamson solves the mystery of the burglary; Levene was the person who stole the company's leads. Thus, Levene accidentally proves that he is the culprit. Benedict Nightingale analyses Levene's confession as follows:

This is probably the play's least convincing encounter, since it depends on an experienced salesman, adept at every variety of slippery behaviour, not merely failing to cover up a small verbal slip but giving way to uncharacteristic weakness, naivete and trust. On the other hand, the incident provides yet more evidence of Levene's insecurity and decline. (Nightingale, 2004, p. 92)

Levene is an experienced salesman, and his primary skill to use while doing his business is his language; however, ironically, he admits to stealing and selling the leads by a small verbal slip because of a flaw in his character, his hubris. Levene's tragic flaw causes him to act with overconfidence and talk too much, and he accidentally gives his crime away to his manager, creating an inevitable path to his tragic downfall.

Mamet's preference of using Levene's overtalking as the last important mistake that causes his tragic downfall is very interesting because, ironically, at the earlier phases of the play Levene criticizes talking too much and labels it as a feminine activity. He draws a separation between "talk," which a person learns "in school," most

likely in a refined, effeminate setting, and the allegedly masculine world of action, work, “I’m the man to sell” (Mamet, 1982, p. 19). Levene’s masculinity is inexorably linked to his capacity to achieve success in business. Women, on the contrary, are perceived as “talkers,” who not only lack the ability to act but also obstruct the efforts of hardworking men (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 38).

Levene believes that “talking” is an activity associated with women, thus feminine. He thinks that a man must not indulge in the feminine activity of “talking,” and instead he must claim his masculinity by taking “action.” He considers acting and being successful at work as the primary means to assert his masculine identity, and he believes that talking and being unsuccessful at work are feminine traits that stand as obstacles between him and his goal. Levene considers his ability to earn money through salesmanship as the ultimate masculine trait. However, at the end, his hubris causes him to overtalk and give his crime away; thus, he reveals that he was the person responsible for stealing the leads. His overtalking, which he perceives as a feminine activity, leads him to his tragic downfall; he is most likely to get fired from his job as a salesman, and he may also be on his way to prison for his crime since Williamson reports his crime to the detective at the office who investigates the burglary.

In this scene, Aristotle’s peripeteia, the reversal of the situation, occurs. Throughout the play, Levene seeks to claim his masculinity, which is under threat, by being successful in his business, and he commits unethical and illegal actions so that he achieves his goals. He correlates being successful in business with being masculine, and he asserts that being unsuccessful in business puts a man in a feminine position; thus, he tries to avoid being labelled as feminine. However, at the end, he fails and finds himself in a feminine position according to his perception of masculinity and femininity. He will be cast out from the business world which means that he will no longer work as a salesman; therefore, he will not be able to achieve success in his work to claim his masculinity. Levene’s Aristotelian anagnorisis, the recognition of the tragic hero, occurs as he realizes that his hubris caused him to make mistakes which have led him to his tragic downfall. He accepts that stealing the leads was a mistake; he confesses, “I wasn’t cut out to be a thief” (Mamet, 1982, p. 101). Levene realizes that his hubris, which led him to commit unethical and illegal acts to claim his

masculinity and be successful in the business world, also led him to his self-destruction. He is destroyed by his own hubris.

When the detective who investigates the burglary manhandles Levene into the manager's office to interrogate him, Aristotelian catharsis of the play occurs. The detective "pushes Levene into the room, closes the door behind him" (Mamet, 1982, p. 107). The closing of the door is a reflection of Levene's symbolic death, since his life as a salesman and his chance to claim his masculinity come to an end. Throughout the play, Levene struggles to achieve success in the business world in order to claim his masculine identity, which is under threat; however, his hubris leads him to his tragic downfall. Mamet provides the audience with a catharsis that projects his tragic hero's, Levene's, tragic downfall; he will probably lose his job and go to prison for his crime. Levene displays many features of a tragic hero; Butcher explains Aristotle's description of the tragic hero and states that "He is not eminently good or just though he leans to the side of goodness. He is involved in misfortune, not, however, as the result of deliberate vice, but through some great flaw of character or fatal error in conduct" (Butcher, 1902, p. 304). Levene is neither completely good nor bad; he is a person whose ambitions lead him to make mistakes. However, he does not make these mistakes deliberately; they are unintentionally made because of a flaw in his character, his hubris. And at the end, these mistakes lead him to his downfall.

At the end of the play, at the pathos stage, Mamet demonstrates the downfall of the tragic hero and relieves the audience from the emotions of pity and fear that they experience during the process. The resolution of the play occurs, and the audience witnesses the final condition into which Levene's actions lead him. Arthur Holmberg analyses the emotional cleansing that Mamet provides with a similar view: "Mamet's text makes abundantly clear why Levene made the wrong choice. 'I wasn't cut out to be a thief,' he confesses (101). The play does not exonerate him, but it floods the audience with a compassionate understanding of his mistakes" (Holmberg, 2014, p. 91).

Mamet's Levene feels like he loses his identity as a masculine man because he is unsuccessful in the business world. He aims to find his true identity and claim his masculinity by being successful at his work. However, his ambitions pave the way for

his tragic flaw to emerge, and his hubris causes him to make mistakes that lead to his tragic downfall. He will be fired from his work; his reputation is damaged, and he faces the possibility of criminal prosecution for his unethical and illegal activities. This setback not only diminishes his feeling of self-worth, but also highlights the frailty of his masculine identity, which is intertwined with his capacity to be successful in business. Levene tries to claim his masculinity by doing business transactions by any means; nevertheless, at the end, he fails.



CHAPTER THREE

1. DESTRUCTIVE LANGUAGE: *OLEANNA*

Oleanna is a three-act play that was written by David Mamet in 1992. It is a two-person drama that examines the issues of power, communication, and sexual harassment that occur in an academic environment. It depicts the conflict between a college professor, John, and one of his students, Carol. When Carol visits John's office to discuss a grade she got on a paper, their conversation suddenly turns into a heated argument about privilege, language, power, authority, and sexual harassment. The power balance between John and Carol changes as the play goes on, since both characters have difficulty taking control of the matter on their own.

John is the tragic hero of the play. He is a successful father, husband, and university professor. Carol, on the other hand, is a student from the lower-middle class who does not have any cultural power or material wealth indicators. When the first scene opens, John talks on the phone with his wife, while Carol waits for their conversation to end. John is soon to be appointed as a permanent faculty member at the university, and based on this, he attempts to buy a new house. However, he learns from his wife's phone call that there is a problem with the house purchasing process. Carol, on the other hand, comes to John's office to talk to her professor about her poor grade. Carol explains that she cannot comprehend the reason for her failure in John's class, despite doing everything she can. Both characters are tense, and they struggle to communicate with each other. As the play goes on, Carol becomes an increasingly growing threat to John, and she appears as the biggest obstacle to John's goals of obtaining a tenure and purchasing a house. Hojatolla Farahani and Mariam Beyad propose that in *Oleanna*, "from the first act to the final scene of the last act, there is the matter of John and Carol's struggle to dominate one another" (Farahani & Beyad, 2020, p. 5). Mamet demonstrates the struggle for power between John and Carol, and each party wants to obtain it in order to dominate the other. Christine MacLeod asserts that *Oleanna* "has obscured what is in fact a far wider and more challenging dramatic engagement with issues of power, hierarchy and the control of language" (MacLeod, 195, p. 202). Therefore, the play depicts a battleground for the languages that the two characters use as a means to dominate each other and establish their power.

As the play begins, John is dismissive of Carol's attempts to assert herself and speak up, as he views them as a challenge to his own authority. John is unable to patiently listen to his inarticulate student and frequently interrupts her:

CAROL: I'm just, I'm just trying to ...

JOHN: ... no, it will not do.

CAROL: ... what? What will ...?

JOHN: No. I see, I see what you, it ... (He gestures to the papers.) but your work ...

CAROL: I'm just: I sit in class I ... (She holds up her notebook.) I take notes ...

JOHN (simultaneously with "notes"): Yes. I understand. What I am trying to tell you is that some, some basic ...

CAROL: ... I ...

JOHN: ... one moment: some basic missed communi ... (Mamet, 1993, pp. 5-6)

John's status as a male professor is a reflection of the university as a cultural authority of power, one that men have traditionally had access to and women, like his student, Carol, have only recently entered. Kellie Bean proposes that the traditional institution of university is "a muscular instrument of the phallocratic order, stands behind him, defines and underwrites his authority over his students" (Bean, 2001, p. 109). Bean perceives university as a powerful tool of the patriarchal order, and she asserts that it supports and legitimizes John's authority over his students. John's power is drawn not only from his own personal abilities or expertise, but also from the more extensive social structures and institutions that give him privilege based on his gender. Therefore, John, as a representative of the patriarchal authority of the university, also represents the traits and customs of masculinity, and these customs enable him to treat Carol with disrespect (Bean, 2001, p. 122). When Carol challenges John's authority, she also challenges his masculinity, which threatens John and makes him feel insecure and like his space is being intruded upon. Victor Seidler claims that masculinity is an uneasy inheritance for men, and they must be ready to defend it at any time, even if it

means to destroy themselves (Seidler, 2003, p. 132). This is what John attempts to do when Carol challenges his masculinity; he tries to protect it at all costs, without considering the consequences.

John dominates the conversation as an authoritative teacher who ignores his student's perspective. He demonstrates Sally Johnson's definition of how a male oppressor uses language in a conversation; she argues that "within the dominance paradigm...a kind of 'all-purpose male oppressor' is constructed in the guise of a mysterious individual who talks too much, interrupts and generally dominates conversations with women" (Johnson, 1997, p. 11). John sees Carol's attempts to assert herself as threats to his own sense of power, masculinity, authority, and identity, and he reacts with a hostile and aggressive language. Steven Ryan asserts that John's authority is under threat, as is evident from his opening monologue. John starts off by using his vocabulary to intimidate Carol. He believes that she will wither if she hears such language (Ryan, 1996, p. 399). In an attempt to overcome these feelings of insecurity and being under threat, John chooses to use complex and academic language and vocabulary. Thereby, he believes that he can establish his authority and claim his masculinity over the discourse:

JOHN: You paid me the compliment, or the "obeisance"—all right—of coming in here ... All right. Carol. I find that I am at a standstill. I find that I ...

CAROL: ... what ... (Mamet, 1993, p. 5)

Seidler proposes that men learn to master language for the purpose of controlling their environment. They utilize language as a tool to project an image of themselves as powerful, independent, capable, and masculine (Seidler, 2003, p. 142). John tries to retain control of the conversation and establish his dominance over their interaction by intimidating Carol with his academic linguistic knowledge because he feels threatened by her attempts to assert herself. This approach is based on the idea that Carol is not able to react to such vocabulary, giving him the upper hand.

In the first act of the play, John accomplishes his goal to dominate Carol and protect his masculine identity by the usage of his complex and academic language. Richard Badenhause asserts that since Mamet instantly defines language as the currency of the environment, *Oleanna* is largely concerned with the power that comes

from one's mastery of language, and Carol is significantly poorer than John (Badenhausen, 1998, p. 4). John's mastery of the academic language enables him to control and manipulate the conversation as he sees fit. Carol seems lost in the complexity of John's preference of terms and vocabulary. She feels dominated and suppressed, as she cannot participate in the dialogue due to her poor skills in academic language. She struggles to understand the language used by John, and as a result, she feels excluded from the academic world. The language John uses in his classes and books creates a difficult obstacle for Carol to overcome. She tells John:

CAROL: I'm doing what I'm told. I bought your book, I read your ...

JOHN: No, I'm sure you ...

CAROL: No, no, no. I'm doing what I'm told. It's difficult for me. It's difficult ...

JOHN: ... but ...

CAROL: I don't ... lots of the language ...

JOHN: ... please ...

CAROL: The language, the "things" that you say ...

JOHN: I'm sorry. No. I don't think that that's true.

CAROL: It is true. I ... (Mamet, 1993, pp. 6-7)

Carol's inadequacy in understanding and using academic language makes her think that she is stupid. She asserts to John that she feels stupid because she cannot relate to or comprehend the academic language and context: "I don't understand. I don't understand what anything means ... and I walk around. From morning 'til night: with this one thought in my head. I'm stupid" (Mamet, 1993, p. 12).

John tries to convince Carol that her failure in understanding the academic context does not stem from her incapacity; it is caused by the dysfunction of the academy. He says, "The tests, you see, which you encounter, in school, in college, in life, were designed, in the most part, for idiots. They're nonsense" (Mamet, 1993, p. 23). He talks about the Tenure Committee, which is responsible for conducting the process for his full membership in the academic world and expresses his disdain

towards them: “they had people voting on me I wouldn’t employ to wax my car” (Mamet, 1993, p. 23). This arrogant statement lays the foundations for John’s hubris, which becomes apparent when he violates academic convention by making an unethical offer to Carol. This offer establishes John’s authority, and it lays the groundwork for his tragic flaw, his hubris, to emerge. When Carol questions the poor grade she got from one of John’s exams, John responds that they can restart the course; if she agrees to work with him in a tutorial setting, her grade will be an “A”: “What’s important is that I awake your interest, if I can, and that I answer your questions” (Mamet, 1993, p. 26). John establishes control over the academic process by controlling the language in response to Carol’s objections that they cannot start over:

JOHN: I say we can. (Pause) I say we can.

CAROL: But I don’t believe it.

JOHN: Yes, I know that. But it’s true. What is The Class but you and me?
(Pause)

CAROL: There are rules.

JOHN: Well. We’ll break them.

CAROL: How can we?

JOHN: We won’t tell anybody.

CAROL: Is that all right?

JOHN: I say that it’s fine.

CAROL: Why would you do this for me?

JOHN: I like you. Is that so difficult for you to ...

CAROL: Um ...

JOHN: There’s no one here but you and me. (Mamet, 1993, pp. 26-27)

This dialogue highlights John’s tragic flaw, which is his hubris. John has excessive pride and confidence in his own abilities. He thinks that he can break the rules of the academic world and get away with it without suffering any consequences. The tragic flaw that ultimately leads to John’s downfall becomes clearer as he demonstrates his

inability to comprehend and relate to Carol's perspective. Because of his hubris, which breeds his sense of entitlement, he is unaware of the true nature of the power dynamics at work and does not understand the harm he does to Carol. Seidler proposes that "Often we use our reason to define 'what would be best in the situation', and so get others to agree. In this way we often assume to take the interests of others into account without really giving others a chance to identify and define their own interests" (Seidler, 2003, p. 133). This approach highlights the potential for John to prioritize his own interests over Carol's. John frequently depends on his ability for situational control and tries to use reason to persuade Carol to agree with his point of view so that he maintains his sense of masculinity. But in doing so, he neglects Carol's perspective, assuming that he is acting in her best interests without allowing her a chance to define hers. By considering that he knows what is best for her, John dismisses Carol's point of view; he insists that he knows what is true and what is possible in spite of Carol's doubts and objections. John's hubris prevents him from seeing that he abuses his authority as a professor and causes harm to Carol. Instead of considering his own behaviours and the potential harm they may cause, he rejects Carol's viewpoint and claims that she misunderstands him. John's aggressive language depicts him as a relentless advocate of masculine dominance who will not accept any political or cultural modification.

MacLeod discusses John's rhetorical aggression against Carol, and she argues that "Carol's place [in the drama] . . . could as easily be taken by a male" (MacLeod, 195, p. 204). MacLeod's argument implies that the communication between the professor and the student on stage cannot be influenced by gender issues, that one is not required to take either character's gender identity into account when analysing this work, and that the play could have just as easily featured a male or female student. Bean, on the other hand, provides an opposite point of view. She asserts that the portrayals of feminine and masculine characters are not conceptually equal in the Western theatre; therefore, male, and female characters cannot be interchanged. Unlike MacLeod, who argues that *Oleanna* should be analysed without considering Carol's gender, Bean claims that the gender of the speaker and audience determines the meaning of what is said on stage, and gender roles that have been culturally built permeate the conversation. Thus, when John demonstrates his eagerness to be around

Carol more by expressing his interest to her and obscurely guaranteeing that they are alone in the room, it is obvious that his words would naturally indicate different meanings if they were addressed to a male student (Bean, 2001, p. 111).

MacLeod's assessment that Carol's gender is not important for the analysis of the play is a doubtful argument, as gender is an important factor in any interpersonal relationship, and especially in the relationship between John and Carol. Bean's point of view, on the other hand, acknowledges the influence of gender in shaping the language and actions of the characters. By pointing out the conventional gender roles that are culturally constructed and personally internalized, Bean highlights how John's language and actions towards Carol are influenced by his perception of her gender. The lines spoken by John, if directed towards a male student, would hold a different meaning. When John informs Carol that he likes her and that there is no one in the room, the male teacher highlights his female student's defencelessness by emphasising their isolation (Bean, 2001, p. 111). Carol's gender is an important factor which shapes John's usage of language when he tries to protect his authority and claim his masculinity. The language John uses might have created a different context if the student was male. John uses a complex and aggressive language as he sees Carol's, a female student's, attempts to assert herself in their conversation as a threat to his own sense of identity, authority, and masculinity. As a result of his hubris, John attempts to assert control over the teacher-student relationship and claim his masculinity by using his aggressive, academic, and masculine language, but this language ultimately leads him to make mistakes such as offering her an A grade in exchange for more visits, telling her that he likes her, and highlighting the fact that they are alone in the room. These mistakes enable Carol to use them as arguments against John in her complaint report, and they set John on the path to his tragic downfall.

In the first Act, the dominance and power John establishes over his student Carol, who struggles to express herself, leads him to have an immense amount of self-confidence. John's excessive pride and self-confidence cause him to make more mistakes that lead him to his tragic downfall. Another of these mistakes occurs when John, acting with excessive self-confidence that stems from his domination of the language battle between himself and Carol, approaches Carol and touches her shoulder to calm her down: "I should not be here, what do you want with me? What does it

mean? Who should I listen to ... I ... (He goes over to her and puts his arm around her shoulder.) NO! (She walks away from him)” (Mamet, 1993, p. 36). This is a fatal mistake for John because Carol uses his touch on her shoulder as an argument against John in her complaint report. The first act closes as John finds out that there is not a problem with the purchase of his new house, and his wife and lawyer were just trying to trick him into joining them for an unexpected party to celebrate John’s tenure in the new house. In Act II and Act III, the tragedy evolves into its “shocking and inevitable” course, as the power dynamics between the two characters begin to change (Kane, 2001, p. 145).

Act II opens with a surprising situation where the balance of power in the play is reversed. After Act I, Carol files a complaint with the Tenure Committee about John, and as a result, an investigation begins. This process indicates that the positive developments in John’s life, such as being appointed as a tenured professor and buying a new house, are at risk. This situation appears as the first sign of John’s Aristotelian peripeteia. John faces allegations from Carol, and the once incredibly defenceless and uncoordinated student now seems to be in control of the discourse. Carol becomes the one who controls the flow of the conversation and uses language masterfully. Thomas Goggans relates this swift power shift between the two characters and Carol’s empowerment in the discourse to Carol’s involvement in her new linguistic “Group.” He asserts that the Group provides Carol with guidance and support to develop assertive and self-confident behaviours (Goggans, 1997, p. 439). Carol demonstrates her newly found power to John when she says, “I don’t think that I need your help. I don’t think I need anything you have” (Mamet, 1993, p. 49). As Carol gains strength from the language of her student Group, John, who is trying to control the academic communication, which is usually his source of strength, gradually falls behind in their battle of languages. John tries to regain his dominance by using academic and complex words like “heterodoxy,” “gratuitously,” “posit orthodoxy,” “detriment” (Mamet, 1993, p. 43). He believes that these words might intimidate Carol, who previously had difficulty understanding the context from similar words (Murphy, 2004, p. 131). However, John’s attempts to regain his dominance with the usage of complex language become pointless, as Carol takes the control of their conversation. She disposes John’s attempts of using complex and academic words and demands him to replace them with

their simple and understandable substitutes; for instance, she tells John to substitute “model” for “paradigm.” John loses his power over their relationship and discourse, and Carol becomes the one who controls the conversation. She tells John, “You. Do. Not. Have. The. Power” (Mamet, 1993, p. 50).

Carol refuses to continue the conversation, and she wants to leave the room. At this moment in the play, John’s biggest mistake occurs; he physically forces Carol not to leave the office. He uses the only power he is still confident in, his physical strength, to restrain her just as she is about to leave the office, thus ensuring his doom. By using language that appeals to institutional authority, Carol’s opposition labels John’s action as an assault:

CAROL: You must excuse me ... (She starts to leave the room.)

JOHN: Sit down, it seems we each have a.... Wait one moment. Wait one moment ... just do me the courtesy to ... (He restrains her from leaving.)

CAROL: LET ME GO.

JOHN: I have no desire to hold you, I just want to talk to you ...

CAROL: LET ME GO. LET ME GO. WOULD SOMEBODY HELP ME?
WOULD SOMEBODY HELP ME PLEASE ...? (Mamet, 1993, p. 57)

Influenced by his hubris, John feels entitled to try to physically control Carol, but this action leads him towards his tragic end. Carol’s attempts to question John’s authority and masculinity make him feel threatened, and as a result, he demonstrates physical aggression to maintain his control over their relationship. Seidler argues that men might try to preserve their power to be patronising and condescending in relationships in a variety of ways, particularly if their authority and control are under threat; their rage and aggression becomes one of the methods to use (Seidler, 2003, p. 77). Before this scene, John only attempts to control Carol through the usage of complex and academic language; however, in this scene, his urge to control her turns into a physical action. John’s attempt to physically restrict Carol might be seen as a threatening action. Mary Douglas argues that “The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious” (Douglas, 2002, p. 115). John’s physical action is a violation of Carol’s

boundaries and can be interpreted as sexual harassment or assault. John does not need to express his sexual intentions to Carol openly in order for Carol to label his action as a sexual assault, since she becomes vulnerable and feels violated by his physical touch.

John's sense of entitlement to control Carol stems from his patriarchal thinking, which is challenged throughout the play. John's hubris is rooted in his belief that his position of power and intelligence gives him the right to say and do whatever he wants without consequence. John's power, privilege, use of language, and security derive from his position within the patriarchal system as a male university professor (Bean, 2001, p. 121). Robert Lawson argues that "an examination of the communicative strategies used by men has been key to advancing our knowledge of how men use language to maintain their privileged (and hegemonic) position in society" (Lawson, 2020, p. 410). John's usage of aggressive language and behaviour towards Carol, such as touching her and promising a better grade in consideration of more visits, is a product of his belief in his entitlement and privilege to assert his power and control over women because of his position as a representative of patriarchal masculinity. John's hubris leads him to dismiss Carol's concerns and belittle her opinions. He fails to recognize the power dynamics between himself and his student and the harm he is causing Carol by his actions. In this scene, where John tries to control Carol physically, John's tragic flaw is on full display. He wants to protect and maintain all his gender privileges (the tenure, the deposit, the authority, etc.) (Farahani & Beyad, 2020, p. 12). John has benefited from the existing power structures that have traditionally favoured men, and he is resistant to any changes that threaten his position of authority. His responses to Carol when she challenges his masculine authority are driven by a sense of fear and insecurity. John's mistake, physically trying to control Carol, eventually leads him to his tragic downfall. This is also the scene where John's Aristotelian peripeteia fully starts.

As Act III opens, the audience learn that the investigation has resulted, and it is decided that John abused his position and demonstrated an unethical attitude toward Carol. Therefore, he is going to be discharged from his position, and he is referred to the Disciplinary Committee for the charges. John invites Carol to his office one more time in order to convince her to drop the charges against him; thus, another phase in the battle of languages begins. Brenda Murphy asserts that at the beginning of Act III,

it is evident that Carol has triumphed in the contest for linguistic dominance. Carol's interpretation of reality is the one that prevails, and she holds the authority and power. Again, Carol becomes the one who takes the lead by inquiring about John's wishes, and John responds by asking her to listen to him, while acknowledging that it will put him in a position of indebtedness to her (Murphy, 2004, p. 131). Mamet depicts a struggle for dominance between Carol and John, and Carol becomes victorious. Language is used to frame the conflict, with Carol's concept of reality prevailing over John's. This demonstrates that Carol becomes skilled in using language to assert her dominance over John at the end of the play. Carol is in a position of power, as she is the one who can ask John what he wants, and he feels indebted to her for listening to him. This reinforces the idea that Mamet uses language as a tool of power and that those who are skilled in using it can assert dominance over others. At the beginning of the play, it is John who establishes his dominance since he uses language better than Carol; however, at the end of the play, Carol takes over the control of the language and asserts her dominance over John.

Carol's control of language in her dialogue with John is demonstrated by Mamet when John refers to her complaint as accusations, and she indicates that they are facts, not accusations: "They have been proved. They are facts . . . those are not 'accusations'" (Mamet, 1993, p. 62). Even though John thinks that his touch on Carol's shoulder in Act I was devoid of sexual content, it is Carol's perspective of the event that shapes the reality, as she becomes the controller of the discourse: "I SAY IT WAS NOT . . . IT'S NOT FOR YOU TO SAY" (Mamet, 1993, p. 70). John rejects Carol's accusations that label his language as seductive and his physical actions as sexual harassment, and Carol objects to his arguments: "You Fool...You think I want 'revenge'. I don't want revenge. I WANT UNDERSTANDING" (Mamet, 1993, p. 71). Thomas Porter asserts that "the 'understanding' she is seeking demands that he acknowledges the validity of her position, that he 'overturns' his patriarchal assumptions" (Porter, 2000, p. 25). John must acknowledge Carol's position as legitimate and abandon his patriarchal presumptions in order for Carol to achieve the understanding she so desperately wants. Despite Carol's attempts to build some kind of connection, John makes another damaging and irreversible mistake:

JOHN. What's the use. It's over.

CAROL. Is it? What is?

JOHN. My job.

CAROL. Oh. Your job. That's what you want to talk about. (Mamet, 1993, p. 71)

Even though John has the opportunity to respond to Carol's poor efforts to build some kind of connection, he still thinks only of his own self-interest. Once again, John demonstrates his inability to comprehend and relate to Carol's perspective. Due to his hubris, which fosters the feeling of deservingness, John lacks insight into the genuine power dynamics between Carol and himself, and he solely focuses on his personal benefits.

John fails to respond to Carol's efforts to be understood, and she answers to his selfishness by attempting to increase her Group's influence at the university. She declares her right to govern knowledge, the basic foundation of the university, while introducing the Group's list of prohibited books, and by doing so, she threatens the essence of the patriarchal authority (Murphy, 2004, p. 132). Carol offers John a way out from his downfall by signing the list of the banned books; however, when John sees that his book is also included in the list, he strictly refuses Carol's intimidating offer and tells her to leave the office: "Get the fuck out of my office" (Mamet, 1993, p. 75). John's first indication of hostility towards Carol occurs here in this scene. Carol then modifies her offer, saying that if he signs, she will reconsider, and they (her Group) will drop the accusations. John tries to regain control, and he assures Carol that he has been thinking about the event for two days, staying in a hotel, and that he would not give in to her intimidations (Porter, 2000, p. 26).

The climax of the play occurs as John has a phone call from his lawyer, Jerry, and finds out that Carol presses criminal charges against him and accuses him of trying to rape her. John asks Carol the meaning of her accusations, and she answers:

CAROL: You tried to rape me. (Pause) According to the law. (Pause)

JOHN: ... what ...?

CAROL: You tried to rape me. I was leaving this office, you "pressed" yourself into me. You "pressed" your body into me. (Mamet, 1993, pp. 77-78)

Carol's masterful usage of language becomes evident as she uses the legal definition of "attempted rape" in order to support her accusations against John: "under the statute. I am told. It was battery" (Mamet, 1993, p. 78). Carol continues to demonstrate her mastery of language and her superiority in the discourse. When she intrudes into John's private life and tries to impose rules on his family, his most private linguistic community, he feels as though his fragile hold on his life is collapsing. Carol tells him, "Don't call your wife, 'baby'" (Mamet, 1993, p. 79). Marc Silverstein analyses this scene and asserts that when Carol criticises John for calling his wife a "baby," she questions the validity of a usage of language that both expresses and strengthens the emotional bond of marriage (Silverstein, 1995, p. 112). John's masculine identity and his position as a husband in a patriarchal family structure are questioned and criticized by Carol once again, and this time he abandons all pretence of morality and starts to beat her. He also switches to a language that shows his unmitigated misogynistic hatred and begins to use sexually offensive terms: "You vicious little bitch . . . You little cunt" (Mamet, 1993, p. 80). Lawson asserts that men use these terms as "linguistic means through which misogynist and verbally violent "locker room banter" is perpetuated and contributes to the participants' co-construction of an intended sexually confident masculinity" (Lawson, 2020, p. 423). This suggests that John uses these sexual insults as a way to assert his dominance and masculinity over Carol. John turns to physical aggression, beating Carol and raising a chair over her, as his linguistic abilities fail him. Jeff Hearn proposes that men's violence against women can be interpreted as "an indication of changing power relations (through challenging previous power relations) or a reassertion of power by dominant groups (as in men's responses to women's power)" (Hearn, 2007, p. 619). Throughout the play, Carol challenges John's authority, power, and masculinity, and John tries to overcome these challenges by using his academic linguistic knowledge. In Act I, he manages to accomplish his goal and establishes his power and authority over Carol by using his superior academic language; however, as the play progresses, the power equilibrium changes, and Carol becomes the one who establishes her authority and power over their relationship, by the usage of her language. John realizes that his linguistic knowledge fails him, and he loses the language battle between himself and Carol, which also means that he loses his masculinity and his authority over her. Thus, he uses physical violence in order to

reclaim his power, authority, and masculinity. Carol responds to John's actions: "Yes, that's right" (Mamet, 1993, p. 80). Until this point in the play, John attempts to control Carol through the usage of language; however, when John's mastery of language fails him, his urge to control Carol turns into a physical assault.

John's Aristotelian anagnorisis, recognition of the tragic flaw, occurs as he drops the chair he raised over, gets back to the desk, and organize some documents on the desk as if nothing really happened. Mamet interprets John's recognition and says, "He undergoes absolute reversal of situation, absolute recognition at the last moment of the play. He realizes that perhaps he is the cause of the plague on Thebes" (Kane, 2001, p. 119). John does not win a victory at the end of the play; on the contrary, he finds himself dragged into a tragic destruction caused by his verbal abuse and physical violence against Carol. This is also where Aristotle's peripeteia, the reversal of the situation, occurs. John experiences the same process that Edmond and Levene experience in *Edmond* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Throughout the play, John believes that his complex academic language is an advantage that will help him prevail in his conversation with Carol, and by doing so, he aims to secure his authority and claim his masculine identity. However, at the end of the play, Carol becomes the one who prevails thanks to her better usage of the language. John's tragic flaw, his hubris, leads him to make fatal mistakes that eventually lead him to his tragic downfall. At the end, John finds himself defeated by Carol's mastery of the language, and his position at university and his masculine identity in society are demolished. Since John associates achieving control over language with masculinity, losing control over language implies femininity. Just like Edmond and Levene, John desperately seeks to claim his masculinity, but at the end, he also fails. John's tragic downfall occurs, and he finds himself at the Aristotelian pathos stage. He is destroyed by his tragic flaw, his hubris. He loses his tenure, his place at the university, and after his physical assault on Carol, he will probably go to jail for his crime. Mamet explains the catharsis created by *Oleanna* with the following words: "tragedy is about horrific things. It's about bringing the hidden to light so that one can grieve. And that's why tragedy, in the perfect form, is cleansing, because it enables us to deal with repression. It enables us to take the repressed and investigate it" (Kane, 2001, p. 209). At the end of the play, the audience experience catharsis, which is the cleansing emotion that arouses by

witnessing the pain and struggles of the tragic hero, and the emotion of relief from fear and pity which follows it.



CONCLUSION

David Mamet considers himself a student of Aristotle, and he employs the rules and guidelines for tragedy that the ancient Greek poet laid out in his *Poetics*. He believes that Aristotelian elements are among the essential components of an ideal tragedy. He centers his plays on Aristotle's principles. The tragic hero of an Aristotelian tragedy must suffer a tragic downfall that is brought on by a tragic flaw. The protagonist's tragic flaw must be an inadvertent character flaw, something that anyone can relate to. Hubris is a quite common tragic flaw. It drives the tragic hero to act with ambition and excessive confidence, which causes him or her to commit fatal mistakes and experience a catastrophic downfall at the end of the play. Mamet follows the Aristotelian notion that the tragic hero of the play must go through a series of unfortunate events and experience a reversal of his/her circumstances. When the tragic hero fails to achieve the desired outcomes and discovers that he/she has achieved the reverse, Aristotelian peripeteia appears. Mamet also believes that the audience must experience catharsis, which is the cleansing emotion that is experienced by the audience at the end of the play, by witnessing the tragic hero's suffering and hardships; it is a relief from the fear and pity that they experience throughout the play. Mamet projects the downfall of his protagonists at the end of the plays, at the Aristotelian pathos stage.

Mamet has a unique obsession with middle-aged male protagonists, dealing with their aspirations, conflicts, issues, and challenges. Male protagonists in Mamet's works experience confusion and alienation since they believe that their authority and masculinity are threatened. They are fixated on their masculine identities. In various situations, these men experience a sense of powerlessness and emasculation. In an effort to overcome these feelings, they aim to forge new identities while simultaneously attempting to claim their masculinity and preserve their authority. This is also the case for Mamet's protagonists in *Edmond*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Oleanna*. The focus of these plays is the male protagonists' ambitions, desires, problems, conflicts, and obsession with their masculine identities. All three protagonists are under the belief that their authority and masculinity are challenged and threatened. These men seek to overcome these challenges and claim their masculinity through various means.

For Edmond, sexual conquest becomes the ideal way to preserve his authority and claim his masculinity. Edmond faces self-destruction in the face of a crumbling society and feels alienated and disoriented while navigating this contemporary society. He leaves his wife and aims to find a sexual encounter in which he can be the dominant figure, since he sees it as the only way to claim his masculine identity. Edmond's tragic flaw, his hubris, stems from his need to claim his masculinity and establish his authority in the modern society. The shifting social norms threaten Edmond's sense of self as a strong, masculine man, and he tries to assert his masculinity and authority once again in a society where they are no longer highly regarded. His tragic flaw drives him to make catastrophic mistakes, such as leaving his wife and killing a waitress, that ultimately pave the way for his tragic downfall. Edmond considers masculinity as being dominant and femininity as being submissive. Throughout the play he aspires to be masculine and dominant by thriving in a sexual intercourse, and he fears becoming feminine and submissive. Aristotelian peripeteia occurs as he finds himself locked into prison for his crimes, where he gets sodomized by his cellmate. In contrast to his aims to be a masculine and dominant figure, Edmond finds himself becoming feminine and submissive in a sexual intercourse.

Glengarry Glen Ross' Shelley Levene perceives masculinity as being successful in the business world and femininity as being unsuccessful. Levene is currently unsuccessful in his work, and this failure makes him feel powerless and emasculated. Throughout the play, he aims to achieve success in the business world in order to discover his true identity and claim his masculinity which is under threat; however, his hubris leads him to develop a kind of self-entitlement which causes him to make mistakes that pave the way for his tragic downfall. Levene tries to claim his masculinity by doing business transactions by any means; nevertheless, at the end, he fails. Mamet provides the audience with a catharsis that projects Levene's tragic downfall. He will be fired from his work, his reputation is damaged, and he faces the possibility of criminal prosecution for his illegal acts. This setback not only diminishes his feeling of self-worth, but also highlights the frailty of his masculine identity, which is intertwined with his capacity to be successful in business. This is where Levene's peripeteia occurs; he correlates masculinity with being successful in the business world and femininity with failure in the business world. At the end of the play, he experiences

failure in the business world; therefore, he finds himself in a feminine position, just like Edmond does in *Edmond*.

In *Oleanna*, John aims to establish his authority and claim his masculine identity by communicating in a complex academic language, thinking that this will give him the upper hand in his dialogue with Carol. However, Carol triumphs in their battle of language because of her more effective usage of language. John's tragic flaw, hubris, causes him to make grievous mistakes that ultimately cause his tragic downfall. At the end, John finds himself destroyed by Carol's superior usage of language, and his position and masculine identity at the university and in society are demolished. This is where Aristotle's peripeteia, the reversal of the situation, appears. John associates the ability to regulate language with masculinity and the inability to regulate language with femininity. Just like Edmond and Levene, John tries his best to claim his masculine identity; however, he fails in his attempt.

All three of Mamet's protagonists feel that their authority and masculinity are under threat and being challenged, and they pursue different paths to reclaim them. For Edmond, sexual conquest is the way to establish his authority and claim masculinity. He believes that by asserting his dominance over women, he can demonstrate his power and masculinity. This desire for power ultimately leads him to his tragic flaw, hubris, which causes grievous mistakes, resulting in his tragic downfall. Similarly, in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Levene aims to claim his masculinity and establish his authority through achieving success in the cutthroat environment of real estate sales. He becomes desperate to achieve success, and his hubris paves the way for him to commit a crime that ultimately results in his tragic downfall. In *Oleanna*, John attempts to assert his authority and claim his masculinity through his use of complex language and academic discourse. He thinks that his intelligence and sophisticated language make him superior to his female student, Carol. John's tragic flaw, his hubris, causes him to make fatal mistakes to dominate Carol through language and power dynamics, such as offering her a good grade and physically restraining her, and these mistakes eventually pave the way for his tragic downfall.

Despite their different approaches to claiming their masculinity, all three characters share a common tragic flaw: hubris. By analysing the three plays and their

protagonists, this thesis shows how hubris leads these men to the pursuit of claiming and defending masculinity. They become intensely consumed by their desire for power and control, and their hubris causes them to make fatal mistakes which in turn lead them to their tragic downfall. After experiencing their tragic downfalls, the protagonists unwittingly adopt a state of existence that contradicts their preconceived ideas of masculinity. The fundamental concern about tragic flaw is restated and reinforced in this part of the thesis, highlighting the challenging paths the protagonists take to reclaim their sense of self and masculinity on the face of a catastrophe.



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