Honor among thieves? Socio-economic theories of Thorstein Veblen in the plays of David Mamet

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HONOR AMONG THIEVES?
SOCIO-ECONOMIC THEORIES OF THORSTEIN VEBLEN
IN THE PLAYS OF DAVID MAMET

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Steven Allan Halverson
University of Northern Iowa
May 1996
ABSTRACT

Award-winning playwright David Mamet has acknowledged numerous times his indebtedness to the socio-economic theories of turn-of-the-century economist Thorstein Veblen, whom Mamet credits as influencing the motivation of the characters in several of his plays set in work-related environments.

Veblen, who was largely influenced by Darwin and Freud, declared that the economic institution of capitalism encourages an instinctive "predatory animus" in man to surface due to capitalism's encouragement of the ownership of private property. Veblen asserted that the desire for private property goes beyond one's essential physiological needs and is driven instead by the psychological drive to improve one's self-esteem and project a predatory image to one's peers. Veblen introduced three key concepts regarding his socio-economic theory: "predatory animus," "pecuniary emulation" and "conspicuous waste." Interpreting Mamet's business-oriented plays (American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross, Speed the Plow and The Water Engine) based on these concepts will allow insight into Mamet's point of view on the capitalist principles of the United States and his own motivation for creating such plays and the characters that inhabit them. By examining these plays from the perspective of a Veblenian critical theory, Veblen's socio-economic theory of the leisure class will be tested as the foundation upon which Mamet builds dramatic structures that
comment on the capitalist social structure of the United States.

This study constructs and applies a "Veblenian" literary theory to Mamet's plays to examine their subtext and to question whether that subtext is consistent with Veblen's socio-economic theory on capitalism introduced in his first and most influential book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. This study then concludes that Mamet's credit to Veblen as an influence is warranted. The characters in Mamet's plays have a strong need to improve their self-esteem by successfully conveying a predatory image; the most respectable image a capitalist can achieve. Most of the characters in the plays in question fail to realize this sought-after level of predatory status, which is testament to the Darwinian nature of capitalism, where "survival" only comes to the fittest.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: to further develop the largely overlooked theory of Veblenian literary interpretation and apply it thoroughly to the business plays of Mamet to examine how the theory works, and to introduce a new approach to Mamet scholarship; one that constructs a socio-economic interpretation of the canon by establishing a hierarchy of economic relationships and character motives.
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This Study By: Steven Allan Halverson

Entitled: Honor Among Thieves? Socio-economic Theories of Thorstein Veblen in the Plays of David Mamet.

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Chair, Thesis Committee

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Thanks are also due to committee members George Glenn and Karen Mitchell, who dutifully contributed toward making this thesis coherent; Gretta Berghammer and the UNI Theatre Department as well as John Somervill and the UNI Graduate College for always being of assistance above and beyond the call; and finally, Richard Glockner and the cast and crew of the 1992 Theatre UNI production of American Buffalo, whose fine work inspired me to tackle such daunting subjects as David Mamet and Thorstein Veblen.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Award-winning playwright David Mamet has acknowledged numerous times his indebtedness to the socio-economic theories of turn-of-the-century economist Thorstein Veblen, whom Mamet credits as influencing the motivation of the characters in several of his plays set in work-related environments. Those plays that seem to exhibit such a Veblenian influence include: American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross, Speed The Plow, and The Water Engine.

Veblen’s socialist socio-economic perspective declares that the institution of capitalism encourages an instinctive "predatory animus" in man (and he did, in the late nineteenth century, mean males exclusively) to surface due to capitalism’s encouragement of the ownership of private property. Veblen adds that the desire for private property goes beyond man’s essential physiological needs and is driven instead by man’s psychological drive to improve self-esteem and project a positive image to his peers. This study will examine four Mamet plays by interpreting them from a Veblenian perspective in an effort to better understand the subtext of his scripts and to introduce a new metaphorical approach to interpreting his plays.
Problem Statement

This study will apply a Veblenian literary theory to each Mamet business play to examine its subtext and question whether that subtext is consistent with Veblen’s socio-economic theory on capitalism introduced in his first and most influential book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (All future references to *The Theory of the Leisure Class* will be to the 1975 NY: Kelley edition). Veblen introduces several key concepts regarding his socio-economic theory, and interpreting Mamet’s business-oriented plays based on these concepts will allow insight into Mamet’s point of view on the capitalist principles of the United States and his own motivation for creating such plays and the characters that inhabit them. By examining these plays from the perspective of a Veblenian critical theory, Veblen’s socio-economic theory of the leisure class will be tested as the foundation upon which Mamet builds dramatic structures that comment on the capitalist social structure of the United States.

Limitations

Since *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is the only Veblen book Mamet has acknowledged as a direct influence, this study will be limited to the views espoused by Veblen in that book, and will not examine any of the books or writings by Veblen that followed (though it should be noted that Veblen’s later writings did not present a radical
theoretical departure from his first book). Also, only those plays of Mamet's set in a work-related environment will be utilized in this study. "Business" plays are considered to be those involving a significant amount of financially-based motivation for the characters in the plays. Such motivation would include a distinct desire for a substantial increase in wealth, whether it be in terms of actual money or private property, or any of the psychologically-driven needs that Veblen addresses, such as esteem or power.

Definitions

Veblen uses several key words or phrases in delineating his theory of the leisure class. "Predatory," as implemented by Veblen, implies the actions of one who is "habituated to the infliction of injury by force and stratagem" (8). One must possess a predatory animus, or, a "killer instinct" to compete and survive in an environment that promotes class struggle. Veblen's socialist thesis criticizes the United States and its system of capitalism as being such an environment.

Veblen also distinguishes between the "savage" and "barbarian" periods of man's history. The savage period existed first and denoted a "predominantly peaceable culture. . . . Technological knowledge was typically a collective possession, easily accessible to anyone in need of it, and uncontrolled by prescriptive property rights"
The barbarian phase commenced when the technology of production caught up with man's needs for sustenance, which production provides. When production ability surpasses need, man then finds himself with spare time to indulge himself with more frivolous concerns, including competitive free enterprise:

The function of the able-bodied man is to kill and destroy all competitors, to reduce to subservience all alien forces in the environment that assert themselves refractorily against his self-seeking interests. (Dorfman 176)

In man's barbarian phase, any effort that is to be considered worthy of man involves an assertion of prowess. A commonplace drive of man during the savage phase is the "instinct of workmanship." This instinct indicates man's propensity to work productively and efficiently for the betterment of the entire community. This instinct suggests that all effort should be put forth for results that will benefit society, rather than the individual.

"Emulation" is defined as imitation and, as pertains to Veblen, it connotes a propensity to mimic the wealthiest of social classes--the leisure class. Veblen states that "members of each sub-group [strain] to lose their identity with their own group, and [seek] to be identified with the group immediately 'above' their own" (15).

The other major concept Veblen stresses involving man's tendency to imitate the leisure class is "conspicuous waste." Two notions that comprise this concept are
"conspicuous leisure" and "conspicuous consumption."

Conspicuous leisure is the avoidance of productive work by those striving to display wealth and, states Veblen, "conspicuous abstention from labor therefore becomes the conventional mark of superior pecuniary achievement and the conventional index of reputability" (38). Conspicuous consumption then, is the obvious display of material evidence in order to prove one's wealth and status and to prove one's membership in the prestigious leisure class.

**Justification**

As a distinguished socialist whose studies on class struggle paralleled Karl Marx, it is surprising that little has been published pertaining to the application of Veblen's socio-economic theory to literature. While there has been the occasional application of Veblen's theories to the work of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers, no full book or article has been devoted to applying a Veblenian-based interpretation to plays or playwrights. Specifically regarding Mamet, Veblen's influence has at best been briefly cited as one point within a larger general context in books and articles on Mamet. This study will give the issue the attention it merits.

**Review of Related Literature**

**Review of Marxist Criticism**

Although interpreting the Mamet canon by applying Veblen's theory of the leisure class will be a unique
analysis of both Mamet's drama and Veblen's economics, it will not set the precedent for the application of critical socio-economic thinking to the world of literature; that precedent has already been set by the Marxist school of criticism. While Veblen's approach to socio-economics differs somewhat from Marx's (primarily that Veblen's socio-economic theories were written after, and took into account Darwin's theory of evolution and the new scholarly thinking that followed), the two are similar in that they both focus on the problems of class struggle that arise under a capitalistic economic system. It follows that a Veblenian literary theory should then fit comfortably among the many branches of economics-based literary theory concerned with class struggle that fall under the umbrella of "Marxist" criticism. The strength of Marxist criticism, according to Walter Cohen, is its interest in the "totality of the human experience. All aspects of human existence become significant to their investigations" (122). Raman Selden provided the following summary of the purpose of Marxist criticism which can also be applied to the mission of Veblenian-based literary criticism:

Marxist criticism believes that individuals cannot be understood apart from their social existence. Marxists believe that individuals are 'bearers' of positions in the social system and not free agents (38) . . . For Marxism the ultimate ground of its theories is the material and historical existence of human societies . . . Marxist theories are about the historical changes and conflicts which arise in society and appear indirectly in literary form. (49)
Though an exhaustive overview of Marxist literary theory is not the mission of this study, the following is a brief survey of the various branches of Marxist literary criticism:

During the 1920s, Georg Lukacs extended Marx's notion of the "fetishism of commodities" with his book, *History and Class Consciousness*, in which he introduced the concept of "reification," which essentially modified Marx's concept of "commodity fetishism" as object or "thing" fetishism. Walter Cohen summarized Lukacs' view in the book, *Redrawing the Boundaries*, when he stated that "only the proletariat, through the process of revolutionizing itself and the world, can pierce this reified surface and gain access to the contradictory, concrete totality that is society" (323).

The next major movement in Marxist theory was prompted by Germany's Frankfurt School, which also had its genesis in the 1920s. The school rejected Lukacs' belief that the working class would overcome reification and attacked the emerging mass culture (the "culture industry" as they termed it). Raman Selden offered in his book, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, that the Frankfurt School was focused on how the capitalist market system tends to deprive individuals of their autonomy with its "dehumanizing mechanisms" and interprets literature as a prospective "monkey wrench" that may be thrown into the works of a capitalistic system (35). The school's Theodor Adorno
felt that "art acts within reality as an irritant which produces an indirect sort of knowledge" (qtd. in Selden 34). Antonio Gramsci saw a crucial role for culture in the long term, as it represented a shifting struggle between capital and labor to gain the allegiance of the majority of the population (Cohen 324). Cohen suggested that Gramsci's major work, The Prison Notebooks, is "perhaps the most compelling account of twentieth-century capitalist democracy produced in the Marxist tradition" (324). Max Horkheimer echoed Adorno's analogy of literature serving as an irritant and went further, suggesting that the masses routinely reject "difficult experimental texts" from the modernist/avant-garde school because such a work "disturbs their unthinking and automatic acquiescence in their manipulation by the social system" (qtd., in Selden 34). Bertolt Brecht felt that social injustices needed to be presented as "shockingly unnatural and totally surprising" (Selden 32). He introduced the theatre to the "alienation effect," which rendered drama into a presentation that was "unnatural" enough to force its audience into a state of participation rather than "lulling the audience into a state of passive acceptance," as he felt the traditional Aristotelian theatre did (Selden 32).

Though not completely categorized as a member of the Frankfurt school, Walter Benjamin claimed that the new media of the mid-twentieth century served to separate art from
its ritualistic origins and in turn, re-introduced art as a political vehicle (Selden 36). Benjamin argued that art was once the special preserve of the bourgeois elite, when artistic works had an aura deriving from their uniqueness . . . The new media totally shatter this quasi-religious feeling about the arts, and profoundly affect the artist's attitude to production. To a greater and greater extent the reproduction of art objects . . . means that they are actually designed for reproducibility.

(qtd. in Selden 36)

Eva Corredor stated in Tracing Literary Theory that the history of the application of Marxism's "theoretical intermingling between text and society" began in the United States in the early 1960s in the departments of literature at the California Universities of Berkeley and San Diego in the West, and Columbia University in the East. These schools "became political hothouses that transgressed the former boundaries of literary analysis and entered into passionate and provocative dialogues with the radical theories of Marx, Engels, and Lenin" (105).

Frederic Jameson became the nucleus of the Marxist literary movement when Princeton University began publishing his books on Marxist theory in 1971. Jameson's 1981 book, The Political Unconscious, "inaugurated a second moment in contemporary American Marxist criticism in which that criticism played a considerably expanded role in the discipline of literary studies" (Cohen 337). Also in the late 1960s, the journal Telos began publication. The journal
was created by a group of graduate students who, according to Corredor, "undertook to question and discuss in a provocative, enthusiastic, youthful, and sometimes chaotic style any master theoretician or intellectual novelty that appeared on the theoretical horizon" (110).

Concurrently in France, Louis Althusser, in his books For Marx and Reading Capital, located epistemological breaks in Marx’s work as he assumed the role of the "super-reader" who liberated Marx from his customary audience by interpreting Marxism as a "synchronic structure, especially through a substantially modified base-superstructure model" in which he challenged the influence of the traditional Marxist base on the superstructure (Cohen 326).

The most recent Marxist critic of note is Terry Eagleton. Cohen stated that Eagleton "came to international prominence in the late 1970s on the strength of his powerful adaptation of Althusserian thought to literary theory in the English language world" (328). Eagleton suggested in his book, Walter Benjamin or. Towards a Revolutionary Criticism, that Marxist criticism is produced most often when the "class struggle is effectively on the downturn, temporarily quiescent or brutally suppressed" (96). Eagleton also felt that "Marxist criticism springs from periods of proletarian defeat and partial incorporation . . . It remains work which bears political scars of this fact" (96). For Eagleton, the primary task of the Marxist critic is to "actively
participate in and help direct the cultural emancipation of
the masses" (97).

In summary, the constantly evolving state of Marxist
criticism seems to be what keeps the school from fading
away. Corredor suggested that the
plethora of influences on sociopolitical and
Marxist theory has prompted a plurality of voices
that have carried it from its initial Marxist
phase to its current post-Marxist phase . . .
Sociopolitical and Marxist theory constitutes an
interlocutor who has to be reckoned with today and
will, no doubt, have to be confronted tomorrow.
(122)

Comparison of Marx and Veblen

Thorstein Veblen often tends to be categorized with
Karl Marx since both men denounced capitalism and the greed
it tends to encourage, and championed more socialistic,
communal approaches to governing. Forest Hill, in Thorstein
Veblen: A Critical Reappraisal, expounded on the
similarities of the men’s agendas:

[Both] chose as the central problem the analysis
of capitalism and institutional change. They had
strong theoretical interest in crises and
depressions at a time when these subjects were
neglected and little understood. In addition,
they were quite willing, each in his own way, to
criticize economic institutions and conditions.
They felt, indeed, that it was their moral or
intellectual duty to pass judgment upon the
the economic order. (146)

The two economists also differed in major ways. Marx
developed his theory of class struggle before Charles Darwin
revolutionized philosophical thinking with his theory of
evolution. Marx’s views on economics were more orthodox,
in the Hegelian tradition; that is, he viewed humans as being basically good and willing to contribute labor for the betterment of society. Marx felt that the institution of private property embraced by capitalism tended to make humans avaricious and self-serving rather than community-centered.

While Veblen agreed that capitalism tended to break down society with the imposition of private property, he did not agree with Marx about the nature of humans. Veblen’s socio-economic theory was born out of the influence of Darwin and Freud. Thomas Sowell stated in his essay, "The 'Evolutionary' Economics of Thorstein Veblen," that though Veblen "had a large, unacknowledged debt to Karl Marx" (40), he called for an "expansive conception of economics that would range into sociology, psychology, history, and anthropology" (44). Veblen felt that human nature needed to be an essential ingredient in the study of economics. Leonard Dente, in Veblen’s Theory of Social Change, added that according to Veblen, the essence of Darwinian evolution is the denial of any "original" human nature. All the human proclivities, propensities and wants, even though they have been internalized and appear to be "natural" have in fact been formed and shaped through a cultural developmental process. (29)

Veblen argued that it was essential for psychology to be applied to economic analysis, which is what separated him from Marxism. Veblen viewed Marx’s theory as "non-
evolutionary" since Marx felt that socialism would be the final goal of the class struggle, driven by every human's "inner necessity." Veblen rejected Marx's concept of a "final goal" for the working class as antiquated, or rendered obsolete by Darwin's evolution hypothesis, which suggested that there is no finality to the experience of life (Hill 138). Stanley Daugert, in The Philosophy of Thorstein Veblen, suggested that Veblen is critical of Marx for his "misplaced emphasis on class interests," and added:

what the Marxists have named the 'materialistic conception of history' . . . has very little to say regarding the efficient force, the channels, or the methods by which the economic situation is conceived to have its effect upon institutions. (70)

From his book, Veblenism: A New Critique, Lev Dobriansky added to the distinction between Veblen and Marx by claiming that

unlike Marx's theory, Veblen's class conception nurtures no illusion about any popular reflexive action to economic misery operating as a principle of class cohesion or about the millennial oncoming of a classless society. (285)

Veblen felt that Marx's "classical" assumptions about human behavior had to be revised in a more Darwinian structure. Hill explained that in Veblen's opinion,

Marx uncritically adopted natural rights and natural law preconceptions and a hedonistic psychology of rational self-interest . . . He attributed rational self-interest not only to individuals but to entire classes, thereby explaining their asserted solidarity and motivation in the class struggle. Veblen rejected the concept of rational class interest and the labor theory of value. (139)
Veblen differed from Marx by suggesting that institutions tended to regulate social behavior and that institutions often imposed "ends divergent from the instinctive ends" of individuals. Greed encouraged by institutions such as capitalism tended to override an individual's instinct for contributing for the betterment of the community. Veblen also felt that particular types of occupations played a role in forming the habits of thought in humans; this pattern led to the formation of institutions (Hill 134).

Given that the fundamental difference between Veblen and Marx seems to be the influence of Darwin, Hill offered that Marxism became Veblenism; Marx's problems were given Veblen's solutions through use of Veblen's approach, postulates, and conclusions. Marxian insights no doubt lived on, but they took root in Veblenian ground and flowered in Veblenian splendor. (142)

Recent Veblenian-based Interpretation of Literature

In recent years, several turn-of-the-century American writers have been tested by means of a Veblenian literary theory. The writings of Henry Adams, Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, Henry James, and Edith Wharton have all been considered from a Veblenian perspective. The most thorough application of a Veblenian literary theory came in 1983, when Daniel Lance Bratton based his dissertation, "Conspicuous Consumption and Conspicuous Leisure in the Novels of Edith Wharton," on two groups he found within the
leisure class Wharton wrote about in her early-twentieth century novels: *The Age of Innocence*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The House of Mirth*. The two groups consist of those who display conspicuous leisure and those who conspicuously consume. Bratton theorized that Wharton’s novels show the chronological "displacement of social habits based upon conspicuous leisure by values centered on conspicuous consumption" during America’s gilded age" (14).

Ruth Bernard Yeazell also examined Wharton’s novel, *The House of Mirth* in her 1992 article, "The Conspicuous Wasting of Lily Bart," in which she considered Veblen’s theory of conspicuous waste as manifested by the novel’s character, Lily Bart. Yeazell quoted Wharton as stating that "a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys" (714). Yeazell added that, "like Veblen, Wharton represents a world in which people acquire and maintain status by openly displaying how much they can afford to waste" (714).

In 1987, Ross Posnock discussed the concept of the "commodity status" of women under capitalism in the works of Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Henry James’ *The American Scene*, and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Posnock’s article, "Henry James, Veblen, and Adorno," agreed with Adorno that women had escaped the "sphere of production only to be absorbed all the more entirely by the sphere of consumption" (31).
Also in 1987, George A. Kennedy's "Fin-de-Siècle Classicism: Henry James and Thorstein Veblen, Lew Wallace and W.D. Howells," argued that the role of classic literature in America serves as more than an expression of "pecuniary culture," as Veblen had suggested. Where Veblen found knowledge of the classics to be merely evidence of wasted time that was permissible due to wealth, Kennedy argued that there has been a "democratization of the liberal arts in general and the classics in particular" (21).

In 1991, L. R. Lind examined Veblen's concept of learning as a leisure class occupation in "Nineteenth-Century American Attitudes Toward the Classics." Lind paraphrased Veblen by stating that the classics "held up an archaic ideal of manhood by inspiring an aversion to what is merely useful and by consuming the learner's time in acquiring useless knowledge" (13).

Willa Cather was the subject of two articles in the early 1990's. In 1991, Lady Falls Brown interpreted Cather's My Mortal Enemy through a Veblenian perspective in her article, "A Poor Man Stinks and God Hates Him;" while Michael Spindler, in a 1992 article titled "Cather's The Professor's House", proposed that the work in question had a "parallelism of Veblenian dichotomies" to another one of Cather's works, Tom Outland's Story.
Finally, Claire Virginia Eby examined Veblen's concepts of pecuniary emulation and conspicuous comparison in Theodore Dreiser's novels, *An American Tragedy* and *Sister Carrie* in her 1993 study, "The Psychology of Desire: Veblen's 'Pecuniary Emulation' and 'Invidious Comparison' in *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy,"* where she explained a "construction of the modern self" through a combination of economics and psychology.

**Veblen's Influence on Mamet**

One of the first articles to call attention to David Mamet was Ross Wetzenton's prophetically titled 1976 article, "David Mamet: Remember That Name." In the article, Mamet made a reference to Marx in explaining his thought behind *American Buffalo*: "As Marx says, other people have objective reality to us only insofar as they possess something we want. Their possession of it denies it to us—that's the only way we can see them." Mamet stated that although he didn't consider his play Marxist, he did feel that the theatre is a place of "ethical exercise," an arena for "ethical interchange" (103).

Mamet's first allusion to Veblen came in a 1978 article by Richard Gottlieb titled, "The Engine that Drives Playwright David Mamet." In the interview with Gottlieb during the rehearsal of his then-current play, *The Water Engine*, Mamet discussed his new play and reflected on his recent success, *American Buffalo*. Mamet also expounded on
his (and Veblen's) perspective on the state of the
capitalistic United States:

There's really no difference between the
lumpenproletariat and stockbrokers or corporate
lawyers who are the lackeys of business . . . part
of the American myth is that a difference exists,
that at a certain point vicious behavior becomes
laudable. (24)

Mamet added that the job of American theatre today should be
to look at some of the assumptions upon which our society
functions:

In the theatre today we're beginning to
recognize ourselves as Americans . . . Theatre is
saying that being American is nothing to be
ashamed of. But we have to learn how to deal with
it. We need to take a look at certain taboo
aspects of ourselves. (24)

Jack Barbera's 1981 article, "Ethical Perversity in
America: Some Observations on David Mamet's American
Buffalo," detailed Mamet's exposure of the "shoddiness of
the American business ethic," and contained the first direct
reference to Veblen's influence on Mamet. In the article,
Barbera referred to a June 6, 1980 letter from Mamet when he
stated that "Mamet got the idea of an identical ethical
perversity existing at both ends of the urban economic
spectrum from Thorstein Veblen" (274).

June Schlueter and Elizabeth Forsyth's 1983 article
titled "America as Junkshop: The Business Ethic in David
Mamet's American Buffalo," picked up where Barbera left off,
adding to scholarly discussion over Mamet's most well-
received plays to that time. While the article made no
specific mention of Veblen, it contributed to Mamet scholarship by further unearthing more details about the motivation of the characters in *American Buffalo*.

In 1984, Mamet went into great detail concerning Veblen’s influence over his business plays in an interview with Matthew Roudane in *Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present*. In response to Roudane’s question concerning his interest in the "myth of the American Dream," Mamet replied:

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 . . . One feels one can only succeed at the cost of someone else. Economic life in America is a lottery. Everyone gets 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 . . . As Thorstein Veblen in *The 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 hurray for me and to hell with you.’ (74)

Mamet later touched on Veblen’s notion that the leisure class feels even obligated to exploit the lower classes:

As Veblen, who’s had a big influence on me, says, a lot of business in this country is founded on the idea that if you don’t exploit the possible opportunity, not only are you being silly, but in many cases you’re being negligent. (Roudane 75)

Christopher Bigsby published two major pieces of Mamet scholarship in 1985. One was a fairly lengthy article
devoted to an overview of Mamet's work in his book, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Beyond Broadway*; the other was the first entire book to be devoted to Mamet and his works titled, *David Mamet*. In this book, Bigsby chronologically detailed considerations concerning the Mamet canon. One of the issues addressed was the influence of Thorstein Veblen upon selected works of Mamet’s. In discussing *American Buffalo* and referring to the 1978 Mamet interview with Richard Gottleib, Bigsby noted that Mamet “demonstrates a central conceit which he derived from Thorstein Veblen, namely, the relationship between the businessman and the lumpenproletariat” (73). In acknowledging Veblen’s concept of the predatory phase of life as an important point of reference for Mamet, Bigsby suggested that "Mamet’s point seems to be that American society is caught in just such a predatory phase" (74). Bigsby aligned Mamet’s thinking with the early twentieth century sociologist E. A. Ross (who was quoted by Veblen), when he offered that for Mamet, it is business which sanctions greed, frees the exploiter from guilt and argues for the abolition of restraint . . . It is not without interest, then, that Mamet turned to Veblen for his justification. (77)

For another reference to Veblen, Bigsby cited Mamet’s 1983 notes for the National Theatre Study’s presentation of *Glengarry Glen Ross*:

As Thorstein Veblen says, the behaviour on this level, in the lumpenproletariat, the delinquent
class, and the behaviour on the highest levels of society, in the most rarified atmospheres of the leisure class, is exactly identical. The people who create nothing, the people who do nothing, the people who have all sorts of myths at their disposal to justify themselves and their predators... they steal from us. They rob the country spiritually and they grab the country financially. (78)

In these notes, Mamet was promoting what Veblen had introduced as a concept nearly a century earlier, that all classes tend to emulate the predatory nature of the truly elite leisure class.

Matthew Roudane returned to the Mamet forum in 1986 with one of the first scholarly articles on Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Though the article deals mainly with Roudane's perception of Mamet's attraction to "civic issues" (akin to those Alex de Tocqueville discussed in his book, *Democracy*), it does reinforce the fact that Mamet's "views of the social contract have been influenced greatly by Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*" (35).

Also in 1986, Mamet's first book of essays, *Writing in Restaurants*, was published. Among the brief essays covering a wide variety of subjects was "Capture-the-Flag, Monothemism, and the Techniques of Arbitration," which contained a reference to Veblen in regards to conspicuous display of ostentatiousness: "Thorstein Veblen said that the more jargon and technical language is involved in an endeavor, the more we may assume that the endeavor is essentially make-believe" (5).
The second book focusing on the works of Mamet saw publication in 1987. Dennis Carroll’s *David Mamet* forsook a chronological treatment of Mamet’s plays in favor of a more categorical approach. Carroll’s study divided Mamet’s plays into chapters dealing with themes on business, sex, learning, and communion among others. While Carroll officially categorized *American Buffalo* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* as "business" plays, he didn’t refer to Veblen as extensively as Bigsby had in his book on Mamet. A passage where Carroll does acknowledge Veblen as a significant source of influence appears in a chapter on the "business" plays where he interprets that, in reference to *Glengarry Glen Ross*,

American capitalism creates the incentives and the context that drive the salesmen of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. But it also creates the petty crooks of *American Buffalo*: the detritus of those on the bottom rung of the ladder, the ‘have-nots’ who, according to Thorstein Veblen, make up a 'delinquent' society as sensitively aware of rank and status as the 'leisure aristocracy' of successful businessmen, and as prone to operate on the same principles to justify predatory action.

(32)

David Savran interviewed Mamet as one of twenty interviews with contemporary playwrights published in his 1988 book, *In Their Own Words*. In the interview, Mamet responded to Savran’s suggestion that the subtext of his plays is always about power, buying, and selling:

The thought occurred to me that almost every English novel I know . . . they’re all about people being embarrassed about their lack of money. And I guess most American literature--the
American literature that I love, that I grew up on—is about business. That’s what America is about. (136)

The year 1990 saw the publication of a third book on Mamet titled, *David Mamet: Language as Dramatic Action*. As the title suggests, this book by Anne Dean explored how language not only describes one’s actions, but how it also prescribes those actions. While Dean’s treatment of the Mamet canon is specifically focused on his use of language, she does make reference to Veblen: "Veblen saw at the turn of the century what Mamet believes is happening today—that the corrupting influence of the evolving economic system will eventually destroy civilization" (92).

In 1992, two more books were published concerning Mamet. One was another survey of contemporary playwrights by Bigsby titled, *Modern American Drama: 1945-1990*, in which a chapter is devoted to Mamet. In this chapter, Bigsby explains the influence Veblen had on Mamet perhaps more bluntly and boldly than ever:

Not for nothing was Thorstein Veblen an early influence... It was in Veblen that Mamet could have found the salesman apotheosised as the quintessence of dishonesty. There, too, he would have found a surviving religious commitment generalised in the direction of a concern for the human spirit. In Veblen’s work, as in Tolstoy’s, he could find an instinctive hostility to the institution which seemed to absolve the individual of his moral responsibility. (217)

*David Mamet: A Casebook* also appeared as a collection of essays edited by Leslie Kane. The book is a compilation of many new essays on a variety of subjects concerning Mamet’s
plays and films by noted scholars. Among the essayists, Matthew Roudane appeared once again in the field of Mamet scholarship with his article, "Mamet’s Mimetics," which suggests that for Mamet, the inclination toward money, exchange, and "commodity fetishism" (to borrow a term from Marx) is so strong that in place of love we find sex, lies, and money, and if there’s capital gain, such free enterprise-gain takes on any social form necessary for that moment. As Thorstein Veblen argues throughout Theory of the Leisure Class, human desires are fulfilled only after the individual dons a predatory mask. (12)

Roudane later adds that Mamet’s characters reflect his indebtedness to Thorstein Veblen, whose Theory of the Leisure Class underscores human action and response in terms of "pecuniary emulation," imperialist ownership, sexual roles as first seen in tribal communities, honor, invidious comparisons, and the relationship between self-worth and wealth. Mamet is a theatrician of the ethical. But his characters, sets, and overall situations map out a predatory world . . . juxtaposed with American history and its mythic implications, his plays outline a tragic world in which, perhaps, only the fittest (and surely the greediest) might survive. (27)

The most recent literature on Mamet was published in 1993. Gay Brewer’s book, David Mamet and Film: Illusion/Disillusion in a Wounded Land, studied the first three original films that Mamet wrote and directed: Homicide, House of Games, and Thing’s Change. Concerning Thing’s Change, Brewer quoted Mamet from an article in the February 1991 issue of Mirabella:

Thorstein Veblen informed us that status (and thus, domination) was achieved not through direct
display of wealth, but through display of that commodity priceless beyond wealth, i.e. time---through display of leisure. (70)

While writings on Mamet will continue to trickle in, there remains plenty to explore regarding Mamet's plays besides the popular issue of his unique, rhythmic use of language. Through exploring the influence of Thorstein Veblen upon Mamet's writings, new insights should be discovered regarding the interpretation of Mamet's plays from a socio-critical perspective.

Methodology

This literary study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the study. The second chapter is the analysis of Veblen's socio-economic theory based on his first and most influential book, The Theory of the Leisure Class. Chapters three through six will apply a Veblenian literary theory to Mamet's business-oriented plays; and the final chapter will draw a general conclusion based on the results found in chapters three through six.

Conclusion

The final product of this study is an examination of the plays of David Mamet based on the socio-economic theory presented by Thorstein Veblen in his first book, The Theory of the Leisure Class. Veblen's first book is a commentary on economically driven motivation of individuals in the capitalistic United States. The completed study offers
a critical Veblenian literary analysis of Mamet's business plays and encourages other such studies of Veblenian-driven character motivation in drama and fiction.
CHAPTER 2

VEBLEN'S THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS

Introduction

Paul Homan, in Contemporary Economic Thought, summarizes Thorstein Veblen’s mission in economic study as follows:

[Veblen's] particular tasks are (1) to substantiate his primary thesis that institutions grow out of a process of habituation in relation to man's instinctive traits and to his physical surroundings; (2) to show how this process shapes the terms in which men explain their environment; and (3) to explain modern economic life in terms of the forms of habituation which have shaped its institutions and habits of thought. (140)

Veblen begins The Theory of the Leisure Class by stating that "the institution of a leisure class is found in its best development at the higher stages of the barbarian culture" (1). Using feudal Europe as an example, he notes that the distinction between social classes is rigorously observed in such instances. As for a capitalistic society such as the United States, Veblen comments, "upper classes are exempt from industrial employments, and this exemption is the economic expression of their superior rank" (1).

Veblen theorizes that any form of manual labor performed every day as a livelihood is considered by those classes of superior pecuniary or monetary rank to be the exclusive province of inferior classes. Drawing from the widespread acceptance of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Veblen postulates that cultures also "evolve" from communally
peaceable to independently barbaric. Leonard Dente, in

Veblen’s Theory of Social Change, states that

Veblen’s theory of evolutionary change is also a theory of conflict between the cultural traits of workmanship and exploit. . . . Certain traits are ‘psychological survivals’ from other eras. . . . From the peaceable ‘savage’ era the survivals are the instinct of race solidarity—conscience—the sense of truthfulness and equity, and the instinct of workmanship, in its naive, non-invidious expression. In the ‘barbarian’ era, predatory traits emerge. (32, 33)

Veblen suggests that the industrial, or, manual employments of the late nineteenth century were akin to what was considered "women’s work" in the primitive barbarian culture:

There is in all barbarian communities a profound sense of the disparity between men’s and women’s work. His work may conduce to the maintenance of the group, but it is felt that it does so through an excellence and an efficacy of a kind that without derogation be compared with the uneventful diligence of the women. (5)

Veblen suggests that the institution of a wealthy leisure class has emerged gradually during man’s transition from a "peaceable to a consistently war-like habit of life" (7). Two conditions must exist for the emergence of a wealthy leisure class: first, "the community must be of a predatory habit of life . . . habituated to the infliction of injury by force and stratagem;" and second, "subsistence must be obtainable on sufficiently easy terms to admit the exemption of a considerable portion of the community from steady application to a routine of labour" (7, 8).
According to Douglas Dowd, in *Thorstein Veblen*, "Veblen saw rational inclinations subdued, diverted, and 'contaminated' by man's atavistic predatory inclinations" (13). To paraphrase, any community capable of sustaining a leisure class must follow a warrior-like code of honor and have an excess supply of consumable goods, so much so that not everyone in the community need contribute productive labor toward creating such a supply.

Contrary to what its name suggests, Veblen states that the "savage" period in man's history is peaceable, and it is not until man enters the "barbaric" phase that he becomes predatory. Homan paraphrases Veblen's thoughts:

"The savage period is conceived to have been predominantly a peaceable culture... Technological knowledge was typically a collective possession, easily accessible to anyone in need of it, and uncontrolled by prescriptive property rights. Under these conditions the selective process was such as to inculcate the parental instinct (a proclivity to forward the ends of the group) and the instinct of workmanship (a 'taste for effective work and a distaste for futile effort') as dominant human traits. (142)"

In *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, Joseph Dorfman states that:

"In the predatory social economy the function of the able-bodied man is to kill and destroy all competitors, to reduce to subservience all alien forces in the environment that assert themselves refractorily against his self-seeking interests. Slaughter and the instruments of slaughter, being honorific, are of high worth and value. (176)"

Homan adds that the predatory, barbaric phase in the "evolution" of man cannot begin until man becomes
technically and technologically advanced to the point where he is not applying all his effort to mere sustenance, when he is able to devote some time, due to the efficiency of his workmanship, to more leisurely pursuits:

The incentive to the accumulation of private property necessarily awaits the time when the state of the industrial arts permits the accumulation of goods above those essential to the current necessities of life at this stage, property might be accumulated by those in a position to practice fraud upon their own group... The predatory acquisition of property at the expense of other groups begets warlike organization. (143)

Veblen contends that there had long been a distinction between those employments considered worthy and those not considered worthy. The worthy employments in any such culture are classed as "exploit" by Veblen due to the existence of some taking advantage of others for financial gain. Unworthy employments are those that have no connection with exploit; these would be the lowest forms of "industrial," or manual, labor: the exploited (8). Veblen feels that this distinction between exploitive and non-exploitive employments still exists in the United States. He labels these classes "exploit" and "industry." Where industry suggests a productive effort to create goods that contribute to the sustenance of the community, exploit is, as Veblen defines it, "an outcome useful to the agent... [by] the conversion to his own ends of energies previously directed to some other end by another agent" (12, 13). He suggests that exploit is the employment of another to
perform manual, industrial labor for the profit of the employer, or, exploiter.

Under his theory, Veblen feels that exploit is, as has proven to be the case throughout history, an undertaking appropriately suited to males, as they are "stouter, more massive, better capable of a sudden and violent strain, and more readily inclined to self-assertion, active emulation, and aggression" (13). He feels that for any effort to be considered worthy of man, it must involve an "assertion of prowess." As such a notion becomes more accepted and consistent, the community fashions it into a "canon of conduct" whereas no employment or even any acquisition is "morally possible to the self-respecting man at this cultural stage, except such as proceeds on the basis of prowess--force or fraud" (14).

Veblen maintains that employments classed as "exploit" are considered noble and worthy in such cultures, while those classed as "industry" are unworthy, debasing, and ignoble. "The concept of dignity, worth, or honor, as applied either to person or conduct, is of first-rate consequence in the development of classes and of class distinctions" (15). Man has a natural "instinct of workmanship" which is the propensity to work productively and efficiently. When such traditions as the habitual comparison of individuals on the basis of exploitive and industrious employments are in place, this instinct of
workmanship "works out in an emulative or invidious comparison." In such a situation,

viable success becomes an end sought for its own utility as a basis of esteem. Esteem is gained and dispraise is avoided by putting one’s efficiency in evidence. The result is that the instinct of workmanship works out in an emulative demonstration of force. (16)

Veblen also states that visible proof is necessary in proving pecuniary success:

Tangible evidences of prowess--trophies--find a place in men’s habits of thought as an essential feature in the paraphernalia of life. Booty, trophies of the chase or of the raid, come to be prized as evidence of preeminent force. Aggression becomes the accredited form of action, and booty serves as prima facie evidence of successful aggression. As accepted at this cultural stage, the accredited, worthy form of self-assertion is contest; and useful articles or services obtained by seizure or compulsion, serve as a conventional evidence of successful contest. (16, 17)

Veblen maintains that an "assertion of superior force" is necessary to sustain honor. The term "honorable" becomes synonymous with "formidable;" "worthy" becomes synonymous with "prepotent." "Where aggression means conflict with men and beasts, the activity which comes to be especially and primarily honourable is the assertion of the strong hand" (17).

As civilizations pass from "peaceable savagery" to a more barbaric, "predatory" phase (where the institution of social class forms), the opportunities and incentives for emulation increase because men’s activities increasingly take on the characteristics of exploit, and the invidious
comparison of one exploiter to another becomes more habitual and commonplace (16). Veblen states that within a system that encourages such predatory animus, the barbarian appreciation of worth and honour, the taking of life—the killing of formidable competitors, whether brute or human—is honourable in the highest degree. And this high office of slaughter, as an expression of the slayer’s prepotence, casts a glamour of worth over every act of slaughter and over all the tools and accessories of the act. (18)

A man’s honor is always foremost on his mind. Stanley Matthew Daugert, in The Philosophy of Thorstein Veblen, emphasizes that "Veblen begins by assuming man's regard for his reputation as one of his chief motives" (59). Veblen notes that a culture has reached the predatory phase when such a predatory animus or attitude has become the habitual and accredited spiritual attitude for the members of the groups; when the fight has become the dominant note in the current theory of life; when the common-sense appreciation of men and things has come to an appreciation with a view to combat. (19)

Daugert adds that the reason assigned for the change from a peaceful, primitive stage of culture to a predatory, barbarian stage is that the struggle for existence changed from a 'struggle of the group against a non-human environment to a struggle against human environment'. (64)

Veblen stresses that a culture cannot experience the predatory phase until its methods of industry became efficient enough to where goods not considered essential for subsistence could be produced in addition to those needed for subsistence. These excessive goods then "leave a margin
worth fighting for, above the subsistence of those engaged in getting a living" (20). Veblen feels that any transition from "peace to predation" in modern times would depend on the "growth of technical knowledge and the use of tools" (20), such as had been the case during the industrial revolution that radically changed the United States during the last decade of the nineteenth century. With such a sudden dramatic increase in the efficiency of industry, man suddenly found himself free to indulge beyond mere subsistence. Such a predatory animus and an economic incentive toward profit rather than survival are natural partners according to Veblen. Daugert adds that human nature is generically economic, for the moment man acts, no matter how he acts, his actions guide the cumulative growth that influence the formation not only of economic institutions but also of all cultural institutions in some measure. In the social environment men's actions necessarily impinge upon and affect other men's actions. Men are not isolated beings. (Daugert 67, 68)

**Pecuniary Emulation**

The first major concept in Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* is his theory of "pecuniary emulation." Veblen stresses that capitalism encourages the pursuit of private property, that is, the private ownership of goods and services for personal use. The notion of private property opposes the principles of socialism, which encourage individuals to own only what they need to survive. The guiding principle behind socialism is that
individuals would be motivated to contribute their efforts toward production that would maintain the entire community, rather than for personal gain as capitalism tends to encourage. Veblen states that wherever the institution of private property is found, the "economic process bears the character of a struggle between men for the possession of goods" (24). Any struggle among men could not be productive for the entire community.

Veblen also suggests that every person's motivation to own goods and services is not out of any need for those goods and services, but to display for the community that they can afford such goods and services. Whether one actually can afford such goods and services is beside the point as long as one could appear in the eyes of the community to be able to afford such goods and services. "Emulation" is the root motive to ownership in a capitalistic society (25).

Daugert describes Veblen's "pecuniary emulation" as "human jealousy writ large under the institution of private property and free competition" (61). Veblen states that "wealth confers honor; it is an invidious distinction. Nothing equally cogent can be said for the consumption of goods" (26). By this, Veblen is suggesting that there is no reasonable or practical explanation for owning goods and services beyond those needed for survival. Any pursuit of goods and services beyond basic physiological needs is
driven by a competitive desire to appear better than one's peers, and this drive is fueled by the notion of private property as a benefit of a capitalistic system. Seckler, in *Thorstein Veblen and the Institutionalists: A Study in the Social Philosophy of Economics*, notes that

the existing system has not made, and does not tend to make, the industrious poor poorer as measured absolutely in means of livelihood; but it does tend to make them poorer in their own eyes, as measured in terms of comparative economic importance. (38)

Thomas Sowell adds to this argument in his article, "The 'Evolutionary' Economics of Thorstein Veblen," by stating that

While [Veblen's] theory of the leisure class dealt with waste by the wealthy, Veblen found the poor equally vain and wasteful. A 'not considerable amount of physical privation' was suffered because 'what might be the means of comfort is diverted to the purpose of maintaining a decent appearance or even a show of luxury.' (40)

Dobriansky states in *Veblenism: A New Critique*, that

"these traits are not restricted to the behavior of any one particular class, but instead, are generalized throughout the pyramidal structure of classes in society by the pervasive activity of social mimesis" (282). In regard to the classes that tend to form in such a capitalistic system, Daugert states that

In Veblen's mind there is always this connection between the organizations of society, the kinds of environment . . . and the somewhat lonely, helpless individuals who are born into them, that those individuals seldom learn to resist these influences effectively. This is one of the greatest tragedies in the human drama. (67)
Dowd contributes to Veblen’s case for pecuniary emulation by suggesting that within the substantial bulk of the population that belongs to the non-leisure class, there is of course even more considerable stratification. Veblen saw the members of each sub-group straining to lose their identity with their own group, and seeking to be identified with the group immediately ‘above’ their own—i.e. next closest to the leisure class proper. . . . This standard acts much as the carrot placed in front of the donkey’s nose. (15)

Veblen refers to the earlier ages of humankind to provide a model to explain his theory on the drive for ownership. He suggests that what is now private property, began as "booty" displayed as "trophies of the successful raid" (27): "The utility of things or persons owned lay chiefly in an invidious comparison between their possessor and the enemy from whom they were taken" (27). Veblen applies this model to his times by suggesting that since the industrial age allowed humans to rely much less on predatory activity in action and thought, private property replaced "trophies of predatory exploit as the conventional exponent of prepotence and success" (28). The times no longer encourage the display of "stolen" property, so people rely on the more socially acceptable process of acquiring property as a means of building one’s personal esteem and reputation within the community. According to Veblen, wealth becomes "intrinsically honourable." He feels that the mere possession of goods, whether inherited, purchased, or "acquired" in a less reputable manner, became the
"conventional basis of reputability" (29). Veblen suggests that with capitalism,

property now becomes the most easily recognized evidence of a reputable degree of success as distinguished from heroic or signal achievement. It therefore becomes the basis of esteem. Its possession in some amount becomes necessary in order to acquire any reputable standing in the community. It becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one’s good name. (28, 29)

Daugert adds that "Modern industrial organization . . . narrows the scope of emulation . . . to its economic form, leaving but little freedom for the individual to satisfy his 'regard for reputation' in other ways" (61). Such a culture, while innocent in appearance, still possesses predatory instincts. Veblen considers capitalistic societies to be "protracted" or extended predatory cultures. Within these cultures, only individuals with an "aberrant temperament," that is, an invidious or malicious temperament, can ultimately "retain their self-esteem in the face of the disesteem of their fellow men" (30). The possession of private property is taken to correlate directly with self-esteem. It is therefore reasonable for individuals to "need" as much private property for themselves as their peers possessed and preferably more:

In any community where goods are held in severalty it is necessary, in order for his own peace of mind, that an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others. (31)
Veblen suggests that the present "pecuniary standard" or, standard of private property ownership, will always be the point of departure for the next individual's "fresh increase in wealth" (31). This constant battle of "one-upmanship" would lead to severe competition in the accumulation and display of private property, which would in turn lead to more and more vicious instances of predatory animus. Veblen implies that the desire for more wealth, the means by which private property is acquired, can rarely be satisfied. "Since the struggle is substantially a race for reputability on the basis of an invidious comparison, no approach to a definite attainment is possible" (32). Veblen adds that an individual's "invidious comparison can never become so favourable to the individual making it that he would not gladly rate himself still higher relatively to his competitors in the struggle for pecuniary reputability" (31, 32).

Veblen summarizes by suggesting that such a drive for the display of wealth through possession of material goods and services overpowers the more naturally innate "instinct of workmanship" among humans, which is more socialistic in that it drives each individual to productively work toward the betterment of the community rather than personal gain:

The currently accepted legitimate end of effort becomes the achievement of a favourable comparison with other men; and therefore the repugnance to futility to a good extent coalesces with the incentive of emulation" (33).
Veblen is stating that the only time the leisurely man will engage in useful effort is when it involves emulation.

Homan states that

the predatory stage is of central importance in Veblen's interpretation of economic development... Social esteem comes to be based upon control over property and freedom from economically useful work. Consumption is guided by the desire for social esteem and consequently takes conspicuously useless forms. (145)

Dowd adds: "When our pleasure is derived from the attitudes of others (real or presumed) toward our consumption, and when we avoid working with our hands even when such activities are not poorly paid, monotonous, or dangerous, it is emulation" (9).

Dente states that an individual's "group-regarding" and "self-regarding" proclivities naturally clash since they are working toward opposite goals. Among the self-regarding proclivities is "ostentatious consumption, that is, an inclination for conspicuously wasteful expenditures and useless employment" (31).

Regarding "useless employment," Homan expounds:

Under the predatory scheme of graded dignity, consumption is affected by emulation of one's superiors. The result is that workmanship and technology are contaminated by being set to supply many conventional articles whose only use is to display what has come to be meritorious, a control over property and an abstention from useful work. (143)

In a Veblenian context, "ostentatious consumption," "useless employment" and "abstention from useful work" are deemed
"conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure;" the two concepts that comprise "conspicuous waste."

**Conspicuous Waste**

**Conspicuous Leisure**

Veblen feels that the struggle between individuals toward a constantly greater emulation of wealth is not necessarily detrimental to their community and, in fact, could serve to make men "industrious and frugal." The key ingredient in proving true leisure class status (or in emulating the leisure class) is conspicuous waste. One form of such waste is "conspicuous leisure." Conspicuous leisure is pecuniary emulation's requirement of the abstention from productive work by those striving to display wealth. More aptly put, "conspicuous leisure" is a notion suggesting that the truly wealthy should not have to engage in productive labor since they are capable of purchasing the fruits of others' productive labor, or even hiring another to perform any laborious obligations they may have. Veblen suggests that since the barbarian phase supplanted the peaceably savage phase, labor has been associated with weakness and subjection to a master. It is therefore a mark of inferiority, and therefore comes to be accounted unworthy of man in his best estate. By virtue of this tradition labour is felt to be debasing . . . In order to gain and hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put into evidence. And not only does the evidence of wealth serve to impress one's importance on others and to keep their sense of his importance alive and alert, but it is of scarcely less use in building up and preserving
Offered in a more eloquently blunt manner, Veblen states, "it is felt by all persons of refined taste that a spiritual contamination is inseparable from certain offices that are conventionally required of servants" (37). Since the days of the Greek philosophers, productive labor that serves man's basic everyday needs has never been recognized as a "prerequisite to a worthy or beautiful, or even a blameless, human life" (37). Since productive labor is a sign of poverty and subjection, "conspicuous abstention from labour therefore becomes the conventional mark of superior pecuniary achievement and the conventional index of reputability" (38). Rather than being identified as a sign of laziness, conspicuous leisure is seen as a sign of monetary strength.

Veblen contends that productive effort has been shunned by able-bodied men since the beginnings of predatory culture, and this tradition has been reinforced in the "passage from the predatory to the quasi-peaceable manner of life" (39). Veblen adds that the institution of a leisure class was inevitable in a capitalistic society because if it would not have emerged due to the ramifications of private ownership of property, it would have emerged as a result of the dishonor associated with productive effort in such a
society (39). In addition, Veblen asserts that any association between the leisure class and productive labor would be in the form of ownership of the productive labor on the part of the leisure class, and the motivation for this ownership would be the "gain obtained by the honourable method of seizure and conversion" of the productive operation rather than the mere pursuit of an increase in wealth (40).

Veblen feels that becoming involved in productive effort was a "morally impossible" prospect to the "noble, freeborn man" since the abstention from labor is not only an "honorable or meritorious act, but it presently comes to be a requisite of decency" which leads to a more "strenuous insistence on leisure" on the part of the leisure class (41). Also, as the population increases, free enterprise becomes more difficult for men of high moral and ethical standards because "the customs governing ownership gain in scope and consistency" meaning that all people within a society try to live their lives by emulating the leisure class. The alternative for such men of integrity is "beggary or privation" since they cannot or will not compete on a predatory level:

Wherever the canon of conspicuous leisure has a chance undisturbed to work out its tendency, there will therefore emerge a secondary, and in a sense spurious, leisure class--abjectly poor and living a precarious life of want and discomfort, but morally unable to stoop to gainful pursuits. (42)

Veblen is stating that even though those in the poverty
bracket cannot afford to pass up opportunities to earn an income through productive labor, many will decline such opportunities as a result of the stigma placed on productive effort by the leisure class. Those beneath the leisure class would rather put their effort into emulating the leisure class, and be worse off for it, than become a self-sufficient member of society by way of productive effort.

A non-productive use of one’s time is not necessarily evidence of conspicuous leisure. Veblen suggests that proper execution of conspicuous leisure involves the use of immaterial goods including knowledge of the various branches of learning, manners and breeding, polite usage, decorum, and formal and ceremonial observances. "Such immaterial evidences of past leisure are quasi-scholarly or quasi-artistic accomplishments and a knowledge of processes and incidents which do not conduce directly to the furtherance of human life" (45). Veblen is suggesting that a knowledge of such "non-productive" processes is evidence that a purported member of the leisure class has been able to afford to avoid productive labour in pursuit of less productive matters.

A knowledge of good form is . . . evidence that that portion of the well-bred person’s life which is not spent under the observation of the spectator has been worthily spent in acquiring accomplishments that are of no lucrative effect . . . they are a voucher for a life of leisure. (49)

Veblen tersely summarizes his theory of conspicuous leisure
by offering that "the pervading principle and abiding test of good breeding is the requirement of a substantial and patent waste of time" (51). The practice of conspicuous leisure by the highest leisure class serves as a "canon of conduct" for all classes beneath it: [it] is the birthright and the criterion of the gentleman at his best" (52).

Veblen feels that capitalism encourages a "master and servant" working relationship within society. Having servants is evidence of the ability to pay. Taken further, encouraging one’s servants to engage in conspicuous leisure is even further demonstration of wealth and power. A servant’s conspicuous leisure is more subtle than that of the leisure class; their leisure is an occupation of an ostensibly laborious kind. It takes the form, in large measure, of painstaking attention to the service of the master, or to the maintenance and elaboration of the household paraphernalia; so that it is leisure only in the sense that little or no productive work is performed by this class. (57, 58)

Veblen suggests that such servants became a "subsidiary" or "derivative" leisure class who perform "vicarious leisure for the behoof of the reputability of the primary or legitimate leisure class" (59). By calling such servants a subsidiary or vicarious leisure class, Veblen suggests that servants serve as a form of proxy for their masters; though they perform laborious tasks, their performance of such tasks exhibits leisure on the part of their masters: "The leisure of the servant class exempt from productive labour
is in some sort a performance exacted from them, and it is not normally or primarily directed to their own comfort" (60). Conversely, ineffective servants are not tolerated, not because of their overall lack of productivity, but because "bungling work would imply inability on the master's part to procure the service of specially trained servants; that is to say, it would imply inability to pay for the consumption of time, effort, and instruction required to fit a trained servant" (61).

While conspicuous leisure is a more subtle form of invidious pecuniary display in comparison to the blatant consumption of extravagant goods, Dorfman stresses that conspicuous leisure is of equal importance with conspicuous consumption, both of them based on waste as the means of achieving a good pecuniary name. The choice between them is only a matter of advertising expediency. But conspicuous leisure from useful activities is the older, more comprehensive principle of the leisure class scheme. (177)

**Conspicuous Consumption**

Providing evidence of being a member of the true leisure class means not only putting on a display of conspicuous leisure, but indulging in goods of little or no productive value to society (for instance, purchasing a necklace rather than a snow shovel) as a further means of emulating wealth and power. Dente summarizes the pitfalls of this pecuniary emulation encouraged by capitalism when he suggests that
emulation dominates utilitarian consumption activities. This emulation leads to conspicuous consumption based on envy and jealousy. Emulation, based on private property in a business society, leads to further problems. These problems arise because emulation serves as one motive for the accumulation of wealth. The procession of wealth becomes evidence of efficiency, honor, power, and prowess. Therefore, under the regime of private property . . . the result of this appropriation is a maldistribution of income which leads to waste in consumption and production. (13)

Conspicuous consumption of extravagant goods, and in such excess, requires servants to tend to their maintenance. Veblen suggests that

under the requirement of conspicuous consumption of goods, the apparatus of living has grown so elaborate and cumbrous . . . that the consumers of these things cannot make way with them in the required manner without help. (65, 66)

Having money at one’s disposal is not enough to build one’s esteem and reputation throughout the community. Veblen feels that more has to be done with one’s wealth in order to earn the respect and admiration of one’s peers; a person’s word is not enough. A display of evidence is needed to prove one’s wealth and good breeding. Such an ostentatious display of impractical goods is obligatory for the approval of the leisure class. Homan states that "the institution of property, originating in fraud and force, then protected by law and custom, comes in this phase to be associated with productive effort" (147). By "fraud and force," Homan is referring to the "booty" or "trophy from the raid" that Veblen ascribes to the predatory, barbarian
class; the "law and custom" then, is the system of capitalism under which a leisure class operates.

The emphasis of conspicuous consumption is always on the impractical, since it is impractical types of goods and services that truly prove that one has legitimate wealth: "Unproductive consumption of goods is honourable, primarily as a mark of prowess and a perquisite of human dignity" (69). The classes well below the true leisure class can only afford to purchase those goods that they need for subsistence. The leisure class on the other hand, is "obligated" to purchase costly goods that are not needed for subsistence since only these goods are considered honorable by pecuniary standards among the leisure class (70). "Since the consumption of these excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes more honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit" (74). Dorfman elaborates on Veblen's notion:

The law of conspicuous waste, however, controls the prevailing pecuniary scheme of life. It does not encourage innovation, but is merely regulative. It abjures the methods of life and kinds of goods which are most efficient industrially, because they do not contain the necessary element of superfluous cost on which to rest a complacent invidious comparison. (177)

Dobriansky adds:

A religious abstention from the purchase of low-priced goods commonly accessible to the general run must be piously observed in order to afford oneself the most convincing grounds for a
favorable invidious comparison against others. (282)

Entertaining becomes an important factor in the lives of the leisure class. It is not even enough to conspicuously own and consume excessive goods and services, but one must also share and bestow upon one’s peers the good manners and breeding that such a leisurely lifestyle has delivered. The leisure class member becomes

a connoisseur in creditable viands of various degrees of merit, in manly beverages and trinkets, in seemly apparel and architecture, in weapons, games, dancers, and the narcotics . . . [this tends to] change his life of leisure into a more or less arduous application to the business of learning how to live a life of ostensible leisure. (Veblen 74)

Maintaining one’s reputation among one’s peers means calling on their "aid" in the exchanging of "valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments" (75). Friends should give and expect to receive gifts of value (of a frivolous nature) as a means of mutual confirmation of membership within the leisure class. While such "aid" may come willingly from friends, competitors can also be relied upon to reaffirm one’s reputability:

The competitor with whom the entertainer wishes to institute a comparison is, by this method, made to serve as a means to the end. He consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is a witness to the consumption of that excess of good things which his host is unable to dispose of single-handed, and he is also made to witness his host’s facility in etiquette. (75)

It should also be noted that there are often impecunious (or, non-wealthy) vicarious consumers of
leisure. As wealth accumulates, new classes form within the ranks of the leisure class and some of these classes fall out of the leisure class altogether. With such an occurrence, "gentility" may be inherited without the proper wealth to support it, as far as the leisure class is concerned. Veblen names this class the "impecunious gentlemen of leisure," and this class affiliates itself to the leisure class through "a system of dependence or fealty to the great ones" and in so doing, they gain some measure of repute and become "indices" of their entertainer's rank and "vicarious consumers of his superfluous wealth." Veblen considers such men "vicarious consumers without qualification," regarded as among the true leisure class (76). Veblen considers the impecuniary gentleman to represent an "investment" on the entertainer's part as one more example of his pecuniary power as a source from which they draw and thus, as a long-term investment toward "good fame" (78).

As we descend the social scale of classes in an industrial community, we see that conspicuous leisure drops off rapidly as an alternative for the head of the household. The male head of the house is left to resort to productive industrial occupations. As this occurs, conspicuous leisure and consumption is adopted as a ceremonial ritual by the wife of the head of the household and to some extent, menials hired as "auxiliary performers" of vicarious
leisure. Such a "passing of the torch"
remains in vogue as a conventionality which the
demands of reputability will not suffer to be
slighted. It is by no means an uncommon spectacle
to find a man applying himself to work with the
utmost assiduity, in order that his wife may in
due form render for him that degree of vicarious
leisure which the common sense of time demands. (81)

However, the vicarious leisure performed by the wife
does not take the form of "idleness or indolence," but
rather, it "almost invariably occurs disguised under some
form of work or household duties . . . which prove on
analysis to serve little or no ulterior end" (82). Veblen
considers such effort toward "household adornment and
tidiness" to be mere unproductive or "wasted effort" which
is conditioned "under the guidance of traditions that have
been shaped by the law of conspicuously wasteful expenditure
of time and substance" (82). Veblen feels that even though
household chores would appear to be beneath the man of the
house, they give the man of the house a measure of repute
when performed by the wife as a more crude form of
conspicuous leisure.

Veblen stresses that such notions as beauty and comfort
must be achieved by means and methods that commend
themselves to the great economic law of wasted
effort. The more reputable 'presentable' portion
of middle-class household paraphernalia are, on
the one hand, items of conspicuous consumption,
and on the other hand, apparatus for putting in
evidence the vicarious leisure rendered by the
housewife. (82, 83)
Veblen feels that such a repetitious pattern of leisure and consumption on the part of the housewife is the "abiding mark of the unfree servant," which lent directly to the repute of the head of the household at the turn of the twentieth century (83).

Since the leisure class is situated at the pinnacle of the social structure in terms of reputability, its standards become the norm of reputability for the entire community, and the observance of this norm becomes the obligation of all classes within the society. The result is that

The members of each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal. On the pain of forfeiting their good name and their self-respect in case of failure, they must conform to the accepted code, at least in appearance. . . Accordingly, both [conspicuous leisure and consumption] are in vogue as far down the scale as it remains possible. . . No class of society, not even the most abjectly poor, forgoes all customary conspicuous consumption . . . There is no class and no country that has yielded so abjectly before the pressure of physical want as to deny themselves all gratification of this higher or spiritual need.

Veblen summarizes that reputability depends on the element of waste that is common to both conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption (85) and an "unremitting demonstration of ability to pay" (87).

Veblen acknowledges that the pace of life is quickening and that signs of pecuniary strength now have to be more simplistic and symbolic. He stresses that conspicuous consumption has to precede conspicuous leisure as a means of
displaying pecuniary strength since goods are more easily recognized than services: "The signature of one's pecuniary strength should be written in characters which he who runs may read" (87). Veblen feels that as a community develops economically, leisure "loses ground" to consumption (91).

With the increased emphasis on the conspicuous consumption of goods, or, the "human proclivity to ostentation" (90), the urban poor are forced to stretch those goods needed for subsistence in order to have the money to spend conspicuously to "keep up a decent appearance" (87). The lower classes still strive to keep up a decent appearance "on pain of losing caste" (88). Ironically, cigarettes and alcohol are often used in public by the urban poor as a means of consuming conspicuously (89).

Referring to his concept of the "instinct of workmanship," Veblen feels that the characteristics of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure clash with man's innate drive toward productivity, so man satisfies this instinct by rationalizing productive intentions out of his conspicuous waste:

However wasteful a given expenditure may be in reality, it must at least have some colourable excuse in the way of an ostensible purpose... the instinct of workmanship expresses itself not so much in insistence on substantial usefulness as in an abiding sense of the odiousness and aesthetic impossibility of what is obviously futile. (93)

Veblen supports this assertion by arguing that "waste" is
considered a "deprecating term" in everyday life, which is therefore evidence of such an instinct of workmanship (98). What emerges from the mixing of the self-indulgent lifestyle of the leisure class and the class's natural instinct of workmanship then is an acknowledged sense of guilty pleasure that results from the conflicting instincts: "A reconciliation between the two conflicting requirements is effected by a resort to make-believe of purposeful employment" (96).

Veblen stresses that the motive behind such conspicuous consumption and leisure is emulation, which he considered "the stimulus of an invidious comparison which prompts us to attempt to outdo those with whom we are in the habit of classing ourselves" (103). Each class within society envies and attempts to emulate or copy the next class above it on the social ladder. Each class's standards of reputation are established by the class above it, rather than by the given class itself:

All canons of reputation and decency, and all standards of consumption, are traced back by insensible gradations to the usages and habits of thought of the highest social and pecuniary class—the wealthy leisure class. (104)

The irony that results from the lower class's propensity for emulation in the form of conspicuous waste is poverty. In favour of visible consumption it has come about that the domestic life of most classes is relatively shabby, as compared with the 'éclat of that overt portion of their life that is carried on before the eyes of their observers. As a secondary consequence of the same discrimination,
people habitually screen their private life from observation. (112)

Summary

The main principles of Veblen's Theory of the Leisure Class are: As cultures "evolve" from a peaceable, "savage" phase where each individual within the culture contributes brute, industrial labor for the means of the survival of the culture, to a more competitive, "barbarian" phase that encourages the display of "trophies" as a gauge of prestige among individuals within the culture, classes eventually form within the culture as a result of such habitual categorization. As cultures evolve from the predatory, barbarian phase to a more civil phase, where goods can be produced efficiently and the acquisition of trophies by means of brute force is unlawful, transacting for goods and services for the purpose of displaying monetary power as a means of gaining prestige becomes fashionable. Veblen alleges that the United States, with its system of capitalism, is such a culture. Within such an evolved culture, Veblen theorizes that classes form under the criterion of perceived ability to pay. The term "perceived" is crucial in such a culture since some classes would form under a true ability to pay, while others would form as a result of the struggle to keep close to the true leisure class, emulating an ability to pay by sacrificing goods that would serve basic needs for survival. Veblen feels that capitalism tends to encourage a non-productive
"master and servant" relationship among individuals within the culture rather than collective productivity in industrial pursuits. Such a system, with its emphasis on conspicuous waste as a means of emulating the true leisure class, tends to widen the chasm between the classes, making the rich richer and the poor poorer.
CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN BUFFALO

Mamet's first business-oriented play concerns the attempts of three lower-class men to practice their own versions of free enterprise. Two of the men plan to steal a valuable coin collection, while the third falls short in his own attempt at free enterprise by failing to profit from his investment. The play is a parable of the vicious selfishness capitalism encourages and suggests that in such a system, only the fittest, the most merciless will survive.

To understand American Buffalo from a Veblenian perspective, one must consider Veblen's theory of "pecuniary emulation," for this play does not deal directly with the true leisure class, but rather portrays three lower-class men, two of whom exert vast amounts of energy to appear better than they actually are. These two men, Don Dubrow and Walter "Teach" Cole, are, according to Veblen, displaying the predatory traits of the barbaric man, a man who is not above breaking the rules to come out on top. Don is the proprietor of a junk shop, while Teach evidently does not hold down any sort of permanent employment. Both men feel the pressure to live up to the standards of the true leisure class. They pursue elaborate schemes that, in their own minds, meet the standards of leisure class acceptability, thereby eliminating their own feelings of worthlessness in a society where "value" is of the highest regard.
Don's junkshop is the setting for the entire play, and the first hint of emulation comes from the shop's name: "Don's Resale Shop." Don has chosen to upgrade the image of his shop of relatively worthless artifacts in an effort to make the shop appear more palatable to the higher classes, who would not be interested in consuming anything called "junk." Don has embraced the tactic employed by car salesmen who have transformed "used" cars into "pre-owned" vehicles. June Schlueter and Elizabeth Forsyth also note in the title of their article, "America as Junkshop: The Business Ethic in David Mamet's American Buffalo," that Mamet has utilized Don's junkshop as a particularly appropriate metaphor for what capitalistic America has become. In the wake of the self-serving free enterprise that has expanded since the industrial age, America finally becomes a junkshop in the greed-driven Nixon and Reagan administrations.

The play begins with Don lecturing his uneducated, drug-addicted "gofer" Bob on life in the business world. With this kind of behavior, Don is emulating the higher classes labelled by Veblen as "exploit," the profiteering of employers like Don who use laborers like Bob for their own profit. Don tells Bob that in business, effort that is less than 100% is failure, adding a phrase that will prove highly ironic as the play unfolds, "Action talks and bullshit
walks" (4 *all future references to American Buffalo will be to the 1976, Grove Press edition). Don then refers to another "friend and associate" named Fletcher, whom Don apparently categorizes as a class higher than he, someone to emulate: "Now lookit Fletcher [...] Fletcher is a standup guy [...] He is a fellow stands for something" (4 *Author’s note: Due to Mamet’s idiosyncratic writing style, it is emphasized that all punctuation, capitalization and italics in the quotes from his plays are verbatim. Any single-spaced ellipses within editorial brackets are mine). Don classifies Fletcher as a role model based on his ability to end up with other people’s money, whether it be winning four hundred dollars in the previous night’s poker game, or cheating another off-stage character named Ruthie out of a slaughterhouse tool, a pig leg-spreader that he sold to Don for a profit. Concerning the pig iron, Mamet has chosen an instrument that not only appropriately symbolizes the predatory nature of business in a capitalistic society, but also illustrates Veblen’s concept of the barbarious predator needing "booty" or a "trophy" as evidence of conquest or the "successful raid." With Ruthie’s pig iron now in Don’s possession, Fletcher not only has displayed evidence of what is the business equivalent of a successful predatory "rape" or "slaughter," but he also has a witness to his prowess, a guiding principle in Veblen’s theory of the leisure class.
In discussing the pig iron transaction, Bob states that the deal wasn’t ideal because Ruthie became "mad" at Fletcher afterwards, to which Don replies that "the fact remains that it was business. That’s what business is [...] People taking care of themselves [...] 'Cause there’s business and there’s friendship" (7). Don adds that "Things are not always what they seem to be," which would not only hold true for the nature of business, but also for the nature of emulation, and then concludes the discussion with "You don’t have friends this life. . . . You want some breakfast?" to which the more proletariat-like Bob replies "I’m not hungry," hinting at his lack of an appropriately predatory, capitalistic inclination (8). Don takes advantage at this point to further upgrade his status by partaking in what he perceives to be the breakfast diet of the upper classes: yogurt and vitamins. By consuming what can be classified as culinary indulgences by Bob’s standards--indeed, Bob states that he doesn’t take vitamins because they’re "too expensive" (9)--Don has succeeded in consuming relatively costly products conspicuously as a means of further gaining good repute in the eyes of his lower-classed employee. Don is lucky that Bob is unaware that his opting for the plain yogurt reveals him not being aware of the various flavors offered in yogurt, something a true "connoisseur" would know. As a last effort at gaining status in Bob’s eyes, Don offers to purchase vitamins for
Bob, demonstrating wealth and further imitating the pecuniary leisure class.

The play’s third character, Teach, enters cursing about Ruthie, who has humiliated him with a sarcastic remark in front of another off-stage character named Grace after he helped himself to a piece of toast from her breakfast plate at the neighborhood diner. Teach complains that he’s always willing to “pop” for refreshments without ulterior motives: “I never go and make a big thing out of it—it’s no big thing—and flaunt like ‘this one’s on me’ like some bust-out asshole” (10). Don supports Teach’s argument by reiterating to Bob that there is no such thing as friendship when it comes to financial matters. Teach epitomizes Veblen’s concept of barbaric, competitive, “predatory animus” when he makes the claim that:

Someone is against me, that’s their problem. . . . I can look out for myself, and I don’t got to fuck around behind somebody’s back [...] But to have that shithead turn, in one breath, every fucking sweet roll that I ever ate with them into ground glass [...] The only way to teach these people is to kill them. (11)

Teach laments being the victim or “prey” to such predatory hostility, but would gladly reverse positions and become the predator if the opportunity arose, not unlike capitalistic opportunists who complain when they are the victims of price gouging, but who will take advantage of a similar situation if the tables are turned.
When the conversation returns to the matter of Bob fetching breakfast, and his lack of appetite, Teach echoes Don’s predatory directive, stating "You got to eat" (12), but later has his predatory bluff called when he adds: "I don’t want anything" (13) when asked for his breakfast order. After agreeing to breakfast, Teach makes an attempt to build upon his perceived status by tipping Bob off about his order for crisp bacon, to "tell the broad if it’s for me she’ll give you more" (13). Teach then warns Bob not to say anything to Ruthie or Grace if they are at the diner.

Teach is hurt by Ruthie’s animosity over the toast incident. Ruthie took the opportunity to portray Teach as holding a lower pecuniary station. It also turns out that Teach is still upset about losing money to Fletcher and Ruthie at the previous night’s poker game. When Don asks Teach how he came out at the end of the night, Teach takes the opportunity to lash back and "prey" on Ruthie: "She is not a good card player, Don. She is a mooch [...] and she plays like a woman" (14). Teach takes this opportunity to level upon Ruthie the most malicious insult that one can deliver according to Veblen’s theory: being likened to a woman, who is always of a lower status than males even within the leisure class. Teach refers to the way Grace, Ruthie’s partner, walks around the table to stretch on occasion, and how he is the only player who, as any good competitor would, hides his cards from Grace’s view. Teach
is suggesting that while all the others strive to put on a
show of good manners and breeding in their trustworthiness,
they are being deceived:

Everyone, they’re sitting at the table and then
Grace is going to walk around . . . fetch an
ashtray . . . go for coffee . . . this . . . and
everybody’s all they aren’t going to hide their
cards, and they’re going to make a show how they
don’t hunch over, and like that. I don’t give a
shit. I say the broad’s her fucking partner, and
she walks in back of me I’m going to hide my hand.
(15)

Teach then makes a plea for the need to distinguish money
and friendship:

We’re talking about money for chrissake, huh?
We’re talking about cards. Friendship is
friendship, and a wonderful thing, and I am all
for it [...] But let’s just keep it separate huh,
let’s just keep the two apart, and maybe we can
deal with each other like some human beings. (15)

As the play unfolds, Teach will be revealed as the one who
cannot live without friendship and approval--the one who
cannot live up to his strong capitalist dogma. Indeed,
contrary to his pronounced credo, Teach is irritated because
Ruth and Grace personify the capitalist attitude of "The
Past is Past, and this is Now, and so Fuck You" (16).

As Teach asks Don where Fletch is, he notices an
assortment of memorabilia from the 1933 Chicago World’s
Fair. The depression-era fair, ironically titled, "Century
of Progress," celebrated Chicago’s centennial. That the
memorabilia is still valued by some is testament that
Veblen’s "conspicuous consumption" still thrives. During
the depression, possession of such memorabilia would bestow
leisure-class status upon the possessor, since it would be assumed that only the wealthy could afford to go to such an extravagance as a World’s Fair. The term "progress" itself has a pecuniary value since it suggests the ability to invest capital. Today’s purchasers of such memorabilia would likely be attempting to emulate conspicuous consumption by purchasing goods of no useful value, such as "antiques." Don tells Teach that he’d ask for fifteen dollars for the souvenir compact he holds, after he realizes that Teach himself isn’t interested. It is assumed that if Teach were actually interested in the compact, the price quoted would have been more. Teach then refers to the producers of the souvenirs as "a bunch of fucking thieves," failing to realize the irony of Don’s own price gouging for a relatively worthless "bunch of crap" (19).

When Bob returns from the diner and distributes the food, Teach warns Don that he shouldn’t eat the yogurt because he has "a feeling about health foods" to which Don replies that "its not health foods, Teach. It’s only yogurt" (21). This is in direct contrast to what Don had been preaching to Bob when the play began. Don is apparently trying to deflect any suspicion in Teach’s mind that he is trying to emulate the higher classes—such emulation would be an admission of dissatisfaction with himself, which goes against the image he tries to present. He convinces Teach, who shows a conservative, business-like
bent by being suspicious of and resistant to change, that yogurt is acceptable because "they've had it forever," to which Teach then replies, "what the fuck. A little bit can't hurt you" (21). Then, complaining about his overly burnt bacon, Teach claims in predatory manner that if you want a business run right, you have to be "breathing on their neck" (24). Teach then learns about Don's plan to steal a coin collection presumed to be in the possession of customer due to his conspicuously extravagant purchase of a buffalo head nickel.

As Don is on the phone with a prospective buyer for the coins, the buyer, presumably, asks if the collection is stolen, to which a flustered Don replies, "are they what . . . ! ! ?? Yes, but I don't see what kind of question is that (at the prices we're talking about . . . )" (27). It turns out that the customer doesn't care whether the coins were stolen or not, and is more concerned that the exchange take place late enough to go unnoticed. This lack of concern over the legality of the situation further illustrates Veblen's theory regarding the predatory animus in barbarian man by demonstrating that such a man is concerned about obtaining "booty," that coming up with property by illegal means is the sign of a worthy warrior. After Don hangs up the phone, Teach jumps aboard the "booty" bandwagon by proclaiming: "Guys like that, I like to fuck their wives" (28), once again objectifying women as
consumable trophies of a successful raid. When Don angrily calls his prospective customer a "fucking asshole," Teach, with perhaps a touch of admiration for the customer, argues, "The guy's an asshole or he's not, what do you care? It's business" (28).

Don then reacts angrily as he recalls his next meeting with the customer, the day after the transaction:

The next day back he comes and he goes through the whole bit again [...] he tells me he's the guy was in here yesterday and bought the buffalo off me and do I maybe have some other articles of interest [...] And so I tell him, 'not offhand.' He says that could I get in touch with him, I get some in, so I say 'sure,' he leaves his card, I'm s'posed to call him anything crops up [...] he comes in here like I'm his fucking doorman [...] He takes me off my coin and will I call him if I find another one [...] doing me this favor by just coming in my shop. (31)

Teach reacts to Don's escalating fury and hunger for revenge by prodding him: "you're going to get him now" (32). Teach is implying that by stealing his coin back, as well as the customer's entire collection, Don will be recognized as the master predator in his ever-escalating bid to out-plunder the adversary. Don will prove himself the more skillful hunter not only by stealing back the booty from the thief, but by raiding the thief's entire collection of "booty."

Don then proceeds to detail for Teach the customer's female companion, revealing his conception of females as trophies for males. He tells Teach: "You should see this chick [...] She is a knockout. I mean, she is real nice-
lookin', Teach," to which Teach ironically replies with a hint of jealousy: "(Fuck him . . . )" (32). Teach tries to dismiss the customer's predatory success, and the "trophy" of his success, in a somewhat Freudian manner that ultimately pays homage to the customer's success (the "trophy" does, presumably, engage in sexual relations with her "master"). Teach then attempts one final time to diminish what appears to be a complete conquest on the part of the customer by labelling him as a homosexual: "(Fuckin' fruits . . . )", suggesting that a male-female couple is worth nothing in terms of invidious display if the sexual (read: predatory) attraction doesn't exist between them.

When Don states that the customer "rode his bicycle to work" (32) the day prior, Teach immediately correlates the word "work," with his knowledge of the customer's conspicuous coin collection to assume that the customer works in a prestigious, highly-paid field, assuming that the customer rode the bicycle to work "(with the three-piece suit, huh?)" (32). Not only is this an ironic example of conspicuous consumption according to Veblen, but also of conspicuous leisure, since it can be assumed in this age of convenience that anyone riding a bicycle rather than a car to work can afford to be leisurely--even late--in this fast-paced world. Perhaps the customer owns his own business, or maybe he is already so wealthy that he can afford to be leisurely, even if it means getting fired from his job. A
third way to read the bicycle image is to consider the cost of being environmentally conscious. Being environmentally conscious can be considered a waste of valuable time or money in the short run. It can be presumed that only the wealthy would have such conspicuous time on their hands, allowing them to ride by bicycle to their destination.

When Don explains to Teach that he’s sending Bobby in to burglarize the customer’s apartment, Teach, aching for the companionship and bond that Don and Bobby share, tries to persuade Don to drop Bobby in order to get the job done right. Teach explains that Don’s loyalty to Bobby should be disregarded since the matter at hand is business as opposed to friendship:

> What are we saying here? Loyalty [...] You know how I am on this. This is great. This is admirable [...] This loyalty. This is swell [...] All I mean, a guy can be too loyal, Don. Don’t be dense on this. What are we saying here? Business [...] don’t confuse business with pleasure. (33, 34)

Teach is now asking Don to drop Bobby from his confidence the same way that Ruthie earlier dropped Teach from hers when he wanted her toast. Teach sees a means of gaining not only a quick windfall from the arranged sale of the stolen coins, but also of gaining respect in the eyes of his peers, especially the cunning Fletcher and Ruthie.

Teach pleads with Don, explaining how he’ll need a person who’s cunning enough, stealthy enough to go in and do the job so that the "prey" "don’t come in right away
and know they been had" (34). For this brief, persuasive instant, Teach has succeeded in emulating the more gentlemanly, modern leisure class predator, one who "kills" his opponent so quickly and cleanly that no evidence is left. He eventually drops his guard though to revert back to his more barbaric ways when he finally confesses to Don, "I want to go in there and gut this motherfucker...Where is the shame in this?" (35).

Teach then indicates the pig leg-spreader and Don explains that it is "a thing they stick in dead pigs keep their legs apart all the blood runs out," to which Teach nods in comprehension (35). Again, the image of the pig iron is present at the moment when one friend is betraying another in the name of profit and reputation; first Fletcher deceives Ruthie out of the pig iron (and presumably sells it to their friend Don for a higher price), and now it emerges as Teach betrays Bobby by asking Don to include him in the theft instead.

As the pair discuss the plans of the heist, Don reminds Teach that "this is real classical money we're talking about" (36), indicating he is very aware of the increase in prestige, in reputation, that can be gained if the robbery is a success. Don is aware of the pecuniary value placed on his former coin and the assumed collection due to their rarity and the demand such exclusiveness brings. Don is at least subconsciously aware that a nickel may be worth
five cents to the unsuspecting--it is still a nickel after all--and worth much more to one who can identify it as a trophy worthy of conspicuous consumption. Teach agrees with Don's assessment and reiterates that Don should "take the time to go first-class" (37), meaning Teach himself, on his raid of the "classical" booty.

As Bob re-enters, Don asks Bob if the diner charged him again for the coffee that he missed the first time. Don too, knows what it's like to be the prey as well as the predator. Teach then begins to quiz Bobby, to prod him in an effort to display for Don Bobby's sluggish mental reflexes. Teach picks up the pig iron and asks Bobby what it is, to which Bobby unconvincingly responds that "yeah [...] I know what it is [...] I know" (38). Bobby doesn't know what the instrument is used for even though he earlier called it "pig iron" when he referred to the transaction between Fletcher and Ruthie. Bobby presumably picked up the name of the instrument from Don, and perhaps knew that low-grade iron is often referred to as "pig iron;" but he doesn't know what the instrument is used for. This indicates that Bobby is totally void of the predatory animus necessary to excel in the capitalistic "jungle" of the United States, and even if he could identify the predator's weapon of choice, he would be incapable of "executing" the slaughter--or the burglary, which appears to be what Teach is driving at through his interrogation.
Bobby then changes the subject by asking Don for an advance on his cut of the burglary payoff. Don asks Bobby if he needs it, to which Bobby replies, "I don't need it..." (39). This is Mamet's first hint about Bobby's forthcoming non-barbaric attempt to emulate the leisure class. Vicariously acting as Don's "proxy," he purchases the other buffalo nickel from its owner, displaying good taste on behalf of Don, the "head of the household." Don then tells Bobby that he's going to "hold off" on the burglary, and then adds, "And, on the money, I'll give you . . . forty, you owe me twenty, and, for now, keep twenty for spotting the guy . . . okay?" (41). Bobby then asks, "Could you let me have fifty?" to which Don replies, "And you'll give me back thirty?" Bobby suggests, "I could just give back the twenty." Don reminds Bobby that this is "not the deal," and Bobby offers, "We could make it the deal" (41, 42). Bobby is emulating Don, the pecuniary mentor, as he has witnessed Don haggle with his customers, a form of playing with his prey, like a cat, before finally going in for the kill. Again, Bobby proves to be quite inept in his efforts at emulation, though he manages in his clumsiness, to ultimately receive twenty-five dollars rather than the initial twenty. After Bobby leaves, Teach begins to prod Don for information regarding valuable coins. Teach wants "a crash course. What to look for. What to take. What to not
take ( . . . this they can trace) (that isn’t worth nothing . . . )" (45). Don replies, in true barbaric fashion, "First off, I want that nickel back" (45). In order to feel like a truly worthy "barbarian" of the leisure class, Don needs to steal back the "trophy" which he considers to have been stolen from him; the buffalo head nickel. Being an emulator of the leisure class, Don is not above "actual" theft the way the true leisure class is; he does not consider theft to be uncouth or evidence of ill breeding, but rather, a means of winning back his imagined good repute. As Teach attempts to get more information on the customer, he reveals his own awareness of emulation. Teach wrongly assumes that the customer carried a briefcase into Don’s shop when he bought the nickel after knowing that Bobby earlier claimed to have spotted the customer loading a suitcase into his car. Teach equates various forms of briefcases with pecuniary strength. He has begun attaching leisure class icons to his and Don’s fantasized leisure class "barbarian" in an effort to build up the imagined gains in good repute that accrue from besting such a worthy opponent.

As Teach and Don discuss where the customer may be hiding the coin collection, Teach once again contradicts his emphasis on cautiousness by admitting, "as we’re moving the stuff tonight, we can go in like Gangbusters, huh? We don’t care we wreck the joint up" (46). Teach later admits that
with burglary, as with all predatory environments, "it's hard to make up rules about this stuff" (47).

Teach then wants to see Don's coin value guide, a source used by collectors to find value of coins. Whether one has coins or not, the guide is a good means of emulating conspicuous leisure and good taste since it would be assumed that any owner of such a guide has an interest in valuable coins and might even possess such a collection. Don again fails at his attempt to emulate the leisure class when he admits that the book is not the latest edition, "all the values aren't current . . . " (47), a fact that would not be overlooked by the leisure class. In utilizing the book, Teach explains to Don that "you got to know what you're talking about" (49), and then proceeds, when Don asks him if he wants to take the book along, to say, "naaa, fuck the book. What am I going to do, leaf through the book for hours on end?" (49). Leafing through the book for hours on end is precisely what the wealthy, displaying conspicuous leisure while determining what to conspicuously consume, would do. Don also fails to emulate the leisure class when Don admits that he doesn't know any of the "stolen" nickel's identifying criteria (49).

When Don asks Teach how he plans to get into the customer's apartment, Teach lacks the strategic mind of a true "warrior" when he offers, "aah, you go in through a window they left open, something [...] there's always
something [...] we'll see when we get there" (49, 50). Don is concerned by Teach's lack of a definite strategy and states that he is going to ask Fletcher, the ultimate "predator," to join the operation. Teach is hurt by Don's lack of confidence in him. Don suggests, "we can use somebody watch our rear" to which Teach responds, "you keep your numbers down, you don't have a rear" (52). Teach is proposing a more capitalistic approach to the heist; the fewer people involved in the operation, the more profit for those who are involved. However, without the safety in numbers that is the fundamental principle of life among the "prey" (the industrial proletariat), life will be more sharply divided between the successes and failures of "business" operations like Teach and Don's. Teach, seeing the possibility of his being bypassed like Bobby, relents and admits that "a division of labor" (53) may be helpful in this heist. This is Teach's first failure as even an emulator of a true capitalistic barbarian: He has succumbed to the non-barbaric weakness inherent in socialism.

Act II begins at 11:15 that evening as Don waits alone in his shop for Teach and Fletcher. Bobby surprises Don by showing up unexpectedly. He tries to sell Don a buffalo nickel at his cost--for no profit. Bob is surprised to find out that Don may not want the coin, that he'll have to inspect it to determine if it's "worth anything" (60). To the "connoisseur," not only must a coin be scarce enough,
it must also be in presentable shape; "excellent condition" (48) as Teach quoted from the book earlier. Like fine art or wine, a coin should also reflect the good taste and breeding of its buyer; a scuffed or dulled coin would not do in terms of satisfying one's proclivity toward conspicuous waste. Don tells Bob that "what's important in a coin [...] what condition it's in [...] if you can (I don't know ...) count the hair on the Indian, something. You got to look it up" (61). This rhetoric is beyond Bob, who sees the coin as a work of art; of equal value to any other buffalo nickel. Bobby then suggests that his buffalo nickel is worth ninety dollars because "the other guy went ninety bucks" (61). Don displays his predatory bent by claiming that the customer "was a fuckin' sucker, Bob" (61). Even though Don feels that he profited nicely from the sale of the original nickel (for which he presumably paid little or nothing), he still feels unworthy as a predator since his "prey," the customer, walked away freely, even satisfied that it was he who made the "killing." To profit is not enough. To profit without a proper amount of "bloodletting" would be the equivalent of a carnivore contenting itself with cat chow. Bob claims that "the book don't mean shit" (62), to which Don responds, "the book gives us ideas, Bob. The book gives us a basis for comparison" (62). Don is stating that in capitalistic America, it is people's perceptions that count. Image is, of course, the point of
emulation, an effort to raise the standards that serve as the "basis for comparison."

Teach finally arrives and is scolded by Don for being late. Teach is suspicious of Don for considering him hired help, a means for Don to display conspicuous consumption as well as conspicuous leisure. Teach once again reverts to his innate socialistic sense when he corrects Don's assumption by saying, "you aren't paying me to do a thing. We are doing something together [...] You want to find a reason we should jump all over each other all of a sudden like we work in a bloodbank, fine. But it's not good business" (63). Though he fights it due to the pressures put on the leisure class and all classes below it by capitalistic structure, Teach is aware of the most logical means of maintaining subsistence, which is through the solidarity of a socialistic structure, where all prevail and no one dies as a result of the system under which they exist.

As Bobby explains to Teach that he's at the junkshop because he acquired his own buffalo nickel, he states that, "I like 'em because of the art on it" (64). Bobby, innocently enough, has his own aesthetic criteria for determining what is valuable to him. Teach, on the other hand, needs to ask, "is it worth anything?" (63) before making his own decision about the coin's value to him. Capitalism encourages pecuniary value over aesthetic
value. Capitalistic "predators" become interested in art only when a substantial value is placed on the art, and even then, they are only interested in "making a killing" by reselling the art in the future at the latest, presumably higher, value. To get rid of Bobby, Teach asks him what he wants for the nickel; Bobby responds by asking for fifty dollars. Though he cannot believe that Bobby would ask for fifty dollars for the nickel, Teach should jump at the offer since he knows nothing about coins except that the customer readily paid Don ninety dollars for the other nickel. It is the nature of capitalism that no one is beyond reproach, no one should be trusted to ask a fair price for what's being sold. A predator should never be trusted. The trio prove how truly inept they are as capitalists; they talk about consulting the price guide, but never actually do consult it, which would resolve the issue of what Bobby's nickel, as well as Don's first nickel, is worth.

After Bob leaves, Don attempts to locate Fletch by calling the Riverside Diner. Teach complains about the diner, claiming they overcharge for coffee "(Thirty-seven cents for take-out coffee) [...] A lot of nerve you come in there for sixteen years. This is not free enterprise" (72). Once again, Teach shows his contradictory nature by inadvertently championing the cause of socialism by claiming that price gouging "is not free enterprise" (72), which, in actuality, it is. Teach then continues to contradict
himself by adding,

You know what is free enterprise? [...] The freedom [...] of the individual [...] to Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit [...] In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. Am I so out of line on this? [...] Does this make me a Commie? [...] The country's founded on this [...] without this we're just savage shitheads in the wilderness [...] Sitting around some vicious campfire. (73)

Teach has managed to justify the diner owner's pricing his coffee at thirty-seven cents. He also has ironically distinguished between Veblen's terms, "savage" and "barbarian;" with "savages" being the equivalent of the community-oriented socialists and "barbarians" the individually driven capitalists.

When Fletch cannot be located, Teach states, "I say fuck the cocksucker" adding, "It's kickass or kissass, Don, and I'd be lying if I told you any different" (73, 74). Teach is paraphrasing the credo of capitalism to Don, who is wavering between loyalty (socialism) and selfishness (capitalism). When Teach tries to convince Don that Fletch is probably planning on betraying the two of them by stealing the coin collection himself, Don states that Fletch would not do such a thing, to which Teach replies in true Veblenian lingo, "He would. He is an animal" (75). Teach is likening Fletch to a predator, who observes no rules regarding equality among the "pride" of which it is a member. With the fervor of a barbarian, Teach then attempts to call Don to action pleading, "let us go and
take what is ours" (75), as though the law of the land were
still based on the "eye for an eye" mentality, where the law
defines possession (including "booty") as ownership.

Don claims he wants to wait for Fletch because Fletch
"knows how to get in" (77). Teach is bewildered with Don's
claim and responds, "What the fuck they live in Fort Knox?
[...] You break a window, worse comes to worse you kick
the fucking back door in. (What do you think this is, the
middle ages?)" (77). Teach again ironically conjures up
Veblen's theory that man's barbaric era began in the middle
ages when technology became advanced enough to allow for
idle time, which could be spent pillaging and plundering.

Teach also alludes to the Darwinian theory that Veblen
adapted into his own theory of the leisure class when he
speculates on where the customer might keep the presumed
safe combination: "There are only just so many places
it could be. Man is a creature of habits. Man does not
change his habits overnight" (78). Veblen has maintained
that man will keep adapting to his environment and continue
seeking more for himself. As alluded to in chapter 2,
Veblen's theory came in the wake of the theory of evolution
proposed by Darwin. Veblen's post-Darwinian belief in the
adaptive qualities of humans grates against Marx's main
principle: That man has an ultimate goal, which is equality
for all, and that man will stop his striving once it is
reached.
Teach then tries to convince Don to drop Fletch by fabricating a lie about how Fletch won big at the previous night's poker game. Teach claims that Fletch spilled his Fresca on purpose to distract everyone long enough to grab the correct discarded cards to create a "heart flush to the king" (82). Teach is trying to come between Don and Fletch in order to win Don's approval and reduce the number of moneymakers involved to three: Don, Don's phone connection, and himself. When Don questions him, Teach defends himself, claiming, "I don't fuck with my friends, Don. I don't fuck with my business associates," which is contrary to Teach's earlier statement regarding business and friendship as contradictory pursuits (83).

After Teach admits to Don that he's suspicious of Bob for showing up with "a certain coin, it's like the one you used to have" (83), he also admits to being suspicious of Fletch for not showing up: "The guy you brought in doesn't show, we don't know where he is [...] something comes down, some guy gets his house took off [...] Fletcher, he's not showing up" (83). All this from the one self-acknowledged capitalist who doesn't "fuck" with his friends.

Teach abruptly pulls out a revolver and begins to load it to Don's objection. Teach explains to Don that they need the gun: "God forbid something inevitable occurs and the choice is [...] either him or us [...] I'm saying God
forbid the guy (or somebody) comes in, he’s got a knife . . . a cleaver" (84). Teach feels that he needs to be properly prepared for the excursion, like a hunter on a safari, or a buccaneer on a raid. Teach’s allusion to the possibility of being "butchered" by a cleaver is ironic considering the recurring imagery of the pig leg-spreader. Perhaps it is now these two would-be thieves who are the "stuck pigs" in the slaughterhouse called "capitalism," victims of the standards laid down by those who run such an operation, the leisure class. Teach then tries to label the property owners as the wrongdoers in capitalistic society: "All the preparation in the world does not mean shit, the path of some crazed lunatic sees you as an invasion of his personal domain. Guys go nuts, Don, you know this. Public officials . . . Ax murderers . . . all I’m saying, look out for your own" (85). Teach feels it is his right as predator of the wild "to embark on any fucking course he sees fit" (73), and that no "prey" should be able to contest that right.

As a patrol car drives by the store, Teach admires the officers for the arsenal of weaponry he imagines the car contains: "They have the right idea. Armed to the hilt. Sticks, Mace, knives...who knows what the fuck they got. They have the right idea. Social customs break down, next thing everybody’s lying in the gutter" (86). Teach envisions the police, with all their barbaric weapons at
their disposal, to be the "king of beasts" in the predatory environment of America; that when all procedures are thrown out, they, as the "kings," will be standing when the dust settles. The ultimate example of "looking out for number one."

Bobby returns to inform Don and Teach that Fletcher, in fact, was mugged and got his jaw broken earlier and is laid up in the hospital. Teach is still suspicious of Bob and tells him to "stick around" (89). Bob is in a hurry to leave to tend to what he perceives to be, in his own emulative way, "business" (89). Encouraged by Teach's prodding, Don begins to suspect that Bob is in league with Fletcher in a conspiracy against himself and Teach. Teach's rampant paranoia, befitting a "capitalist," has infected Don. Don asks Bob, "are you fucking with me here?" (90), as he dials the hospital where the rattled Bob thinks Fletcher is staying. Bob explains that he can't remember which hospital Ruthie said, but that it was a group of "spics" that "broke his jaw . . . they didn't care it was him" (92). Bob cannot understand from his innocent proletarian perspective, how capitalist "barbarians" can commit such random acts of viciousness. Bobby doesn't recognize the irony that Fletcher, the ultimate capitalist "warrior," would have presumably done the same to his attackers had he seen them first.

Teach is not satisfied with Bobby's claim that Fletcher is in a hospital. Teach berates Bobby, explaining, "we've
been sweating blood all day on this" (93). Again, the slaughterhouse imagery of the pig iron surfaces. The imagery the slaughter metaphor suggests is of the livestock farmer, the "motherly" provider and protector of his "young," betraying his trusting, market-ready animals to their doom. Similarly, Teach and Don have fallen prey to the same economic system that encouraged their predatory animus. Teach seems to be aware of this when he claims, "let's make this clear: Loyalty does not mean shit a situation like this; I don't know what you and them are up to, and I do not care, but only you come clean with us" (93). What Teach does not understand, like Bobby with the Fletch situation, is that the acknowledged lack of loyalty that capitalism promotes includes him as well. As Bob pleads to Don that he knows of no conspiracy concerning Fletcher, Teach hits him viciously on the side of the head. Don adds, "You brought it on yourself" (94) suggesting that no altruistic proletarian will survive if he willingly moves into the land of capitalism. Don "reasons" with Bobby stating, "we don't want to hit you" (95) as Bobby's ear begins to bleed profusely. Teach is disappointed that his "prey" has passed on to the point that it can no longer be played with, like a cat that has been too aggressive too quickly with a captured rodent. He states, "(fuckin' kid poops out on us . . . )" (95).
Don then receives a phone call from Ruthie, who tells him the name of Fletch's hospital. As Don hangs up, Teach spots one last opportunity to celebrate around his humiliated "kill" when he tells Bobby, "and you owe me twenty bucks" (96). As Don dials for Columbus hospital, Teach unwittingly makes a subtle cry for socialism (and socialized medicine) when he complains about the "(fuckin' medical costs . . . )" (96).

As the trio prepares to leave the shop, their utter lack of predatory prowess is exposed. First, Don pleads with Bobby to tell the doctors that he fell down a staircase, erasing any evidence of a predatory attack. Bobby then admits under Teach's interrogation that he bought the coin at a coin shop for the fifty dollars he borrowed from Don, presumably the price for which he'd be willing to sell it to Don. Teach cannot understand Bobby's non-invidious ways and states, "you people make my flesh crawl" (100). As Don tells Teach to go get his car, Teach responds defensively: "I am not your nigger. I am not your wife" (100). Teach feels like a possession, a trophy of Don's. He is aware of the humiliation in being used to display proof of Don's conspicuous leisure. Don tells Teach to get out. Teach is incredulous that Don believes Bobby about the coin. Teach attempts to hurt Don by exposing his emulative tendencies when he declares, "You fake. You fucking fake [...] You seek your friends with junkies.
You’re a joke on this street, you and him" (101). Teach has exposed Don as a leisure class fraud, a fact that Don’s neighbors and associates are likely aware of, a man who has to, as Teach states, "buy his friends" (101). Don advances on Teach, claiming, "you stick this poison in me" (101) as he hits him; the poison Don refers to being Teach’s encouragement of barbaric, predatory animus; Veblen’s vision for the traits of the inevitably tainted, ultimate capitalist.

To quell the violence, Bob admits that he never saw the customer leave that morning with his suitcase. Teach reacts by picking up the leg-spreader and "trashing the junkshop" (103), the tool a metaphor for the havoc capitalism reeks upon it environs. Teach cries:

The Whole Entire World.
The World Is Lies.
The World Is Lies.
The Whole Entire World.
The World Is Lies.
The World Is Lies.
There Is No Right And Wrong.
Every Fucking Thing.
Every God-Forsaken Thing.
Every God-Forsaken Thing.

Teach then adds that, "we all live like cavemen" (103), as he calms down. Teach’s reference to cavemen is meant to be likened to man’s barbarian state, but in actuality, ironically recalls Veblen’s theory of the "savage" state of man, where the community works together toward a common goal, survival. Teach finally exposes himself as non-predatory by constructing for himself a newspaper hat to keep the rain off his head, hardly a priority for the true
hunter. After placing the hat on his head, Teach makes good his statement that the three hapless thieves are indeed Veblenian "cavemen" as Don and Teach make a united effort to assist their fallen "comrade" to aid.

**American Buffalo** is a play about the viciousness of the capitalistic philosophy that the United States embraces. This malevolence is encouraged not only in the true leisure class by exploitation of labor, but also in those who attempt to emulate the invidious behavior of the leisure class: the poor. As Don, Bob, and Teach illustrate through their misadventure, the working class makes a poor leisure class--even an emulated one. Rather than pecuniary emulation, the labor class would find its energy better spent at uniting for a revolutionary uprising. The trio's pathetic attempts to emulate the leisure class fall woefully short of the "conquests" of the true leisure class, or even the successful emulators of the leisure class.

**American Buffalo** was David Mamet's first indictment of capitalistic America. His next business play, *The Water Engine*, was a spin-off of sorts to a reference made in *American Buffalo* to the 1934 Century of Progress World's Fair that took place in Chicago. Set in that period, *The Water Engine* is a more detached parable about the dangers of greed and the power of propaganda.
CHAPTER 4

THE WATER ENGINE

Published shortly after American Buffalo, The Water Engine is somewhat of a "prequel" to that acclaimed play, as Mamet continues to explore the mindset and motivations of the leisure class and those lower classes that emulate it. The 1933-34 "Century of Progress" World's Fair that was alluded to in American Buffalo becomes the setting for The Water Engine. Mamet lashes out at the corrupt powers that be, whose patriotic propaganda not only discourages socialistic ideals that individuals might harbor, but ultimately encourages the emulation of the leisure class as a means of pacifying the masses into a materialistic stupor modest enough to ward off any thoughts of revolutionary uprising.

Charles Lang is the protagonist of The Water Engine. In a Faustian bid for wealth, fame, and security that only the leisure class enjoys, Lang has successfully created an engine that runs on nothing but water and now has to enlist the services of a patent attorney to patent his work to protect him from the theft of his idea. The verbal contract with the attorney turns out to be no better than a deal with the devil, as Lang, the emulative proletarian, shall find out.

Two images that keep appearing throughout the play are those of a chain letter and the Century of Progress
Exposition itself. Both are metaphors for false idols or gods engineered by the leisure class to preach propaganda of material optimism to the ignorant, lower classes, to keep them in line and quell any glimmer of revolutionary inspiration.

In Mamet's own words, the play is set in a radio station in 1934 [...] In Steven Schacter's productions, in Chicago and New York, many scenes are played on mike, as actors presenting a radio drama, and many scenes were played off mike as in a traditional, realistic play. The result was a third reality, a scenic truth, which dealt with radio not as an electronic convenience, but as an expression of our need to create and to communicate and to explain--much like a chain letter. (Introduction)

The film adaptation made for television (TNT: 1992) treated the story in a more traditional, linear, three-act manner.

The play opens with an announcer's voiceover from the Century of Progress Exposition:

... and welcome to the Century of Progress Exposition. Yes, the Second Hundred Years of Progress ... The concrete poetry of Humankind. Much is known and much will yet be known. As we rush on. Chicago, 1934. The Century of Progress.

(5* all future references to The Water Engine will be to the 1978 Grove Press edition)

Meanwhile, Charles Lang is in his makeshift laboratory coaching himself in Marxist sentiment, exposing his true proletarian mindset as he works on his creation:

The techniques of chemistry should not be difficult. We are all made of chemicals. We are the world in this respect. ... Things can work out. Things can work out if we persevere. ... If we will think correctly. Why must I distinguish between inorganic and organic? All things come from hydrogen. They all come from the earth. As we
do. We are made of molecules. We all are made of light. We are the world in this respect.
(5, 6)

Lang voices the credo of the proletariat; to overlook individual differences and band together in solidarity; to pursue the end goal of a classless society; and to not covet material goods at the expense of fellow proletariats.

A voice over of a chain letter then reads: "Neither the Rain nor Snow nor Gloom of Night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds. . . . Do not break the chain" (6,7) as a mailman delivers mail to a candy store as the proprietor’s son Bernie yells, "It’s only the mailman, Pop" (7). The proprietor, Mr. Wallace, then mildly scolds his son for not leaving the register drawer open when they closed the previous night, demonstrating to his son a modest yet prudent grasp of the principles of free enterprise; one of which is to deter thieves from breaking and entering by impecunious display.

The chain letter then continues, making references to people who have fallen on hardship, allegedly due to breaking the chain. The letter presents optimistic false hopes to the lower classes: "Pass this letter on to three friends. Happiness and health will be yours" (7). The chain letter is ironic in that it promises much, yet is a veiled threat that will keep proletariats in the "chain gang," broken in revolutionary spirit by the false capitalistic promise of easy money.
More groundwork is then laid at the office of Morton Gross, patent attorney, where an inventor of a postal processor is being turned away by the secretary as the voice of the chainletter again beckons.

Do not break the chain. . . . In September, 1934, a young man in Chicago, Illinois designed—built an engine which used distilled water as its only fuel [...] Write in your name at the bottom of the list. Send a postal order for one dollar to the name which appears at the top of the list, and cross that name off the list. (9)

The man referred to is Lang, and the letter suggests that Lang gave in to the false hopes the letter promised, but doesn't, at this point, state his fate. The letter however does allude symbolically to the nature of capitalistic free enterprise when it commands the exploited, lower classes (the "bottom of the list") to give their money, the result of their hard work, to the leisure class (the "top of the list").

In Gross' office, Lang makes his Faustian deal by insisting on a contract before talks begin, and giving Gross a dollar bill as a retainer. After receiving the dollar, Gross asks, "Do you trust me now? . . . And if you couldn’t trust me what good would your contract be?" (9). Gross is teasing Lang about his naive trust in ideas he considers sacred, ideas that are from Gross' perspective nothing more than meaningless fodder for high-priced attorneys.

Lang explains his water engine to the skeptical Gross and, emulating the leisure class power he may be beginning
to feel, adds, "If you will come this evening you can see it. But I'm [...] going to go to someone else if you don't come." To which a smiling Gross replies, "I thought we had a contract?" (10). Gross can afford to be amused because Lang has admitted a certain degree of avarice just by meeting with him; and now that Lang has exposed himself, it's only a matter of time before Gross will win the patent for his associates; one way or another.

In the hallway to Gross' office, Lang is confronted by the postal process inventor, who claims that Gross "won't see me anymore. . . . I could revolutionize the mails . . . the delivery of mails." Lang steps onto the elevator as the elevator operator asks, "down?" which symbolizes Lang's momentary taste of potential leisure class status within the fortress of Gross' "ivory tower" and his descent back to his true level of status and class. The fact that Gross won't see the postal process inventor anymore is a danger sign to those who have ideas that are significant enough to promote. To an extent, the leisure class prefers to stall progress and continue exploiting the working class, keeping it in line with the false promise of opportunity and admittance to the leisure class.

After exiting the elevator, Lang phones his sister, Rita, who asks him, "did you tell him, just the way we worked it out? [...] You must be careful with these people" (14, 15). Rita serves Lang to some extent as his "backbone"
and motivator in preparing to deal with the unscrupulous leisure class. It can be assumed that she is the one who suggested that Lang make a contract of sorts with Gross before talking about his engine.

Later at Mr. Wallace’s candy store, Lang is helping Wallace’s son Bernie build a toy airplane as Wallace attempts to sell him coffee and doughnuts and make conversation: "You seen that thing they have over at the fair the Hall of Science? ... The 'Rocket Ship' [ ... ] Some of the things there, I cannot believe, that they’ve got in the future," to which Bernie replies, "They’re not only in the future, Poppa ... they’ve got 'em now" (16). Wallace’s naive, out-of-touch observation (including the assumption that the future exists—now) exhibits his lack of predatory inclination, which will keep him grounded as a nickel and dime entrepreneur, too small to threaten the leisure class, and too content to entertain revolutionary ideas. The Hall of Science, like the chain letter, is a device of the leisure class that serves to keep people like Wallace optimistically complacent about their future. When Wallace asks Lang if he’s been to the exposition yet, Lang, the would-be water engine tycoon, answers, "I went last year" (16) signifying that he is up to date regarding innovation and has broken the chain of false optimism and is forging ahead on his own, to stake his claim to leisure class status.
Gross arrives at the store to meet Lang and see his invention. As the two exit, the ever-prudent Wallace exhibits his limited business sense by calling, "Goodnight, Mr. Lang, that's fifteen cents" (17). Wallace again displays his ignorance by expressing his astonishment at the Hall of Science’s exhibit of the future, to which Bernie again exclaims that such technology is functioning now. Wallace's ignorance to progress renders him nothing more than a harmless emulator of the leisure class, something capitalism and all of its marketing encourages in the lower classes as a means of fueling the capitalistic machine that powers the leisure class.

As Lang leads Gross to his laboratory, Gross probes him for information and makes veiled threats: "You live around here? [...] I looked you up [...] I know where you live [...] I checked up on you [...] I spoke to your company" (18, 19). Without even seeing the invention, Gross is already laying the groundwork for blackmail, to exploit Lang and his invention in the name of corporate profit. Once in Lang’s laboratory, Gross continues the probing asking, "Who paid for all of this? [...] This is all yours? [...] All of this equipment?" in an attempt to work Lang into a compromising position. As Lang prepares his engine, he explains, "What you’re going to see is like a sailboat. My sister says. There are no more factories [...] This engine, Mr. Gross, draws from the Earth. It draws its power
from the Earth" (20). Lang has taken a purist, "non-
progressive" approach to his engine, using a plentiful,
"uncorrupted" source of fuel to run it.

After unwittingly giving his sister away as the
"friend" who also knows about the engine, Lang quotes her as
suggesting that as a result of his invention, Lang will
deliver the proletarian class to salvation by liberating
them from the "chains" and shackles of the factories, which
are the hellish prisons run by the barbaric leisure class.
After a couple false starts, the engine finally runs, making
a believer of Gross.

Later, Lang and his sister Rita sit in their apartment
conversing and listening to the radio. Rita says, "You know
what I want? [...] A place with a balcony. ... And fans
... Electric fans" (21). Rita is caught in a
contradictory no-man's-land. With the prospect of wealth
comes the first urge to conspicuously consume and display
the ability to pay. She wants a balcony, which, as an
architectural strategy, can be considered a luxurious
indulgence of the affluent. Electric fans were also
something of a luxury in 1934. In embarking on this deal,
Lang and Rita display their envy of the leisure class
lifestyle. Then, exposing their proletarian subconscious,
Lang states that they will move to the country, to which
Rita replies, "We could have a farm" (21, 22).
Rita then breaks the fantasy by warning Lang not to trust Gross: "They are all thieves you know . . . All of them are thieves" (22). In her somewhat confused state, Rita is voicing both proletarian distrust of capitalists, and prudent, capitalistic concern about the possibility of other greedy individuals stealing her treasure (the water engine) and the profit that is sure to follow.

The chainletter then voices over:

"The terror of the Cities of the Night is Stilled Commerce. Demons and fears of sleep have been eradicated by the watchmen of the modern order. Now we are characters within a dream of toil" (23).

Glorifying the exploitation of proletariats, the chain letter praises the leisure class, calling them guardians of proletariats, heroes who battle the nightmarish demons of Marxian disruption. This segment of the chain letter is one of the more obvious examples of leisure class propaganda in the play.

Another strong Marxist sentiment comes from an anonymous voiceover that questions the idea of capitalism:

If a man worked all his life
And put his life savings into dollars
And he put them in a bag
And someone took it from him
Then where would he be?

Pause.

Had he not worked?
Must he seek charity?

Pause.

The man who took it--When he spent it--Who would
know it was not his?

Meanwhile, in an area of Chicago known as Bughouse Square, Lang awaits Gross as a soapbox speaker rails against capitalism in the background:

every time I feel the thrill of pride. . . . When patriotic songs are played. . . . And when Old Glory takes the breeze. . . . I find myself ashamed. . . . Yes. Ashamed. When will we learn to choose between the quality of our impressions? . . . . Patrioticism is a real feeling. Yes. We feel it beneath our breastbones, in our hearts, our spirits rise. It serves the cause of death. (24, 25)

Lang meets with Gross as the soapbox speaker continues:

What is there so attractive in these tearful, pompfilled ceremonies? What is so seductive in them? They support the torture of the ages. The Great War, the pogroms, the Crusades, the Inquisition (may God Bless us all) "My Country Right or Wrong" [ ... ] We support these things, friend, you and I. The power of the torturers comes from the love of patriotic songs. We are the Hun. . . . Russia is a fiction, friend. She is a bugaboo invented to distract you from your troubles . . . . There is no Russia. Russia is the bear beneath your bed. (25, 26)

The soapbox speaker is suggesting that patriotic themes and ceremony are nothing more than propaganda created by the leisure class as a means of instilling in proletarian classes a blind faith and devotion to the leisure class and its malevolent dogma. The speaker then lists such patriotic, military efforts as the first world war, the Crusades, and the Inquisition as wanton slaughter made digestible to the ignorant masses through the aid of propagandistic brainwashing. Embracing the Marxist ideology, the speaker also sees Russia (still young after
its 1917 revolution) as an innocent state, made evil only through leisure class propaganda.

As the speaker says his piece, Gross asks Lang if he ever frequents the square. Lang says no, indicating his ignorant acceptance of the patriotic propaganda despite his and his sister's lowly position in life. Displaying his position as a "watchman" of the proletarian class, Gross then admits, "I do. I like to hear the speeches. Get a different slant on things" (26).

Gross then takes Lang to meet an unannounced third party in their venture: Oberman. Lang is immediately suspicious and pleads with Gross to stay with them. As Gross leaves, a Knife Grinder passes through the square softly singing, "Knives to grind. I've got your knives to grind" (28). This is a playful hint from Mamet of the traitorous, back-stabbing of Lang that has just transpired courtesy of Gross, as the leisure class representative, Oberman, begins to position himself for the kill. Like Gross, Oberman asks, "Do you get up in the Park much?" to which Lang replies, "Not in years" (28). Oberman too is applying a "litmus test" to Lang to identify his revolutionary aptitude. Satisfied with Lang's answer, Oberman then explains that he and the interests he represents want to develop, produce, and market the engine in as profitable a manner as possible. Lang mistakes this appeal to be a request to license his engine,
and Oberman corrects him, stating his interests want to patent the engine. Mamet then gets another wink in as Oberman comments, "I should get up here more often" (30); suggesting that frequenting the square is a way to keep his predatory skills sharpened by keeping watch over the revolutionary proletariats and the gullible patriots who heckle them. Lang clarifies, "You want to buy it from me" to which Oberman replies, "And we want to protect you" (30). Oberman doesn’t say from who, but it can be assumed that he is implying that Lang needs to "buy" himself protection from Oberman and the barbaric leisure class by "selling" them his invention as Oberman and his associates are not willing to simply license the engine for a mere portion of the profits.

Lang argues that the engine is his, and Oberman suggests;

The law is not precise on some points [...] litigation is expensive. [...] A substantial case could be made for the ownership of the machine by those who’ve paid for its development. [...] Dietz and Federle. The company for which you work. [...] They could say you had worked on the engine for many months while in their pay and on their premises. [...] The laboratory you have built yourself on Halstead Street is fitted entirely with tools and material from Dietz and Federle. Then to whom does the engine belong? (30, 31)

Lang denies Oberman’s allegations and claims ownership.

Oberman continues:

Let’s not be specious. Everyone has motives, thieves included. They will say you are a thief, and they will be upheld. [...] Quite simply Mr. Lang, my people want the engine. Dietz would deal with us. We’d rather deal with you. But we still will deal with whom we must [...] you put us in an
unprotected stance [...] By dealing with you a case could be made for our collusion in the theft. . . . I think that in the light of this our offer is . . . eminently reasonable. (31, 32)

Lang’s is put in an awkward position. The only way for the proletariat to rise to the ranks of the leisure class is to emulate them by stealing "booty" from competing barbarians. However, while the leisure class is rewarded for such an act, the lower proletarian classes are punished by imprisonment. Oberman tells Lang to sleep on it and contact him the next day.

As Oberman walks off, the soapbox speaker can be heard in the background: "Where are the benefits to you and me? . . . what about the wheat? I ask you where’s the wealth, where is the wealth? . . . The ownership of land. These things do not change. They don’t change with giveaways and murals" (32, 33). The speaker is echoing Lang’s initial Marxist sentiment that the proletariats "are the world" in regards to being the fundamental foundation that sustenance is built upon; whether it be in a purely Marxist environment or an exploitative capitalistic environment. The speaker feels that as long as the proletarian class is in existence, there is hope for revolution. But they must reclaim the land; a sentiment Lang expressed earlier, unwittingly.

The next day, a railroad conductor’s voiceover is heard to shout out the destinations of a train bound for New York state that is named the Twentieth Century Limited.
This insert is likely another hint from Mamet on the fate of the proletariat in the United States as it prepares to begin its second century of "progress" that will span the rest of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first.

Lang then storms into Gross' office to find Gross and Oberman in conference. Lang charges, "You didn't know what's in there. You don't know. If you cannot have it, kill it . . . . There's nothing sacred to you [...] You wrecked my lab. . . . I think that I should kill you" (35, 36). Lang is now feeling the weighty price of "selling his soul" to the leisure class, and as he vents his anger toward them, he reveals a suppressed revolutionary propensity; a propensity that the leisure class knows must be crushed before it arouses revolutionary spirit in the working classes. Lang then adds, "You people are savages. . . . You're animals. . . . And I came here to do business with you. We decided to do business" (37). Lang reveals a certain confusion about where he stands as he accuses Gross and Oberman of being "savages," a term Veblen reserves for the honest, hard working proletariat. Lang has felt up until now that he has been dealing with fellow "savages," not realizing that he is among "barbarians." In American Buffalo, Teach had referred to non-barbaric, non-predatory proletariats as being nothing more than "savage shitheads in the wilderness," and Lang has proven him right--from a capitalistic perspective anyway. Lang is correct in calling
Gross and Oberman animals however (assuming he means predatory animals). He admits his own limitations as a barbarian when he admits that he decided to take a substantial loss by deciding to do business with the two instead of fight them in court, where the waters are thick with predators.

Oberman questions whether the plans are safe, and Lang responds, "Why do you play with me? You know if they’re safe or not. ... If they’d stolen them, you wouldn’t let me in, I’d be arrested somewhere, wouldn’t I? For some two-dollar wrench I took from Dietz" (37). Lang feels like prey that is toyed with before being viciously killed; an analogy that will prove prophetic. Lang finally admits to thievery, but it is such a pathetic plundering as to barely register on the leisure class scale of barbaric acquisitions.

Upon Lang’s acknowledgement that the plans and the engine are still safely in his possession, Oberman tries a different approach, stating,

Mr. Lang, you’re very lucky. You have no idea [...] business communities, who knows, that girl out there at the desk, some cab driver, perhaps [...] there are many ways. I think that we are very lucky here" (39).

Lang then experiences his first genuine predatory urge as he threatens the two:

You are scum. You’re nothing. I’m leaving now, I’m going, maybe I’ll come back. If I come back you’re going to meet our terms. Our terms. And Oberman? I may go up to your company, I may just say how badly you have botched this up, I make a deal. I go over your head. Part of the deal, you are gone.
Lang has demonstrated some predatory animus of his own, and in so doing has proven himself to be a formidable barbarian after all; formidable enough for Oberman to resort to more drastic measures. Oberman threatens to sue Lang for possession of the engine plans as Lang exits.

The first act ends with the chainletter voice over that instructs, "Make sure you send the letter on to someone who you trust will send the letter on. All people are connected. Pause. Do not send cash" (41). It has become apparent that all people, even proletariats, are not trustworthy. Even the noble mail deliverers, who stand tall in the face of rain, snow, and the gloom of night, can no longer be entrusted with a dollar bill and fall under suspicious scrutiny in a capitalistic state.

Act II begins with Rita's voiceover reflecting her bleak hopes as she states, "They're going to get him now. The whole thing will go down. It all goes down when we have given up the things we own. . . . We must all be careful" (43). Rita again displays her confusion as she is torn between the avarice of capitalism and the solidarity of socialism. On one hand, she is still the dupe of the leisure class, taken in by their propaganda of capitalistic hope, that preaches ownership as not only a privilege, but a right in a capitalistic state; when one ceases to "own," one
ceases to be significant, and becomes one of the exploited proletarian, industrial class. On the other hand, Rita is preaching solidarity throughout the community when she stresses that we must be careful not give up the things we own.

Meanwhile, Lang is on the elevator after having just left Gross' office, as the elevator operator again clarifies Lang's status: "Down, we're going down" (43). A woman in the elevator suggests to her companion that she has read that people can die of loneliness. When the companion questions this, the woman is adamant about the theory adding, "Well, I read it" to support her claim (44). This is a subtle touch by Mamet to suggest the media's power of persuasion. It is no wonder that the masses could so easily be misled into believing such swindles as chain letters and progress expositions. Lang exits the elevator only to be accosted by police officers. He manages to escape.

Meanwhile, at Wallace's Drugstore, Mr. Wallace is telling a story to his son Bernie about a train that had a malfunctioning engine. He explains that the designer of the train happened to be on the train at the time of the malfunction. After some scrutiny, the designer taps a specific spot with a hammer, and later bills the president of the railroad fifteen thousand dollars for the repair. At that moment, Lang enters, interrupting a story that shall
later prove significant. Lang asks for change so he can use the phone.

Lang then places a phone call to the Chicago Daily News and succeeds in contacting Murray, the city reporter. Murray questions Lang on why the police are after him. A long pause of silence from Lang’s end is symbolic of how he has grown to distrust everyone, even the press, which has historically served as bastion of the proletarian class. Lang ironically asks Murray to meet him at the zoo, among even more predators. Perhaps Lang feels a kindred connection with the other caged carnivores, who symbolize aspiring predatory capitalists, controlled into complacent submission by the wily leisure class. As Murray hangs up, he cynically comments, "Well, a Free Press is the First defense for liberty. Or words to that effect" (49). Murray himself no longer believes in the power of the press in the capitalistic United States.

After finishing his call to Murray, Lang phones Rita, who confesses to being very frightened. Lang promises that everything will be all right, to which Rita optimistically adds in a moment of wishful thinking, "When we are famous... And we are safe" (50, 51). Even at this point, Rita is clinging to the false hopes that have been subtly reinforced through the leisure class’s propaganda.

As Lang hangs up, he spies the police talking to Mr. Wallace, who is savvy enough to evaluate Lang’s predicament
on the spot and send the police out on a wild goose chase. In this perilous moment, Wallace has dropped his emulative veneer long enough to show his true proletarian colors in aiding his desperate comrade against the oppressors. Seeing that the police are heading for his store again, Wallace orders Bernie to lead Lang out through the cellar, evoking an image of the underground railroad, which led many slaves of exploitation to freedom in the nineteenth century.

Later, at the Hall of Science exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition, a lecturer is relating to a tour the irony of three business moguls who had met together in a Chicago hotel room one night, dying violent deaths; presumably at the hands of mobsters, the ultimate capitalistic predatory barbarians.

As the lecturer concludes his comments, the tour barker goes into his spellbinding spiel:

Science, yes, the greatest force for Good and Evil we possess. The Concrete Poetry of Humankind. Our thoughts, our dreams, our aspirations rendered into practical and useful forms. . . . What are our tools but wishes? Much is known and much will yet be known, and much will not be known. (53)

The optimism conveyed in the Barker's shortened spiel at the beginning of the play: "Much is known and much will yet be known," is now more grave, as the phrase "much will not be known" is included. The drop in idealism in the Barker's outlook is matched by Lang, who's most paranoid fears have been realized. Lang has come to realize that with progress comes corruption, the opportunity for exploitation.
The barker asks Lang if he’s all right, acknowledging that Lang has been at the exhibit since the afternoon. It is ironic that Lang has succeeded in hiding in the corrupt leisure class’s own lair as a means of eluding them. The leisure class have apparently wrongly presumed that one enlightened to their exploitative ways would steer far from the Century of Progress, the symbolic equivalent of a slaughterhouse serving as refuge for sheep. As the Barker exits temporarily to clock out for the day, Lang takes the opportunity to call Rita as a voice over sings the praises of progress, only to sign off with, "Souvenirs available at the main gate" (55), revealing the bottom-line motive of progress: profit.

Lang finds his neighbor, Mrs. Varec, answering his home phone as she explains to him that the police took his sister. Mrs. Varec finally hangs up to ask an unidentified person if she can go now. The leisure class is so powerful it can break the spirit of solidarity that resides in otherwise good souls such as Mrs. Varec, who has proven in the past to be a good neighbor.

A loudspeaker at the Century of Progress then announces that "The fair is closing," which is symbolically related to the dashed hopes and dreams that Lang once entertained regarding his contribution to progress. Lang phones Gross’s office and speaks to Oberman, conceding defeat and offering to deliver his engine blueprints to Oberman personally.
After being allowed to talk to his sister, Rita pleads with Lang not to deliver the plans, claiming, "They won’t make it. They will just destroy it" (59) before the line goes dead. At that moment, Rita has displayed a transformation, a symbolic conversion of sorts as she has offered to sacrifice herself in the name of defying the corrupt leisure class, who she now realizes never planned on adding the Lang's to their membership roster.

Again, a voiceover announces that "The Fair is closing" on Lang, as the Barker returns (60). As Lang and the Barker walk to the exit gate, the Barker tries to cheer Lang up by showing him a chainletter he received in the mail. The Barker reads the letter to Lang:

"Who knows the real power of man's soul?"
"Much good, much pain and misery is caused by our beliefs. Great Wealth and Fame stand just beyond your grasp. All civilization stands on trust. All people are connected. No one can call back what one man does." (60)

The chain letter is tempting in its twisted truth, not unlike the demon that dealt with Faust. The Faustian allusion is evident with the first line; the question remains: Who is the soul powering? The proletariat or the leisure class, who has bought that soul? Fortune and fame have stood just beyond Lang's reach; and as a result, he has known and will know much pain and misery. The leisure class is empowered by the naive notion that civilization stands on trust in a socialistic sense of community, with the belief that each individual contributes to that community.
Lang is inspired by the last line the Barker reads, "No one can call back what one man does." He makes the decision to not let his plans be destroyed. Like his sister, Lang will sacrifice himself to save the plans, losing a battle, but ultimately winning the war against the leisure class. The Barker continues, unwittingly reading a line from the letter that he himself uses in his expedition promotion spiel: "Much is known and much will yet be known and much will not be known" (61). The Barker has proven to be one of the ignorant masses, like Mr. Wallace at the candy store, who believe in the propaganda they are bombarded with without questioning it. These are the hapless souls that Lang has chosen to save by sacrificing himself. In sacrificing himself (by not delivering the engine plans), Lang's message will live on to overcome the world the leisure class has implemented. He adds, "Can you beat this, I'm supposed to send a dollar to three people who I've never heard of..." (61). When stated this bluntly, the Barker cannot believe anyone would be foolish enough to fall for such a ploy; but he himself has bought into a grander scheme that operates under the same patriotic, propagandistic principle of ignorant proletarian sacrifice. Lang decides to show the Barker his blueprints for the water engine, but, in a moment of irony, the Barker for the Hall of Science cannot understand them; he is merely
proletarian-friendly window dressing for the Exposition, serving to lure his own kind into acceptance of the illusion.

Meanwhile, at the Chicago Daily News, the flippant Murray dictates a generic patriotic report of coverage on the exposition, serving to promote leisure class empowerment rather than question it, like the "defender of liberty" the free press is (49):

The Century of Progress, sign and symbol of the great essential strength of the Free Market. All around the nations founder and decay . . . the East Turns Red, and senile Europe limps from day to day in search of that lost leader, that forgotten vigor never to return. For Europe is the Old Land, and this is the New. The West is Golden with the promise of prosperity to come. The Principles which made this country made it great, as it is great, as, once again, it shall be great...Here, now, in Chicago, Phoenix of Communities, we, once again, say, 'I Will,' and rise from the ashes; hardened, strengthened, turned toward the new day. . . . The Day of Progress: The Second Hundred Years of Progress. (62, 63)

Murray's mock patriotism unintentionally will help encourage more complacency on the part of the leisure class and all classes that emulate and serve it as the leisure class continues to bask in its indulgences (even in the face of the Depression). For a day’s pay, Murray has cynically given credibility to the bughouse square Marxist’s argument that Russia’s evil image is capitalistic propaganda when he mentions the East "turning red" and Europe being "senile."

Later at Bughouse Square, the Marxist speaker continues to question American values:
What happened to this nation? Or did it ever exist? . . . did it exist with its freedoms and slogans . . . the buntings, the gold-headed standards, the songs. With Equality, Liberty [...] In the West they plow under wheat. Where is America? I say it does not exist. And I say that it never existed. It was all but a myth. A great dream of avarice . . . . The dream of the Gentleman Farmer. (63)

The speaker is suggesting that there never was an America that lived by the values embraced by such documents as the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution. Indeed, even these documents were nothing more than propaganda from the neophyte leisure class.

Lang meets with Oberman in the square. Rita is not with him. The speaker at Bughouse Square can still be heard saying,

I say that we live in the final time. . . . With want in the midst of abundance. . . . In the final moments. When we, when America irrevocably ceases to be Europe, and commences the fulfillment of its malevolent destiny as the New World. (64)

Lang whispers to Oberman that he has put his engine plans in a mailbox. Oberman threatens Lang that he will be forced to tell him where the plans have been deposited, and Lang defiantly responds, "No. I think you will find that that is not the truth" (65).

The Bughouse Square speaker has suggested that the proletarian class in America is realizing its ultimate crisis: Extinction; and the class is in need of a savior to lead it to salvation from the oppressive leisure class. Lang has taken it upon himself to defy wealth, the great
temptation of the leisure class, and sacrifice himself for the good of the proletarian class. Lang's blueprints shall live on as the proletarian gospel, the water engine a symbol of solidarity and Marxist community, where individuals work for the betterment of the community rather than to compare favorably with their contemporaries.

Later, at Wallace's candystore, Bernie is passing on the story of the railroad engineer to a customer:

And so [the President of the railroad] calls the guy up and asks him, "How come fifteen thousand dollars for one hammer tap . . . ?" . . . And so the guy says, "I gave you the hammer tap for nothing, and the fifteen thousand dollars . . . was for knowing where to tap." (65)

Bernie is catching on quickly to the ways of capitalism and the incentive to specialize within a capitalistic system.

The next morning, Murray phones in a story to the Chicago Daily News involving the discovery of two mutilated bodies bearing signs of extensive injury with drowning as the suspected cause of death; the bodies of Charles and Rita Lang, who have died for the emulative "sins" of their comrades.

At the candystore, Mr. Wallace, the entrepreneur, scolds Bernie for again leaving the drawer open during business hours. As Mr. Wallace scans the freshly delivered newspaper, and excitedly informs Bernie that the Exposition is offering free days on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons to anyone under twelve accompanied by an adult. The leisure class is interested in recruiting young,
impressionable minds as well as reinforcing the leisure class credo in the minds of older generations.

At this moment, the mailman arrives to deliver an envelope to Bernie. Bernie pulls out the plan for the water engine and reads the letter that accompanies it as the Exposition Barker’s voice over pitches the following:

And so we leave the Hall of Science, the Hub of our Century of Progress Exposition. Science, yes, the greatest force for Good and Evil we possess. The concrete Poetry of Humankind... Much is known and much will yet be known, and much will not be known. As we complete our second thousand years. In the dilapidated office buildings, and rooms in Railroad Hotels, in torn and filthy manuscripts misfiled in second-hand bookstores, here rest the vestiges of this and other cultures. Arcane Knowledge in transition from the inaccessible to the occult, as we rush on [...] Technological and Ethical masterpieces decay into folktales. Who knows what is true? All people are connected. (69, 70)

In this more developed spiel, Mamet adds Veblenian commentary on the "future" state of a nation caught up in greed and self-indulgence; a nation that never looks beyond the present. Americans have let greed erode their country into divisions of classes: The "haves" and the "have nots." The "have nots" occupy the aforementioned dilapidated buildings and keep the filthy manuscripts in their secondhand shops; shops like Don's Resale Shop in American Buffalo, which offers "arcane" memorabilia from the Century of Progress Exposition. Lang's water engine was not only a technological masterpiece, proven by its witnessed operation, but also an ethical masterpiece in that
its realization would have freed many from the shackles of leisure class exploit.

Following the Barker's voiceover, comes the voiceover of the Chainletter, which states: "One man saw the plans for a machine which he was told would run on water as its only fuel" (70). As we have no water engine today, we can presume that this man was also snuffed out by leisure class interests if he ever did attempt to develop it. Considering the circumstances, the man referred to in the letter was likely Bernie Wallace, the would-be engineer, who probably attempted to live up to his father's emulative prudent instruction by attempting to fulfill the capitalist dream of achieving wealth through innovation. Instead of implementing the proper channels (selling out to big business in this case) to bring the machine up from the ashes, "like the Phoenix," Bernie went the route travelled by Lang; and the machine never came to fruition.

The play then closes with the Barker's voiceover stating, "The Fair is closing. Those who wish re-entry to the Hall at half-price, see me for a ticket. This is our last tour tonight. They're good tomorrow, though" (70). Finally, as the Fair closes, so too does the leisure class threaten to close its doors to prospective members. Those who wish to emulate, and ultimately join the leisure class must feed the leisure class at the cost of further depriving themselves of the opportunity to amass the wealth necessary
to attain such status. The emulators of the leisure class are warned that they are seeing their last chance to ignorantly feed the disease that is slowly killing them—until tomorrow, when the opportunity will again present itself.

The Water Engine is a more subtle play than American Buffalo. The predatory animus is not as overt as the play centers on Charles Lang, the would-be barbarian who ultimately hasn't the stomach for such bloodlust, no matter how ravenous he may be for a life of "leisure." Like Christ, Lang dies for the sins of his fellow emulators of the leisure class, who ignorantly worship the leisure class in much the same manner that the heathens of biblical times worshipped their false idols. As (arguably) happened with Christ, Lang dies in vain, his message having fallen on deaf ears, as his blueprints likely end up being picked over in a second-hand shop.

Such distractions as progress expositions and chain letters serve the leisure class by diverting the lower, emulative classes away from the real problems the nation faces as a result of living under the avaristic dogma of the leisure class for so long. On the contrary, these distractions rally the troops and reinforce the proletarian classes by giving them false hopes of one day attaining leisure class status. Like the lonely Bughouse Square Marxist, the occasional dissident voice of the community-
minded Marxist has no chance of competing with what the leisure class promises through its propaganda machine.
Arguably Mamet's most successful and celebrated play, 1983's *Glengarry Glen Ross* picks up thematically where *American Buffalo* left off, attacking the philosophies of capitalism and free enterprise that the United States embraces and encourages. With this play, Mamet trades in his brutish junk shop dullards for somewhat subtler representations of America’s business class: the middle-class salesman. While certainly not among the true pecuniary elite as defined by Veblen, the real estate salesmen of *Glengarry Glen Ross* are of a higher station than *American Buffalo's* Don, Teach, and Bob. From their pressed suits to their smooth demeanor, real estate salesmen Shelly Levene, Dave Moss, and Ricky Roma typify variations of the capitalistic "barbarian" hard at work presenting the same veneer of pecuniary emulation they sell. These salesmen are charged with the task of selling useless swamp land to unsuspecting dupes. Such a task requires a deceptive presentation, where all is not as it seems, a practice not uncommon in capitalistic society, according to Veblen. The "co-conspirators" in this scam are the naive clients themselves, who are victims of their own aspirations to achieve "leisure-class" status.

While the three main focal points of Veblen's theory of the leisure class ("pecuniary emulation," "conspicuous
consumption, "and "conspicuous leisure") are not as prominently displayed in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, these notions are still in effect as the salesmen lure their "prey" into their "lairs" of swampland by baiting them with opportunities to put on displays of "pecuniary emulation," "conspicuous consumption," and "conspicuous leisure." What is of greater concern in this play is Mamet's personification of Veblen's metaphorical depiction of the modern capitalist as a predatory "barbarian" warrior. As alluded to in this study's second chapter on Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen felt that capitalists "evolved" from a more purely communistic state (in the Marxist sense of the term) the same way that the barbarians in history evolved from a more peaceful, "savage" human. This concept of economic Darwinism is the primary Veblenian key to *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

The first act of *Glengarry Glen Ross* takes place in a Chinese restaurant across the street from the business office that serves as home base for the salesmen. The first scene opens with Shelly "the Machine" Levene, a burned-out, former "star" salesman for the company, trying to persuade the office manager, John Williamson, to give him better sales leads so that he may win the office's sales contest in which first prize is a new Cadillac. Levene argues with Williamson that it would benefit the company to put him on the leads that are given to the company's current star,
Ricky Roma. Levene acknowledges that a hot salesman like Roma "gets a reputation" (15 *all future references to *Glengarry Glen Ross* will be to the 1983 Grove Press edition), but he pleads that Williamson should "put a proven man out" (15). Levene is playing on Williamson's barbaric, leisure class instincts by suggesting that Roma is merely emulating a "barbarian" rather than being a true "barbarian" as proven by a track record of successful "kills."

Williamson then accuses Levene of being as impotent a hunter as Levene claims Roma to be by stating to Levene, "you blew the last [...] you didn't close" (15, 16). Levene then attempts to defend his unsuccessful "hunt" by blaming it on bad luck, an excuse to which no true predator would stoop. In this brief opening to scene one, we are given plenty of evidence as to the type of person Shelly Levene is; an old, weak "predator" who is now more hinderance than help to his "pack," one soon to fall prey to stronger, more determined "predators."

Like Teach in *American Buffalo*, Levene soon resorts to cowardly "back-stabbing" his fellow salesmen in an effort to improve his own image in Williamson's eyes (an act to which true "hunters" would never resort). Levene calls another salesman, Moss, an "order taker," one who "talks a good game" (17). In Veblenian terms, an order taker would be a servant, one who's primary task is to be conspicuous "evidence" of another's ability to pay; a role unworthy of
the barbaric, capitalistic male. Levene tries to "sell" Williamson on his successful months of sales over the previous few years and ironically, contradicts his earlier, "non-barbaric" insistence in the role of luck in the "hunt," "you think that was luck. My stats for those years? Bullshit . . . over that period of time . . . ? Bullshit. It wasn't luck. It was skill" (18). Through this contradiction, Levene has revealed himself to be an unworthy hunter, guilty through his own words. Williamson then reveals his own lack of barbaric prowess by stating in his own defense that "anybody falls below a certain mark I'm not permitted to give them the premium leads" (19). Williamson exposes himself as being "owned," being a "servant" to the owners of the company, off-stage characters named Mitch and Murray, who are presumed to be legitimate members of the leisure class. Also, the "certain mark" Williamson refers to can be taken as the division between true predators and non-invidious prey, a manner of "separating the men from the boys." Levene argues a main point in Veblen's denouncement of capitalism when he asks, "Then how do they come up above that mark? With dreck. . . . That's nonsense" (20). Levene argues that the "haves" control the circumstances, the opportunities in a capitalistic society, and that the "have-nots" are forced to resort to such hollow practices as "emulation" to satisfy their need to get ahead. In Levene's case, he argues that he can't move up on the sales board
without leads that are something other than "dead ends," yet, he can't receive the premium leads without doing the impossible by converting some of the sure "no sales" into sales.

Levene then laments that the times are more lean and competitive than before, that grown men didn't have to be pitted against each other in the pursuit of objects: "you know what our sales contest used to be? Money. A fortune. Money lying on the ground" (20). Levene suggests that the "booty" was more or less shared in better times, that he didn't have to compete against his fellow men as he does now. Williamson counters that "the hot leads are assigned according to the board. During the contest. Period. Anyone who beats fifty per . . ." Levene cuts Williamson off, arguing, "That's fucked. That's fucked. You don't look at the fucking percentage. You look at the gross" (21).

Basing the competition on the percentage of converted leads rather than gross sales dollars is a truer measure of one's "marksmanship." Any hunter can achieve x amount of kills if he crosses paths with enough "prey," but only the most skilled hunter can achieve x amount of kills with a limited amount of "prey." Being an older, weaker predator, Levene prefers his odds at accumulating gross rather than finessing percentage.

Williamson then reveals some capitalistic, predatory instincts of his own when Levene resorts to bribery:
Levene: I’ll give you ten percent. (Pause.)
Williamson: Of what?
Levene: Of my end what I close.
Williamson: And what if you don’t close.
Levene: I will close.
Williamson: What if you don’t close...?
Levene: I will close.
Williamson: What if you don’t? Then I’m fucked. You see . . . ? Then it’s my job. That’s what I’m telling you.
Levene: I will close. John, John, ten percent. I can get hot. You know that . . .
Williamson: Not lately you can’t . . .
Levene: Fuck that. That’s defeatist. Fuck that. Fuck it. . . . Get on my side. Go with me. Let’s do something. You want to run this office, run it.
Williamson: Twenty percent. (Pause.)
Levene: Alright.
Williamson: And fifty bucks a lead (23, 24).

After further haggling, Williamson bows out of the agreement and Levene resorts to what has to be interpreted as the most "un-manly" of options: "I’m asking you. As a favor to me? (Pause.) John. (Long Pause.) John: my daughter . . ." (26). Williamson holds firm and deflects Levene’s last grasp for sympathy, apparently an ailing
daughter. Levene then angrily asks Williamson, "Is that it? Is that it? You want to do business that way . . . ?" (26). As established in American Buffalo, "crime" is referred to as "business" as a means of rationalizing the emulation of the predatory, capitalistic leisure class. Williamson finally balks at the offer and leaves Levene at the restaurant booth.

The second scene of the first act of Glengarry Glen Ross takes place at another booth in the Chinese restaurant, where two other salesmen for the company, Moss and Aaronow, are conversing. Moss is "selling," persuading the unsuspecting Aaronow to join him in a plan to burgle the premium leads from the company office. Moss lures Aaronow into his trap by complaining that "The pressure's just too great [...] You go in the door [...] I got to close this fucker, or I don't eat lunch,' 'or I don't win the Cadillac . . . ' We fuckin' work too hard. You work too hard." Moss summarizes by stating, "They killed the goose" (30). Moss, unlike Levene, feigns weakness by "exposing" himself as a fraud in terms of being a true "predator" in the Veblenian sense. He implies that he is not willing to work in "stalking" his "prey" and would rather wait passively for an overabundant "herd" of opportunities to happen by. Moss complains that, "You get a bad month, all of a [...] they got you on this 'board' [...] Some contest board [...] It's not right" (31).
To "sell" Aaronow, Moss sets himself up as the "prey," with his name below the cut-off line on the board being akin to the scent of the fox being presented to the hounds (the top salesmen) before the hunt begins. In Moss's ruse, the successful Ricky Roma is playing "hound" to the "hunters;" Mitch and Murray.

Aaronow, a truly unworthy predator, feels that any semblance of "customer service" in sales is gone, stating "it's not right to the customers" (31). Moss offers faux agreement, lamenting that, "what did I learn as a kid on Western? Don't sell a guy one car. Sell him five cars over fifteen years" (31). While purchasing five cars over fifteen years from a salesman is certainly overly-indulgent, conspicuous consuming, such a record of sales is also evidence of some level of customer service. Unlike true invidious, capitalistic barbarians, the two "unworthy hunters" have no stomach for devouring "the goose that lays the golden eggs." One is sincere, one insincere. Moss suggests that duping a person into one extravagant car is short-sighted. In this respect, Moss (who's acting) and Aaronow have also "failed" in Veblenian terms by not living up to the expectations charged to them as capitalistic "barbarians."

Moss continues to bait Aaronow by adding:

a fuckin' man, worked all his life has got to [...] cower in his boots [...] For some fuckin' 'sell ten thousand and you win the steak knives' [...] 'You lose, then we fire your [...]'
No. It's medieval [...] it's wrong. 'Or we're going to fire your ass.' It's wrong. (32)

It's particularly ironic that Moss should refer to a period in time specifically named by Veblen as a key period in man's "ascension" from his "savage" state to his "barbaric" state. In a Veblenian interpretation, Moss has smugly presented Aaronow with the proverbial "red herring," bait for the "wolf in sheep's clothing" to lead its fellow unsuspecting lamb to the "slaughter."

Moss continues the ruse adding:

we enslave ourselves. To please. To win some fucking toaster [...] and the guy that got there first made up those [...] He made up those rules, and we're working for him. That's the God's truth. And it gets me depressed. I swear that it does. At MY AGE. To see a goddamn: 'Somebody wins the Cadillac this month. P.S. Two guys get fucked.' (35, 36)

Moss continues waxing socialistic by stating:

You don't ax your sales force [...] You fucking build it! Men come...when they build your business, then you can't fucking turn around, enslave them, treat them like children, fuck them up the ass. Leave them to fend for themselves. (36)

Enticing Aaronow with a theme of Marxian/Proletarian sentiment, Moss attempts to "close" the "sale" with a segue into rhetoric more analogous to a Leninist revolutionary:

Someone should stand up and strike back [...] Should do something to them...pay them back. (Pause.) Someone, someone should hurt them. Murray and Mitch [...] Do something to hurt them. Where they live [...] Someone should rob the office. (37, 38)

Moss segues once more, this time to the rhetoric of Veblen's
capitalist barbarian: "if we were that kind of guys, to knock it off, and trash the joint, it looks like a robbery, and take the fuckin' leads out of the files" (38). As part of his ruse, Moss also feigns being a better "talker" than "hunter" however (not unlike American Buffalo's Teach), when Aaronow asks what the leads would be worth:

What could we get for them? I don’t know. Buck a throw . . . buck-a-half a throw . . . I don’t know . . . Hey, who knows what they’re worth, what do they pay for them? All told . . . must be, I’d . . . three bucks a throw . . . I don’t know. (38)

Moss then attempts to seek out and exploit any trace of barbarian proclivity in Aaronow by stating, "It’s a big reward. For one night’s work" (42). Moss hopes that the prospect of "booty" or a "trophy" from the raid will appeal to the "non-barbarian" Aaronow. Moss draws Aaronow further into the trap by telling Aaronow that he’ll have to commit the burglary. Moss explains that he’s been too vocal in complaining about the contest, and he’ll be the prime suspect. Moss then threatens Aaronow with blackmail, by claiming that he’s an accessory before the fact. When Aaronow asks Moss why he’s doing this to him, Moss simply replies, "That’s none of your fucking business" (45). Moss gloats, revealing that Aaronow just made him five thousand dollars. Aaronow replies, "you said that we were going to split five . . . ."

Moss: I lied. (Pause.) Alright? My end is my business. Your end’s twenty-five. In or out.
You tell me, you’re out you take the consequences.

Aaronow: I do?

Moss: Yes. (Pause.)

Aaronow: And why is that?

Moss: Because you listened. (46)

Moss has seemingly made a successful kill, not only duping Aaronow into committing the burglary, but profiting greatly from the efforts of his "hired help." "Exploit," in the Veblenian sense of the word, applies to both sides of the law.

The third and final scene of the play’s first act takes place in another booth at the Chinese restaurant where Ricky Roma, the office’s star salesman, is drawing a potential client into his web. Roma is baiting his prey by singing the praises of capitalistic individualism:

When you die you’re going to regret the things you don’t do. You think you’re queer . . . ? I’m going to tell you something: we’re all queer. You think that you’re a thief? So what? You get befuddled by a middle-class morality . . . ? Get shut of it. Shut it out. You cheated on your wife . . . ? You did it, live with it. (Pause.) You fuck little girls, so be it. There’s an absolute morality? May be. And then what? If you think there is, then be that thing. Bad people go to hell? I don’t think so. If you think that, act that way. A hell exists on earth? Yes. I won’t live in it. (47)

Roma is encouraging his dupe, a middle-class “everyman” named James Lingk, to seize the significant opportunities that cross his path. A distinct trait of the free enterprise system is the encouragement of spending now
rather than saving for the longer term. Salesmen make their living off of convincing their "prey" that they need whatever it is the salesman is selling. Roma continues to corner his prey with capitalist rhetoric:

I do those things which seem correct to me today. I trust myself [...] Stocks, bonds, objects of art, real estate. Now: what are they? (Pause.) An opportunity. To what? To make money? Perhaps. To lose money? Perhaps. To "indulge" and to "learn" about ourselves? Perhaps. So fucking what? What isn’t? They’re an opportunity...All it is is THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU. (Pause.) That’s all it is. How are they different? (Pause.) Some poor newly married guy gets run down by a cab. Some busboy wins the lottery. (Pause.) All it is, it’s a carnival. (49, 50)

Having hooked his "supper," Roma begins to reel Lingk in as he pulls out a small map of undeveloped swamp land in Florida with the conspicuously ostentatious name of "Glengarry Highlands." Roma has whipped Lingk into an individualistic spending frenzy that Roma knows will move him all the farther ahead on the office’s contest board, further evidence of his prowess as a hunter.

Act 2 takes place inside the ransacked, burgled real estate office the next morning. Roma enters to find Aaronow, Williamson, and a police detective named Baylen, who is investigating the case. Roma, being the true capitalist "barbarian" of the group of salesmen, is concerned only about whether his contracts (his trophies from the "raid") were stolen. When Williamson assures Roma that the Lingk contract had already been safely filed at the
bank prior to the break-in, Roma responds in true predatory fashion:

Then I'm over the fucking top and you owe me a Cadillac [...] And I don't want any fucking shit and I don't give a shit, Lingk puts me over the top, you filed it, that's fine, any other shit kicks out you go back. You ... you re-close it, 'cause I closed it and you ... you owe me the car. (54, 55)

The meek Aaronow attempts to smooth the tension between Roma and Williamson by suggesting that the company is insured against theft. Williamson responds stating, "I'm sure that we're insured, George" (55). Roma, ever the individualist, answers: "Fuck insured. You owe me a car" (55).

As Williamson and Baylen return to Williamson's office, Roma calms down long enough to ask Aaronow how he's doing. Aaronow, knowing he's in the presence of "barbarian" greatness, responds: "I'm fine. You mean the board? You mean the board . . . ?" After innocuously answering that he's fine, Aaronow comes to the realization that a "warrior" like Roma must be referring to predatory pursuits like the contest board rather than merely drumming up small talk. The insincere Roma is caught off guard and responds, "I don't ... yes. Okay, the board" (56). Roma then tells Aaronow not to be nervous because he has nothing to hide. Aaronow states that he gets nervous when he talks to the police. Roma ironically responds to Aaronow's admission: "You know who doesn't? . . . Thieves . . . They’re inured to it" (61). Roma, who epitomizes the phrase "grace under
pressure," then tells the weak, non-barbaric Aaronow, "The truth, George. Always tell the truth. It's the easiest thing to remember" (61).

Levene enters the office triumphantly having sold eighty-two thousand dollars worth of property; he eventually notices that the office has been ransacked. At about the same time, Moss exits Williamson's office, where he has just been interrogated by Baylen. Moss, a warrior more due to emulation than effort, displays his lack of a keen mind for the hunt by blundering out, "Anyone talks to this guy's an asshole . . ." (65).

Roma presumably finds it hard to believe that Levene sold such a large amount of property to two known "deadbeats," Bruce and Harriet Nyborg. Ever cunning however, he plays along encouraging Levene to go into detail about his "kill." Displaying his insincerity, Roma suddenly interrupts Levene to tell Moss that there are no good leads. Moss asks if the contracts were stolen, to which Roma replies, "Fuck you care . . .?" (68). Amidst Levene's attempt to tell his story Moss and Roma square off to each other, like two rams. Moss asks, "What does that mean?" to which Roma replies, "It means, Dave, you haven't closed a good one in a month, none of my business, you want to push me to answer you. (Pause.) And so you haven't got a contract to get stolen or so forth" (69). The "defeated" Moss backs down, claiming,
You have a mean streak in you, Ricky, you know that [...] Bring that shit up. Of my volume. You were on a bad one and I brought it up to you you'd harbor it. (Pause.) You'd harbor it a long while and you'd be right [...] You're fucked, Rick--are you fucking nuts? You're hot, so you think you're the ruler of this place [...] I get this shit thrown in my face by you, you genuine shit, because you're top name on the board. (69, 70)

Roma then ridicules Moss for being an emulator of the successful hunter by claiming:

Dave, you know you got a big mouth, and you make a close the whole place stinks with your farts for a week. "How much you just ingested," what a big man you are, "hey, let me buy you a pack of gum. I'll show you how to chew it." (70 71)

Roma makes the same complaint that Teach had made in American Buffalo; having to tolerate "emulators" needing to put on a big display of the supposed position and their supposed prowess that earned them that position. Roma continues berating Moss, and reveals the competitive nature of a capitalistic society: "Your pal closes, all that comes out of your mouth is bile, how fucked up you are . . . " (71).

Moss then exposes himself as a true capitalist as he challenges the leader of his pack: "Who's my pal . . . ? And what are you, Ricky, huh, what are you, Bishop Sheean? Who the fuck are you, Mr. Slick . . . ? What are you, friend to the workingman?" (71). Moss admits he typifies and embodies an uncompromisingly capitalistic philosophy when he admits to having no "pals." Being a capitalist, he also admits his disdain for the less successful,
proletariat-like salesmen Levene and Aaronow when he mockingly accuses Roma of being a "friend to the workingman," an insult intended to cut deep into the hide of a model capitalist like Roma. Moss finally reveals that he possesses less of a stomach for "the hunt" when he decides to get away from such a dangerous, predatory environment: "I’m going home [...] I’m not going home. I’m going to Wisconsin" (71). Moss then makes one last attempt to display predatory bravado by exclaiming to Roma, Levene, and the company in general, "And fuck you. Fuck the lot of you. Fuck you all" (71).

Upon Moss’s departure, Roma then encourages Levene to continue the narration of his big sale. Levene re-focuses on his story and continues, explaining in detail how he slowly, surely convinces the Nyborgs to sign. His manner is similar to the methods Roma earlier used on James Lingk, preaching the ways of the capitalistic opportunist. Levene recalls for Roma what he stated to the couple:

I know that you’re saying ‘be safe,’ I know what you’re saying. I know if I left you to yourselves, you’d say, ‘come back tomorrow,’ and when I walked out that door, you’d make a cup of coffee . . . you’d sit down . . . and you’d think ‘let’s be safe . . . ’ and not to disappoint me you’d go one unit or maybe two, because you’d become scared because you’d met possibility. (72)

Levene then claims, "I did it. Like in the old days, Ricky. Like I was taught" to which Roma responds, "Like you taught me . . ." (73, 74). Roma is subtly suggesting that the student has gone on to best the teacher. Once the protege,
Roma has risen past all to become the mentor to Levene and the other salesmen due to his recent success.

Levene finishes his retelling of his sale by building it to mythic proportions as he proudly proclaims, "They signed, Ricky. It was great. It was fucking great. It was like they wilted all at once. No gesture . . . nothing. Like together. They, I swear to God, they both kind of imperceptibly slumped" (74).

As Levene asks Williamson for more leads, Williamson suggests that, "if the sale sticks, it will be a miracle," to which the offended Levene responds,

> Hey, fuck you [...] You have no idea of your job. A man’s his job and you’re fucked at yours [...] you don’t have the sense, you don’t have the balls. You ever been on a sit? Ever? Has this cocksucker ever been . . . you ever sit down with a cust . . . (75, 76)

Levene berates Williamson for not being suited for the hunt. He then further insults Williamson by suggesting that not only is he not a "barbarian" male, but that he serves the "role" or "purpose" of a woman by "barbarian" standards. Levene refers to his more successful years of selling when he asks Williamson, "Is that luck? Is that some, some, some purloined leads? That’s skill. That’s talent [...] and you don’t remember. ’Cause you weren’t around. That’s cold calling" (76). Levene again betrays himself by denouncing luck now that he has apparently succeeded, when in his earlier conversation with Williamson, he had blamed a streak of bad luck for his lack of success. Like a warrior past
his prime, Levene has to again refer to the his past successful hunts in attempting to maintain his honor.

Soon after, Roma spies his last dupe, James Lingk, entering the office. He quickly gives Levene brief signals to watch for as the two seasoned salesmen enter into a surprisingly polished improvised routine intended to bamboozle Lingk into humbled compliance. Roma correctly hypothesizes that Lingk could only have come to the office to ask to rescind the deal made the previous night. Roma, aware that Williamson stated he'd already sent Lingk's check to the bank, tries to convince Lingk that the check has yet to be cashed, and thus, the three days legally allowed to Lingk to rescind the deal haven't even started.

Chaos soon erupts throughout the office as Baylen, Aaronow, and Williamson burst out of Williamson's office. Aaronow, the one admitted proletarian, complains of mistreatment and a lack of respect by a "barbarian" like Officer Baylen:

No one should talk to a man that way. How are you talking to me that [...] How can you talk to me that [...] I didn't rob [...] Is anybody listening to me [...] ? [...] I work here, I don't come here to be mistreated [...] I want to work today, that's why I came [...] Where does he get off to talk that way to a working man. (87, 88)

What Aaronow considers to define the phrase "working man," is quite different than how the rest of the "barbarian capitalists" define it. Aaronow is treated in the same manner that all of the salesmen's "clients" are treated.
The fact that Aaronow is presumably the low man on the board is testament to his proletarian demeanor.

Lingk meanwhile, has also proven himself to be unworthy as he pleads with Roma that his wife has taken upon herself the "man’s" task of calling the attorney general to inquire into any rights the couple may have to rescind the deal. In a Veblenian interpretation, money is the capitalistic "barbarian’s" greatest weapon, and not suited to be in the hands of a female. Roma attempts to put Lingk’s wife back in "her place" by calling her "prudent," a dirty word to capitalistic salesmen. Prudence is a characteristic more suited to the hunted rather than the hunter. Roma states that such a characteristic is "something women have" and turns to Levene, another "hunter," to damage her credibility further by adding, "This woman can cook" (83).

After Aaronow’s interruption, the conversation resumes between Roma and Lingk as Lingk further degrades himself as a would-be barbarian by telling Roma that his wife "wants her money back [...]. She told me ‘right now’ [...] she told me I have to” (90). When Baylen (one predator) comes for, and distracts Roma (another predator), Lingk (Roma’s "prey") attempts to "escape." Roma pleads with Lingk to reconsider, Lingk admits, "I can’t negotiate [...] I don’t have the power [...] I can’t talk to you, you met my wife [...] She told me not to talk to you [...] She told me I had to get back the check or call the state’s att. . . ." (91-93). Worse
than Aaronow in the eyes of the "barbarian," is Lingk, who is of the "cocksucker" status that Levene earlier accused Williamson of being; that is, a male "reduced" to the "role" of the female, and in this case, switching roles with a female.

Williamson misinterprets the discussion between Lingk and Roma and assures Lingk that (as he had earlier told Roma), his check had indeed been cashed the previous night. This is exactly the situation that Roma was trying to avoid. Now knowing that he indeed has only two more days to cancel the transaction, Lingk "escapes" from Roma's grasp in haste, but not before characteristically apologizing to Roma: "Don't follow me. . . Oh, Christ. (Pause. To Roma:) I know I've let you down. I'm sorry. For . . . Forgive . . . for . . . I don't know anymore. (Pause.) Forgive me" (95).

Roma, furious after watching his big sale fizzle, unleashes a flurry of invective toward Williamson:

You stupid fucking cunt. You, Williamson . . . I'm talking to you, shithead. . . . You just cost me six thousand dollars. (Pause.) Six thousand dollars and one Cadillac [...] Where did you learn your trade. You stupid fucking cunt. You idiot. Whoever told you could work with men? [...] I'm going to have your job, shithead [...] I don't care whose nephew you are, who you know, whose dick you're sucking on [...] What you're hired for is to help us [...] to help men who are going out there to try to earn a living. You fairy [...] You fucking child. (96, 97).

Williamson is again demoted to the "role" of the female, this time by Roma, one with enough "barbarian" clout to make
the accusation stick. As a capitalistic "barbarian," Roma displays his bloodlust for money and material objects, and his respect for the ritual of the "hunt," how it's only suited for men who know how to "stalk" and "prey."

As Roma enters Williamson's office with Baylen, Levene, like a predator past its prime waiting for leftovers, attempts to pick up where Roma left off: "You are a shithead, Williamson [...] You can't think on your feet you should keep your mouth closed [...] You can't learn that in an office [...] You have to learn it on the streets."

Levene then again contradicts the image he is trying to emulate by preaching a philosophy more akin to Marxism than capitalism:

Your partner depends on you [...] You have to go with him and for him [...] or you're shit, you're shit, you can't exist alone [...] you just fucked a good man out of six thousand dollars and his goddamn bonus 'cause you didn't know the shot, if you can do that and you aren't man enough that it gets you, then I don't know what [...] You're going to make something up, be sure it will help or keep your mouth closed. (97, 98)

Emulating a true predator, Levene finishes with, "Now I'm done with you" (98). Williamson then questions Levene on how he knew that he had fabricated his comments to Lingk involving the cashed check (Levene wasn’t present when Williamson had told Roma that the check was sent to the bank). Williamson then threatens Levene by stating that "This is my job on the line, and you are going to talk to me. Now how did you know that contract was on my desk?"
Beaten down yet again, Levene shrinks to a shadow of his emulated image as he desperately retorts, "You’re so full of shit [...] I don’t know what you’re saying" (99, 100).

After finally admitting that he split the cash from the sale of the stolen leads with Moss, Levene retreats back to his true "non-warrior" self by adding, "It was his idea" (101). Ironically, the "feminine" Levene pleads with Williamson to deal with him, claiming that with the Nyborg sale, "I got my balls back" (102). Williamson, showing some vicious invective of his own, then explains to Levene that the Nyborg’s are nuts [...] did you see how they were living? [...] Call up the bank. I called them...I called them when we had the lead...four months ago. (Pause.) The people are insane. They just like talking to salesmen. (103, 104)

When Levene asks why Williamson gave him leads that he knew were no good, Williamson simply, cruelly replies: "Because I don’t like you." When Levene again desperately refers to his ailing daughter, Williamson replies, "Fuck you," and enters his office to talk to Baylen. With this premeditated gesture of viciousness, Williamson has proven that he’s less a "stupid fucking cunt" or "fairy" than Levene, or even Roma, thought. In fact, Levene, for all his braggadocio, is indeed more suited for such a non-barbaric title.
Roma exits Williamson’s office as Williamson enters. He claims to the sullen Levene: ”it’s not a world of men . . . it’s not a world of men, machine [...] there’s no adventure to it. (Pause.) Dying breed. Yes it is. (Pause.) We are members of a dying breed” (105). The "breed" is dying quicker than Roma realizes as Levene has already "passed on" from barbarian "manhood." After witnessing Levene’s smooth improvisation with Lingk, Roma suggests that they become selling partners; that he could learn from Levene. Before Levene has a chance to answer, Baylen enters and escorts him into Williamson’s office. Roma then states to Williamson in an almost subconscious predatory manner, that

when the leads come in I want my top two off the list. For me. My usual two. Anything you give Levene...whatever he gets for himself, I’m taking half. You put me in with him [...] Do you understand? My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours. I’m taking half his commissions--now, you work it out. (107)

Roma, displaying a distorted interpretation of solidarity, recognizes that he is the superior predator to the older Levene, but that Levene may have a few classic "tricks" to teach him. Feeling "generous," Roma the capitalist grants Levene half of Levene’s earnings while keeping all of the earnings made off of his own leads. Roma is exploiting Levene by forcing him to produce half the effort for only a quarter of the profit. In a fitting ending based in a capitalistic environment, Roma, the predator king, walks
away unblemished while relatively well-meaning proletariats like Aaronow and Levene remain victims of the capitalistic system.

Glengarry Glen Ross is loaded with Veblenian innuendo of a different kind. Rather than portray emulators to the thrones of "conspicuous leisure" and "conspicuous consumption," Mamet here has portrayed the sheer viciousness that can infect the capitalistic individual whose only motive is to further their own station in life without regard to how it may affect others. Roma, Moss, Levene, and Williamson demonstrate the kind of back-stabbing malevolence that can permeate a business atmosphere in a capitalistic environment. Even resorting to such betrayal of confidence, two of these four characters still end up losing out. This is another consequence of the capitalistic philosophy.
CHAPTER 6

SPEED THE PLOW

_Speed The Plow_ is an attack on the shallow commercialism that often is the result of the capitalistic philosophy of the United States. The play features three self-centered Hollywood "players" who strive to improve their status among Hollywood’s elite. The play features Bobby Gould, a newly promoted Hollywood producer in charge of searching out potential motion picture projects for his studio; Charlie Fox, who has worked in Gould’s shadow for years; and Karen, Gould’s ambitious temporary secretary. The play concerns the battle taking place in Gould’s conscience as he struggles over whether to "greenlight" a film that is a guaranteed commercial bonanza, complete with a star who’s billing will insure success, or to approve a financially risky project adapted from a challenging novel entitled, _The Bridge; or, Radiation, Half-Life and Decay of Society_. Backing the more mainstream project is Fox, Gould’s unscrupulously savvy, longtime associate; supporting the more literary work is the cunning Karen, a conniving "temp" whom Fox ultimately accuses of being nothing more than a "tight pussy wrapped around ambition" (78* all future references to _Speed the Plow_ will be to the 1988 Grove Press edition). The "rope" in this tug-of-war between such exemplary capitalistic barbarians is Gould, usually a superior barbarian in his own right, who has been lured by
the status-hungry Karen into becoming a more sincere, philanthropic "socialist" concerned with bettering his environment by becoming the would-be producer of a sure commercial flop that would nonetheless be inspirational.

The play begins with Fox entering the newly promoted Gould’s office to find him browsing through passages from *The Bridge; or, Radiation, Half-Life and Decay of Society*, a "courtesy read" that has been forwarded to him by his new boss. Gould reads the book, about how the ruining of the Earth by radiation is part of God’s ultimate plan, aloud to Fox. In the novel, there is a "growth of animalism" (4) as a result of the radiation. This radiation could be interpreted as a metaphor for capitalism and the eventual havoc such a philosophy could wreak. Likewise, the "animalism" described as a result of the radiation could be interpreted to be the barbaric, predatory animus that runs rampant in such an economic system.

When the impatient Fox attempts in vain to capture Gould’s attention, Gould finally lightheartedly accuses Fox of being a "slave to commerce" (4). Gould states to Fox that "you got to have fun [...] or else you’ll die, and people will say ‘he never had any fun’" (4, 5). Gould displays that even "fun" falls under the trappings of Veblen’s theory on the leisure class when he reveals that he is more concerned with his image as one who has fun, than "fun" itself.
Fox then asks how close Gould is to the studio’s top executive, Ross; and Gould reveals a certain amount of "ostentatious display" and "conspicuous leisure" on Ross’s part when he states, "Over ten mil I need Ross’s approval. Under ten mil, I can greenlight it" (5). Ross has employed a servant to "weed out" the "nickel and dime" decisions that fall beneath his concerns. Nevertheless, Gould’s position is a prestigious and powerful one to most people, including the envious Fox. Gould accuses Fox of trying to "promote" him, that is, trying to take advantage of Gould’s new position as a means of furthering his own position. In his new position of prestige and power, Gould has become keenly aware of "promoting" (it is also quite likely that Gould "promoted" others to get where he is). Gould explains that avoiding "promotion" is the purpose behind the maze of channels that earnest "promoters" are made to wade through on a daily basis. Not only are such channels defenses against "promoters," they also serve as exploited labor and conspicuous leisure to reinforce the status of those in Gould’s position.

Fox finally is able to reveal to Gould that he has convinced the superstar Doug Brown to "cross the street" (7), to leave his studio to do a film for Gould’s studio. As the two discuss the details, we are indirectly introduced to the presence of Karen, although at this point, she is nothing more than the ears on the other end of the
phone to which Gould gives orders including an order for coffee.

Fox explains to Gould that he gave the script to Doug Brown's "guy" (8); this "guy" being a means of displaying conspicuous leisure on Brown's part much like the role Gould plays for Ross. As the two are conversing, Gould receives a call from the as yet unseen Karen about a call to Gould and he explains to her in a true "superior" male fashion, "No calls. Just Richard Ross. And we need coffee" (9). Once again the woman is relegated to inferior status in the capitalistic world.

Gould receives a call from Richard Ross, who sets up a meeting with him. At this point, Gould assumes that as the superior barbarian, he shall break the news and pitch the plot to Ross when he asks Fox, "We'll see him in ten minutes [...] Oh, Jesus [...] what's the story? Tell me the . . ." to which Fox responds, "I can tell it. No, you're right. You tell it" (10). Fox starts explaining the film: "Doug's in prison [...] These guys, they want to get him" (11). Knowing that they're targeting this film to the leisure class and emulators of that leisure class, Gould interrupts, adding, "black guys" (11). Gould is aware that the leisure class and the emulators of the class he's targeting is made up predominantly of white males, and having "black guys" as the antagonists reinforces the leisure class notion of white males being superior not only
to females but to males of other races. Fox continues, between Gould’s calls to Karen for coffee, explaining that the "black guys" are going to rape Brown, and he responds that he will eventually have his revenge because he couldn’t live with, as Gould suggests by interrupting, the "degradation" (12). Fox continues: "With his, his knowledge of computers, so on, with his money [...] His links to the Outside" (13). Fox is referring to Brown’s barbaric prowess at the skills necessary to succeed for today’s barbarian. Gould asks about the other necessary trophy for the successful barbarian when he asks, "A girl?" (13), which Fox confirms excitedly.

Knowing the leisure class’s need for status, Gould then reassures Fox on the issue: "I know what you’re going to ask, and I’m going to see that you get it. Absolutely right: You go on this package as the co-producer. (Pause.) The name above the title" (14). The two then exchange compliments on each other’s loyalty and Fox confides that "I hesitate to ask it, to ask for the credit [...] ’Cause I know, anybody was to come in here, exploit you [...] your new ‘position,’" (16). This apology of Fox’s also rings hollow, a mock-humbleness in a society where the humble finish last. Almost embarrassed by such a display of humility, mock or otherwise, the barbarian nature in Gould rises as he offers, "Hey, hey, hey (Gould checks his watch.) Let’s go make some money" (16).
The two then find out that Ross has to fly to New York right away and can’t keep his appointment with them. Fox is worried that the deal will fall through as he only has until ten the following morning to get the deal contracted or he loses Brown for the picture. Gould explains to him that it’s better to present such an opportunity to Ross in person, to conspicuously be the "Bringer of Good News" (18). Fox agrees, admitting, "It’s just, you move up to the big league . . ." (18). Being a prospective member of the true leisure class, a status he will enjoy should the deal go through, Fox is nervous of any delays that could cause the deal (and Brown) to slip through his fingers. After being reassured by Gould, Fox bursts out, "I’m going to be rich and I can’t believe it" (19), to which Gould replies:

Rich, are you kidding me? We’re going to have to hire someone just to figure out the things we want to buy […] The question, your crass question: how much money could we stand to make […] I think the operative concept here is ‘lots and lots […] Great big jolly shitloads of it […] But money […] Money is not the important thing […] What can you do with money? […] ‘Buy’ things with it […] What would you do with them? […] Take them out and dust them, time to time […] I piss on money […] Fuck money […] But don’t fuck ‘people.’ […] it’s a people business […] It’s full of fucken’ people (19-22).

Fox responds: "We’re gonna kick some ass, Bob," to which Gould replies, "That we are" (22). Gould’s mock-eloquent line concerning people is quickly lost among the viciousness of Fox’s lust for power and vengeance. Fox continues,
expounding on his vicious fantasy: "We’re gonna kick the ass of a lot of them fucken’ people [...] We get rolling, Bob. It’s ‘up the ass with gun and camera.’ [...] ‘Cause when you spend twenty years in the barrel...oh maan...I’m gonna settle some fucken’ scores" (22).

Fox then alludes to having felt inferior, like the Veblenian female, when he grudgingly states, "A bunch of cocksuckers out there [...] Ross isn’t going to fuck me out of this...?" (22). Fox has played the role of the Veblenian female to the true barbarians, the leisure class, and now he is ready for vengeance, to assume the role of barbarian and rape and pillage the males of his former class of emulators to remind them of their station in life.

Feeling perhaps a desire to play the barbarian, Fox states that he needs coffee, which prompts Gould to check with Karen on the status of their coffee. Realizing that Gould has a secretary unfamiliar with the office, Fox asks in true leisure class manner, "What, you got a new broad, go with the new job..." (23).

As Karen enters the office with coffee for the two, Fox and Gould continue their self-effacing clowning when they accuse each other of "prostitution:"

**Fox:** You’re just an Old Whore.

**Gould:** Proud of it. Yes, yes.

**Fox:** They kick you upstairs and you’re still just some old whore.
Gould: You're an old whore too.

Fox: I never said I wasn't. Soon to be rich old whore (25).

Fox explains to Karen that he's totally loyal to Gould and that he's never forgotten him "Because the shit of his I had to eat, how could I forget him?" (26). The razzing continues as Fox states to Gould: "You're gonna decorate your office. Make it a bordello. You'll feel at home [...] and come to work in a soiled nightgown"

Gould: I'm a whore and proud of it. But I'm a secure whore [...] (To Karen:) Karen. My friend's stepping up in class. [...] (To Fox:) They're going to plot against you, Charlie, like they plotted against me. They're going to go back in their tribal caves and say, "Chuck Fox, that hack..."

Fox: "That powerful hack..."

Gould: Let's go and steal his job [...]  

Fox: Behind my back. Yes, but in public...?  
They'll say: "I waxed Mr. Fox's car. He seemed pleased." [...] "I blew his poodle. He gave me a smile." (26, 27)

Between their "complimentary" insults, the two men exhibit ample predatory animus toward their fellow barbarians. First, they liken their competition to the equivalents of the subservient Veblenian female, who is at their disposal
as nothing more than a sexual diversion. Gould also makes perhaps a direct Veblenian reference as Mamet’s mouthpiece when he refers to their contemporaries retiring to their tribal caves to plot against the two. This would recall the "savage" or "barbarian" stage analogies used by Veblen in characterizing capitalists. Finally, Fox again displays his lust for power by drawing up images of exploit, even sexual exploit in his references to such menial work as waxing a car and perhaps the ultimate in degrading tasks, "blowing" a poodle; in image, the most "feminine" of canines. These last two tasks also represent a fantasized conspicuous leisure on the part of Fox; having servants display his ability to pay.

In explaining their revelry to the uninformed Karen, Fox explains the philosophy of Hollywood, which serves as a microcosm of the capitalistic nation:

**Fox:** Life in the movie business is [...] like the beginning of a new love affair: it’s full of surprises, and you’re constantly getting fucked [...] That’s the way it is.

**Gould:** It’s a business, with its own unchanging rules. Isn’t that right, Charlie?

**Fox:** Yes, it is. The one thing is: nobody pays off on work.

**Gould:** That is the truth.

**Fox:** Everybody says "Hey, I’m a maverick" [...]
But what do they do? Sit around [...] Waiting for the [...] Endorsement of their Superiors. (29, 30)

Gould then continues the jibing:

**Gould:** You put as much energy in your job as you put into kissing my ass . . .

**Fox:** My job is kissing your ass. (31)

The two then continue their mock exchange of feminine leisure class fantasies when Gould suggests the two go "swishing by Laura Ashley and pick out some cunning prints for my new office;" to which Fox responds, "Whyn't you just paint it with broken capillaries, decorate it like the inside of your nose?" (32). Fox is making a complimentary conspicuous display before Karen of Gould’s apparent abuse of cocaine, a diversion of the more debauched wealthy class. To summarize, Gould finally jokingly states, "You see, all that you got to do is eat my doo doo for eleven years, and eventually, the wheel comes around;" to which Fox replies, "Pay back time" (32).

After Karen leaves the office, Gould tells Fox that he’ll meet him for lunch in half an hour, after he finishes some calculations. Fox accuses Gould of staying to proposition Karen, saying, "You never did a day's work in your life [...] Eleven years I've known you, you're either scheming or you're ziggin' and zaggin', hey, I know you, Bob [...] I know you from the back. I know what you're
staying for" (34). The two then debate whether Karen is "ambitious" enough about making a career for herself in Hollywood that she would have sex with Gould. Feeling the need to defend himself and display his barbaric prowess at the same time, Gould offers Fox a wager on whether he can succeed in having sex with Karen. Fox offers one hundred dollars on the bet. Gould takes advantage of his chance to further enhance his barbaric image by counter-offering a bet of five hundred dollars instead. Fox, perhaps feeling a renewed sense of adventure due to his impending gain in status, agrees and then exits the office to complete business of his own.

Karen again enters the office and Gould begins to lure her into his web. He explains to her the nature of the film business as a means of becoming closer to her and gaining her confidence. He explains that Fox has brought him a verbal commitment from Doug Brown to do a film with Gould's studio. When Karen asks if it's a good film, Gould answers her question by explaining the nature of the film industry (and capitalism) to her:

Well, it's a commodity [...] I don’t know if it is a good film [...] I'm not an artist. Never said I was, and nobody who sits in this chair can be. I'm a businessman [...] The question: Is there such a good thing as a film which loses money? In general, of course. But, really, not. For me, 'cause if the films I make lose money, then I'm back on the streets with a sweet and silly smile on my face, they lost money 'cause nobody saw them, it’s my fault. A tree fell in the forest, what did I accomplish [...] in the job I have, somebody is always trying to "promote" you: to use
something, some "hook" to get you to do something in their own best interest [...] 'Cause this desk is a position to advance, y'understand? (41)

When Karen questions why Gould can't have The Bridge: or, Radiation and the Half-Life of Society. A Study of Decay adapted for film, he explains to her, "This job corrupts you. You start to think all the time 'what do these people want from me?'" (43). Later, Gould adds,

If you don't have principles, whatever they are . . . then each day is hell, you haven't got a compass. All you've got is "good taste"; and you can shove good taste up your ass and fart "The Carnival of Venice." Good taste will not hack it. 'Cause each day the pressure just gets worse. It gets more difficult. (44, 45)

Upon this blatant confession of the nature of Hollywood in particular and capitalism in general, Gould challenges Karen to read the book, see if it's suitable for film, and report to him personally at his home that same evening.

Act 2 takes place at Gould's residence, where Karen is in the midst of describing to Gould how The Bridge: or, Radiation and the Half-Life of Society. A Study of Decay has affected her. She explains that she interprets the author's intent to suggest that "radiation . . . all of it, the planes, the televisions, clocks, all of it is to the one end. To change us--to, to bring about a change" (48). This passage can be understood to be a metaphor for the punishment that the leisure class, and all who emulate it, will receive as a result of its ravenous desire to conspicuously consume which leads to division, rather than
solidarity, of the classes. Karen explains that the radioactive holocaust is actually a blessing in disguise of sorts as it will change all humans

To this new thing. And that we needn't feel frightened. That it comes from God. And I felt empowered [...] when something made sense, you've heard it for the longest time and finally you, you know what it means. So . . . so . . . it's not courage, it's greater than courage. (48)

This passage reflects the author's, and perhaps Karen's, proletarian view of the avarice encouraged by the capitalistic philosophy of the United States, and how the notion of a proletarian uprising (not unlike the Russian revolution of 1917) to quell such greed seems so attractive to the "have-nots" of the nation. Karen conjures up romantic visions of such "revolts" when she offers:

it puts you at Peace. And I'll tell you: like books you find at an Inn, or in a bookshop, when, you know, when you go in, that you'll find something there, something. Old, or, or scraps of paper . . . have you had this . . . ? In a pocket, or, or even on the ground, a phrase . . . something that changes you. And you were drawn to it. (49)

Later in the same brief monologue, Karen reveals the first hint of predatory, capitalistic incentive on her part when she exclaims: "like my coming here. Why? A temporary job. But I thought, who can say I knew, but I thought I knew, I thought: I would find something. (Pause.) Too much. It all came at once. So much. May I have another drink?" (49). Karen is countering Gould's ulterior motives with some of her own. As will be revealed later in the play,
Karen is aware of Gould’s intentions, and she is manipulating those intentions to satisfy her own goal.

As Karen continues about the novel, she explains that "our life is ending. Yes. It’s true. And he says that, that these are the Dark Ages. (Pause.) They aren’t to come, the Dark Ages--they are now" (49). Mamet is perhaps disseminating subtle Veblenian references to the capitalistic man as "barbarian" and the twentieth century as the current period of the era commonly referred to as the "medieval" age; an era that has never passed according to Veblen.

With her impassioned response to a work he assumed to be dreary, Karen has impressively (from a "barbarian" perspective) out-maneuvered Gould in this predatory game of cat and mouse. Gould is a changed man when he confesses: "your report on the book. It means something, it means a lot [...] A freshness, you said a naïveté, but call it a "freshness" [...] I think it’s fantastic" (50). Karen asks to work on the film of the novel and the two debate over the prospects for profitability of such a venture. Karen argues that the public doesn’t want to see movies such as the pending Doug Brown prison film. Gould counters by stating:

Of course they do, that’s what we’re in the business to do [...] that’s what Make the thing everyone made last year. Make that image people want to see. That is what they, it’s more than they want. It is what they require. (56)

This blatant statement of Gould’s invokes leisure class
sentiment (and the sentiment of those who emulate the leisure class) about image requirements for successful emulation; another Veblenian hint that is testament to Hollywood's (and the leisure class') awareness of capitalistic class structure and struggle, and the wants and needs of the various classes to assist them in overcoming their struggle. Gould continues defending his position by claiming, "Everyone Is Trying To "Promote" Me . . . Don't you know that? Don't you care? Don't you care? Every move I make, do you understand? Everyone wants something from me" (57). Ironically, Gould is feeling more the prey, even though his motives for inviting Karen over were definitely predatory. Karen is slowly, successfully luring her prey into her lair. She then cleverly puts Gould in an awkward position by admitting, "I knew what the deal was. I know you wanted to sleep with me. You're right, I came anyway; you're right" (57). Karen is confusing her prey with honesty; she adds, "You wanted something--you were frightened [...] That forced you to lie. I forgive you [...] You know how I can? Because we're just the same" (59). Seeing that she has jabbed her opponent into a delirious state, Karen goes for the knockout:

In the world. Dying. We prayed for a sign. A temporary girl. You asked read the book. I read the book. Do you know what it says? It says that you were put here to make stories people need to see. To make them less afraid. It says in spite of our transgressions--that we could do something. Which would bring us alive. So that we needn't feel ashamed. (Pause.) We needn't feel frightened.
The wild animal dies with pride. He didn't make
the world. God made the world. You say that you
prayed to be pure. What if your prayers were
answered? You asked me to come. Here I am.
(59, 60)

Waxing so prophetically, Karen has politely torn into
Gould's jugular, killing his animistic, predatory spirit
with an uncustomary kindness. Ironically, the female has
proven to be the superior warrior—or so she thinks.

Act 3 begins the next morning in Gould's office, where
an unsure Fox is confessing that he has doubts (perhaps
being an emulator of the wealthy for too long) asking
himself, "Am I worthy to be rich?" (61). Fox wants
reassurance from Gould that he is, indeed, to be the co-
producer of the prison film, and that this is only the
beginning of their new professional relationship as co-
producers. Fox then admits "a certain amount of jealousy,
toward you [...] And the other thing, talk about envy, is, a
certain extent, I was riding, several years, on your
coattails" (62, 63). After admitting his jealousy toward
Gould, Fox thanks him for being "man enough, that you were
friend enough, you never brought it up, you never rubbed it
in" (63). In a Veblenian interpretation, the doubts about
Gould's actual level of barbarian worthiness begin to fester
at this point as Gould states to Fox that he has decided to
decline on the prison film and "greenlight" the "eastern
sissy writer's" radiation project instead. Not believing
Gould, Fox's barbarian sensibilities take hold as he
inquires about the wager between the two regarding Karen. Speaking in a demeaning manner toward Karen (as is appropriate in discussing the lower status sex), Fox asks Gould, "Do I owe you, for sure, the five c? Fess up [...] The broad come to your house? [...] You fuck the temporary girl? You fuck her" (63). Gould disregards the query and repeats to Fox that he alone is going to present to Ross the proposal for the radiation film. Still not quite understanding Gould’s meaning, Fox pleads with Gould to keep him in their informal partnership saying, "Bob, to to, finally get a position where I can be equal; where I brought you the film, it means a lot to me" (64). Fox is displaying to Gould his need to be of equal status to Gould and his class, a class he has been emulating for as long as he can remember. From the start, Fox has been most concerned with the status that would come with the prison film. Presuming he would be paid the same "finder’s fee" whether he co-presents the project to Ross or not; and whether he receives the "co-producer" credit or not, Fox proves how important status and inclusion in the leisure class is to him.

When Gould is finally able to impress upon Fox the fact that he has no intentions of "greenlighting" the prison film, Fox is beside himself as he explains to Gould that Doug Brown only gave him until ten that morning to solidify a contract on the film; now Gould’s vacillating has cost him the chance to sell the project elsewhere. Fox’s loyalty
to Gould, due to financial incentive or otherwise, has possibly cost him the project. A more cagey leisure class "barbarian" would have immediately shopped the project to all the studios to obtain the best offer. Fox, as well as Gould, have proven that they have much to learn before they are to become respected leisure class warriors.

Fox then appeals to capitalistic reason when he frankly states to Gould:

Now, listen to me: when you walk in this door, Bob, what you’re paid to do [...] is make films that make money--you are paid to make films people like. And so gain for yourself a fortune every day. This is what Ross pays us for. This is the thing he and the stockholders want from us. (66)

For Fox, Ross and the stockholders, the leisure class, dictate what will or will not be suitable for the "movie going public," predominantly the emulators of the leisure class. Aesthetic does not play a part in the decision-making process in Hollywood or the United States. Fox reasons with Gould that he’ll be "off the sports list" (66), a phrase referring to the leisure class in general; once Gould is off such a "list," he is also off the leisure class roster.

To display his good intentions, Gould tells Fox to present the project to Ross by himself. Fox argues: "I take Ross the film, he’ll make the film, and he’ll give me a ‘thank you.’ You know that. I need you. I need your protection . . ." (68). Through this admission, Fox has
revealed that he has come to Gould less out of loyalty than for a more prudent, practical motive; to achieve more money and the good repute that follows such a reward. Gould can only respond to Fox’s bewilderment by explaining his newfound enlightenment as follows: "I think [...] that we have a few chances [...] To do something which is right [...] I’ve wasted my life, Charlie. My life is a sham, it’s true. But I think I’ve found something" (68, 69). Fox responds by berating Gould:

you’re gonna spend ten million dollars for a piece of pussy [...] Are you getting old? What is this? Menopause? Your 'life is a sham'? Two days in the new job, you can’t stand the strain. ...? They’re gonna invalid you out, your name will be a punchline in this town. (69)

To hurt Gould, and perhaps to startle him back into "reality," Fox resorts to likening Gould to weaker, non-barbaric images of females and the mentally and physically weak. Fox punches Gould and continues to insult him in a flurry of invective:

you wimp, you coward [...] you fool--your fucken’ sissy film--you squat to pee. You old woman . . . all my life I’ve been eating your shit and taking your leavings. . . . Fuck you, the Head of Production. Job I could of done ten times better’n you, the press, the money, all this time, and now you’re going to be some fucken’ wimp, cost me my, my, my . . . fortune? Not in this life pal. (70)

Fox then calms down and tries to reason with Gould by explaining that people come to Hollywood for only one reason: "Everyone wants power. How do we get it? Work. How do they get it? Sex. The End" (71). Fox is explaining to
Gould "warrior to warrior" that the female of the species, incapable of the true hard labor expended by males routinely, has to use sex as a bargaining chip to achieve her goals of leisure class status. Fox continues:

The broad wants power. How do I know? Look: She's out with Albert Schweitzer working in the jungle? No: she's here in movieland, Bob, and she trades the one thing that she's got, her looks, get into a position of authority--through you. Nobody likes to be promoted; it's ugly to see, but that's what happened, babe. I'm sorry. She lured you in. 'Come up to my house, read this script . . .' She doesn't know what that means? Bob: that's why she's here. (71)

Gould counters that Karen "understands" him, "she knows what I suffer." Fox responds with a monologue that bluntly delineates the maxim of capitalism:

'What you suffer. . . ?' 'What you suffer. . . ?' You're a whore. . . . Bob. You're a chippy . . . you're a fucken' bought-and-paid-for whore, and you think you're a ballerina cause you work with your legs? You're a whore. You want some sympathy? You don't get none. You--you think you can let down. You cannot let down. That's what they pay the big bucks for. This is what you put up with you wanna have two homes. (71, 72)

Fox suggests that there is a Faustian nature to capitalism, particularly capitalism interpreted in a Veblenian light, as alluded to by Fox with his reference to multiple home-owning. Fox indirectly admits that females can prove to be shrewd predators in their own right when he states, "She wants something from you. You're nothing to her but what you can do for her" (72). Gould tells Fox to leave his office noting, "read the plaque on my door. I am your superior" (74). Backed into a corner by Fox, Gould is desperate to
escape his interrogation. He finally resorts to reminding Fox of his higher leisure class status as bluntly noted by the plaque on his door. Fox requests that Gould call Karen into the office so that he may ask her one question: Would she have slept with Gould had he not "greenlighted" that radiation film. When Karen admits that she wouldn't Fox accuses Karen of being "a Tight Pussy wrapped around Ambition. That's who you are, pal" (78). Though he loathes Karen, Fox does pay her a compliment buried in his verbal assault; he calls her "pal," a slang term historically reserved for males. Fox considers Karen a warrior to be reckoned with, to be judged by male standards of barbarian excellence. Gould then laments to Karen, "You told me to Be a Man . . ." (78). Karen is so clever, she almost succeeded in reversing female and male roles with Gould, with Karen speaking as a "male" to the more "effeminate" Gould.

Fox, satisfied that Gould has changed allegiance back to him, calls Ross' secretary and states that the two will be late as Gould exits to the washroom. Karen then confesses to Fox: "I think I'm being punished for my wickedness." Fox then chides her for having the poor timing of an inexperienced predator: "you made your move on something wasn't ever going to make a movie. Cause the people wouldn't come" (80). To Fox, ability and potential do not necessarily translate into prowess. A successful
capitalistic barbarian must have all the attributes of a worthy warrior. Fox then adds the "death blow" to his opponent when he claims, "You ever come on the lot again, I'm going to have you killed" (80). Fox is again feeling like a worthy leisure class barbarian; even to the point of displaying conspicuous leisure by suggesting that he can employ servants to do his killing for him if he so pleases.

As Gould re-enters from the washroom, Fox sympathizes with him, but dashes any hopes that Gould may harbor for a more Marxian state: "Well, Bob, you're human. You think I don't know? I know. We wish people would like us, huh? To Share Our Burdens. But it's not to be" (81). Fox then consoles Gould by prodding him on with a pep talk laced with leisure class reinforcement,

Well, so we learn a lesson. But we aren't here to 'pine,' Bob, we aren't here to mope. What we are here to do? Bob? After everything is said and done? What are we put on earth to do?

Gould: We're here to make a movie.

Fox: Whose name goes above the title?

Gould: Fox and Gould. (81)

Fox: Then how bad can life be?

Interpreted in a Veblenian light, Speed the Plow becomes more than a play about the relationships and dealings of shallow, crass Hollywood stereotypes. A Veblenian interpretation uncovers the decay of morality
caused by the leisure class and its commitment to encourage class struggle through pecuniary emulation; the effort to attain status based on unattainable (for most) pecuniary qualifications established by the leisure class. Fox and Gould are proud of their status among the leisure class to the point of playful, self-effacing mockery and accusations of being capitalistic whores. For these men, being considered a "whore" is the utmost compliment; the equivalent of being called a worthy predator or barbarian. True to Veblen's interpretation of the leisure class, inferior females ultimately can't hold up to such stringent standards of excellence as put forth by the men of the leisure class.
David Mamet's acknowledged credit to Thorstein Veblen as an influence upon his playwriting appears, after thorough investigation, to be warranted. Veblen's assertion that capitalism promotes "predatory animus" in those within the socio-economic system has been conceptualized by Mamet in the four plays that served as case studies for this thesis. Capitalistic man is driven by more than physiological needs. The need for a respectable image plays a large part in his motives. Mamet's characters are driven largely by their need to improve their self-esteem. In a capitalistic society, self-esteem is directly dependent upon successfully projecting a predatory image, the most respectable image the capitalistic man can achieve. That several principle characters fail to realize this status is testament to the Darwinian nature of capitalism, where "survival" only comes to the fittest.

In *American Buffalo*, Teach, Don and Bobby all prove to be unworthy predators. Veblen stresses that emulation will take place in capitalistic society, where class division and struggle is a common characteristic. Don and Teach typify the emulative barbaric predator; all talk and no significant action. When the time for barbaric demonstration is at hand, they fail, and are exposed as insignificant frauds. Bobby is a better person (from a socialistic perspective)
than his cohorts only in that he has no predatory animus to speak of; he is merely proving his allegiance and maintaining his awkward "friendship" with Don and Teach. From a capitalist's viewpoint, however, Bobby is not a better person than Don or Teach, he is actually worse. Bobby is truly pathetic because he does not even know enough to emulate barbaric, predatory traits.

In The Water Engine, Charles and Rita Lang also fail decidedly in their attempt to attain leisure class status through the success of the water engine. Lang's initial greed, fueled by leisure class-inspired fantasy, causes him to turn down a quick buyout offer from the leisure class' representative, Oberman, and die a tortuous, premature death at the hands of the leisure class; a class he cannot join because his proletarian instincts eschew predatory animus.

Glengarry Glen Ross details the hapless attempts of two supposed warriors, Shelly Levene and Dave Moss, who resort to an office break-in to obtain sales leads that will boost them to the status of their office's one salesman with true barbaric prowess: Ricky Roma. While Levene and Moss are competent enough to go through with their scheme (unlike Don and Teach), their lack of true barbaric prowess ultimately spells their failure within the capitalistic system when Levene slips up and exposes himself. Roma however, is this study's first example of a leisure class emulator with enough predatory animus and barbaric prowess to potentially
carry him to true leisure class status. Even Williamson, despite his misjudgment concerning Lingk, shows leisure class promise when he proves cunning enough to catch Levene’s slip and ruthless enough to admit giving Levene bad sales leads simply because he doesn’t like him.

Finally, *Speed the Plow* takes us up the social ladder to get a more detailed look at an actual member of the leisure class (more so than the fleeting glimpses of Oberman in *The Water Engine*). Bobby Gould is a man who has climbed up to leisure class status and nearly loses it due to a weak moment of Marxist sentiment that is evoked by Karen, a would-be barbarian who is ultimately out-gunned by a veteran of leisure class emulation and barbaric, predatory demonstration, Charlie Fox, another likely candidate for eventual induction into the leisure class.

In constructing a Veblenian literary analysis of the plays of David Mamet, it is advantageous to formulate a character hierarchy based on Veblen’s concept of “predatory animus.” In the Mamet plays considered in this study, most true leisure class characters are off-stage characters: Mitch and Murray, the sales company owners in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and their chief competitor, Jerry Graff; all of the business owners that Oberman represents, who have a mutual interest in snuffing Lang’s water engine; and Ross, the studio head in *Speed the Plow*. Oberman and Gould also are of a lower station in the leisure class as they work
specifically for others who are higher, yet are of a certain wealth and predatory inclination to ensure inclusion. Keeping the true leisure class characters off stage is an effective means of displaying how "untouchable" the leisure class is, as well as how transparent and observable the lower classes are in their efforts to emulate the leisure class.

Next on the Veblenian hierarchy are the worthy emulators of the leisure class. These characters are not of sufficient wealth or power to be included in the leisure class, but have demonstrated enough predatory animus to eventually arrive there. Morton Gross, Ricky Roma, John Williamson and Charlie Fox have proven to have enough barbaric prowess to be seriously considered as leisure class candidates.

Lower on the hierarchy are the failed emulators of the leisure class. These are the characters who have been exposed as frauds in their attempt to emulate leisure class animus. They are neither wealthy enough or predatory enough to be taken seriously: Don and Teach; Levene and Moss, and Karen. Fletcher, the off-stage hoodlum from *American Buffalo*, also is categorized here due to his victimization from the mugging. This incident deals a serious blow to his carefully cultivated image as a warrior.

The bottom levels of the Veblenian hierarchy are for those who make little or no effort to emulate the leisure
class, and therefore ultimately serve as little more than prey for the true predators in capitalistic society. These characters often have a more socialistic perspective in their battle against capitalistic exploitation (though often unwittingly): Charles and Rita Lang ultimately forsake their leisure class aspirations and die, Christ-like, for their defiance; James Lingk (the weak link in a capitalistic society of predators) is Roma’s spineless prey; and finally, George Aronow is so lacking in predatory inclination, Moss drops him from the scheme even though he had successfully cornered him into helping.

One character on a level still lower is American Buffalo’s Bobby, the unwitting champion of socialism in his simplistic, non-profit oriented efforts at comraderie. Where the other "non-emulators" of the food chain were tempted by the promises of capitalism (the Lang’s with opulence and recognition; Lingk with excellent returns on his investment; and Aronow with his unsuccessful scheming attempts at higher commissions), Bobby was never motivated by profit potential. For Bobby, the motive behind the purchase of the buffalo head nickel or the participation in the burglary is comraderie, simple male bonding.

While the characters who are categorized in the lower levels of the hierarchy do demonstrate some profit incentive, it is without sufficient predatory drive to result in anything but failure from the perspective of the
accomplished barbarian. Where Don, Teach, Fletcher, Levene, Moss, and Karen demonstrate sufficient animus to be considered potential predators, the Langs, Lingk, and Bobby do not, and are therefore to be considered along with the rest of the inhabitants in the lowest of the four classes as non-predatory and even actual prey for the predatory groups on the hierarchy.

The purpose of this study has been two-fold: to further develop the largely overlooked theory of Veblenian literary interpretation and apply it thoroughly to four plays of David Mamet to examine how such a theory works rather than letting the theory merely serve as a footnote or allusion, which has been the case so far. Likewise, a Veblenian application also introduces a new approach to Mamet scholarship, one that constructs a socio-economic interpretation of the canon by establishing a hierarchy of economic relationships and character motives, as a compliment to the more common linguistic examinations concerning Mamet's rhythmic, street-wise dialogue and psychological realism.

Concerning the application of a Veblenian literary interpretation to the four Mamet plays addressed in this study, American Buffalo dramatizes the evils of Veblen's "pecuniary emulation;" or, imitating the viciousness of the wealthy. As the behavior of the leisure class is emulated by the working class, avarice and distrust work their way
through the class, systematically destroying the unified functions of the body like a cancer.

*The Water Engine* displays the ignorance of the working class, and how that ignorance is reinforced by the leisure class as a means of maintaining the capitalistic status quo. The leisure class uses such propaganda as progress exhibitions to serve as "slaughterhouses" to destroy the free will of the working class "sheep" who enter unwittingly.

*Glengarry Glen Ross* is a parable on how individualism can destroy society. As individuals are pitted against one another, an atmosphere of distrust permeates society and results in a lack of constructive productivity for society as a whole. This play demonstrates Veblen's theory that any acquisition, even theft, is considered honorable in capitalistic society since it furthers the barbaric repute of the individual in question. Such an ideal, in Veblen's opinion, serves to destroy any sense of comraderie in society.

Finally, *Speed the Plow* exposes the reality of what is left behind when society is stripped of any sense of morals or ethics as a result of leisure class ideals and the emulation of those ideals by the lower classes. *Speed the Plow* is a play about what capitalistic society has become in the near-century since Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* was first published.
There is room to explore other aspects of Veblen's socioeconomic theory as it pertains to literary studies. As has been alluded to in the introduction, writers from the Victorian era (Veblen's era as well) are certainly appropriate subjects to continue putting under Veblenian scrutiny. Many novelists of today, mainly in the romance genre, also serve as excellent subjects to study to measure how far (if at all) we have evolved as a culture since Victorian times. Novelists like Danielle Steel and Judith Krantz immediately can be examined to reassess the 1980s and its obsession with pecuniary display.

As has been demonstrated in this thesis, the application of such Veblenian theories as predatory animus, pecuniary emulation and conspicuous waste, as well as the "Veblenian hierarchy" model introduced in this study, is pertinent and imperative to examining ourselves and our capitalistic society. Have we evolved over time as much as we believe? Applying a Veblenian literary theory to our popular culture (theatre, motion pictures, television, literature, art, and certainly advertising) allows us to examine these issues more objectively and conscientiously. This study has demonstrated the need for such an examination; both as a means of bringing to light capitalism's crude, misguided ideals (in the form of predatory animus, pecuniary emulation, and conspicuous waste), and in suggesting that there are higher, more
enlightened ideals for our culture to strive for; primarily the sharing of both burden and profit.

Also, a Veblenian interpretation of drama such as this study can serve as a tool for theatrical productions. Directors, dramaturgs, actors, and designers can all benefit by being introduced to the metaphorical possibilities a Veblenian approach to Mamet offers. Other Mamet works, while not as business-oriented, can also profit from a Veblenian reading; particularly concerning Veblen's more general theory of "predatory animus" and the individualism associated with it. Such plays would include: *Bobby Gould In Hell*, *Edmond*, *A Life In The Theatre*, *The Poet and the Rent*, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, and *The Shawl*.

Mamet has also written or adapted several motion picture screenplays that would serve as excellent subjects for Veblenian reading: *Hoffa*, *Homicide*, *House of Games*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Untouchables*, and *The Verdict* are all appropriate for Veblenian interpretation.

Other playwrights or screenwriters that would serve to further a Veblenian approach to literary criticism include Frank Loesser (*How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*), Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*), Nicholas Pileggi (*Casino* and *Good Fellas*), Mario Puzo (*The Godfather*), Elmer Rice (*The Adding Machine*), and Quentin Tarentino (*Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *True Romance*) to name a few.
Both David Mamet and Thorstein Veblen condemn capitalism and the self-serving greed it encourages; greed that spreads throughout society like a cancer. Mamet's business plays are largely populated by capitalism's losers; those who have attempted to play with the leisure class at their own game by transparently emulating them. Such braggadocio without backing is doomed to fail when wealth is the final litmus test. Mamet and Veblen both appear to be in agreement that the majority in a capitalistic society stands to lose when it bases all evaluation and judgment according to standards that are exclusively economic. As the United States enters an election year in which conservatism is being championed as moderation and liberalism struggle to maintain an identity, It appears that both Mamet and Veblen's theses are more pertinent than ever.
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