

## LIFE IS A PLAY: Reading David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* through Cognitive Poetics

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the concerns of Cognitive Poetic critics has been with the issue of how literary authors make meaning by means of metaphor. Building on the Cognitive Linguistic theories of metaphor, the field of Cognitive Poetics has been concerned, among its many diverse areas, with the studying of metaphor in literary texts. Proposing the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argued in *Metaphors We Live By* that our conceptual system is metaphorically shaped. In addition, they claimed that the metaphoric linguistic expressions are the manifestation of the fundamental conceptual metaphors forming individuals' cognitions. Conceptual metaphors were defined as the underlying structures of these expressions by means of which people comprehend intangible concepts through more tangible ones. Using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the present essay explores the conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A PLAY in David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In these plays, Mamet depicts a world in which performance, in its theatrical sense, becomes the characters' survival strategy and a manner of living. As one of the most influential playwrights of his time, Mamet has always been concerned with the issues which most afflict America. He finds the ills of his society manifested in the relation among people. An attempt is made to explain the ways in which life-as-play finds expression both linguistically and thematically in the different contexts of these works.*

*Keywords: cognitive poetics; metaphor; conceptual metaphor ;David Mamet; Sexual Perversity in Chicago; Glengarry Glen Ross*

### INTRODUCTION

What cognitive science has contributed to the study of metaphor over the years is invaluable. As Peter Stockwell (2002) asserts in his book *Cognitive Poetics*, “cognitive science is responsible for placing metaphor at the centre of language and thought in general” (p. 105). The change in how metaphor was regarded took place, more particularly, with the emergence of the cognitive approach in the field of linguistics during the late seventies and early eighties (Geeraerts & Cuyckens 2007). This new theoretical position inaugurated in the works of Lakoff, Langacker and Talmy argued for a study of linguistics in which “the formal structures of language are studied not as if they were autonomous, but as reflections of general conceptual organisation, categorisation principles, processing mechanisms, and experiential and environmental influences” (Geeraerts & Cuyckens 2007, p. 3). As Steen and Gavins (2003) explain, cognitive linguists were interested in “exploring those aspects where meaning and knowledge became hard to distinguish” and, therefore, assumed “a close connection between experience, cognition, and language” (p. 9).

The new trends in the study of linguistics had a direct impact on how metaphor was perceived by scholars. Metaphor was no longer only a matter of words; rather, it was a phenomenon that consisted of linguistic, conceptual, socio-cultural, neural and bodily levels at the same time (Kovecses 2005, p. 8). Following these footsteps, Lakoff and Johnson

published their seminal work called *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980. As its authors explain in the preface, the book was written out of a concern “with how people understand their language and their experience” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. ix). Their principle theory argues for the metaphorical nature of human's conceptual system. The work of Lakoff and Johnson was the beginning of many related discussions about how metaphors shape our understanding. Lakoff and Johnson give a definition of metaphor which is rooted in its conceptual nature: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 5). Seen from this perspective, “metaphor ceases to be the sole device of creative literary imagination; it becomes a valuable cognitive tool without which neither poets nor you and I as ordinary people could live” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. ix).

Consequently, Lakoff and Johnson proposed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) which argues that linguistic metaphorical expressions are the manifestations of a metaphorically shaped cognition. They claim, therefore, that “metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 6). As Peter Stockwell (2002) puts it, conceptual metaphors are the underlying structures of metaphoric expressions which are shared by groups of people, such as ARGUMENT IS WAR in which ARGUMENT is the less tangible conceptual domain mapped onto the more concrete one, namely WAR (p. 109). It is important to realise that conceptual metaphors not only influence our language but more importantly deeply affect how we interact with one another. Therefore, “it is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 4). The conceptual process, however, takes place largely unconsciously (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 257). Lakoff and Turner (1989) posit the nature of metaphor as omnipresent, accessible to all, conventional and irreplaceable (p. xi). As a result, a cognitive approach to studying metaphors would not only explore the workings of the conceptual systems of individuals in different cultures, but also attempt to demonstrate how these conceptual metaphors influence our everyday actions in ways that may not be readily perceivable.

Semino elaborates on the dynamic relationship between discourse and ideology and explains the role that metaphor plays in this correlation. She treats discourses as “linguistic phenomena, i.e. as particular ways of talking about particular aspects of reality within particular social contexts and practices” and ideologies as “cognitive phenomena, i.e. as (shared) conceptualisations of particular aspects of reality” (2008, p. 90). She asserts that the relationship between the two is a dynamic one since discourses are reflections of particular ideologies and also play a part in shaping them; similarly, ideologies are the results of discursive practices while at the same time they limit and inform them. She then continues to underline the crucial role of conventional conceptual metaphors in shaping ideologies and the importance of their conventional linguistic counterparts in creating discourses (Semino 2008, p. 90).

By introducing the phenomena of ‘highlighting’ and ‘hiding’ as an explanation for the workings of various metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson identified the way in which conceptual metaphors such as ARGUMENT AS WAR shape a special understanding of their target domains and in turn form a certain ideology. In this particular conceptual metaphor, the features of cooperation and collaboration are hidden at the expense of highlighting those of aggression and competition. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, such a conceptual metaphor is so deeply built into the culture that it is impossible for individuals to execute arguments in any other way (pp. 63-4). Equally important, indeed, are the metaphorical expressions which are the manifestations of conceptual metaphors in discourse. As Goatly (2007) points out, “the influence of language upon our thoughts and perception of reality is most powerful when we

are unaware of it, when it expresses hidden or, technically speaking, *latent ideology*” (p. 27). In other words, what people call commonsense is the knowledge determined and bounded by a certain ideology and in a particular discourse. People may be aware of other ways of conceptualizing due to being able to speak another language or being alert to the influence of discourse on their perception (Goatly 2007, p. 27). In the same way, the cognitive effect of conventional metaphors goes unnoticed.

A Cognitive Poetic approach to literary texts can be said to lean towards one of its two main currents, namely cognitive linguistics and cognitive sciences (Steen & Gavins 2003). Stockwell (2002) points out that the American model of Cognitive Poetics is generally oriented towards Cognitive Linguistics and benefits from its theories. This model has been highly influential all around the world and its main concerns are metaphor, conceptual structures and issues of reference (p. 9). As Steen and Gavins (2003) assert, metaphor is one of the most exciting realms where Cognitive Poetics and Cognitive Linguistics consolidate (p. 10). Steen notes that “metaphor is clearly one of the areas where cognitive poetics may benefit from the cognitive linguistic enterprise” (Steen 2009, p. 197). Benefiting from, as Turner (2002) calls it, the ‘cognitive turn’ taken by linguists in defining the concept of metaphor, Cognitive Poetic scholars began to explore its different aspects in literary texts (p. 9). In defining Cognitive Poetics, Margaret Freeman explains that this new field of literary studies “focuses on process, not product” (qtd in. Brone & Vandaele 2009, p. 3). Therefore, what Cognitive Poetic critics attempt to accomplish is to a large extent the process through which the meaning of literary text is shaped. Metaphor, as it was already mentioned, is considered by cognitive theorists as the main tool of fabricating meaning and knowledge.

Consequently, the Cognitive Poetic critics have been concerned with how the meaning is shaped, transferred and comprehended by the means of metaphor in literary texts. That is why, as Freeman (2002) contends, this approach to the act of reading could potentially provide a focus which encompasses an exploration of the text, the writer and the reader (p. 466). Employing the CMT, this essay attempts to explore the conventional conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A PLAY in two of the most acclaimed plays of David Mamet by means of their linguistic and thematic manifestations in the text. The essay, then, will aim at explaining the ways in which Mamet presents the minds of the characters as shaped by this conceptual metaphor. The analysis continues to demonstrate how these metaphorically-shaped cognitions affect the characters' behavior and how this conventional metaphor informs the overall theme of the plays. The focus of the essay, therefore, is on exploring this particular conceptual metaphor in the inter-character discourse.

In his essay *Performance as Metaphor*, States (1996) notes that when a word suddenly emerges “from normal semantic practice (a word you are hearing, say, a dozen times a week) ... you can bet that it is a proto-keyword spreading on the winds of metaphor” (p. 65). ‘Performance’, he believes, is such a keyword; keyword as defined by Raymond Williams in that its meaning is closely connected with the problems it is being used to discuss (States 1996, p. 65). Therefore, States explains, ‘performance’ has acquired different metaphorical significations during its course of evolution, since that is simply how a keyword behaves. “Secoded by ideology”, a keyword “never stops ramifying itself until it has claimed as much territory as possible” (States 1996, p. 65). He believes that the shift of the term ‘performance’ into a master concept was brought about in the 60s (States 1996, p. 70). He continues to introduce Ervin Goffman as one of the scholars of the time who contributed to that shift. In 1959, Ervin Goffman, one of the most prominent sociologists of the twentieth century, published his book called *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in which he explores the behavior of individuals in a society in terms of dramaturgical metaphors. Goffman (1959) defines performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (p. 15). As Smith (2006) puts it,

this book “breathed a new life into the ancient ‘all the world's a stage’ metaphor” (p. 42). Smith (2006) continues that Goffman “takes the metaphor forward by concentrating upon the conduct of persons dealing with the exigencies of co-presence” (p. 42).

As Bigsby (2004a) writes, David Mamet “was formed as a writer” in such a decade; a decade “in which performance was seized on as a principal metaphor by sociologists and psychologists” and “the presentational self became a central concept” (p. 32). As a result, Mamet takes an interest in writing about the characters who “perform rather than live their lives” (Bigsby 2004a, p. 7). Callens (2004) explains that in his plays, Mamet would “implicitly confess admiration for the performance skills of his characters, hardly surprisingly, perhaps, for a dramatist” (p. 48). However, Mamet is not only fascinated by what Bigsby (2004a) calls the ‘performed selves’, but is also interested in the way each of these characters fabricate dramatic stories in order to define and be defined (p. 29). Mamet elaborates on the dramatizing urge of human beings in his treatise on the nature and purpose of drama called *Three Uses of the Knife*. Mamet (2000) continues to assert that we, as human beings, find pleasure and comfort in making the ambivalent and the chaotic into a drama with a plot that generates comprehensible meanings “for the hero, which is to say for ourselves” (p. 3). He holds the view that human beings use dramatisation as a survival mechanism to bestow a cause-and-effect structure onto the unfathomable world. Mamet relates this human characteristic to Freud's description of music as a ‘polymorphous perversity,’ i.e. the activity that by stating, elaborating and finally resolving a theme makes music a pleasurable and satisfying experience. Both the acts of dramatizing and performing become the ruling force in the lives of Mamet's characters whether on the stage or on the screen. As Bigsby (2004a) illustrates, the characters in Mamet’s works

not only perform themselves but deploy performance as both strategy and tactic. Dan Shapiro in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* plays the role of a world-wise, sexually compelling, cock-of-the-walk to hide his total failure to connect. The criminals in *We're No Angels* masquerade as priests in order to escape. The protagonist of *Heist* is effectively an actor performing a series of dramas the better to deceive but also because he seems to exist in and through performance, as do the characters in *House of Games*. There are few Mamet plays or films in which the characters do not present their lives as performances, offer stories, stage dramas in which to ensnare their audience. (p. 31)

At the heart of these performances lies the indispensable role of a persuasive language. Bigsby (2004a) observes that the characters of Mamet's works take satisfaction in the “performative pleasures of language”(p. 37). It is almost an erotic urge which drives human beings to submit to a language which moves further away from description towards deception (Bigsby 2004a, p. 37). Words are uttered not for establishing a meaningful communication but to delude for personal gain. As Bigsby (2004b) argues elsewhere, “The language of communality and mutual responsibility is deployed by those who have no faith in it other than as a tactic to ensnare the unwary. Words have no weight except as elaborate mechanisms of deceit” (p. 167).

According to the CMT, however, the true manipulator of thoughts is the conceptual metaphor which makes the people of a society comprehend the conceptual domain of LIFE in terms of a PLAY and the RELATIONS as PERFORMANCES. Metaphors, in particular, have a significant role in making performance and theatricality an essential part of these people's lives. As Kovecses (2005) points out, “it can probably be assumed that each culture is characterised by certain central metaphors, or, as Bradd Shore (1996) calls them, ‘foundational schemas’” (p. 184). Kovecses (2005) suggests that one of the foundational metaphors in the American culture is LIFE IS A SHOW or SPECTACLE, or more generally ENTERTAINMENT; Although this particular conceptual metaphor is not an “American invention”, it can be found “in every facet of American life and popular culture” (pp. 184-5). Elsewhere, Kovecses (2010) explains:

In addition to journeys and gambling games, a frequently used source domain for life is the concept of play; hence, the metaphor LIFE IS A PLAY, as in Shakespeare's famous lines "All the world is a stage, / And all the men and women merely players. / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts" (*As You Like It* 2.7). The institution of the theater obviously evolved from everyday life. Life has thus acquired the concept of a theater play as its source domain. (p. 75)

As a foundational metaphor, LIFE IS A PLAY is constituted by a number of other conceptual metaphors which are smaller in scale. Outlining the mappings of LIFE IS A PLAY, Kovecses (2005) points out that perhaps the most important constituent element of this large-scale conceptual metaphor is the roles people play in life (p. 185); hence the conceptual metaphor of HUMAN RELATIONS AS PERFORMANCES. Lakoff and Turner (1989) assert that "in the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor, the person leading a life corresponds to an actor, the people with whom he interacts are fellow actors, his behavior is the way he is acting..." (p. 21). As it was already mentioned, the works of David Mamet abound with people who lead their lives through performances as their cognition is shaped through the conceptual metaphor that defines living in a society as performing a role. Lakoff and Turner (1989) mention some of the linguistic manifestations of LIFE AS PERFORMANCE in the everyday expressions such as: "She's my leading lady", "You missed your cue", "He saved the show", "Clean up your act", "He plays an important role in the process" and "You're on!" (pp. 20-1). However, as Kovecses (2005) points out, this does not mean "that only those American conceptual metaphors that occur as linguistic expressions should be 'unearthed' and studied", but that American English could be a reliable source of investigation of the dominant metaphors by which Americans 'comprehend their experience' (p. 189). Therefore, the effect of metaphors in shaping the cognition of the members of a society can be observed in their attitudes, even in the absence of linguistic evidences. The two sections that follow first trace the linguistic manifestations of these conceptual metaphors within the text of the play and then relate the discussion into their implied presence in the behavior of its characters in two very different contexts of these plays: one which involves intimate relations and the other which concerns business.

#### LIFE-AS-PLAY IN *SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO*

In his introduction to a collection of essays on David Mamet, Harold Bloom (2004) states that *Sexual Perversity* is among the "very few contemporary dramas of authentic eminence" that depresses him quite immensely (p. 1). Anne Dean (1992) calls it the dramatisation of "the emptiness of relationships in an empty society"; a society which she calls "artificial and sterile" (p. 83). The play which is comprised of very short scenes, tells the story of Bernie and Danny, two office workers, Joan who is a teacher in a nursery school and Deborah, an illustrator who lives with Joan. Their lives intersect when Danny starts a relationship with Deborah. The play is 'laced with obscene language' and abusive words which become the characters' sole shelter to which they recourse as they repeatedly fail to connect with one another (Bigsby 2004a, p. 1).

"Drama is basically about lies, somebody lying to somebody", says David Mamet on the nature of dramatic works in general including Shakespeare's (Schvey 2001, p. 63). 'Somebody lying' is what pervades the scenes of *Sexual Perversity*. As the play begins, we see one man fabricating outrageous stories while his friend listens in awe. Bernie, who acts the role of the powerful mentor to his credulous associate, Danny, is narrating a shocking sexual experience as the play opens. Bernie claims that he has met someone the night before and depicts her as "simultaneously a young girl and a sexual vampire" (Murphy 2011, p. 48).

When at a diner, Bernie sees her telling the cashier that she has forgot her purse up in her room while buying a pack of cigarettes:

BERNIE: ... and she wants a pack of Viceroy's.  
DANNY: I can believe that.  
BERNIE: Get the smokes, and she does this number about how she forgot her purse up in her room.  
DANNY: Up in her room?  
BERNIE: Yeah.  
DANNY: Was she a pro? (Mamet 1978, p. 11)

Bernie offers to pay for her and in return, the woman invites him to accompany her to her room. The metaphor that Bernie uses to refer to the woman's claiming to have forgotten her purse is performing a 'number'. Bernie probably assumes that the woman has acted the role of the damsel in distress to attract his attention into saving her. Even Danny seems to understand that immediately and asks Bernie if the woman was a prostitute. Even though this relationship turns out to be another fabricated heroic tale of conquering the physical realms of a female, it is believed by Bernie to have started with a performance on the part of the woman.

This is not the only time the metaphors of performance and theater are used by Bernie to describe the complex relations of men and women. In scene three, Bernie, this time in real life, tries to talk to a woman in a bar, who is in fact Joan. His unsophisticated and crude manner repels Joan into refusing to continue the conversation:

JOAN: Forgive me if I'm being too personal ... but I do not find you sexually attractive.  
(Pause)  
BERNIE: What is that, some new kind of line? Huh? I mean, not that I mind what you think, if that's what you think ... but ... that's a fucking rotten thing to say. (1987, p. 20)

Bernie refers to the words Joan has just uttered as 'some new kind of line', once again using a constituent element of PERFORMANCE to refer to Joan's behavior towards him. The *NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions* defines 'line' as a 'story or argument' or 'a story intended to seduce somebody' (Spears 2000, p. 252). It also mentions some other expressions which make use of 'line' in the same sense, such as 'lay some sweet lines on someone', meaning 'to speak kindly' and 'run down some lines', meaning to talk to somebody or to seduce with words (Spears 2000, pp. 248-346). The underlying conceptual metaphor manifested in all these expressions is RELATIONS ARE PERFORMANCES. Having this conceptual metaphor in mind, it can be inferred that remembering and saying a 'line' as an element of the source domain is mapped onto an element of the target domain, namely talking or having a conversation. Therefore, the language that Bernie uses and Joan understands is structured in a way that talking with one another is conceived of by its users as dialogues of a theatrical performance, or in other words exchanging predesigned words to achieve a personal purpose. In the beginning of the scene, in order to impress Joan, Bernie starts to tell her his supposedly touching story about his being a busy loner who wants to enjoy himself for only one night as he gets these breaks rarely. Being shocked by the failure of his tale, Bernie returns to it a moment later to seek its effect on Joan. She cuts him off by simply saying that "we've done this before"; as if they have been performing parts of a scripted skit that naturally doesn't need to repeat itself, having just been performed (Mamet 1987, p. 20).

Frustrated with Joan's cold rejection of his proposal, Bernie continues his verbal abuse and his language grows coarser:

BERNIE: ... You think I don't have better things to do? I don't have better ways to spend my off hours than to listen to some nowhere cunt try out cute bits on me? I mean why don't you just clean your fucking act up, Missy. You're living in a city in 1976.

(Pause)

Am I getting through to you?

(1987, pp. 20-1)

In this short extract, once again, the pervasiveness of metaphors of performance in the structure of Bernie's language and thoughts is prominent. He refers to the behavior of Joan toward himself as 'bits', i.e. short theatrical performances intended perhaps to fool him. Among his nervously uttered and confused words, he tells Joan to 'clean' her 'act'. The *NTC* defines this expression as reforming one's conduct or improving one's performance (Spears 2000, p. 79). Using the word 'act', literally meaning part of a dramatic performance, is the vehicle by which Bernie describes the attitude of Joan. Therefore, 'acting' as an element of PERFORMANCE conceptual domain becomes another evidence of the conceptual metaphor of RELATIONS ARE PERFORMANCES which makes the foundation of the characters' cognition on how they perceive human interactions. This conceptual metaphor becomes manifest in different linguistic metaphorical expressions that characters use mostly unconscious of their being metaphorical. Quinn (2004) notes that even Danny's curses are performative and theatrical and thus have little 'referential value' (p. 103). The word 'play' is another linguistic manifestation of this conceptual metaphor which Joan uses in scene sixteen when blaming the children of the nursery school, where she works, of inappropriate behavior. She tells the children not to "play dumb" with her and tell her the truth (Mamet 1987, p. 41). Here again, the act of fooling someone or manipulating one into believing something is conceptualised by means of the metaphor of 'playing' a role.

As Kovecses (2010) explains, "metaphor plays a role in human thought, understanding, and reasoning, and beyond that, in the creation of our social, cultural, and psychological reality" (p. xi). Consequently and in the same way, the social, cultural and psychological reality of human relations is shaped in the minds of the characters of *SPC* through the RELATIONS ARE PERFORMANCES conceptual metaphor. David Punter (2007) uses the theories of Althusser concerning people's subjection to language and claims that people are largely 'interpellated' through metaphors (p. 42). As such, the actions of the individuals become the direct reflection of how their mindset is shaped by the conceptual structure of metaphors. Likewise, the effect of thinking about human relations in terms of performance can be traced in the way that characters behave toward one another and the manner in which they conduct their lives.

The ubiquity of performing in the behavior of the characters is clear from the first scene and continues to mark the play throughout. In this scene, Bernie is seen as he is telling the tall tale of his recent sexual experience. His story is "a tour- de- force- of sexual fantasy, and the longest and most involved" among the many he relates during the play (Dean 1992, p. 56). It is replete with out of the ordinary events that end in a strikingly dramatic scene in which he leaves the hotel room ablaze while his lover is still lying in bed begging him to come back to her. In *Three Uses of the Knife*, Mamet (2000) writes that "the theater is about the hero journey, the hero and heroine are those people who do not give in to temptation. The hero story is about a person undergoing a test he or she didn't choose" (p. 17). The story that Bernie relates is definitely such a fabricated tragedy. As it was mentioned, he accuses his imaginary woman of doing a "number" in order to seduce him whereas, of course, he is the one who is putting on an incredible show to mesmerise Danny. As Dean (1992) says of Bernie's dramatic attitude:

His language takes on the coldness of a character like Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer; his terminology owes more to fictional cops and robbers than to real life. He evidently sees himself as the cool-headed, although rather misogynistic, stud who has been

represented by countless film and television heroes. Bernie has been acting all the time, but perhaps nowhere so purposefully as here; he strives to give Danny the impression of his supreme control over the situation and, in so doing, verbally reenacts what has never taken place. By saying the words aloud, Bernie enjoys a frisson of excitement over an event that had only ever existed in his mind. (p. 60)

In scene nine, Danny invites Deborah, with whom he has recently started a relationship, to listen to Bernie's Korea stories: “Ah! Ask him to tell you about Korea, he has got some stories you are not going to believe” (Mamet 1978, p. 27). As soon as Bernie starts to talk about his being in Korea during the war, it becomes clear that this is also another number that he has performed for his friend evidently a number of times. His knowledge about Korea comes from a TV series that was on at the time and ironically filmed in the Hollywood studios. When he is asked to explain more, he dodges the question:

BERNIE: Yeah, You see M\* A\* S\* H on TV? *(Pause.)* It all looks like that. There isn't one square inch of Korea that doesn't look like that. *(Pause.)* I'm not kidding.  
*(Pause)*  
DEBORAH: When were you there?  
BERNIE: '67  
DEBORAH: Really? What were you doing in Korea in 1967?  
*(Pause)*  
BERNIE: I'm not at liberty to talk about it.  
*(Pause)*  
So what do you do? (1978, p. 29)

Bernie's incredible stories are also the means by which he constructs his character as the wise mentor and the experienced master in the ridiculous theater of media-stricken events that constitute his life and influence Danny's. Danny, in turn, comes to be the perfect audience for Bernie's theatrical performances. He not only does not question the authenticity of the stories, but also is so taken aback by them that he tries to absorb their lessons and utilise them thoroughly in real life. As Bigsby (2004c) writes of the performative nature of *The Old Religion's* characters, “...performance is also falsehood and depends on the acquiescence of an audience” (p. 209). Contrary to the stories he relates, however, Bernie fails miserably to communicate with Joan; the only non-fictional woman we see him try to communicate with.

Since Bernie is not the only member of the society to be constructed through metaphors as a performer in the drama that is believed to be human relations, naturally other characters, too, use performance as the means of communication. In the scene where Bernie tries to present himself as the attractive loner in the bar, Joan responds by acting the role of an innocent mother whose son is sick and has to get home. While she continues to apologise to Bernie in response to his abusive behavior, she is actually putting on a show which she realises would make him more and more frustrated. Moreover, in her conversations with Deborah, Joan tries to play the role of the pensive philosopher of human relations. She tries to use sophisticated words and complicated phrases to express her absolute misandry. As Dean (1992) observes:

Joan tries to sound authoritative, impressive, and in command of what she avers but there remains a sense that Mamet is also satirizing this level of awareness. Like the rest of his characters' conversation, Joan's is artificial—although in a more educated way. (p. 68)

As soon as she stops performing the role of the educated intellectual, however, her ‘urban neurosis’ finds way into her abusive words and ‘streetwise banter’ (Dean 1992, p. 68). Much like Bernie, perhaps, Joan also tries to play the role of the mentor to Deborah and warn her that the relationship between a man and a woman “*was* never supposed to work out” (Mamet 1978, p. 47).



The relationship between Danny and Deborah, too, is not exempt from being performative. In the scene where they meet for the first time, Deborah claims that she is a lesbian either in order to repel Danny or to arouse his curiosity towards her. Whatever her motif, she chooses to play rather than to seek a connection. After this short scene, we see Danny and Deborah in bed striving to make a conversation after following their sexual relation. However, their conversation lacks any hint of emotional connection. The sentences are fragmented, replete with pauses and in desperate need of communicating something, failing and instead talking about mundane issues. In fact, the conversation could well be between two strangers who have just met and are trying uncomfortably to break the ice with pathetic small talks.

DANNY: Well.  
DEBORAH: Well.  
DANNY: Yeah, well, hey...uh...( Pause) I feel *great*. (Pause.) You?  
DEBORAH: Uh huh.  
DANNY: Yup. (Pause) You, uh, you have to go to work (you work, right?) (Deb *nods*.)  
You have to go to work tomorrow?  
DEBORAH: Yes. Well... (1978, p. 24)

Elsewhere, we see Danny and Deborah conversing while they are again in bed. This time they try to fill the gap between themselves by talking about their sexual curiosities. Words help them to keep what little is left of their connection, after having had a sexual closeness, alive and linger the illusion that they are in a relationship. After a few absurd questions and answers, Danny suddenly tells Deborah that he loves making love with her and that he loves her. The juxtaposition of his expression of love with the meaningless conversation that they have just had shows the insignificance of their words. The words ‘I love you’ help Danny to pretend that he is truly connected to Deborah. By uttering those words, Danny fabricates a true relationship in which he performs as a lover. Deborah, however, seems to see through the performance when she confesses to the hollowness of his words at the end of the scene:

DANNY: I love you.  
DEBORAH: Does it frighten you to say that?  
DANNY: Yes.  
DEBORAH: It's only words. I don't think you should be frightened by words. (1978, p. 41)

### LIFE-AS-PLAY IN *GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS*

For the characters of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, however, performance is not just a means of creating an identity; they are con men whose performances are the tools of their trade. In this play, although LIFE IS A PLAY hardly finds expression in words, its presence in shaping the cognition of the characters is felt throughout the text. The play is about four real estate dealers named Levene, Moss, Aaranow, Roma and their manager, Williamson. Murray and Mitch are the owners of the real estate agency and their presence is only felt by the rules they have established. The agency is run by a contest-based system in which the salesmen who close more deals get the better leads and whoever closes the most gets a Cadillac as his prize. The ranks of the salesmen are written on a board which is hung on the wall of the office. The two salesmen who stay at the bottom will be fired. It can be argued that the conceptual metaphor of HUMAN RELATIONS AS PERFORMANCES become the ruling concept based on which these salesmen lead their lives and struggle for survival in the cruel world of business. In other words, the ‘fittest’ of their Darwinian world is the one who can perform and deceive the best. Mamet himself having the experience of working in a real estate agency recalls that

“the salesmen were primarily performers. They went into people’s living rooms and performed their play about the investment properties” (qtd. in Nightingale 2004, p. 97).

However, in *Glengarry* the performances are not limited to the sole purpose of deceiving the buyers. They are also a means by which each salesman can fool his colleagues in order to surpass them in a never-ending business competition. This is precisely what happens in the second scene where Moss is talking to Aaranow who has not been closing many deals recently and is likely to lose his job. Moss intends to force Aaranow into stealing the leads and selling them to Jerry Graff who is the owner of another real estate agency. Moss, however, does not reveal his intentions till the end of the scene. Instead, he tries to pretend that he sympathises with Aaranow’s situation, convince him that it’s not fair for them to work so hard and then trick him into doing the robbery. Roma, too, performs the role of the supporting friend when Levene is enthusiastically recounting how he has closed a deal in the last scene. Much like Teach of *American Buffalo*, Roma pretends believing in a certain code of morality which dictates that one should be supportive of a friend who has been ‘down on his luck lately’ and he accuses Moss for not doing the same (Mamet 1984, p. 55): “Your pal closes, all that comes out of your mouth is bile, how fucked up you are...” (Mamet 1984, p. 56).

As the top salesman of the agency, Roma knows very well that Levene has sold the properties to a couple who are known for their lack of commitment to the contracts they sign and their bounced checks. However instead of telling him, he prefers to enjoy Levene’s failure by faking great interest in his supposedly triumphant story pretending to be supporting a friend. Towards the end of the play and right before Levene goes to talk to the police, who is there to investigate the robbery, Roma tells him that in ‘a world of clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders’, people have to ‘stick together’ to survive (Mamet 1984, p. 90). He stops performing the role of the good old friend, however, as soon as Levene walks into Williamson’s office to talk to the police. Roma tells Williamson that he must have half of whatever commission Levene gets because “My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours” (Mamet 1984, p. 93).

“They are conmen,” as Nightingale (2004) writes of the characters of *Glengarry*, “a class of person Mamet secretly admires. They are actors, for whose imagination and pluck he has a well-attested admiration” (p. 98). The salesmen perform to keep their name on the board and to ‘eat lunch’ and the audiences they have to impress above all are of course the potential buyers (Mamet 1984, p. 15). The third scene is entirely dedicated to the staging of one of such performances with Roma as the main actor trying to sell a property to a guy called Lingk. The scene takes place in a restaurant where Roma starts talking to Lingk, however, not as a salesman but as a friendly companion one can randomly meet in a bar. At first glance, Roma’s speech might sound like a collection of incoherent ‘casual thoughts about life in general’, but it is actually a crafty and persuasive argument with a specific goal: closing a deal (Nightingale 2004, p. 99). Roma starts his argument by asserting the arbitrariness of the moral choices one makes and continues to say that too much caution is harmful to living a full life which he defines as being in ‘the moment’ (Mamet 1984, p. 34). He continues to say that the fear of ‘loss’ impedes us from taking chances and experiencing the pleasure of living an adventurous life.

ROMA: ... What I'm saying, what is our life?

(Pause)

It's looking forward or it's looking back. And that's our life. That's it. Where is the moment?

(Pause)

And what is it that we're afraid of? Loss. What else?

(Pause)

The bank closes. We get sick, my wife died on a plane, the stock market collapsed . . . the house burnt down . . . what of these happen...? None of 'em. We worry anyway. What does this mean? I'm not secure. How can I be secure?  
(1984, p. 34)

Roma is skillfully tempting Lingk to deviate from what seems to be a passive and scared lived life by “maneuvering him towards the paradoxical belief that to take risks is to achieve security: for instance, by investing sight unseen in Florida land” (Nightingale 2004, p. 100). Roma's outstanding performance as a genuinely concerned friend with bold ideas wins over his audience and is about to win him, at the same time, the Cadillac. In the last scene, however, Lingk comes into the recently ransacked office to tell Roma that due to his wife's disapproval of the deal, he has no choice but to withdraw. Moments before Lingk walks in, Roma seeing him from the window and sensing what is about happen, prepares a fast performance with the help of Levene. In this little play which starts with Lingk's entrance, Levene plays the role of the senior vice president of American Express who has bought many lands from Roma during the years and is now in a hurry to take him to his wife's birthday party. In between Roma and Levene's deceitful act of pretending to be in a hurry for leaving, Lingk tries to tell Roma that he ‘doesn't have the power’ to fulfill the contract and if they still haven't filed it, he would like his wife's money back. Roma still tries to escape the situation and leave the office with the help of Levene but he fails to; instead he makes use of the performance trick that has already worked on Lingk before: creating an atmosphere of friendship and sympathy. As the top actor of the agency, Roma knows how to influence his audience by appealing to his sense of insecurity and incertitude. Therefore, he pretends that the deal is not important and that he only wants to help Lingk get a control of his life while skillfully trying to salvage a deal on the verge of annulment.

ROMA: I want to tell you something. Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife. You have certain things you do jointly, you have a bond there . . . and there are other things. Those things are yours. You needn't feel ashamed, you needn't feel that you're being untrue . . . or that she would abandon you if she knew. This is your life.  
(1984, p. 78)

Besides the mentioned little role that he plays in Roma's final piece, Levene tells proudly of his performance that has ended in closing a deal earlier at that day. His method of persuasion or his lines seem not to be very different from that of Roma. He, too, appeals to the buyers' sense of ambition and a nostalgia of fulfilling the American Dream. As he explains, Levene has told the buyers that anything is possible if they only believe in themselves and take chances. He has told them that he understands how painful it is to look around and say “‘This one has so-and-so, and I have nothing . . .’” (1984, p. 53). He continues to encourage them to take this great opportunity that has come along by a full investment in the lands.

LEVENE: This is now. This is that thing that you've been dreaming of, you're going to find that suitcase on the train, the guy comes in the door, the bag that's full of money. This is it, Harriette . . .  
(1984, p. 57)

While the ideas that encouraged the pursuit of the American Dream not only have not led Levene to a lasting success but are also crushing his bones under their savagely competitive structure, Levene makes use of those ideas, while performing, to paint the same picture that has deceived himself before. However, as it was mentioned, this deal that he has closed proves to be ineffective as the buyers are not trustworthy of paying the money. When Levene realises that his last attempts at being a performer have failed, he in effect loses the identity that made him who he was. In other words, since the metaphor of RELATIONS AS PERFORMANCES is what constitutes Levene's idea of interaction, he is hardly capable of

viewing life in any other way or perhaps more precisely he cannot afford to live a life devoid of performances since they are the means by which he constructs his identity and survives in the world of business. Quinn (2004) explains how Levene's failure in performing causes his destruction:

Levene's performances, as a salesman and an actor in fraud, are what constitute his identity, but when he pushes the illusion a step too far, threatening the profit structure of the business, his whole world comes down around him. Realism in this play is a matter of listening closely, following cues and sustaining the illusion of a seamless performance; when the theatrical self breaks down, reality is felt most acutely by Levene as an absence of achievement, for which he must pay with suffering. (p. 100)

Therefore, in a discourse in which human interactions are conceived of as staging performances, the better an actor one is the greater is his chance of survival in the society. An individual's chance of fitting in such a discourse is jeopardised when his/her performance is unexpectedly discomposed.

## CONCLUSION

The modern theory of cognition considers metaphor as an integral part of our conceptual system by means of which we make the abstract entities more concrete, and therefore easily understandable. As an abstract concept, human life and relations are likewise conceptualized in the minds of the people in a society as staging of various performances. The conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A PLAY is one of the most pervasive ones in the American culture. It manifests itself not only in the language, but also in the discourse based on which the individuals think and behave. David Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* palpably reflect this conceptual metaphor as entrenched in the characters' language and cognition by means of which they make sense of their world. Whether intimate or business-like, the relations between the characters of these plays are influenced largely by the conceptual metaphors that determine how they view life and human connections in a society. Since LIFE IS A PLAY and HUMAN RELATIONS ARE PERFORMANCES are the prime factors that prison these individuals' cognition and dictate how they make sense of their experiences, they are each inevitably turned into performers. They perform to create an identity, to connect, to make a living, to survive and therefore, to live. Mamet defines Aristotle's catharsis as that state of understanding where the audience realises that as a human being, one is eternally bound: "We are bound by our character, by our lack of self-knowledge, by the inscrutable ways of gods. To recognise this, and to avow it, is to lay our burden down, to surrender – which is the meaning of *catharsis*" (Mamet 2013, p. xii). Metaphor perhaps could be considered as one of the ruling forces that bounds us in our thoughts and consequently in our actions. It bounds us by defining a concept such as life in terms of another more tangible concept such as a play and therefore blinding us to perceiving it in its entirety. Mamet's plays uncannily dramatise this.

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