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Ekonomija u suvremenoj američkoj drami

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ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes six plays by well-known American playwrights from the point of view of the new economic criticism in order to show that American drama is a valuable literary treasure which contains a lot of information about the American socio-economic developments. *The Long Day's Journey into Night* by Eugene O'Neil, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller and *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams reveal the deterioration of American Dream after the Stock Market Crash of 1929, while the David Mamet's plays *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna* provide us with the USA in which the American dream has been utterly destroyed under the neoliberal policies. The reading of these plays from the perspective of the new economic criticism has revealed the long tradition of critical attitude of American playwrights towards the USA and proved that American drama is a huge cultural capital which provides a wealth of information about the American experience.

KEYWORDS: American drama, Economy, David Mamet

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1. INTRODUCTION

Theater has a long tradition in the USA and yet it seems that it is not incorporated by American Studies scholars in the studies of American identity to the extent as the novel is. Since American Studies is an ever-expanding field which gives great attention to interdisciplinarity and since there is a vast dramatic production in the USA this paper will provide a critical reading of some of the well know American dramas of the 20th century to show the potential of incorporating dramatic texts into the reading of contemporary USA. Paying attention to the changing dynamics of what contemporary means and having in mind the need of using appropriate methodology in order to read the textual layers which are relevant for the present dynamics of the USA society the dramas will be approached from the perspective of economic criticism.

The arguments for such an approach will be provided in the first part of the paper which will provide general methods and background. On the one hand, the need for incorporating economy into studies of literature and culture and a brief introduction to new economic criticism will be explained, and on the other the status of drama in the USA will be discussed providing a short overview of its development important for this paper. Additionally, some crucial differences between narrative and dramatic text important for the analysis will be provided.

The paper will provide a brief introduction and reading of Eugene O'Neil's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* in order to show that economic criticism can be applied to different canonical authors with fruitful results regardless of their poetics. The main analysis will focus on David Mamet's plays *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna*.

Hopefully the conclusion will reveal the importance of the analyzed plays for the present day constellation of the USA showing the existence of a potential corpora of knowledge in American drama to be analyzed and incorporated in American studies.

2. GENERAL METHODS AND BACKGROUND

2.1. THE ECONOMY

2.1.1. INTRODUCING ECONOMICS INTO AMERICAN STUDIES PROJECT

The field of American studies has promoted an interdisciplinary approach from its very beginnings, continuously expanding its methodology in order to respond to its growing subject matter. One of the more recently incorporated approaches is inspired by economics which came to the attention of many scholars after the recent economic crisis or better to say those scholars which tried to incorporate economics into the study of literature gained more recognition within the discipline. For instance, Stipe Grgas in the article “American Studies as a Contemporary Disciplinary Practice” following the economic crisis recognizes that it is “a propitious moment for the networking of economics into the interdisciplinary research project.” He argues that “American writers have given reliable soundings of the tectonic shifts the nation is going through.” (Grgas 14) and some have actually “heeded Michel Beaud’s contention that ‘one cannot understand the contemporary period without analyzing the profound upheavals which the development of capitalism has brought about in societies through the world’” (Grgas 14) This notion of literature as a wealth of knowledge which anticipates and critically deals with the problems that are hard to scientifically predict and thoroughly analyze by the social sciences is one of the greatest treasures the vast archive of literature can provide. However, before going into such an analysis of the literary work of art one must carefully decide on the approach. Therefore, the question still remains why should one opt for the analysis of the economic aspects in the literature as its primary research agenda?

Depending on the American studies school of thought different scholars devised different paradigms to explain the American experience; however, the notion of exceptionalism is one that has permeated the field from its beginnings. “Without much ado, I hold that the dominant and underlying paradigm of American Studies, one which was initially substantiated by scholars within the field and the one which was afterwards, in different ways, negotiated by later practitioners, is the notion of American exceptionalism.”(Grgas 5) However Grgas recognizes Alan Trachtenberg as a key scholar of the “myth and symbol” school who recognized the importance of capitalism in forming of American social structure because “The articulation of experiences that had been silenced in the earlier exceptionalist vision did not unequivocally name capital as the structuring core of the American polity.” (Grgas 8)

Since the present developments clearly show the importance of capital in the structuring of the identity of the present USA various possibilities for reinterpretation of historical developments are opened. However, in order to find evidences of present social tectonics one has to carefully pinpoint the time reference of his research in order to get the most relevant results.

In the book *Američki studiji danas: indentitet, kapital, spacijalnost* (American Studies Today: Identity, Capital, Spatiality) Grgas notes that the contemporary developments necessarily change the importance and relevance of certain historical periods on which we focus. Having in mind the present developments in the USA he recognizes the 1980's as the period crucial for the structuring of the contemporary American experience.

It should be said that in the recent decimal periodization of the American twentieth century, the eighties were marked with the stigmatic syntagm ‘me decade.’ As such they have not drawn that critical attention which would be as fruitful as the detailed analyses of different dimensions of the fifties and the sixties. This seems peculiar

from the today's perspective because even those who approached them, rather unsystematically, recognized in the period of 1980s epochal changes. (36)

Therefore, the time reference for the central archive of texts in the paper is selected on the basis of current socio-economic developments in the USA which at the same time foregrounds both the ideological and the methodological approach to the subject.

2.1.2. THE NEW ECONOMIC CRITICISM

Since the reading of the plays in this paper is aimed to exploring their potential for understanding the economic experience of the USA by analyzing themes, motifs, references and any other formal or contextual relationship with the economy, it is necessary to define the methodology used in such an approach. Having in mind the long history of different ideological approaches which critically dealt with economy and culture it seemed most appropriate to opt for the so-called new economic criticism which is a quite recent and still developing approach to literature. It owes its name to the panel "The New Economic Criticism" organized for the 1991 Midwest Modern Language Association (MMLA) convention by Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmanse. As they state in the book *The new economic criticism: studies at the intersection of literature and economics*. The book is the result of a conference in 1994 "that brought together scholars from both fields to engage in critical dialogue." (Woodmanse and Osten 3) That conference which resulted in the aforementioned book, which presents a large number of different essays on various topics, actually constitutes the core of the new economic criticism which tends to bring together economy and literature.

The essays differ substantially in their approach when it comes to the analysis of economy and literary texts and are categorized by Woodmanse and Osteen into four groups,

these being: production, internal circulation, external circulation and consumption, and metatheoretical approaches.

For instance, Michael Tratner in his essay “A Man is his Bonds: The Great Gatsby and deficit spending” starts by examining the economic circumstances of the 1920s stating that “there was a remarkable shift in the way the average consumer allocated money: savings shrank and debt blossomed.” (365) He explores the historical background furthermore by quoting a “historian of consumer finance” before he focuses on the novel. Although Tratner focuses on the detailed analysis of certain aspects of literary texts he is paying careful attention to the developments of technology and market of the time continuously reinforcing his argument with historical data. This is an example of an approach which is concerned with the production of work of art and carefully examines the historical circumstances in which the author created the work of art. Woodmanse and Osteen suggest that when one would like to approach Dickens from the point of the new economic criticism he or she “would also need to place Dickens and his work within the rapidly expanding industrial and imperialist economy and shifting class structures of Victorian England.” (35)

According to them, the approach concerned with production is “the most prevalent form of economic criticism [which] investigates the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which individual or related works have been produced: here economic criticism comprises a branch of cultural studies or New Historicism” (35)

The approaches termed as dealing with internal circulation are completely different because they rest on a “formalist methods to analyze the internal or intratextual ‘economies’ of a text or texts.” (36). Thus the approaches concerned with production and internal circulation are almost diametrically opposed, because on the one hand „New Historicism sometimes neglects the intertextual in favor of extratextual economies” and formalist

economic criticism on the other “has been marred by its universalist, even ahistorical assumptions about the relationship between the authors and social milieu.”(36) However this approach should supplement the productions approach which is often concerned with extratextual circumstances forgetting about the textual mechanisms. Thus “a critic approaching a work like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* would try to elucidate not only how that massive novel depicts in staggering documentary detail the economy of turn-of-the-century Ireland, but also how its textual economy mirrors Irish economic conditions.” (36)

The economic criticism dealing with external circulation and consumption “focuses on such issues as the market forces at work in canonization; the selling or publicizing of art or literature; the changing dynamics of aesthetic value; the condition of authors or artists as commodities and celebrities, and so on.” (37) This approach not only combines the historical processes of canonization and reception, but is concerned with intertextuality and with the relationship between various texts in literary history where various metaphors from the economy are widely used.

The methateoretical approach deals with the methodology of the discipline itself. “The last form of economic criticism performs such metacritical operations, analyzing the practices, presumptions and protocols of economic criticism itself: its use of economic paradigms and terms (e.g. “value”, “capital”, “economy”); its exploitation of the homological method; the degree to which this discourse is aware of its bias” (38) This final approach does not analyze the works of art but rather verifies methodology used by other scholars in order to firmly establish and develop the field of study.

It is only natural that a combination of the four approaches mentioned by Woodmanse and Osteen can provide a truly complete picture on the economic circumstance of the USA provided in the any work of art, therefore drama as well. However, due to the scope of this

paper and its primary goal of examining issues of the economy in contemporary American drama and its importance in reading and interpreting the contemporary American experience this paper will only partially incorporate the first two approaches.

The approach of new economic criticism concerned with production will be focused mainly on the extratextual circumstances of the USA economy in the time of production of plays used in the analysis in order to see how the economic image of the USA is constructed in the plays themselves and how it communicates with the extratextual situation. This should provide enough context for the more formalist approach of the textual analysis.

2.2. DRAMA

2.2.1. STATUS OF DRAMA IN THE AMERICAN LITERARY CANON

For a long period, American drama has been burdened by the European tradition and although it has developed specific themes and characters from its beginnings, it was recognized as becoming truly American only after Eugene O’Neil. However, although he is “internationally recognized as the quintessential American dramatist of the twentieth-century world stage.” (Manheim 1) and although a wide range of authors appeared afterwards which are received through theaters worldwide it seems that dramatic literature is still in somewhat unequal position when compared with a novel.

Susan Harris Smith in her article “Generic Hegemony: American Drama and the Canon” which was published in *American Quarterly* in 1989 was probably the first to tackle with this problem in a systematic way. The article became a chapter in her book “American Drama: The Bastard Art” which provides a revisionist investigation of the status of American drama keeping in mind various conditions which marginalized it in literary studies.

American drama has been written almost out of the American literary canon because of enduring hostile evaluations and proscriptions that themselves need to be reassessed. I argue that for several reasons American drama has been shelved out of sight: in part because of a culturally dominant puritan distaste for and suspicion of the theatre; in part because of a persistent, unwavering allegiance to European models, slavish Anglophilia, and a predilection for heightened language cemented by the New Critics; in part because of a fear of populist, leftist and experimental art; in part because of a disdain of alternative, oppositional, and vulgar performances; in part because of narrow disciplinary divisions separating drama from theatre and performance; and in part because of the dominance of prose and poetry in the hierarchy of genres studied in university literature courses and reproduced in American criticism. (3)

C.W.E. Bigsby expresses similar concerns about the absence of drama from literary criticism.

In his *Modern American Drama: 1945- 2000* he asks the following: “Why is it that literary critics, cultural historians, literary theorists,, those interested in the evolution of genre, in discourse and ideology, find so little to say about the theatre in general and the American theatre in particular?”(1) His pondering upon the problem continues “Can it really be that an entire genre has evaded the critic who was once drawn to the poem and then the novel and who, more recently, has chosen to concentrate on literary theory? ” (1) to finally conclude that “these might be thought to be rhetorical questions, but the history of literary criticism and cultural studies suggests otherwise.” (2)

One of the factors Harris Smith recognizes as responsible for this silence and omission of thorough critical approach to drama is Marvin Carlson’s observation that “one of the most important directions that American theorists took after 1970 was toward of consideration of the theatre as a performed art...” (qtd. in Harris Smith 51). She also notes that this shift is also present in university teaching when dealing with drama and theater. However, Harris Smith says that “...this is a recent pedagogical phenomenon that pertains to

the study of *all* drama and does not explain or remedy the unique bias against American drama.” (51)

This witnesses that the issue of drama in the USA literary canon is a complex problem created by various historical circumstances which requires comprehensive interdisciplinary approach. However, this paper is mainly interested in amending the wrongdoings which were according to Harris Smith done “by the ‘schools’ of Americanist criticism [which] have ignored American drama. The ‘New York Intellectuals,’ such as Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin, and Lionel Trilling, do not consider American drama. Nor do Leo Marx, R.W.B. Lewis, and Charles Sanford, the American ‘Myth-symbol Critics.’ The ‘New Critics’ are another matter.” (Harris Smith 45-46)

By incorporating drama into a broader American context and reading it from the perspective of economic criticism the goal is to show that drama provided and still provides a crucial image of social dynamics but that we were unaware of its potential or simply didn’t recognize it. By approaching it this way the benefit should be mutual because on the one hand American Studies gain one more valuable resource for construction of American identity and experience and on the other hand American drama gets to “...be considered as a collection of a complex cultural artifacts, as assemblages of conflicting voices and discourses...” (Harris Smith 56)

2.2.2. ON HISTORICAL SPECIFICITIES OF AMERICAN DRAMA

We say that American drama has been erased from the literary canon of the USA. However, it still remains to define the boundaries on the very term of American drama. Although because of the length of this paper we are going to closely examine only several well-known dramas without dealing with the early history of American drama and the

conditions of its formation it is necessary to keep in mind that what is nowadays considered American drama was conceived relatively late. For instance, in the very beginnings a lot of theater production were simply European plays which generated a tradition of Ethnic Theaters in the USA (Shteir 18-33) On the other hand a great part of Native American tradition is simply erased from the conception of American drama. Loren Kruger examines this issue in the article “Our Theater? Stages in an American Cultural History” where she criticizes theater historians of the cold war generation which neglected the Native American tradition and excluded it from the history of American drama. According to her

“at stake here is not just the inclusion of Native American practices into an account of theater in the colonial period but rather the legitimation of a myth of origin in which American theater and Americannes more generally are defined both in opposition to indigenous culture and in the assertion of a priori possession of American identity.”

(702)

The complexity of defining American drama is nicely expressed by Harris Smith

The present state of what accurately should be called 'an Americanist drama,' a drama that participates in and is authorized by the long-standing dominant paradigm of what constitutes an essential “American” identity, is the consequence of a complex and shifting interplay between political, social, aesthetic, pedagogical, and economic practices too slippery to be defined easily. (Harris Smith 58)

Although for instance, early periods of formation of drama in the USA, and the various Native American traditions, the history of their deletion from the canon and history of American drama open interesting questions about the issues of identity and are fruitful ground for various research our focus is to explore the economic aspects in American drama and its relevance for the present day USA. Therefore the logical decision might be to try exploring the American drama of 1920s and 1930s. For instance, Felicia Hardison Londré

among various subjects recognizes a whole set of economic terms featuring as crucial in the plays of that period.

“Far and away the dominant concern of the decade – the subject that figures in virtually every play – is money, debt, and the business of getting rich. Closely related are explorations of the role of the businessman in American life, the nature of marriage as impacted by money, the bootlegging phenomenon, class consciousness, urban stress, and obsession with the motorcar as status symbol.” (71)

According to Anne Fletcher, drama of the 1930s, which follow the stock market crash, “reverberates with sociopolitical commentary” (Fletcher 106) However she notes that

Despite the left-wing tendency of several dramatists, as well as their experimentation in form, dramas of the 1930s for the most part reinforce American values. The plays reaffirm a staunch belief in capitalism as the most effective business structure and exhibit a renewed belief in the American Dream that hard work yields success, that the good are rewarded, and that the boy will get the girl in the end. (Fletcher 109)

The archive of texts that will be problematized in this paper is therefore determined by both the methodological framework of economic criticism which through study of present day situation situates the crucial point for such developments in the 1980s on the one hand, and on the other, by the historical processes of literary canonization. Although the canon of dramas and plays should be revised alongside the conception of what American drama is, this paper will in the first part of analysis start with Eugen O’Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. This seems appropriate for at least two reasons. They are currently well recognized and established writers and they have not been approached from the perspective of economic criticism.

2.2.3. SPECIFICITY OF DRAMA IN REGARD TO THE NOVEL

Depending on historical circumstances, drama has been approached in different manners. For this paper we could accept the simplified model, without paying too much attention to the difference between Anglo-American approaches and those of European critics, and say that recently more attention has been paid to performance than to the text.

For instance, in the approach of German theater theorist Manfred Pfister one can see a clear distinction between the dramatic text and dramatic performance which is much richer in the repertoire of codes it uses to communicate with the audience. Although he says that “the literary historian is not always quite as sharply aware of the importance of non-verbal codes for the dramatic text as the dramatist.” (13) the analysis in this paper will be purely textual.

However, there are still certain important textual differences between the novel and drama even if one disregards performance. First of these differences is the different communication model the dramatic text uses as opposed to narrative texts.

“Dramatic texts may be distinguished from epic or narrative texts in that they are consistently restricted to the representative mode, the poet never allowing himself to speak directly... whilst the receiver of a dramatic text feels directly confronted with the characters represented, in narrative texts they are mediated by a more or less concrete narrator figure.” (Pfister 3)

Another important difference is the different time-space structure of the two. “Dramatic texts... lack the fictional narrator as an overriding point of orientation. Here, it is therefore the time-space continuum of the plot alone that determines the progress of the text within the individual scenic units.” (Pfister 5) The third and perhaps the most important characteristic arises from the aforementioned different communication model because in the dramatic text “the characters are allowed to present themselves directly in their role as speakers... In

‘lyric’ and narrative texts, dialogue is but one of a number of optional formal elements. In drama it is the fundamental mode of presentation.” (Pfister 6)

The dialogical nature of the dramatic text emerges as the most obvious and the most important feature in regard to other literary genres. Dramatic text on the formal level of the textual organization reveals itself as realistic representation of human relationships and social developments because everything is expressed through various characters, while the absence of narrator as a mediator adds to the mimetic characteristic of the text.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: THE GLASS MENAGERIE

Williams's fame begins with *The Glass Menagerie* which was a "considerable success. It ran for 561 performances, finally closing in August 1946 after a run of some sixteen months. It won the New York Critic's Circle Award as well as the *Catholic Monthly* and Sidney Howard Memorial awards." (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 2*, 50) *The Glass Menagerie* is a "memory play" which presents us with the memories of Amanda and her daughter Laura who is insecure and her mother eagerly tries to find her a suitor because of the dim economic circumstances.

From the very structure of the play as a "memory play" arise certain specificities of the text and

"...characters find themselves hopelessly stranded in a kind of temporal and spatial void. They can relate neither to their setting nor to the times in which they find themselves living, and thus they fill that void with distorted memories of the past, or wistful dreams of a redemptive future. But they have no more connection with past or future than they do with the present." (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 2*, 45)

Such a psychological state of the characters is determined by the social and economic reality which provides a powerful context for further developments in the play. There is no mistake that Williams was concerned with the economic situation of his country which is clearly reflected in his plays. "My interest in social problems is as great as my interest in the theatre... I try to write all my plays so that they carry some social message along with the story." (Williams qtd. in Bigsby, *Modern American Drama* 33)

In *The Glass Menagerie* the first reference to the economy is embedded in the secondary text, when the apartment is described as situated in “urban centers of lower middle-class population” (Williams 3). It is a signal to the reader which provides the setting for the development of the play and is conceived by the reader’s imagination or in the process of theater production translated into theatrical language such as for instance scenography. However, it is Tom who opens the play as a narrator and provides a portrayal of economic circumstances in the USA or in Williams’ words “the social background of the play.” (5)

TOM: ...To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to the quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy ... Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis...” (Williams 5)

The middle class, which was previously mentioned in the secondary text of the play, reappears in the narrator’s words addressed to the reader once again. Through the brilliant metaphor of blindness Williams provides the image of the people lost in the economic turmoil. The presented period of the thirties which provides this “social background” is characterized as a “quaint period” because of the “dissolving economy” and “disturbances of labor.” Bigsby notes that “Tennessee Williams’s imagination, like Arthur Miller’s, was dominated by the social realities of the 1930s.” (7) and that “Tom’s opening speech in *The Glass Menagerie* contains an implicit attack on America. The collapse of the old world left only a sense of baffled incomprehension” (Bigsby 47)

However, Williams’s concerns with social problems and his attack on America are reflected in the textual fabric of the play even when not explicitly addressed. For instance,

when Amanda addresses Tom she says that “In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is – each other.” (Williams 31) Again the times are characterized as “trying” and what she has in mind are the economic circumstances, especially because Tom provides for the family and will have to continue to do so, since his sister Laura quit Rubicam’s Business College. Amanda was completely disappointed with her daughter lamenting that she “won’t have a business career – we’ve given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion!” (Williams 16) which is a proof that business is more important and put before Laura’s psychological and physical health.

When Tom invites a friend from work home for dinner as a potential suitor for Laura, as instructed by mother, the first thing she inquires Tom about him are the information concerning his job and economic status.

AMANDA: Sounds to me like a fairly responsible job, the sort of a job *you* would be in if you had had more *get-up*. What is his salary? Have you any idea?

TOM: I would judge it to be approximately eighty-five dollars a month.

AMANDA: Well – not princely, but –

TOM: Twenty more than I make.

AMANDA: Yes, how well I know! But for a family man, eighty-five dollars a month is not much more than you can just get by on. . . . (Williams 44-45)

After approving the job by saying that it seems “fairly responsible” she further inquires about his salary, explicitly asking the amount. Tom then provides approximate numbers, and Amanda describes it as obviously not quite satisfactory, but Tom provides comparison with his salary, again in numerical terms, and Amanda once again repeats the amount of his salary situating it in the context of everyday life. After her question about the salary the three out of four replies contain numbers which clearly shows the importance of money in everyday life.

Similarly, when Amanda talks about her gentlemen-callers the most important, or better to say, only thing we find out about them are the information about their economic status.

There was young Champ Lauglin who later became vice president of the Delta Planters Bank. Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds... The Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune – came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold! (Williams 9)

Again, we have a substantial number of terms explicitly related to the sphere of economy:

“Delta Planters Bank”, “Government bonds” for which the exact number of “fifty thousand” is provided, “fortune”, “Wall Street” and interestingly a metaphorical expression of “Midas touch” which comes from the Greek mythological king who could turn everything he touched to gold.

Apart from a direct attack on the American economic system at the very beginning of the play by the narrator, similar comment is made later by Jim when he talks about how he will succeed one day in life investing in public speaking skills. “*Knowledge – Zzzzzp! Money – Zzzzzp! – Power!* That’s the cycle democracy is built on!” (Williams 82) His investment in knowledge is completely motivated by the lust for money which shouldn’t be seen completely as a corruption of his character but rather something that is imposed on him by historical circumstance of the time in which he is living. Money is this crucial step between the knowledge and power which is seen as an absolute goal of democracy. By defining democracy as a system in which the most important role of knowledge is acquiring money which on the other hand serves as tool of power Williams provides a harsh and quite explicit critique of the values promoted by the USA.

3.2 ARTHUR MILLER: DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Death of a Salesman can in the simplest terms be described as “the story of an ageing salesman, baffled by a lifetime of failure in a society which apparently values only success.” (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 2*, 174) Although the play isn't demanding or overly complex in its structure it still

presents a rich matrix of enabling fables that define the myth of the American dream. Indeed, most theatregoers assume, on a priori level, that the principles Willy Loman values – initiative, hard work, family, freedom, consumerism, economic salvation, competition, the frontier, self-sufficiency, public recognition, personal fulfillment, and so on – animate American cultural poetics... Although Willy Loman ... endorses such value, it is an endorsement foisted upon him less by personal choice than by a malevolent universe whose hostility mocks his every pursuit. (Roudané 63-64)

Such richness of different components behind a character is what is to be expected of a play which after the premier “ran for 742 performances, won the Antoinette Perry Award, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize.” (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 2*, 186) and is according to Bigsby “undoubtedly one of the finest plays ever written by an American” (186) and “has proved as one of the most powerful and affecting plays in the American theatrical history” (174) However, the main interest in this paper is the economy and Miller's play simply abounds with motifs related to it.

Already at the beginning, in his conversation with Linda, when complaining about the sons leaving the house Willy says the following: “Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.” (Miller 15) Although Willy's main focus could be defined as a critique of the family structure development of the time, it is hard to ignore the quite dense concentration of motifs connected to economy – *work*, *pay off* and *own*. It's

almost as if these three verbs are sufficient to describe the contemporary human life cycle.

One has to work in order to earn money so he or she could pay for something in order to own it. Conversation further develops in this direction when Willy is criticized by Linda “WILLY: When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?” (Miller 15)

LINDA: Oh, the whole block'll be at that game. Did you sell anything?

WILLY: I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston.

LINDA: No! Wait a minute, I've got a pencil ... That makes your commission... Two hundred – my God! Two hundred and twelve dollars!

WILLY: Well, I didn't figure it yet, but...

LINDA: How much did you do?

WILLY: Well, I – I did – about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence. Well, no – it came to – roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip

LINDA, *without hesitation*: Two hundred gross. That's...

WILLY: The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for the inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda break records.

LINDA: Well, it makes seventy dollars and some pennies. That's very good.

(Miller 34-35)

Willy asks “What do we owe?” (Miller 35) and then their conversation continues in a bleaker tone where Linda provides him with various expenses. “Well on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator – ... Well, there's a nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and a half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining ... Then you owe Frank for the carburetor.” (35-36)

Thaddeus Wakefield claims that “Willy's relationship with Linda is based on the amount of money Willy makes, and she determines Willy's value precisely, down to the very last penny.” (28) Furthermore he argues that “Willy Loman fails to fulfill the traditional requirements of masculinity [which] is challenged by the fact that Willy fails to provide for his family and to protect his children and wife.” (27) His failure to fulfil these requirements can be seen also when Willy is humiliated by Howard at work and is ready to work for less money in almost each new line; “sixty-five dollars a week” (79) “fifty dollars a week” (80)

but Howard remains merciless, simply explaining that “business is business (80)” and Willy simply continues “If I had forty dollars a week.” (81)

But economic factors are responsible not only for the deterioration of Willy’s masculinity but for the other American myths in the play. For instance, Biff wants to go west and live the American dream. “Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built like we are should be working out in the open.” (Miller 23) However his dreams cannot be supported by the economic developments of the USA, which are the reason he doesn’t have the money to start his project. He says to Happy that “the trouble is we weren’t brought up to grub for money. I don’t know how to do it.” (Miller 24) And since Willy fails to provide for him, he will eventually take his life in order for Biff to get money from insurance. Krasner says that “the play attacks the American Dream largely because it takes seriously the fact that someone is worth more dead than alive.” (Krasner 49) The commodification of human life in *Death of a Salesman* is perhaps best described in Raymond Williams’s words. “Willy Loman is a man who from selling things has passed to selling himself, and has become, in effect, a commodity which like other commodities will at certain point be discarded by the laws of the economy” (Krasner 49)

What is especially interesting in regard to the *Death of a Salesman* is the fact that the play continues to be equally interesting and alluring to the contemporary readers. This can partially be ascribed to the similar experiences related to the economic context which people recognize in their lives as similar or equally to that of the Miller’s play and easily identify with the character’s problems. “Half a century later, the significance of *Death of a Salesman* has only increased...From an economic perspective, Willy’s struggles to pay the mortgage and, above all, his insurance, resonate for theatergoers who themselves increasingly feel the

financial pressure exacted upon them by an increasingly capitalist, or at least Westernized world. (Roudané 83)

Miller's play tackles the problem of deteriorating American Dream by examining how the market developments in the USA affected an old salesman who was not able to cope with these developments. Willy Loman is representative for the whole class of salesmen who struggle in the world with changing economic paradigms. The play anticipated the heartless and competitive world of business which will have completely developed by the 1980s as a result of implementation of neoliberal policies.

3.3 EUGENE O'NEIL: LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

Eugene O'Neil is probably one of the key figures in the American drama, the Nobel laureate in Literature, whose plays won numerous awards and whose dramatic form has influenced a huge range of American dramatists. *Long Day's Journey in Night* is probably one of the most popular of his plays, which portrays the family life of an actor James Tyrone and his wife Marry and their two sons, Edmund and Jamie. Harold Bloom in the Foreword to the play says that O'Neil is "the elegist of the Freudian 'family romance,' of the domestic tragedy of which we all die daily, a little bit at the time." (O'Neil xii)

The play has numerous autobiographical elements (Bigsby, *American Drama*, 21) and provides an insight into the family problems of Tyrone's such as Mary's drug addiction, Edmund's and Jamie's failures in life, Edmund's tuberculosis and Tyrone's failure both as a husband and father. Among the numerous reasons for their situation the economy of the period happens to be a crucial one.

The huge number of motifs connected to economic sphere is presented in the very beginning of the play when Tyrone is talking to Mary about the cheap cigars.

TYRONE: There's nothing like the first after- breakfast cigar, if it's a good one, and this new lot has the right mellow flavor. They're a great bargain, too. I got them dead cheap. It was McGuire put me on to them.

MARY *A trifle acidly*. I hope he didn't put you on to any piece of property at the same time. His real estate bargains don't work out so well.

TYRONE: I wouldn't say that, Mary. After all, he was the one who advised me to buy that place on Chestnut Street and I made a quick turnover on it for a fine profit.

MARY: ... I know it's a waste of breath trying to convince you you're not a cunning real estate speculator.

TYRONE *Huffily*. I've no such idea. But land is land, and it's safer than the stocks and bonds of Wall Street swindlers. (O'Neil 15)

On the example of getting cigars at "a great bargain" Tyrone's cheapness, which will be problematized by different family members through the play is introduced for the first time. Different money-related motifs follow afterwards: "dead cheap", "property", "real estate bargains", "to buy", "quick turnover", "fine profit", "real estate speculator", "land" which is here regarded in terms of economic value, "stocks and bonds", "Wall street". The dynamic conversation between Mary and Tyrone shows a substantial concentration of economic terms especially if one is aware of the textual economy of the dramatic text, where words are used and distributed with great care. At the end of the quotation we can notice an echo of the 1920's stock market crash and bewilderment with the stock market.

It seems that all of the analyzed plays early at the beginning provide an explicit context regarding the economic circumstance of the characters which is then continuously reinforced and further developed through the play. For instance, later on when Edmund mentions Shaughnessy, Tyrone, who is his landlord, automatically concludes that "he wants his rent lowered" (O'Neil 23), when talking about Edmund Jamie says he has "always come home broke" (O'Neil 36). On the other hand, when Jamie criticizes his father for being cheap

Tyrone accuses him that he has “never known the value of a dollar and never will!” (O’Neil 32).

The relationship between Jamie and Tyrone is from the economic viewpoint mostly concerned with the argument about the value of the money, which Jamie obviously never got to know, and Jamie’s constant accusation of Tyrone saving money on doctors for Mary. He says that Hardy is “a cheap old quack” (O’Neil 30) and that Tyrone chose him because he “only charges a dollar” (O’Neil 31), according to him he did the same thing when Mary was pregnant with Edmund “From what Mama’s said, he was another cheap quack like Hardy! You wouldn’t pay for a first-rate –“(O’Neil 40) Tyrone is doing the same thing with Edmund who got tuberculosis and Jamie pleads to him to “pick out a good place and not some cheap dump!” (O’Neil 82) and not give Hardy his “old over-the-hills-to-the-poorhouse song about taxes and mortgages.” (O’Neil 82)

Mary’s drug addiction is central for the development of the play and has been approached differently by various scholars. Judith E. Barlow for instance examines her position from the feminist perspective claiming that O’Neill “simultaneously understands Mary’s maternal failures and blames her for them.” (172) In the article “The stature of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*” Manheim observes the similarity of the drug addiction with her religious fate expressed at the end of the play, providing the reading in which through drug addiction O’Neill problematizes his “own ambivalence toward the religion of his youth.” (209.) However, if we approach Mary’s drug addiction by having in mind Jamie’s arguments of Tyrone’s cheapness economic factors come into play as crucial for such developments. “Most scholars have analyzed Mary’s drug addiction as the root of their problems, yet it is capitalism’s effect which have led to Tyrone’s cheapness, thus exacerbating Mary’s problems (and the entire family’s for that matter).” (Wakefield 10)

Having in mind his obsession with constant investments into land and properties and cheapness on the other hand it is perhaps best to define Tyrone as “a character that reemerges through the Gilded Age: a self-made millionaire spiritually bankrupt.” (Krasner 51) Mary’s opinion on his investments from the beginning of the play is further reinforced towards the end when Tyrone answers the phone in hope it is McGuire.

MARY: McGuire. He must have another piece of property on his list that no one would think of buying except your father. It doesn’t matter any more but it’s always seemed to me your father could afford to keep on buying property but never give me a home. (O’Neil 75)

Apart from explicit references to the economic hardship, a more metaphorical reading of the play’s development is possible. Bigsby notes that

“...the Tyrones cling together, afraid of the future and unable to face the past because that is to remind themselves of a promise which was in part blighted by their own willfulness as well as by the operation of something they wish to dignify with the name of fate. For the truth is that they all allow absolute authority to the past.”

(Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 1*, 101)

This inability to look into the traumatic past as well as to deal with the present situation because of the fear of the future could be expressed through Williams’s metaphor of blindness. And this blindness in the “Long Day’s Journey into Night”, which is the main reason for characters being unable to respond to the trauma of Mary’s drug addiction, Tyrone’s being cheap, Edmund’s and Jamie’s failure in life, is a result of the economic background of the play.

The plays analyzed so far show the echo of the stock market crash from 1929, and critically approach the idea of American dream. Williams and Miller perhaps thematize and approach the economic experience more directly than O'Neill but if we read them attentively one can easily notice the importance of economic factors in the plot development. However, although these plays have a considerable amount of references to economy and critical relationship towards their characters and money in general, the American dream is still strongly embedded in the society and this is reflected in the dramatic literature as well. Approximately two to three decades later with the emergence of neoliberalism things will change considerably. David Mamet's plays present us with the USA where the American dream has failed and where money, business and economy as dominant themes are approached explicitly.

3.4 DAVID MAMET: AMERICAN BUFFALO

David Mamet's career as a playwright started in Chicago and he has written several notable plays such as *Lakeboat* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. However he became a critically acclaimed playwright after his play *American Buffalo* from 1975 "brought critical attention to a 27-year-old playwright..." (Roudané 58) when it opened on Broadway in 1977 and "received the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award for the best play of the year." (Bigsby, *Introduction Volume 3*, 252)

The play is set in Don's Resale Shop where we meet the owner Don Dubrow, his friend and associate Walter Cole called Teach and Bob, who is in dramatis personae listed as "Don's gopher". Don has sold a nickel for ninety dollars to a customer and is eager to steal it back and virtually the play completely focuses on Don, Tech and Bob devising a plan to get the nickel back. However, through the marginal figures of American society and "slender plot" Mamet creates a unique universe mimetic of a society burdened with business ideologies which are misinterpreted and corrupted, as he himself has pointed out.

"Soon after the play opened, Mamet confessed to the fact that he had been motivated in part by his fascination with American business. *American Buffalo*, he argued, 'is about the American ethic of business... About how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business. I felt angry about business when I wrote the play.'" (Roudané 58)

The theme of business is perhaps best expressed in Don's *tutoring* Bob because he usually gives him certain life lessons, like "*Never* skip breakfast, Bob." (8) but the theme of business reapers through their conversation as the dominant theme. Don explains to him that business is nothing more than "common sense, experience and talent" (6). However, the most important thing is not to mix business and friendship "Cause there's business and there's friendship, Bobby..." (7) Don is not only older and more experienced but, more importantly,

he is also economically superior to Bob which means that he has a much better understanding of business. When he provides life lessons about breakfast Bob complains that he cannot maintain such a healthy lifestyle because the vitamins “are too expensive” (9) and he “can’t afford ‘em.” (9) Don says that he shouldn’t be concerned with it and Bob asks him “You’ll buy some for me?” (9) This dialogue clearly constructs the world where relationship and social hierarchy is established through the money and as such is representative of the situation in the USA.

The abundance of motives connected to the economy points towards the conclusion that the whole play is structured and constructed on the economic experience of life in the USA. Here it is opportune to turn to Boris Tomashevsky and his essays “Thematics” where he distinguished different types of motivation in the plot development.

We may distinguish two major kinds of arrangement of these thematic elements: (1) that in which causal-temporal relationships exist between the thematic elements, and (2) that in which the thematic elements are contemporaneous, or in which there is some shift of theme without internal exposition of the causal connections. (Lemon 66)

Thus, the key propelling motif of the play, or in Tomashevsky’s terms a compositional motif, a buffalo-head nickel comes from the economic sphere as well. This suggests that although the economy always had an important role in human life, the time has come when it is more visible and stronger than ever and it is therefore possible to construct the whole work of art based on the economic sphere of human experience. The importance of the buffalo-head nickel is further reinforced by the subversive title of the play. Bigsby who sees the play as a “savage satire on the collapse of American values, on the process whereby American liberal principles have been accommodated to a rapacious self-interest” (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 3*, 262) observes that such values “like the American buffalo itself ... have fallen

victim to greed, to a confusion between price and value.” (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 3* 262)

The main reason why Don wants to steal the nickel back is because he believes that the buyer tricked him and that he sold it for less than it was actually worth.

TEACH: Ninety dollars for a nickel.

DON: Are you kidding, Teach? I bet it’s worth five times that.

TEACH: Yeah, huh?

DON: Are you kidding me, the guy is going to come in here, he plunks down ninety bucks like nothing. Shit yeah. (31)

According to Don, it must be “worth five times” what he sold it for. The language becomes highly numerical, the world depicted is a place where everything is calculated and the worth is estimated according to purely numerical values. The frequent usage of amounts of money is best seen in the dialogue between Bob and Don when Bob asks if he “could have a little bit up front ... like fifty or something.” (39) and in the complicated set of replies about how much Don will give and how much lend to Bob and how much the latter will have to return.

DON: ...I’ll give you ... forty, you owe me twenty, and, for now, keep twenty for spotting the guy.

...

DON: But I’m giving you twenty just for spotting the guy.

BOB: I need fifty, Donny.

DON: Well, I’m giving you forty.

BOB: You said you were giving me twenty.

DON: No, Bob, I did not. I said I was giving you forty, of *which* you were going to owe me twenty. (41)

Aside from this, the play features another money affiliated motif, the game of poker, which occurred a night prior to the time the play takes place. The whole set of motifs connected to poker is governed by the realistic motivation providing the perfect setting for the characters and the development of the plot. Moreover, it is a recognized symbol of

American gambling culture, which has inscribed in itself certain romantic values of a unique American experience. Don describes Fletcher, who won the game, as a man who succeeded “...with just a nickel in his pocket” (4) Fletcher who does not appear as a character in play, is a remote figure of a noteworthy individual who managed to succeed by himself. His accomplishment is further reinforced by the amount of money he won the previous night at the poker game. “DON: The Fucker won four hundred bucks last night” (5) However, the corruption of business which is problematized by the play symbolically appears in the poker game as well. By the end of the play Teach claims that Fletcher cheated. Thus the game of poker becomes an analogue with the betrayal and corruption in business. Moreover, Teach is against calling for Fletcher to join in their operation of stealing the nickel back, and his argumentation returns to the theme of business. “We’re talking business, let’s *talk* business: you think it’s good business call Fletch in?” (52)

This sentence by Teach is interesting because it shows us one of the key mechanisms Mamet uses in creating the realistic language of his characters, and that is repetition. By doing so, not only does he create realistic language but underlines certain themes, because such dense distribution of specific words is always indicative and calls for critical attention; especially in a dramatic text which simply in quantitative terms contains less textual material than the novel. In the above mentioned scene when Don talks about Fletcher winning money, after presenting the information for the first time “The Fucker won four hundred bucks last night” (5), he repeats the information after just thirteen short replies, of which the longest is five words long, while eight of them are two or one word long. However, the repetition is not the only mechanism employed by Mamet nor is the realism of language his only goal. The dialogical structure of the play is fractured by constant interruptions.

TEACH: You know what is free enterprise?

DON: No. What?

TEACH: the freedom...

DON: ...yeah?

TEACH: Of the Individual...

DON:...yeah? (72)

TEACH: ... To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit.

DON: Uh-huh...

TEACH: In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. (73)

According to Pfister “dialogues with a higher frequency of interruption exhibit a clear tendency to reflect a close relationship between dialogue partners. That is, the higher the frequency, the more marked the dialogical and actional quality of the verbal interchange.” (142) This feature is skillfully exploited by Mamet because he creates tight bonds between the characters only to break them later on, and this corresponds to the world of business in the USA which is the main theme of the play. Furthermore, this fragmented language structure perfectly reflects the image of a broken American dream.

The disjunctions of their speech, though accurate enough as a rendering of the real language of the streets, gain power less as a simple strategy of naturalism than as an analogue of their social and psychological incompleteness and the disintegration of that dream of upward mobility, personal completion, spiritual fulfilment and national achievement which is the special promise and animating myth of their society.

(Bigsby, Introduction: *volume 3*, 253)

This leads us to the conclusion that the language itself and the way it is used to construct the fictional world reflects the reality of the USA in Mamet’s play. It is a world of a dynamic fast paced verbal exchange. However *American Buffalo* lacks a key element for a traditional drama, an initial state, a certain type of change and a final state.

American Buffalo is not plotless through inadvertence or incompetence. The lives which Mamet dramatises are themselves without plot, without direction, purpose, transcendence. His plays do not so much employ symbols, as did Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller; they are symbolic enactments of their own themes. (Bigsby, *Introduction: volume 3* 266)

By masterful usage of language Mamet creates the world where motifs of business and money, nickels and coins are nothing more but a fractured elements of broken reality in a plotless universe where all characters are paralyzed with their greed and fear.

3.5 DAVID MAMET: GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS

Glengarry Glen Ross is David Mamet's play from 1983 which focuses on careers of four real estate salesmen – Roma, Levene, Moss and Aaronow who are in a constant fight with their office manager Williamson who provides them with leads for their sales. The play depicts a ruthless world of competitive salesmen who are doing legal business but who are morally even more corrupt than the characters from the *American Buffalo*.

Act One takes place in a booth at a Chinese restaurant where Levene is trying to convince Williamson that he should give The Glengarry Highland's leads to him... "...The Glengarry Highland's leads, you're sending Roma out...he's throwing the leads away. All that I'm saying, that you're wasting leads... put a *proven man out*..." (15) This *in medias res* opening immediately introduces us with the omnipresent motif of this play – the leads. All the salesmen are fighting for the leads because they are information about potential buyers which are necessary to make the sales. The importance of leads for their sales is best seen in Levene's pleas which are reiterated through the play. "You're burning my ass, I can't get a fucking *lead*.../ I need the *leads*.../ ...I need the leads. I need them now." (18) "Ah, fuck. Leads! Leads! Williamson!" (74) It is interesting that not all the leads are the same; they are often accompanied and described with a certain adjective or descriptive phrase. For instance, when talking to Aaronow about rival real estate salesmen Moss says that "he's got the good leads" (34) Despite constantly pleading for the new leads he doesn't want just any leads. "And I want three worthwhile leads today and I don't want any bullshit about them and I

want ‘em close together ‘cause I’m going to hit them all today. (77) or on another occasion, “I want leads don’t come right out of a phone book. Give me a lead hotter than that, I’ll go in and close it.” (22) Everyone wants *hot leads* which are termed as *premium leads*. “Levene: I can’t close these leads, John. No one can. It’s a joke. John, look, just give me a hot lead. Just give me two of the premium leads.” (23) On the other hand some of the leads obviously cannot be *closed* and the best example for those are the magazine subscription leads described by Levene as “fucking deadbeat magazine subscription leads.” (63) The success of the salesmen is determined according to their sales, but the information about buyers is crucial to make the sales.

Williamson, who is the office manager, has the power to distribute the leads to Levene, Moss, Aaronow and Roma because that is actually his job “Williamson: ...my job is to marshal those leads... (18)” However, he constantly repeats that he cannot distribute them freely. “Williamson: I’m *hired* to watch the leads... You, wait a second, *anybody* falls below certain mark I’m not *permitted* to give them the premium leads. (19) He says that “the hot leads are assigned according to the board.” (22) The board stands for Mitch and Murray who are the owners of the real estate office but never appear as characters in the play. By not introducing them as characters Mamet is constructing a world in which the real source of power, which is governing the lives of salesman, is hidden and beyond their reach. The board stands for the system which determines the lives of ordinary people and they cannot reach it or fight it.

Similar to this, the dominance of the *leads* motif creates a world in which salesmen do not work with real money, but with the lists of buyers which are a remote representation of certain values. The estimated worth of certain leads is revealed in aggressive verbal exchanges between the characters.

Williamson: You know what those leads cost?

Levene: The premium leads. Yes. I know what they cost. John. Because I, *I* generated the dollar revenue sufficient to *buy* them. Nineteen senny-*nine*, you know what I made? Senny-*nine*? Ninety-six thousand dollars. (20)

As it is the case in *American Buffalo* the most powerful tool used by Mamet is the language of the play.

Levene (*Pause*): Is that it? Is that *it*? You want to do business that way...?

Williamson *gets up, leaves money on the table.*

Levene: You want to do business that way...? (26-27)

The repetition of verbal utterances is just as common in *Glengarry Glen Ross* as it is in *American Buffalo*, and as we can see in the above example the dominant theme is business ethic and betrayal. However, although the theme problematizes the issues of American business culture just like the *American Buffalo*, the setting and characters are indicative of the market developments in the USA. Characters come from a different social strata and share the profession with Miller's Willy Loman. Therefore, we can easily recognize similar character streaks in for instance Levene who constantly talks about his success during the old days when fighting Williamson and in this respect resembles Willy Loman's rhetoric when he confronts his boss Howard Wagner.

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. I bought him a trip to Bermuda once... (26)

According to Nightingale "both dramatists see that archetypal American figure, the drummer or salesman, not only as the representative of a capitalist system which is ruinous to personal decency and to relationships but also as its victim." (90) However the key difference is the

period in which the plays take place. While *Death of Salesman* was written in 1949 and takes place roughly at the same time, *Glengarry Glen Ross* was written 1983 and deals with the period of its production. “Here is Arthur Miller’s Willy Loman at work in the 1980s: just as vulnerable but even more driven, even more compromised and distorted by the pressures of commerce and the harshness of American society.” (Nightingale 89) The key differences between the two plays arise from the different economic and social circumstances of the periods of their production. “In Miller’s 1949 the American dream was deeply compromised but still had its moral and perhaps even its spiritual aspects. By Mamet’s 1983 it had become heartless and soulless, a Darwinian mix of unscrupulous competitiveness and greed.” (Nightingale 91) The comparative reading of the two plays and the examination of the position of salesmen in Miller’s and Mamet’s play, gives us the opportunity to examine the sphere of economic experience in the USA in two different periods. “...Mamet was responding to the economic and social ruthlessness of Reaganism (in an interview in 1984 he explicitly compared the President’s values with those of the world he had recently depicted in *Glengarry Glen Ross*) ...” (Nightingale 90)

In that interview Mamet commented on his preoccupation with the American Dream which was heavily influenced by the neoliberal developments.

It [The myth of the American Dream] interests me because the national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive and succeed. Instead of rising with the masses one should rise from the masses. Your extremity is my opportunity. That's what forms the basis of our economic life, and this is what forms the rest of our lives. That American myth: the idea of something out of nothing. And this also affects the spirit of the individual. It's very divisive. One feels one can only succeed at the cost of someone else. Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone's got an equal chance, but only one guy is going to get to the top. "The more I have the less you have." So one can only succeed at the cost of, the failure of another, which is what a lot of my plays - *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* - are about. That's what Acting

President Reagan's whole campaign is about. In *Glengarry Glen Ross* it's the Cadillac, the steak-knives, or nothing. In this play it's obvious that these fellows are put in fear for their lives and livelihood; for them it's the same thing. They have to succeed at the cost of each other. As Thorstein Veblen in *Theory of the Leisure Class* says, sharp practice inevitably shades over into fraud. Once someone has no vested interest in behaving in an ethical manner and the only bounds on his behavior are supposedly his innate sense of fair play, then fair play becomes an outdated concept: "But wait a second! Why should I control my sense of fair play when the other person may not control his sense of fair play? So hurrray for me and to hell with you." (Kane 46-47)

Mamet was well aware of the developments that influenced market and economy in the USA under neoliberal policies of Regan administration, and has problematized these developments, particular to the USA, recreating the experience in his plays.

The Croatian theater critic Sanja Nikčević in her book *Gubitnički genij u našem gradu : Suvremena američka drama* (Losers' Genius in Our Town: Contemporary American Drama) explains how it was difficult for her to explain to Croatian students why the play *Glengarry Glen Ross* was funny when she returned from the New York in 2005. According to her, the play "contains a lot of situations typical for the so-called capitalist society, many of which were completely foreign to us in the previous system and we still haven't completely embraced the new one." (81) Her argument is interesting evidence that Mamet's play portrays uniquely American experience which is hard to translate and understand because of the cultural difference. The motif of leads is the most reveling in this sense. "When I read the play for the first time I was convinced that a lead is a good piece of land...It seemed to me that you need to have a good piece of land and you won't have any problem selling it..." (Nikčević 82) Nikčević elaborates the cultural shock of the leads experience;

"In a country where information is still provided without charge ... the whole concept that it is more important to have an address of a potential buyer than the good merchandise seems turned upside down. For us it is still logical that if you have good

merchandise finding a buyer is not a problem therefore the American thesis that a good salesman will sell anything to someone who fulfills basic requirements (steady salary and absence of personal ideas for investing) seems rather confusing.” (82)

The reception of *Glengarry Glen Ross* in the countries with different economic system and salesmen culture clearly shows the uniqueness of American system and experience which is revealed and critically attacked by the play. Furthermore, the change of reception over time of such works of art in the processes of globalization can show the dynamics of influence of certain cultures over the others.

However, it is necessary to point out that Mamet’s language of salesman is not easily understood even to the native speakers because the characters use a lot of technical terms. Here are just some of the examples from the play.

Levene: put a *proven man out*... and you watch, now *wait* a second – and you watch your *dollar* volumes... You start closing them for *fifty* ‘stead of *twenty-five*... you put a *closer* on the...(15)

Levene: ... Cold *calling*, fella. Door to door. But you don’t know. You don’t know You never heard of a *streak*. You never heard of ‘marshaling your sales force...’” (77) to Williamson

Levene: That’s fucked. That’s fucked. You don’t look at the fucking *percentage*. You look at the *gross*. (21)

Moss: You don’t *ax* your sales force. (36)

It is interesting that “when *Glengarry Glen Ross* was staged by the National Theatre in England there was a discussion as to whether the program should produce a glossary of the seemingly technical terms used by the salesmen – leads, cold calling, etc.” (Bigsby 33 David Mamet) Mamet opposed this idea, and the play was not accompanied by a glossary. This is rightfully so, because the highly technical language, and the fact that we have trouble understanding the play at some moments because of it, reveals to us the fact that we live in a world which we poorly understand.

3.6 DAVID MAMET: OLEANNA

Oleanna is a two-act play from 1992 which has been interpreted in various ways and provoked a lot of debate and discussions among the critics. Carol is a college student who is unable to follow the class material and she visits her teacher John during his office hours to help her understand the material, namely his book which she has bought and read but is still unable to comprehend anything.

By the end of the play Carol will accuse John of harassment and his career is ruined. Not much is possible to discern about who is right or wrong in the play because there is little said. Both characters speak only a couple of words often interrupting each other, or leaving their sentences unfinished, and there are only a couple of longer replies between them. The play has often been approached by feminist critics who attacked Mamet as misogynist. “Appearing at a time when ‘sexual harassment’ had become a particularly loaded term, *Oleanna* helped fuel ensuing debates about political correctness and the framing of harassment policies in academic settings.” (Braun 104)

Mamet has always rejected such accusation “I don’t take, personally, the side of the one [character] rather than the other. I think they’re absolutely both wrong, and they’re absolutely both right (144.)” (Murphy 125) Although his play offers a lot for the readings from the feminist perspective the economic forces that dictate the lives of both Carol and John are overlooked. The play opens with John talking to phone while Carol is in his office and he repeatedly asks “And what about the land. (*Pause*) The land. And what about the land? (*Pause*) What about it? (1)”. Only later on we find out that he is to be granted tenure and is buying the new house. John has worked his whole life for the tenure, his wife is constantly calling him and they are trying to close the deal for the new house but she is nervous and he has to convince her that everything will be fine. “...No we aren't going to lose the, we aren't going to lose the house.” (2) Carol is disturbing that moment of his success.

She wants to enter that world as well, but is denied by the course and inability to comprehend the material for the course needed for successful completion of her education.

CAROL: ... I come from a different *social*...

JOHN: ...ev...

CAROL: a different economic... (8)

As we can see, Carol stresses her different economic status, she perceives it as important and as an impediment for understanding the material of the course and her advancement. She doesn't want to radically change anything but to be accepted into the academic circle which in her terms stands for economic improvement.

In a most fundamental sense, *Oleanna* is about the use and abuse of terms of art, specialized language or jargon which serves as the ticket of admission into restricted linguistic communities that confer power, money, and/or privilege upon their members. The linguistic communities in the play are those of real estate, academia, the feminist movement, and the law. (Murphy 126)

Although *Oleanna* does not engage the economic structure in a straightforward way like *American Buffalo* or *Glengarry Glen Ross* its characters development is still determined by the economic situation and striving of both characters for economic improvement. The language is once again employed by Mamet as the key tool and subject and linguistic mastery in the play is the metaphor for mastering certain areas of human experience, of which the economic one plays an important role in the lives of Carol and John.

4. CONCLUSION

American drama is still not incorporated in the American studies project to a great degree but it is a substantial literary corpora which can offer a lot of evidence on the various developments of American identity and experience. Through the analysis of motifs and themes connected to the economy this paper has tried to reveal how the economic experience is represented and critically approached in *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, *Long Day's Journey into Night* by Eugene O'Neill and later on in David Mamet's plays *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Oleanna*.

In the analyzed plays by Williams, Miller and O'Neill the American dream is still not completely shattered. If nothing more there are memories of prosperity present. While Williams and Miller engage in the economic criticism more directly in *Long Day's Journey into Night* economic factors are only revealed by close reading as one of the crucial forces for the development of the plot. Mamet's plays are a reflection of the world in which the American dream is completely destroyed, there is no substantial thematic developments in his plays and the destruction of mythical American values is done through broken language structures. While *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* take a head on approach to American business and abound with references to the socio-economic developments in the USA, *Oleanna* doesn't deal with these themes directly but in a more subtle way. Furthermore *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* cover the period of 1970s and 1980s in the USA when the neoliberalism was taking firm hold and therefore these plays are still relevant for the contemporary economic experience of the USA

This paper only partially covered some of the well known American dramas. However approaching the corpora of single authors like Miller, O'Neill or Williams can reveal a lot about the history and development of American identity and experience. Finally, apart from

being only read and approached as texts, all these dramatic texts can be completely comprehended in the theater through analysis of various productions, and the reasons which bring them to the stage.

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