

AN ANALYSIS ON CONSTRUCTIVENESS IN DAVID MAMET'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Unlike most conservative thinkers and writers today, such as Ben Shapiro or Jonah Goldberg, Kirk's work focuses on the interconnectedness of ideas to culture. Kirk ensures to connect conservative politics to artistic endeavours, spirituality, and science, to mention a few, in his writing for *American Buffalo*. He does not write primarily about one subject. The mentor/student relationship between Donny and Bobby is the most significant relationship in the play, as is already said. The researcher investigates a traditional view of their relationship. In general, mentors are expected to pass along their expertise and knowledge to their mentee. Kirk emphasized that the question of what to conserve, protect, or reform was the main driving force behind the conservative ideology. The most significant conflict Donny faces throughout the play is how and when to get Bobby to think about this. The relationship between Donny and Bobby in *American Buffalo* serves as the central focus of this essay's examination of the conservative ideology's fundamental principles.

Keywords: conservative, relation, struggle, conserve, future

The widely held misconception that a playwright's professional stock plummets if he is thought to be prolific is challenged by David Mamet's publication history. Mamet has produced more than twenty unique, full-length plays in the last three decades. In addition, he has written fourteen screenplays, two collections of prose fiction, two collections of poetry, six children's books, and eight volumes of nonfiction. He debuted a brand-new play in 1999 and released *Jafsie and John Henry*, his fifth collection of brief essays, along with two scripts and a poetry collection. ¹ He also helms motion pictures.

Mamet's brief pieces cover a consistent range of subjects, including drama, manly pastimes (such as card games, hunting, drinking, and friendship), the American Jewish identity, and childhood experiences. In *On Directing Film* (1991), the controversial acting primer *True and False* (1997), and *Three Uses of the Knife*, a study of "the nature and purpose of drama," he expanded on his findings on theater and motion pictures.

American Buffalo follows three men as they strive to realize their skewed visions of the American Dream in a pawn shop run by one of the protagonists. The play examines the impact of language and how easy one might succumb to one's most sinister views. It is a modern rendition of a classical tragedy. Mamet also describes in great depth how people might become deceived into compromising their own principles as well as those of their spouses and friends. *American Buffalo*, now regarded as a masterpiece of American theater, serves as a lesson in carefully examining and upholding one's values and principles as well as a demonstration of the use of words as character. The play has had numerous professional productions, many of which garnered favorable reviews. The 1983 revival and the Broadway premiere each received four Tony Award nominations in addition to numerous Drama Desk awards. Mamet also won

the 1977 Best American Play Award from the New York Drama Critics Circle. "Working with the tiniest imaginable vocabulary—words like nothing, great, and no, as well as those of four letters—Mr. Mamet [...] has created a deceptively small-scale tragedy that is packed with the power to explode the largest of American myths," Frank Rich wrote in his review of the play for the New York Times. Even while it may not be as frequently revived or collected as Mamet's 1984 play *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *American Buffalo* is nonetheless one of his most well-known works. 2015 saw a fresh revival of it on London's West End. The hierarchical, familial relationships Mamet creates between the three characters play a role in the play's durability, at least in part. There is a lot of scholarly interest in these fluid, changing partnerships. My analysis is not different in this regard. I have an interest in Donny, Teach, and Bobby's hierarchy and how it affects the development of their characters. It is important to note that this hierarchy sometimes appears in production when Bobby is cast as a black man, thereby reinforcing racial hierarchies. As previously indicated, my analysis, however, is concentrated on the characters as they are presented in the play. In any event, the researcher believes that the mentor-student bond between Donny and Bobby has the greatest dramatic impact because it serves as the impetus for a majority of the play's action. Dramatic relationships are nothing new. In actuality, it dates back to the Greeks. It is therefore not strange that Mamet would include such a relationship in his work given his preference for Aristotelian theatrical conventions. In these types of partnerships, the mentor's job is to impart knowledge, experiences, and instructions to their mentee so that they will be better equipped for their own endeavors. But now the mentor must decide precisely what to impart: what merits preservation, protection, or reform?

For instance, Teach manipulates Donny out of jealousy over their relationship, and Donny betraying Bobby sets up the violent finale of Mamet's play. Furthermore, Mamet uses the mentor-student relationship to teach the audience a lesson in loyalty and trust. Russell Kirk addresses what he sees as the six principles that make up the core of contemporary conservatism in his book *The Conservative Mind*. These principles are not meant to be exhaustive, but they do give readers a general grasp of the philosophy, which Kirk described in reaction to his worries about the New Deal's expansion of government power and what he saw as his geopolitical rival in Soviet Communism. According to Kirk, conservatives first uphold "a belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which regulates society as well as conscience" (8). Then, he asserts that conservatives believe in the importance of social structures and classes as well as a "affection for the increasing variety and mystery of human existence, in contrast to the shrinking uniformity, egalitarianism, and utilitarian purposes of most radical systems" (8). The other three canons assert that there is a relationship between freedom and property, that those who want to "reconstruct society upon abstract designs" or those who propose to do so using unconventional or perhaps even unproven ideologies should be viewed with suspicion, and that hasty innovation may not be in society's best interests (9). As was already mentioned, one of Kirk's conservative tenets is his conception of classes and orders, through which conservatives frequently perceive the organization and hierarchy of society. This conservative canon is precisely described by Kirk as follows.

Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes, as against the notion of a 'classless society' [sic]. With reason, conservatives often have been called 'the party of order' [sic]. If natural distinctions are effaced among men, oligarchs fill the vacuum. Ultimate

equality in the judgment of God, and equality before courts of law, are recognized by conservatives; but equality of condition, they think, means equality in servitude and boredom. (8-9)

In other words, conservatives think that imposing financial equality through the government would be catastrophic for a civilized society. According to Kirk, the lack of material benefits would make inhabitants less motivated to discover, develop, and/or create, which could result in boredom. Furthermore, if there were an equal distribution of income, it would be difficult to implement equality of condition or result. *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism* (2010) by renowned historian David Farber argues that political compulsion and possible bloodshed would be necessary to share the citizens' riches equally (3). As the government would be completely in charge of allocating wealth rather than individuals (i.e., the free market), Kirk would think that the only equality that would result from such tactics would be that of slavery. As a result, people would be subject to the government. Many conservatives, including renowned economist Thomas Sowell, think that the free market is the most effective and fair way to distribute and divide wealth in society. According to conservative theory, the free market merely spreads one individual's wealth to other people through trade. The wealth in question is not said to have "descended from heaven," or to be pre-existing or finite; rather, it is the result of individual labor and willingness to take on risk. Conservatives argue that if the government were to perceive prosperity as manna from heaven that fell evenly to the ground, eliminating choice, risk, and opportunity, people would then become completely dependent on their government, erasing their personal agency (Sowell 10-12). Bradley J. Birzer analyzes Russell Kirk's explanation of this modern conservatism concept in his book *Russell Kirk: American Conservative* (2015). Birzer notes that despite Kirk frequently using the word "order," he hardly ever explains it. Kirk's order was "the order of divine providence as traditionally understood and defined in orthodox Judaism and Christianity," in contrast to the order sought by conventional right-wing dictators of the 20th century (414-415).

Like the eminent German classical scholar Theodor Haecker, Kirk views "order" as the ultimate spiritual nature of the cosmos (1). In other words, everyone must make an effort to balance the divine and mundane orders in their own location and time, according to their own unique and fallen way (Birzer 415). Kirk didn't care about social or tribal hierarchy; he was more concerned with each person's potential. To put it another way, Kirk felt that if equality was imposed by the government, people would lose the will to realize their full potential. Kirk's explanation of the conservatism's principles delves into the word's etymology. It's crucial to emphasize that for Kirk, conservatism must conserve, even though it can appear like a tautology. According to Birzer, "conservatives reform the best of what has been presented to them across the generations, but idealists always look forward to something perfect" (111). A significant portion of culture is maintained by successive generations imparting their knowledge and concepts. Kirk and many other conservatives are of the opinion that it is the responsibility of the younger generation to carefully analyze the concepts and then determine how to effectively apply them.

Kirk writes in his introduction to *The Conservative Mind* that "the preservation of the old moral traditions of humanity is the essence of social conservatism" (8). When explaining the

causes of the American Revolution, he goes into further detail, arguing that the colonies' refusal to uphold or accept the rules that the British had given them served as its catalyst (75-78). Kirk thinks that it is part of human nature to constantly challenge received wisdom. Should they remain unchanged or undergo some sort of reformation? The Americans rose up to demand opportunity for all and end future oppression. Donny and Bobby's mentor-student connection is clearly established in *American Buffalo*. Bobby is not just Donny's gopher, but also someone to whom Donny can impart knowledge and offer advice regarding how to operate their particular line of pawnbroking company. Before the performance starts, Donny has made a \$90 sale to a coin collector of a buffalo nickel, which is a rare nickel with a buffalo motif that was produced by the US Mint in the early 1900s. Donny, however, is of the opinion that the client conned him and questioned his expertise. Teach tricks Donny into betraying Bobby as his preparations to restore his pride and get his coin are coming together, costing the play's most important connection.

Donny should have safeguarded Bobby as Bobby's mentor, and as a result of his failure to do so and the results of that failure, Donny has to reevaluate what in his own life needs to be kept, protected, or changed. Bobby is tasked by Donny with finding the coin collector and learning more about him so that they might steal the man's collection as retaliation for the collector's disrespect of Donny. At the beginning of the performance, Bobby apologizes to Donny after losing the collector's trail. The interaction between Donny and Teach, his coworker, is fraught with convoluted power dynamics, opposing worldviews, and ideological disagreements. They appear to hang out in the same circles and are, in a sense, coworkers and friends. They look to be pals because they occasionally play cards together. The play also includes a number of moments where Donny and Teach were together in the past for various reasons, and they are more familiar with one another than either character is with Bobby. As soon as Teach enters the room, Donny starts listening to him rant and rave about his previous interaction with their acquaintances Grace and Ruthie. The play's main conflict is caused by the intricate, multifaceted relationship Mamet creates between Donny and Teach. Mamet even described Teach as the Devil who appears to entice the main character in interviews (Roudané 66). Teach, in contrast to Bobby, does not consider everything Donny says to be true or wise counsel. Teach pushes Donny to think differently on multiple occasions and challenges him consistently. When Donny doubts Teach's role as his coworker, his participation in the con, or the motivations behind his acts, this combative element of their friendship stands out in particular. Their relationship is based on complex statements and disputes. Or, as Teach puts it, "games," all of which are intended to preserve the relationship while simultaneously elevating one of them in the hierarchy of their power. In this section, Teach's deception attempts to influence Donny are failing, so Mamet's opponent takes a defensive stance. This ambition intensifies the already frequent ideological and philosophical disagreements between Donny and Teach. While Teach choose to seize possibilities presented to him by others, Donny takes the initiative to chase his own prospects. He rejects Donny's perspective and challenges him fiercely until one of them caves.

This obstacle typically manifests in disagreements regarding Bobby. Donny's commitment to his moral position and his allegiance to Bobby begin to erode as the play progresses, and Teach eventually persuades him to do so. Teach highlights Bobby's youth and inexperience despite the fact that the character has shown no signs of being unfaithful to Donny in an effort

to advance his own career. Teach focuses on Donny's role as the student's mentor, giving the impression that Donny is a decent man who merits a happy resolution to his deception. Teach continues by emphasizing his own enthusiasm and how it will undoubtedly help Donny, whereas Bobby cannot be counted on to contribute well to the plan (or so Teach claims). Teach's strategy focuses on sabotaging Donny's ability to impart knowledge to Bobby in order for him to conserve, as well as on influencing their mentor/student relationship. Further examining the results of Teach's manipulation, Roudané observes that Donny is not mistaken in his skepticism over the use of Bobby in the deception. Bobby is, after all, a heroin addict in recovery who is young and inexperienced. However, Mamet creates Teach to be especially adept at manipulating Donny's negative traits and bringing out his pride and avarice (Roudané 64). Donny's vices, or arrogance as Roudané alleges, make him unaware of how he is being used and keep him from taking into account the ramifications of his choice to substitute Bobby for Teach in his scheme. When Teach questions Bobby about his unexpected entrance carrying a buffalo coin, Donny's blindness is never more obvious. By include stutters and grammatical errors in his discourse, Mamet underlines Bobby's lack of intelligence compared to the other two characters. The pupil can't keep up with the Devil, and just when Bobby needs Donny the most, he can't see how sincere and desperate he is. BOB: Donny, I have no idea. Ruthie and Grace Teach snatches something in the area and strikes BOB hard in the side of the head. TEACH: If you screw with Grace and Ruthie, you shithead, I'll kick your fucking head in. [...] fictitious patients at the hospital You fruit, that doesn't mean crap to me. WOMAN: Donny DONNY: You caused it by your own fault. (Mamet 94) 25 Donny, who is adamant that Bobby is deceiving him, lets Teach, the Devil, brutally beat his pupil. Teach basically promised him a more lucrative outcome should he join Donny in the con rather than Bobby or Fletcher, thus his greed for immediate money drives him to betray Bobby. Donny understands the full impact of his actions after a phone call to the hospital reveals that Bobby was telling the truth about Fletcher. Donny has abandoned not only his friendship with Bobby but also his role as mentor and the obligations that go along with it. "You come in here, you stick this poison in me," he screams at Teach (101).

Donny makes a mistake, but he still learns a lesson—possibly the one he had been trying to teach Bobby from the start. This acknowledgment of Donny's is an Aristotelian standard, as other academics have noticed, and one that I think is mirrored in Kirk's works. However, Mamet closes the play in an unexpectedly upbeat manner. The three somehow come together despite the fact that Bobby is seriously hurt, Teach is grieving his losses, and Donny is second-guessing his decisions. Bobby is taken care of by Donny, and Mamet makes the implication that Donny will change after the curtain falls because of his apologies to Bobby. He is aware of what has to be safeguarded and, more significantly, what needs to be changed. He won't allow himself to be taken advantage of so easily in the future, and he'll work his hardest to earn the unwavering loyalty of his pupil. This will allow the pupil to keep learning from Donny and preserving his teachings. Bobby's devotion to Donny gives Mamet's play emotional weight and a chance to consider the role of the student in the mentor/student relationship.

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