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Machismo and Homosociality in Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross**

David Mamet' in *Glengarry Glen Ross* Adlı Eserinde Maçoluk ve Eş-Sosyallik

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ÖZ

Amerikan edebiyatının ve sinemasının önemli isimlerinden biri olan David Mamet bir çok oyun ve senaryo yazmış ve bunların bir çoğunu yapımcılığını ve yönetmenliğini kendisi üstlenmiştir. Tüm erkek karakterlerden oluşan *Glengarry Glen Ross* işten atılma korkusuyla ofisteki panoda isimlerinin en alta yazılmasını istemeyen dört gayrimenkul satıcısıyla ilgilidir. Bu korku onları manipülasyona, yalancılığa ve hatta kanunsuzluğa yönlendirir. Oyundaki en göze çarpan şey karakterlerin birbirleriyle olan ilişkileridir. Karakterler, ahlak ve ilke yoksundur. Eş-sosyal ofis, karakterlerin hayatta kalmaya çabaladığı bir maço arenaya dönüşür. Mamet, oyunda Amerikan rüyasına referans yaptığı Darwinist bir toplumu hicveder. Karakterlerin birbirleriyle olan ilişkisi modern çağa karşılık ilkel ve pragmatist durur. Bu minvalde oyun erkek iç dünyasını göstermek bakımından önemli bir rol üstlenir. Bu çalışmada David Mamet'in önemli oyunu *Glengarry Glen Ross* maçoluk, eş-sosyallik ve erkek psikolojisi açılarından irdelenecektir.

ABSTRACT

One of the distinctive persons of American literature and cinema, David Mamet has written a great number of plays and scripts and many of which are produced or directed by Mamet himself. *Glengarry Glen Ross* consisting of all male characters deals with four real estate salesmen who do not want to be the bottom name on the board in their office for fear of dismissal. This fear leads them to manipulation, falsehood and even illegality. The most conspicuous thing in the play is characters' relationships to each other. Characters have a lack of morality and principle. The homosocial office turns into a macho arena where characters endeavor to survive. Mamet satirizes a dog-eat-dog society in the play, which has also a reference to American dream. The characters' interaction to each other seems primitive and manipulative despite modern age. In this sense, the play also reveals male's inner psychology because human's instinctual aims such as surviving and potency are unearthed in the play. In this study David Mamet's distinctive play *Glengarry Glen Ross* will be argued with machismo, homosociality, man's psychology.

1. Giriş

David Mamet is one of the distinctive dramatists, script writers and producers in American theatre and film industry. *Glengarry Glen Ross* is about four real estate salesmen whose fear is to be written at the bottom of a chart because it means the person written will quite likely be dismissed. All salesmen are male named as Shelly Levene, Richard Roma, George Aronow and Dave Moss and they can fight a circle saw so all want to have the leads written the premiere customers they can easily sell real estate even if it depends

on burglary. Furthermore, Mamet leaves the characters in the middle of a dilemmatic chaos. Because, if they want to attain the deadbeat leads, they have to gain sales chart. For this reason, the characters are drawn into vortex from which they cannot escape. Yet, if they postulate a well sale chart, they need these deadbeat leads. Despite being friendship to each other, they live in a dog-eat-dog world.

The play becomes very successful at Britain's National Theatre and was also awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The film adaptation co-starring Al Pacino, Ed Harris, and Jack

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Lemmon was shot and directed by James Foley. The critics pay much attention to the play. Bigsby (2004b: 177) asserts that Mamet depicts “capitalism as an enabling myth rooted in greed”. Furthermore, the other critic, Piette summarizes the play as “a play about trust and trust betrayed, about dreams cynically manipulated and refashioned to serve something both more and less than human need” (Piette, 2004: 78). In this context, Mamet attempts to comprehend man’s inner psychology profoundly.

The success of play depends on the author himself. Many critics speak well of Mamet himself and his plays. For instance Harold Bloom (2004: 1) likens him to Marlow while Christopher Bigsby resembles him Arthur Miller. He believes the reason why Miller and Mamet write plays on American business is due to their families’ financial difficulties (Bigsby, 2004a: 33). In this sense, his ability and success are incontestable. However, his experiences in a real estate office are sources of inspiration of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. (Nightingale, 2004: 89). However, Mamet generally deals with male characters as all figures in the play are men. It is not exceptional in his plays. Mamet reflects a world where everybody gasps for life. The critic states “in Mamet’s world, to survive is to seem to succeed” (Bruster, 2004: 51).

All these findings indicate that the play has an important role to recount men’s behavioral patterns and their inner psychology. Creating a setting where there is no woman character, Mamet argues the relationship between male and other males. Also, he intends to indicate the consequences of American dream imposed. Hence, we must, first of all, observe the social background of the play.

2. American Dream or American Business

Mamet creates an ambiance which everyone regards everybody as an enemy. As Roudané (2004: 67) names, it is a “rhetorical battleground”. The salesmen feel the pressure of imperatives which consist of American myth and norms. This makes their life harder than it is. Living a life in terms of social expectancy forces the figures behave differently. The author complains about American conditions and describes the country as “spiritually bankrupt” (Nightingale, 2004: 101). The possibility of doing everything for good economic conditions results in sociological freakiness and frightening. Being a man like that urges the person to seek any opportunity for overwhelming the person[s] regarded as enemy. One’s failure is another’s success. It can be thought as a lottery that one is able to manage while all the others fail. This symbolizes economic life in America and life conditions in the play. Mamet’s preference of salesmen is also distinctive to picture stereotyped American figures because they are representative of the capitalist American society. However, we must bear in mind that they are the victims of this society as well. This feature makes them both murderers and victims. While reading the play, readers hesitate about the emotions they feel. The characters claiming to own a dream land sell pieces of land which consist of marshes out of Florida. As Nightingale asserts, “the business of America is business, America itself” (Nightingale, 2004: 93). Furthermore as Billington from the Guardian states “a chillingly funny indictment of a world in which you are what you sell” However, Piette takes the idea

a step further by associating with the politic era. According to him, the characters reflect the then term’s political views:

Mamet’s salesmen seem apt representatives of the Reagan–Bush–Thatcher era, which in turn prefigured the brutal downsizing of companies which characterized the 1990s. Mamet’s salesmen are not simply the agents of a callous capitalism: they are also its victims. In this respect, the burglary of the office simply replicates the predatory values of the culture (Piette, 2004: 78).

It would be injustice if it was said that the entire American business system was like that. Mamet emphasizes his disappointment of business system, which was experienced in estate agent by himself.

On the other hand, many critics including Roudané, Piette and Nightingale come to agree that Mamet forms a Darwinist world on the subject of American business society. While Roudané (2004: 70) uses “an ungovernable Darwinianism” for office milieu, Piette thinks the characters reflect “a portrait of a battle for survival, a Darwinian struggle in which the salesmen offer a dream of possibility” (Piette, 2004: 78). Also Nightingale (2004: 91) depicts the office conditions as “heartless and soulless, a Darwinian mix of unscrupulous competitiveness and greed”. The stronger ones survive in this Darwinian world. No matter what kind of situation it is, human instinctively tries to sustain his life.

The business ethics is another important factor in the play. The author emphasizes deceptions and disloyalty. If it helps you reach the summit, you can do whatever you can do. Cheating and even robbery are allowable in the play. For instance, stealing the leads is a very important factor in the play. The corruption of the system is portrayed very skillfully. However, as aforementioned, readers are confused with the feeling while reading the play. We cannot get angry with, or be sad about the characters who stole the leads. Because they live in rapacious agent and when they are at the bottom of table, they will be fired. If you are at the top, you will have the Cadillac. The lack of humanist feelings, asperity of the organization and harsh behaviors make both employees and employers place in a situation “that require decisive but unpopular behavior” (Garaventa, 1998: 541). Their attitudes can be regarded as unethical or unpopular. Nevertheless, another critic Goldensohn (2000: 250) views from different perspective. In his opinion religion and ethics are perverted in the USA: “messianic and Salvationist hope and the pastoral ethical teachings of Christianity struggled with the language of daily life and commerce”.

The contradiction in the play is a setting which is created for the rise in the clash. Mamet expects to accelerate the suspense in the play. The reason why the play is written is to perform in the theatre. So it is typical for a writer to confuse the readers’/audiences’ feelings. However, Mamet well knows the negative effects of salespeople in the society. Trying to sell encyclopedias or hoovers, salesmen are indicated as greedy, crafty and garrulous in especially media sector. Mamet’s preference of salesperson as a character refreshes his setting in the play.

The base of system emerges from desire of realization of American dream. There is a direct target that is encouraged or manipulated to be had. Money and potency are the most wanted things for fulfillment of this dream. Yet, in the play,

instead of money salesmen are fighting for the leads which enable them to make easy sales. The leads symbolize to be at the top of table. In fact, many of the second generation Jewish writers such as Saul Bellow and Arthur Miller are concerned about the same idea. For instance, Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Bellow's *Seize the Day* have the same topic. Mamet was inspired by these writers. However, the relationship between men should be argued

3. Machismo

As aforementioned, all characters in the play are male and they live in dog-eat-do world. In this kind of milieu marriage or having a family seems a burden for men. Furthermore, it can be regarded as uninspiring and uninteresting. Also, in a patriarchal society the responsibility of taking care of a family forwards burdens more and more deadweight, which makes men want to escape from. Hence, men must create a prototype to follow. Mamet generally creates model men in his plays. As the critic states, in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* he manipulates "the willingness of the traditional hero the white heterosexual male to empower himself through mythmaking and impersonality, and thereby to embrace these agents as the essential components of a man's survival" (Vorlicky, 1995: 92). Moreover, the sales rates determine the masculinity level. The success brings more testosterone. Although there are no female characters except Levene's daughter indirectly, we can deduce their machismo from play's setting. Holmberg (2014: 75) states: "*Glengarry Glen Ross* consecrated Mamet the Molière of male masochism".

However, in Mamet's world, the characters' attitudes and transformations are the result of America and American dream. In his many plays the relationship between men and women are "raping and pillage" (Mamet, 1988: 133). The characters seek for power and potency by using the advantage of their gender. The fight between each other is not always fair or ethical. Mamet thinks that it is America itself. They have to be tough enough to wear the britches in the family. As the critic states, these characteristics make the male figures vicious and malicious:

The excerpt from *Glengarry Glen Ross* at the beginning of this article, in which a malevolent superior characterizes "being a good father" as incompatible with doing the job well, is illustrative (Tepper, 2000: 181).

The machismo can be viewed in all characters' attitudes in the play. However, Richard Roma, a successful salesperson, is a good model to exemplify it. Like all the characters in the play he has lack of humanity, benevolence and is stuck in atmosphere of dystopia at high pressure. In this situation his dialogue with James Lingk is an acceptable example:

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 middleclass 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. That's me. You ever take a

dump made you feel you'd just slept for twelve hours...? (*Glengarry Glenn Ross*, 39).

Roma's inner psychology is subverted by the idea of fulfilling American dream. Starting a family or marriage is only obstacle for it. According to him, world turns into escapade and accomplishment. Nightingale claims; "Flatteringly, he implies that the man whose macho self he hopes to discover and exploit is, like him, a world-weary stud" (Nightingale, 2004: 100). Other characters like Shelly Levene more or less act like Roma does. For instance, Levene has a daughter suffering from illness and his daughter is the weakest part of him. Levene regards her as a burden and he forces himself to work harder and to search alternative ways of gaining money. Levene's biggest obstacle in order to fulfill his dream is his family.

4. Homosociality

Although the play seems about the business ethics, and American dream, it also deals with males' psyche and their relationships between each other. Mamet uses a setting that there are no female characters. So, it becomes a manly world. Digou (2003: 272) claims that distractions and pretense characters are only about the play. This allegation encapsulates Mamet who substantially intends to create a manly world. He basically deals with the masculinity in his plays and film scripts. He underlines male features such as his fear, desires, and priorities. Furthermore, when depicting his male characters, he uses usual masculine words including slangs, jargons and argots. All these figures in Mamet's plays are exposed to Darwinist society, harsh capitalism and failed business. On the other hand, Mamet's depiction of women contains misogyny: in one of his plays, *Lakeboat*, he depicts women as "soft things with a hole in the middle" (Mamet, 1987: 59). It is enough to turn the spotlights on him. Especially feminist critics strictly criticizes him

After all, the relationships between each other play very important role for definition of homosociality in the play. There isn't any difference between their business life and free activities. As McDonough (1992: 201) asserts, "distinctions between business and personal or leisure activity become blurred". For instance, the characters are shuttles between office and Chinese restaurant. The Chinese restaurant is a place for fraternizing and drinking. It is the only place to socialize. So all day they are together and have no opportunity to meet new friends or people except their customers. This creates a homosocial space. Radavich touches on characters' friendships and fights:

Glengarry Glen Ross (1983) showcases the sexopolitical battle of the male "pack," with one-on-one friendships relegated to somewhat lesser status. In yet another all-male play of characters now middle-aged, the focus shifts to male rape ("fucking up the ass") and enslavement (18). And the "screwing" is not merely verbal. (Radavich, 2004: 74)

They are at shambles and they have to be successful in order not to lose. Their selling rates run parallel to their testosterone level. Success raises their masculinity.

To argue more broadly, we must focus on characters' identity. Their way of business and connection with others shape their identities. Also, the critic considers it from a different angle. He claims the play "similarly makes

financial desperation over into a problem of identity” (Quinn, 2004: 99). Quinn is right about this idea; yet, their pain threshold [masculinity] is very high. Although they desperately want to get rid of the job, they carry on work in the office under high pressure, which proves to have limited identities because they hasped in rivalry in the office. And they are also well aware of the identities. For instance, Teach, Edmond, and Levene can be argued in terms of their identity. Regarding of understanding their weakness, the characters tends to compare themselves with the women by believing that men are stronger than women. The characters, considering the social norms and expectations, are examinee in contrast and are apt to stand by the stronger ones as in the case of Darwinist society. Their homosocial tendency may as well emerge from this thought.

The characters’ perspective to femininity has a distinctive role to understand their homosociality better in the play. As aforementioned, the characters think being a woman is deficiency or loss. As McDonough insists, “woman as contamination, woman as threat is the basis of much of the paranoia common to Mamet's male characters” (McDonough, 1992: 203). There are many examples in the play to prove it. For instance, Lingk is persuaded by Roma to buy land. In fact, Lingk quests Roma’s friendship and an approval as a man by other men. The following day, Lingk comes and says “It's not me, it's my wife” (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, 89). Also he lacks “the power to negotiate” (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, 92). Frustration or wife’s dominance is a dichotomy and it is enough to ostracize from the group. Furthermore, as McDonough asserts, woman symbolizes American dream: “Suddenly, now that it has proven to be impossible to grasp or to maintain, has proven to be a failure, the American Dream has been genderized-now it is woman” (McDonough, 1992: 204). This dream is inaccessible. No matter how hard you work to be prosperous, something pulls you down. Like Mamet, the characters have misogynist thoughts and behaviors.

Although the characters are at the age of forties and fifties, they sometimes behave like schoolkids. For example when Roma whiffled the smoke to Williamson, he threw pencils to Roma’s back. Again Roma told Moss “Hey, let me buy you a pack of gum, I’ll show you how to chew it” (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, 71). Even though it seems boyish jokes and friendly behaviors, harsh competition and predated lie behind. The office turns into an arena where gladiators fight. American dream sounds like strong capitalism. The characters survive by sticking together. Holmberg (2014: 79) likens the milieu to what is seen “as in chimpanzee politics, so too in the homosocial real estate office. Domination and submission drive the all-male action”. While Levene approaches to the coffee machine, Blake said “Put that coffee down. Coffee’s for closers only” (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, 10). Instead of Levene, Moss protested and attempted to leave.

Glengarry Glen Ross is slightly different from Mamet’s other works. Although eroticism constitutes a big part of his all male plays, this play deprecates any sex. The characters like Roma find sex no worth and insignificant: “The great fucks that you may have had. What do you remember about them?” (*Glengarry Glen Ross* 28). His previous plays details sexuality, potency and male loyalty. Yet, one cannot catch this because the play comprises homosocial milieu. However, it mustn’t be confused with homosexuality. There

is no reference about it. The relationships between each other are homosocial not homosexual even though they quite often use slang, swearing words and phrases. Surrounded with male friends, the characters in the play regard the slangs or swearing words as normal language in their daily lives. Their homosocial space provides them convenience and comfort. The use of disapproval language becomes an ordinary and everyday activity for the characters.

Hence, Mamet’s language must be argued in the play. Mamet uses sexual words and slangs in almost every play. However, there are many critics such as Zinman thinking that Mamet’s language is great in stylization and writing:

But Mamet's "fucks" are not boring-he can inflect the word in more ways than anyone could have imagined. Every critic, every reviewer, every writer of book-cover blurbs tells us how Mamet's ear is so finely attuned to American speech; he is the magician of macho, the wizard of obscenity. (Zinman, 1992: 208)

The conversations between characters are dominated by sexual words. Dean (2004: 7) postulates that it is “an effort to conceal their insecurity and loneliness”.

5. Conclusion

To sum up Mamet is a distinctive person in American film industry and literature. His usage of American context that includes his society and the people desiring to fulfill American dream is so successful. Although he uses disapproving and slang language and his plays teem with fucks, he intends to indicate the reality as it is. As the critic states: “The relentless flow of words- complaints, boasts, and bids for pity, all wrapped in obscenity- depicts a world in which greed is the central motivation” (Weales, 1984: 595). This situation forces the characters live in dog-eat-dog society. However, Mamet’s men manage to survive in this kind of space. Their relationship between each other is so close that they do not think about female friendship or any intimacy with them. They are stuck between each other, which Mamet wants to indicate his society and the individuals of modern period. He can be regarded as playwright of American literary society depicting males’ psychology. Especially in homosocial environment, Mamet well observes man versus other man or men in his plays. His characters are overwhelmed with capitalism, social pressure, and expectancy of others. So, Mamet successfully reveals his desires, fears, and the relationships between each other. In this context, he displays male attitudes and personality well in this play.

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