

Lyotard's Notion of Grand Narratives in *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*

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Abstract

Arthur Miller (1915-2005) and David Mamet (1947) are two of the world's most renowned dramatists due to writing plays like *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) which are concerned with the theme of American dream and how the blind faith in it may lead to moral corruption. These two dramatists' obsession with this dream's falsehood is in accordance with Jean-François Lyotard's outlook about the death of metanarratives like the American dream that has been replaced with some micro-narratives. This could be investigated clearly through *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* which doom the deceitful capitalist society by showing the bitter reality of the American dream. This paper attempts to analyze these two plays through Lyotard's notions of the "metanarrative" and "little narrative" to discuss how his distrust towards the metanarratives and objective realities can be traced in these plays. The results will show that Miller uses the modern approach in his play to criticize the destructive effects of capitalistic system and also show how the ideals of American dream turn into nightmare. On the other hand, Mamet uses the postmodern approach to play with ideals of American dream and show how the \inalienable right of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness turn into competitive world, and the land of opportunity has become a lottery in which one will reach to the top by defeating all others.

KeyTerms: American dream, Grand narratives, Micronarratives, The Postmodern Condition

1- Introduction

Modernism in literature is chiefly distinguished by following a feeling of awareness of or self-consciousness. As a literary style modernism was established after the First World War. On the other hand, postmodernism is characterized by some techniques such as paradox and unreliable narrator. Postmodernism appeared as an objection against the Second World War. Concerning the American dream, these two genres used to be regarded as developing the idea of American dream after two wars and protesting against the outdated beliefs which brought about the American dream's destruction.

These two genres were established in order to reflect upon the confusion and the inner conflicts which challenge the beautiful representation of the American dream. A distinguished feature of modernism and postmodernism is self-awareness. This feature played a very important role in American dramatists' tendency to show the actuality of the world which has been filled with illusions and empty dreams. These writers were discontented with the social rules that had influenced the American literature. Thus, modernism and postmodernism genres were developed to awaken the Americans who were distracted by false dreams.

The violence of both World War I and World War II was so great that the literary figures attempted to show reaction by crumbling all false impressions of the American dream. This issue caused the literature to be more skeptic and suspicious about the old traditions and impressions which had been leading the American life for a long time. The concept of the American dream has changed in most of the modern and postmodern literary works. This drastic change was the result of the people's shaken beliefs after the two horrific wars which were the origin of the modern and postmodern man's disillusion, disappointment, and uncertainty. This change which very soon found its way to people's mind and criticized the whole obliteration and distortion of their beautiful dreams.

American drama consists of a lot of plays which are classic, modern, and postmodern. Each category follows some particular themes. In this regard, we can say that the state of the society in different aspects like economic, political, social and cultural aspects has affected the plays and dramatists to a great extent. Some of these well-known playwrights include Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Eugene O'Neill.

The significance of these dramatists is their intention to write about the social problems. It can also be claimed that their writings are all included in the modern classification of the plays because of having similar features such as language, themes, style, and characterization. In these plays it has been attempted to comment on the American society. In addition, they all reflect their authors' perspective about the notion of the American dream.



2- Significance and innovation of the Study

The significance of this study is that it will examine the postmodern features in Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and compare these features with *Death of a Salesman* as a modern play. Moreover, this study focuses on transformation of American dream from a modern critical viewpoint to a parody that seemed to play with decline of the ideals of American dream in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Both Mamet and Miller flout the ideals of American dream that was shaping the notion of American identity from different perspectives.

Miller in *Death of a Salesman* attacks the dark aspects of American dream through a critical lens, while Mamet in his *Glengarry Glen Ross* tackles with the ideals of this concept as a parody. This study is also significant because it bases on Lyotard's theory of fall of Grand narrative. He believes that the grand narratives like American dream do not have any influence in postmodern era.

Moreover, the innovation of this study is that it will analyze the postmodern features in *Glengarry Glen Ross* and how the concept of American dream transforms from a modern critical viewpoint in *Death of a Salesman* to a parody in *Glengarry Glen Ross* based of Lyotard's philosophy who thinks of postmodernism as the age of such metanarratives' bankruptcy.

3- Background of the Study

As one of the most remarkable modern dramatists, Arthur Miller is the subject of many books, because upto now his *Death of a Salesman* has attracted a lot of attention. For example, *The Cambridge companion to Arthur Miller* (1997) by Bigsby studies Arthur Miller's plays by analyzing their social and political context and the influence of some factors like the Depression in them. This companion also includes the main studies of Miller and a comprehensive account of his work. The reason I use this book is that its fifth chapter presents useful materials about *Death of a Salesman* and says that this play "presents a rich matrix of enabling fables that define the myth of the American dream" (p. 60).

Bigsby (2005) has also investigates Arthur Miller's works such as his plays, poetry, fiction and films. He also gives a detailed account of how Miller's works were influenced by the events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its seventh chapter is exclusively about *Death of a Salesman* and how The idea for *Death of a Salesman* had long been in Miller's mind. The perception of the American Dream is also analyzed in this play because it is indicated that "Willy Loman's American dream is drained of transcendence. It is a faith in the supremacy of the material over the spiritual" (p. 105).

Khodambashi Emami's article (2011) discusses that Arthur Miller and his plays has been praised by Marxist critics as a strong critic of capitalist societies.



This paper makes use of Frankfurth school's views and exposes some faults and contradictions in characterization, plot and other aspects of the play that would question Miller's disapproval of capitalism (pp. 353-358).

Regarding Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Dorff (2000) has also studied issues such as feminism, ethnicity, the mythological land motif, and the discourse of anxiety, gendered language, and Mamet's vision of America and provides deeper insights into his works. However, his part has solely focused on *Glengarry Glen Ross*. His book also includes an interview with Sam Mendes as the director of the greatly celebrated 1994 revival of *Glengarry Glen Ross* in London (pp. 195-209).

Greenbaum's "Brass Balls: Masculine Communication and the Discourse of Capitalism in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*" (1999) is about how David Mamet has referred to *Glengarry Glen Ross* as a —gang comedy about men, work, and unbridled competition. It also analyzes this masculinity and the discourse of capitalism. Additionally, this article talks about the means by which Mamet's characters, who are constituted by the demands of capitalism, use language as a source for supremacy and manipulation.

4- Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research will study the transformation of American dream from modern to postmodern perspectives. What is going to be done here is the analysis of how postmodernism could affect the lives of American people. Postmodernism is a new intellectual era in which, man tries to liberate himself from the oppressive structures of the past. It embraces fragmentation and conflict in matter of history, identity and culture.

It is anti-realist, holding that it is impossible to speak thoroughly about an existing reality. It refuses that reason or any method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge of reality. Postmodern thinkers insist that modernity failed to bring the social order to society because it searched for an external reference such as God, reason, and science on which to build a philosophy. For postmodern thinkers, there is no such point of reference because there is no ultimate truth that can unify the elements of the universe and, thus, there is no absolute reality.

According to Chris Baldick's (1990) postmodernism is —a disputed term that [...] in its simplest and least satisfactory sense [...] refers generally to the phase of 20th century Western culture that succeeded the reign of high Modernism, thus indicating the products of mass television since the mid-1950s (p. 201). In fact, postmodernism refers to disconnected feelings, eclectic reminiscence, nonrefundable simulacra, and licentious frivolity, in which the assets of deepness, consistency, meaning, innovation, and validity are supposed meaningless.

Moreover, it rejects the view that any cultural phenomenon can be interpreted as the effect of single reality. For postmodern thinkers, there is no such thing as "objective reality" and all definition and depiction of the truth are subjective. Truth itself is relative, depending on the nature and variety of cultural and social influences in human's life. Among postmodernist theorists, this study will mainly focus on Lyotard's ideas because his philosophy is chiefly characterized by a strong objection against meta-narrative and as Jenkins (1997) declares, "he famously defines postmodernism as incredulity towards meta-narratives" (p.33).

According to Lyotard, doubt, skepticism, and disbelief in such metanarratives are what shape the postmodern world. He suggests that metanarratives should be replaced with modest narratives. Grand narratives are claimed to form a particular feature of postmodernism which are "narratives about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, proposing a society legitimation through the anticipated completion of a (as yet unrealized) master idea" (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995, pp. 102-3).

One of these meta-narratives belongs to the concept of American dream as one of the strongest grand-narratives. For Lyotard, postmodernism is regarded as the end of meta-narratives, making him believe that post modernity is an age of 'meta-narratives' shattering. In other word, postmodernity is an age of plurality and fragmentation.

Although these two plays which will be discussed in this study criticize the ideals of the American, their outlooks are different. Miller in *Death of a Salesman* attacks the dark aspects of the American dream. But Mamet in *Glengarry Glen Ross* plays with the ideals of the American dream and he shows how this dream became as a false mythos in a capitalist and materialist and the way it conceals the truth of the original American dream.

By applying the theory of Lyotard (1984), this study will try to show and prove how this postmodern critic underlines the ever-growing distrust of the postmodern condition and the reliance on some form of "transcendent and universal truth":

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives [...] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language [...] Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? (pp. xxiv-xxv)

As stated before, Lyotard criticizes metanarratives like Marxism which is closely related to the grand narrative of American dream because he believes that these metanarratives will bring about chaos and are not reliable. Lyotard believes that in the postmodern period each person can shape the reality according his or

her point of view. Reality becomes a human construction constituted by each individual's dominant social group.

There exists no center, no one can claim it alone understands or has absolute truth. For Lyotard, capitalism and the rapid developments in science and technology since world war have put an end to grand narratives. He considers the capitalist society as "a vanguard machine dragging humanity after it, dehumanizing it" (1984, p. 63) because it reduces everything to a lesser being.

In both *Death of a Salesman* and *Glengarry Glen Ross*, we see how this dream makes the main characters wish to achieve success and freedom; however, not only do they not achieve this, but they are also imprisoned by their greed which costs their own freedom. According to this dream, all people are equal and have the same chance of life, freedom, and cheerfulness. But what the two plays demonstrate is a different picture because each individual's attempts to be more successful destroy this equality and can be regarded as the main reason of class distinction in American society.

In *Death of a Salesman*, we see how Willy's understanding of American dream is different from the other characters, leading to his unsuccessfulness and critical condition. In the other play which is by Mamet shows that different characters are trying to be more successful than the other ones in order to be richer but the same American dream makes them commit diverse crimes. Both of the two the plays show the destructive effects of this dream on the characters.

Actually, these two dramatists criticize the ideals of American dream from different outlooks that will give the idea of transformation of American dream from a critical lens to a parody. Miller in his play *Death of a salesman* criticizes the dark aspects of this dream and shows how modern American dream turned into nightmare.

On the other hand, Mamet in *Glengarry Glen Ross* plays with ideals of American dream and shows how these principles like "The inalienable right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are directed exclusively to the elect of competitive world, and "The land of equal opportunities" has become a lottery in which only one will reach to the top by defeating all others. What this dream suggests as the path to success and failure. In both of the two plays we observe a kind of capitalist culture: who is at the top is happier and more successful and who is at the bottom is poorer and with no place among the others even in his family.

5- Discussion and Result:

5-1 Analysis of *Death of a Salesman* Regarding its Objective Reality

One of these significant writers is Arthur Miller because an in-depth analysis of his texts will prove what a modern American drama is. His plays such



as *A View from the bridge* and *death of a salesman* verify this claim. Dramatists like Miller try to depict the everyday realities like the depression, crisis in religion, and the incessant struggle to reach the American dream. Even the stage directions of Miller's plays particularly *Death of a Salesman* describe a situation signifying the state that the events on stage are like a dream in which illusions dominate the reality. Such directions chiefly represent the dream-like essence of Willy's life and everyday American life in general.

In Miller's *Death of a salesman*, Willy as the main character lives in a capitalistic world while he has nothing because of building his life around dreams. His illusions have taken the place of any reality in his mind, —The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want|| (Miller, 1998). Here we can see how controlling the illusions are in Willy's life because he is trying to live the American dream but he doesn't succeed; hence, he begins to believe his own lies and so does his son Happy, —I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream|| (Miller, 1998). Therefore, illusion rules any kind of reality for Willy.

However, Miller makes his audience perceive the reality through the character Biff as Willy's older son because it is this character who eventually makes the reality known to his family, specifically his father. After discovering his father's affair, Biff —realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been|| (Miller, 1998) and starts to consider his father as a phony man. He awakens his father and Happy to the fact that how destructive it is to believe in illusions. At the end of the play, the death of Willy Loman could be the representative of the death of this dream and this illusion. And we can see how reality takes control by showing how Willy was not as liked as he made out to be.

Miller's plays show the characters who are ambitiously following the American dream and finally encounter some sort of tragedy or collapse, suggesting that the American dream is in fact an illusion. In his 1998 book *Three uses of the Knife*, Mamet supports this by stating, —Our (America's) world position is not tenuous, but our mental balance is...we are determined to squander all...to defend ourselves against feelings of our own worthlessness, our own powerlessness|| (p. 408).

Each character in Miller's plays like *Death of a Salesman* refutes reality and instead accepts the illusion of success because s/he believes that it is better than to accept the bitter reality in which they live. By portraying this fact, Miller wants to show the false hope that America gives to its people and how reality is better lived than dreamt of. So, Miller's drama is the acceptance of reality through the story of illusion, —It is in the drama that the critique of the —Dream|| has its roots|| (1998, p. 406).



It can also be claimed that another feature which makes Miller's plays modern is its being autobiographical which can be linked to illusion versus reality. *Death of a Salesman* resembles Miller's life in many aspects and shows how as a young person during the Great Depression, Miller experienced the disillusionment of America. *Death of a Salesman* is actually a mirror which echoes these feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, and alienation through Willy's tragedy

The reason why *Death of a Salesman* is regarded as an example of a modernist play can be because of the fact that in most of the modern literary works there is a lack of identity and spirituality and because the exercises is totally a pointless idea. Thus, by portraying the character of Willy Loman, Miller intends to say that the pursuit of the American dream is also a pointless action. One of the main features of modernism is that the modern society has a set of principles and anything outside them is regarded as a disorder.

This idea is also evident in *Death of a Salesman*, because in this play Willy has been portrayed as a man who is being ruined by capitalism. Miller skillfully shows how capitalism has destroyed the meaning of an individual life. This does not only make his life despondent, but also destroys the lives of his wife and two young boys. Miller's play shows his anger with the capitalist system and this is one of the themes that dominates any modern writing.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller has produced a tragedy which is modern in many aspects such its style and subject. One aspect of a modern literary work can be the theme of the disintegration of the family life which is also very well noticeable in Miller's play because it evidently shows the disintegration of an American family. Willy is living in his illusions, Linda continually makes excuses for him, Biff is purposeless, and Happy like Willy avoids accepting the reality of his life. Actually, all the family is caught up by a lie and the only one who is aware of this illusion is Linda but her love and compassion for Willy does not allow her to confess that her husband is wrong. Thus, what leads the family to their disintegration is actually their living in illusions.

As the other modern aspects of the play it can be said that its action is presented in a serious and complete way which causes the audience or the readers to come to pity and terror in order to evoke catharsis. The play has also a modern setting. Miller as child of the great depression has staged the disturbing years of the Second World War. The most imperative factor is the presentation of Willy, an average man, as the hero of the tragedy. Like a classic tragic hero Willy also has a tragic flaw, leading to his ruin. His flaw is his preoccupation with his dreams and illusions.

As mentioned, the play also stimulates the feelings of pity and fear for Willy because he is not a bad man and his only flaw is his obsession with his dreams. But this mistake does not deserve such a bitter punishment. We also

become very fearful after seeing the tragedy of Willy. Willy not only is the symbol of the post-depression American middle-class society, but he is Everyman and any one can identify himself with him.

The next significant feature of a play like *Death of a Salesman* is related to family that is under growing pressure from both within and outside. In modern plays, the family is portrayed as starting to be disintegrated and shattered. The roles inside the family are also disturbed; in this regard, the gradual failure of the father who is weakened and demoted is more noticeable. The father becomes an indecisive figure, and aloof, mother attempts to keep the family unified, and the children are extremely dissentient. There is an obvious lack of closeness in this type of family. All these points in a family represent the deep changes in the society. Family thus becomes a representation of such changes and a place in which the opposing views that are the traditional views of the parents and the dissentient views of the children struggle with each other.

One of the most fundamental impressions of modernism is that the world of appearances is a delusion which both discloses and masks an important reality. These illusionary appearances fall into three types. First, there are the false appearances of nature which trick us due to our incomplete knowledge. Second, there are the mind's self-deceptions, the insentient schemes that are defined as different methods of domination or protection. And third, there are the cover-ups of purposely manipulated appearances and absolute lies.

Likewise, one of the ideas that is suggested by *Death of a Salesman* is the question of what reality is. There is an objective reality in this play. Willy has his own reality and it is fairly real to him. *Death of a Salesman* is according to what was stated before a modern play and one of the main features of modernism is to be composed of an objective reality. Although anyone has been stuck in his/her illusions, they all know that these illusions are deceitful and finally lead to their collapse. And this is what the playwright intends to uncover.

There is also another feature which is important in this regard and it is related to Willy Loman as the main character. Willy is a modern tragic hero or better say an anti-hero because he is after a dream that is supposed to give him happiness but this very dream is the origin of his pain and sufferings. Miller has also presented Willy who is very common in every aspect as his play's protagonist. Because as Jesse Matz (2004) has announced,

Characters in modern novels are not heroes: they are rarely singled out for their superior traits, and they rarely achieve much. If anything, they are worse than normal – less beautiful, less accomplished, less intelligent, and less likely than the average person to overcome adversity. In the larger scheme of things, there is a long and steep descent from the epic heroes of myth and legend to the anti-heroes of modern fiction. The former were far better than average, superior to their environments, and destined for

triumph; the latter are weak, disaffected, and passive, undone by circumstance, and lucky to make it through at all. (p. 45)

Matz also states that the reason why the modern protagonists are presented as antiheroes goes back to the reason that the writer wants to portray the reality of the modern world by avoiding the illusion:

Being an anti-hero, however, does not make a character unlikable, uninteresting, or absurd. There is real heroism in anti-heroism, in an unheroic world. As Lionel Trilling puts it, –Nothing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero, in whose indifference to or hatred of ethical nobility there is presumed to lie a special authenticity.¶ If the modern world disallows heroic action – and that is one way to define the problem of modernity – then truth demands unheroic characters. Moreover, it champions them, because it sees the heroism in even the simplest daily acts of survival. And so modern writers see heroism in ordinary thoughts and actions. (p. 46)

Matz proclaims that this interest in the alienated individual goes back to the modern novel's need to question reality. A main part of the modern novel's effort at experimental innovation is a belief that conventions get things wrong, and that the individual mind, the mind posed against society's definitions of the good, the heroic, the worthwhile, is more likely to be right, exciting, and interesting.

Modern works tend to suggest that personal truth outdoes received wisdom; and they tend to take pains to show how the painful struggle of anti-heroical subjective consciousness leads to the greatest insights, the truest truths. There are problems, however, with this fondness for the subjective, anti-social mind of the estranged individual. If it goes too far, it can lead to solipsism – the situation in which the individual self has no awareness or knowledge of anything beyond itself. If it goes too far in another direction, it can create a dispersed self, in which no stable identity can take hold. And finally it can lead to characters that seem hardly to exist at all (Matz, 2004, p. 49-50).

5-2- Willy's Disintegration of Identity

Based on Matz (2004, p. 49-51), modern literary works are avant-garde because of the belief that the individual mind which is against the society's norms is much more acceptable and in accordance with the reality. Modern writers are after showing that how the agonizing efforts of "anti-heroical subjective consciousness" will result in more insights and truths. Matz has also stated that this experiment of the modern writers to show the subjective, anti-social mind of the alienated modern characters has got some problems because in case of going too far, it can lead to solipsism, which signifies the condition in which the

individual self has no knowledge of anything in the outside world. The other problem is that if it goes too far in another way, it may lead to a discrete self, in which there is no firm identity. And finally it can create the characters that appear hardly to exist at all.

This is the same problem that has happened to the main character of Miller's play because he seems to have no stable identity. And finally it has created a character that appears hardly to exist at all. Because Willy is so much distanced from the outside world that subjective reality becomes no reality at all. In this case that the character has no firm identity and his identity has been shattered, he seems to have no basis. In fact, Willy's illusions have made him forget about the reality that the American dream is fulfilled through hard work not just popularity. He is surrounded by so many illusions that his identity has started to shatter so catastrophically that finally leads to his death.

5-3- American Dream as a Grand-narrative in *Death of a Salesman*

Narrative of American dream proclaims a set of promises and ambitions which are closely identified with national identity, especially that of economic opportunity and prosperity, wealth and give chance for all people to gain money, success, and happiness, regardless of their birth and social back ground. One of these grand narratives belongs to the notion of American dream. Lyotard argues that these grand narratives have lost their power to legitimize discourses.

As he (1984) says "The grand narrative have lost its credibility, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation"(p.37). It was after the advent of the Great Depression that James Truslow Adams (1931), in *The Epic of America*, defined the American dream as a dream that would enable all human beings, regardless of their social position, to flourish while having the same chances and the same right of freedom (p.416).

This dream is actually a grand narrative that seems to have lost its credibility in this play. However, some characters like the protagonist of the play are so obsessed with this dream that it leads to their devastation at the end. In fact, anyone who is after the fulfillment of this dream will face collapse and this event shows how illusory it is.

Death of a Salesman is believed to be a play about Willy's loss of identity and powerlessness to change. He is so trapped with illusions that this is going to ruin all his family. In this play it can be noticed very well that Miller is in objection with the capitalist society and the illusion that has been known as the American dream. So, he has attempted to show his objection through that Willy's death that represents to the death of American dream.

Like most of Miller's plays, *Death of a Salesman* can be viewed as an extinction of the American dream. The sarcastic fact about this dream is that it should result in success, but it encourages greed, selfishness, and conceit. What



is striking in this play is the way in which this once fortunate dream is altered into a frightening illusion. This is obvious in Willy's character who chases the American dream of success, but the more he attempts, the more distraught he is. Through this character, Miller has shown the ineptness of this dream and the desperateness of attaining a dream that is just a delusion. This is proved by what Lyotard (1979, pp. xxiv–xxv) has stated that the grand narratives have become bankrupt.

5-4- Language of *Death of a Salesman*

As it was stated earlier, modern American drama follows some specific themes such as reality versus illusion, language that reflects the current society, and an exploration of social and cultural changes. In fact, an important purpose of any modern American drama was to —speak to a world in which the individual had been increasingly cut loose from the traditional "anchors" of religion, socio/political alignments, family relationships, and a defined self-image. The modern American drama was an excessively emotional drama which paved the way for the next generations like what we today consider as the postmodern drama.

Language is one of the main features in any modern drama like Miller's plays. Told through a stream of consciousness narrative, the play is a challenging text because it challenges capitalism and the failed American dream. Miller has used a language in *Death of a Salesman* that is typical of any modern tragedy. The characters' language in the play can also be identified with everyman's language that he uses in the real life.

Miller makes his characters speak in a true to life style or a vernacular way, echoing the directness, humor and pain of a family which belongs to the working-class category. For example: Biff: "*I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I ought get married. Maybe I ought get stuck into something.*" This is a matter of fact, vocabulary, full of bad grammar, slang, and casual, sloppy pronunciation. Yet Biff is instinctively going right to the heart of his confusion. Thus, Miller's language in this play is colloquial and informal because his characters are mostly from the working class.

His language is the language of a modern tragedy. Besides, the language Miller's characters speak is approximately the language they speak in their real life. Contrasting the language in the classical tragedies, the dialogue of *Death of a Salesman* is in an ordinary language. The importance of using a common man's speech in this play signifies the fact that it is about the tragedy of a common man; consequently, the language should be the language of the common man.

Leonard Moss (1964) has approved of Miller's dexterous use of the common man's language and has declared that the language of the play is as influential as far as character delineation is concerned. The other reason of

choosing such a common language is the fact that this play's social base has influenced Miller's choice of a true-to-life dialogue; actually, this type of dialogue seems to be the only dialogue that can make the audience observe how repetitive are Willy's everyday experiences in contrast with the superciliousness of his ambitions.

Other factor which causes *Death of a Salesman* a modern tragedy regarding the language is its application of both the ordinary and poetic language. *Death of a Salesman* actually lays specific focus on dialogue by using the language of the common man. Miller also attempted to avoid any use of artificial speech.

6- Analysis of *Glengarry Glen Ross*: Representation of Reality

Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* is just like Miller's *Death of a Salesman* about a group of salesmen who struggle to overwhelm each other in a cruel competition. They are so motivated to reach success that they do not avoid any action which guarantees this goal. Sometimes, they may even commit crimes and immoral actions. For example, Levene and Aaraw break into Williamson's office in order to get the deal from another salesman. Unlike Miller, Mamet is obsessed with the evil points of a capitalist society and shows how manipulation, deception, lying, and stealing have become methods in business world. Anne Dean describes the subject of the play as it follows:

The premise upon which *Glengarry Glen Ross* is based is, in a way, a paradigm of capitalism. The company's bosses have organized a sales competition in which the salesman with the highest "grosses" –financial profit- wins a Cadillac and is automatically guaranteed the best "leads" (addresses of prospective land buyers), the runners-up win a set of steak knives, and the losers are sacked. That the successful salesman is given the best leads while the runners-up are forced to accept inferior leads from the "B" list or are even dismissed, underlines the unfairness of a system that penalizes those who are weak and needy but rewards those who least need such support. (qtd. in Kane, 2013, p. 192)

Postmodern plays like this Mamet's play reflect the ideas of this epoch because the elements of postmodernism are easily observable in his play. The play also establishes the ills of the capitalistic system. However, Mamet presents this issue in a comic way. He does represent his outlooks and message within the play. This is what the postmodern writing suggests because objectivity is important in this era's literary works and the writer does not take any side because problems are measured from manifold viewpoints.

This refers to the other element of postmodernism that is relativism. What was just stated is in contrast with *Death of a Salesman* because this play tries to communicate the writer's message that Willy should try to disregard the

temptation of a capitalist society and find meaning in something different. Mamet does not attempt to present his own perspective and interpretation; thus, he does not also offer a solution to the problem, but leaves it to his audience. This is what is suggested by postmodernism which puts focus on multiplicity.

Mamet's play is unquestionably postmodern. As mentioned, his staging the silliness of a system that inspires a number of grown-up men for a Cadillac shows how obsessed he is with the devaluation of some important values like morality, resulting from a capitalist system. *Glengarry Glen Ross* is also playful and funny but this doesn't stop it from showing a dark image of humanity.

Another feature that makes this play a playful one is in its dialogues. Thus, this play is not modern because although the characters may make the audience sad, they are not basically tragic like what we may see in a modern play. In fact, a modernist play attempts to provide catharsis as what makes the audience feel like they want to make better choices than Willy did. Mamet's play provides no catharsis and is not tragic or modern. It is postmodern, especially in the way it offers us no answers and no meaning.

Mamet has tried to stage the disparaging influences of the American dream on the human soul. His play shows how the false values of a capitalist society may make people develop some beliefs and creeds to reach their goals. Unethical individualism is the most perceptible of these creeds which fails any relationship and disintegrates friendship and the family life. As Piette (2004) argued "*Glengarry Glen Ross* offers a portrait of a battle for survival" (p. 74).

Sepehrmanesh and Dehghani (2014, p. 46) have declared that according to the American dream, individualism looks to be total independence conferred upon the individuals to move in every direction they aim. However, the evidence proves that enslavement under the guise of individualism rules and controls the activities of the individuals. This ostensible individualism is, in fact, organized through diverse means such as —Ideological State Apparatus‖ of which the American Dream is an example. The way the four salesman behave under capitalism shows that they are trapped in an extremely competitive spirit and are left with no other choice except to prefer their own success and not the failure of others. Thus, the rejection of moral principles in this condition results in the disturbance of all ties and moral behavior like leading to greed.

In this play, success is an achievement of a purpose which can justify the limitless attempts of the characters to fulfill their dream. Their obsession with the American dream and its consumerist principles influences even their beliefs and sometimes they know that they are violating these creeds but conquering others to achieve their goals is more important and they may even sacrifice many loved things in this path.

Mamet's play presents the cruel force of the business world upon several salesmen. It tells that human collaboration is fundamentally pointless in the

postmodern era. Mamet shows that the postmodern person is. He shows how the characters are competing against each other and if one of them acts well, it's bad news for the others. This pressure influences the actions and communications of all the chief characters.

Most of the characters in this play sell lies to themselves as well as to their friends and anyone else. They have to break moral rules because they need to survive in the cruel business world. The most fundamental principles of the American dream like work ethic and equal chances are contradicted because many savage actions can be noticed.

Mamet has presented his characters in a way that shows how each of them has a specific reality for himself. This is one of the most important features of a postmodern play like *Glengarry Glen Ross*. According to Bressler (2011), postmodernism means that all that is left is difference. It should be accredited that each person has his/her own perceptions of reality; reality, then, is a "human construction" formed by each individual's prevailing social group. There exists no center, nor grand objective reality, but as many realities as there are people (p. 89).

Glengarry Glen Ross portrays Mamet's assessment of a world where business controls everything including each individual's morality and beliefs. The play is about the relationship between a number of tormented characters' internal reality and external reality. The salesmen as the main characters' of Mamet's play have stuck into two philosophies. The first principle is that they have to compete because competition is of high significance in a capitalist society, and second, that they can be successful in this competition when they are not intruded. So, they all feel that they are free enough to do whatever they wish in their chase of the American dream. Success is so important in this path that Roma inclines to dishonesty, and Moss and Levene to crime. Thus, a significant theme in the play is that the preoccupation with fulfilling the American dream destroys morality and leads to the collapse of the human beings.

For example, Roma explains that people should not be ashamed of doing things that are not moral. He acknowledges that "I do those things that seems correct to me today. I trust myself. And if security concerns me, I do that which today I think will make me secure" (Mamet, 1996, p. 28). So, Roma believes that the definition of morality is based on his or her desires and requirements. Also, the other salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross* think that if they want to be really successful, they should separate morality from business morals.

One of the most distinguished points about Mamet is the way his characters talk. The characters in *Glengarry Glen Ross* all have a specific speech form. For example, a character may say "should of" instead of the grammatically correct "should have," because Mamet is concerned with reflecting the way his

characters would actually talk. Furthermore, Mamet believes that the way people speak affects the way they behave.

So, the language the characters may employ is the same as the everyday interaction in order to communicate the feelings of estrangement, meaninglessness, and the illusory nature of meaning in the real life, and also the perception that any character has of the reality. Each character believes that the only way that he can fulfill his vision of the American dream can be fulfilled through different ways and his own vision of reality. For example, one tries to satisfy it through lying, cheating, stealing, and other possible ways.

6-1- Replacement of Micro-narratives with Grand-narratives

In postmodernism, a grand-narrative refers to a narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience, or knowledge, proposing a society legitimation through the predicted achievement of a master idea (Lyotard, 1992, p. 29). However, Lyotard is a critic of grand-narratives and believes that postmodernism marks the end of these narratives.

In *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (1979), Lyotard has talked about the growing suspicion toward the grand-narratives and has acknowledged that:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives [. ..] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language [...] Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? (pp. xxiv-xxv)

One of the very old grand-narratives is the American dream that seems to be of not much importance anymore as noticed in the postmodern plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mamet wrote this play to show his skepticism toward this metanarrative and to say how bad it is because of its destructive effects on the lives of a number of people.

Any character's pursuit of this dream makes him commit any illegal and immoral act and this shows the corruption of this myth because it once meant to give anybody the same opportunities but now it paves the way for any illegitimate action. This is why grand-narratives are giving their place to the micro-narratives.

Lyotard suggested that metanarratives should give way to the "localized" narratives, which can 'throw off' the grand-narrative by placing more focus on specific local contexts. They argue for the existence of a "multiplicity of theoretical standpoints" rather than for grand-narratives (Peters, 2001, p. 7). This skepticism is also because of the subjective nature of the reality in postmodernism. In fact, taking different approaches to reality means that the grand-narratives are pointless and have given their place to micro-narratives.

In Mamet's play, duplicities and dishonest struggle have caused corruptions. Just like Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* also dooms the deceitful capitalist society by showing the bitter reality of the American dream because it has enabled people to disrespect the values. Thus, *Glengarry Glen Ross* is a sarcastic attack on the American dream because just Aaronow and Lingk who are both submissive are not involved in bad actions. The challenge of the American Dream in this play is that it claims that such a dream is an idea, and not a grand-narrative. It is also different to each of the characters.

6-2- Language Game in *Glengarry Glen Ross*

What has caused David Mamet to be known as a celebrated dramatist is his distinguishing language that is shown in the dialogue of his characters. The language that he employs is abusive and is used as a means to expose the besmirched world of the American business. The language of his plays initiates from the characters' inner worlds. The characters are often violent and this violence is shown by a particular language.

In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Mamet stages the man's condition and his life in a tainted and merciless business world through idiomatic conversations. Although the play is led by men, there is a significant difference between them, as Anne Dean notes "In *Glengarry Glen Ross*, his subjects are businessmen but they all behave like crooks" (qtd. in Kane, 2013, pp. 195-196). Language's central role in order to create distinctive characters in Mamet's works cannot be denied. When the male characters speak, they usually speak in a hysterical informal language. This dialogue lets the conversations reveal the disappointment of the characters. Mamet also depicts certain characters as losers by using slang in his dialogue.

The language that Mamet has used to write *Glengarry Glen Ross* exposes the anxiety and interest of the postmodern men in the American dream. In fact, Mamet's language signifies him as a realistic playwright. According to Roudane (2004), "*Glengarry Glen Ross* (1996) may appear flawed with its overused expletives, but when audiences understand Mamet's aesthetic—that the language functions as a kind of street poetry, a deliberately embellished dialogue—then the acerbity of the language takes on non-realistic qualities" (p. 335).

Because the play is about a number of salesmen, Worster (1994) has indicated that "a particular way of using language (the ability or inability to 'sell') is central to the characters' identities and relationships to each other" (p. 375). Worster also indicates that amongst all Mamet's plays, this is the one which is to a great extent about talk. The characters recurrently question each other, and the words "say," "said," "tell," "told," "talking," and "speaking" appear over two-hundred times in the play (p. 376).

According to Greenbaum (1999), characters of this play continually need to be certain about what was "said," because the characters know that the language of the salesmen, their discourse, is particularly undependable. In no better way is this point illustrated than with the linguistic acrobatics that Moss (one of the clearly dominant salesman in the play) inflicts on Aaronow in an attempt to persuade him to steal the leads from the office so that they can be sold to Jerry Graft--Murray and Mitch's prime competitor. Toby Zinman (1992) refers to this questioning as a variation on aporia, the trope of doubt, "the real or pretended inability to know what the subject under discussion is" (p. 209).

Cullick (1994) has stated that,

The language of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* obstructs immediate entrance into the action. The characters interrupt each other, leave sentences unfinished, complete others' sentences, and use abbreviated jargon that frequently employs expletives and invectives. Such language has been criticized for creating characters that are dulled by their sameness in speaking" an endless stream of vituperation. However, the characters' discourse reveals subtexts in their relations. Dennis Carrol notes that the play's language, especially in the first act, does not so much further a plot as suggest a "pattern of interactions" among the characters. The pattern is that of the salesmen closing themselves off from one another in their drive to close sales. Mamet's business office prevents any sense of community by producing a competitive discourse of closure.' (p. 23)

Glengarry Glen Ross belongs to the genre of black comedy and so its tone is dark and satirical; it means that although the salesmen's deceitfulness is sometimes funny and amusing, it can be sad, too. Mamet has applied dark humor or black humor in order to reveal to us the nature of its characters and to show how the current problems can stimulate a kind of bitter laughter.

The uniqueness of Mamet's dialogue has made it known as "Mametspeak." His language is actually a type of rhythmical sharp-witted jargon. Also known for the copiousness of swearwords in his writing, Mamet defends his dialogue and believes that the truth is communicated through this kind of language. Mamet critic Anne Dean (1990) suggests that Mamet's characters express "an honesty that is uncluttered by the bonds of polite conversation" (p. 34).

She elaborates, "From the bluntest of materials, Mamet carves his dialogue, establishes mood and character, and imbues his work with tension and movement. With apparently so little, he achieves so much" (p. 16). However, there are many critics who don't think so. According to Ben Brantley, "The ripe street vernacular of early Mamet has been replaced by perfumed locutions of improbable archness. Well, mostly anyway. Obscenities explode every so often,

rather like stink bombs at a garden party ... there is a distancing air of contempt to the proceedings, a faint disdain for the emptiness of posturing estheticism" (qtd. in Sauer & Sauer, 2003, p. 79).

Growing up in Chicago also significantly shaped Mamet as a writer. Concerning the "American" rhythms of his dialogue, Mamet says he picked them up from real people. "Well, people talk them. I mean that's what people say on the street." He has also said, "I grew up in Chicago, and the patterns of speech around the country, even in spite of television, are different" (Isaacs, 2001, p. 214). Film critic Barbara Shulgasser associates the violent language in Mamet's plays to his need to dissolve the emotional violence he lived in as a child (Whatley, 2011, p. 13). Mamet thinks of the power of language as the source of all the effectiveness in theatre and says:

Another piece of wisdom, the first I'd ever heard about the Life of a Playwright, came from Tom Jones, one of the play's authors. I was nineteen years old, watching the end of the play from just inside the door to the lobby. I heard a sigh, and there was Mr. Jones behind me, looking at the stage and shaking his head. —If only they would just Say the Words . . . he said. (Mamet, 1996, p. 33)

Mamet thinks of language so powerful that in his writings the lack of oral communication is considered as the worst punishment. The main reason Mamet insists his stage language is not realistic is because of the poetic features that he brings to speech. Mamet says, "It's poetic language. It's not an attempt to capture language as much as it is an attempt to create language The language in my plays is not realistic but poetic. The words sometimes have a musical quality to them. It's language that is tailor-made for the stage." He also insists his stage language is an "interpretation" of how people talk and not a recreation. "It is an illusion So in this sense my plays don't mirror what's going on in the streets. It's something different" (Roudane, 1996, p. 180).

According to Schvey (1992), in most of Mamet's plays, there is a lack of communication between the characters. "It is not merely that Mamet has applied the rhythms and peculiarities of the American speech, with its vulgarities and 'you knows' as eloquently as Pinter has the English, but that [Sexual Perversity] carries with it, for all its humor, an undercurrent of profound despair for the ugliness and sterility of what human relationships have become in our society of quick, casual sex without feeling" (p. 92).

Whatley (2011, p. 20) believed that in Mamet's plays the potential for meaningful contact is communicated through "nuance, implication, pause and silence". Mamet often uses italics and quotation marks to highlight specific words and to draw attention to his characters' recurrent deceiving use of language. His characters regularly disturb one another and their sentences are incomplete. Furthermore, certain words are purposely distorted in order to show



that the character is not paying attention to every detail of his dialogue. When he was asked about the way he developed his writing style, Mamet answered, "In my family, in the days prior to television, we liked to while away the evenings by making ourselves miserable, based solely on our ability to speak the language viciously. That's probably where my ability was honed" (Randall, 2006, p. 276). Mamet has said that "the purpose of technique is to break down the barriers between the conscious and the unconscious mind" (Bloom, 1986, p. 193).

7- Conclusion

This study meant to assess Miller's and Mamet's play regarding the concept of American dream through Lyotard's theory about the grand narratives. According to Lyotard, all the grand narratives are rejected because they have failed to bring the social order to society. He suggests that the grandnarratives should be replaced with the micronarratives. AS result, each character can shape the reality according his/her point of view. It was argued that both Miller and Mamet adopt the similar themes, but using different approaches. Miller uses the modern approach in his play to show the destructive effects of this dream on human condition (tragic and sad) and Miller also tries to create meaning from Willy's tragic life. On the other hand, Mamet uses the postmodernism approach to show the decline of the American dream. Mamet in *Glengarry Glen Ross* makes no hope to create meaning out of pathetic lives of his characters. He demonstrates that the only way to resist the chaos by playing with chaos

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