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A Script and Acting Analysis of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

By

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Abstract:

Glengarry Glen Ross is a Pulitzer Prize-winning play by David Mamet. This paper is a practical guide for the actor to understanding the events of the play and, specifically, to approaching the role of Richard Roma, with a particular emphasis on Michael Chekhov's psycho-physical work. First, I will discuss the circumstances, values and themes of the world of the play in relation to the character Shelley Levene as the main agent of the events. Then my focus in character analysis will shift to Richard Roma as the lead character of the ensemble. Together, the two characters create a contrasting duo between old and young, unaccomplished and hyper-successful. Shelley is the real estate agent who drives action. However, his opposite in Roma is the most successful salesman at the real estate agency.

While the initial event is what happens right before the play starts to set its action in motion, the central event is the highest point of action, which leads to the main event that introduces the resolution of the storyline. Again, the paper starts with an analysis of Shelley and his relationship to the initial, central and main events and ends with a character analysis of Roma and a discussion of how an actor might begin to create a performance using Chekhov's movement work. It is through such script and character interpretation that an actor is able to achieve depth and specificity, while uncovering layers of meaning in performance.

Script Analysis:

This section is a script analysis outlining the initial, central, and main events and the themes of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. From the beginning, the audience and readers are introduced to a hyper-competitive, isolated world of capitalist gain at any cost to the point of lying and cheating. Every man in the sales agency is working only for his own financial benefit. Accordingly, a salesman's ability to adapt his techniques and convince potential clients to buy land becomes essential for success.

The play starts in a Chinese restaurant by revealing the discontent of the real estate company's oldest salesman, Shelley Levene, in response to information he has received to finish actual deals, selling pieces of land to unsuspecting clients over the phone. Unlike his colleagues who complain about getting bad leads, real estate agent Richard Roma, who doesn't appear until Scene 3, is seen closing a major deal with a client named Lingk. Thus, the events of the play start with this dichotomy.

The initial event for the course of the play is the sales contest set by real estate agency owners Mitch and Murray, who all the characters work for in order to get the premium leads, which are the best information for obtaining potential land buyers. In the contest, the highest grossing salesman will be awarded a Cadillac car. This contest sets in motion a feeling of necessity and urgency for salesmen Levene, Moss, and Aaranow, while Roma is off closing deals and, again, absent from the first two scenes.

It would not make sense to speak of Richard Roma without first explaining the character of Shelley Levene, who is the least profitable salesman in the office. Both characters hold down two ends of the spectrum: adaptability and success versus an inability to adapt. This complementarity informs a full understanding of the play. On the one hand, Roma is decisive,

capable, successful, and action-oriented in his speech. His style as a salesman includes a certain level of grandiosity. However, he employs tactics of lying and cheating his way into large deals through convincing his clients of their need to buy from him. For example, his manipulative speech to Lingk at the Chinese restaurant is full of exaggeration about the beauty of life and capturing the essence of every moment just to set him towards signing a large deal (Mamet47). He over-ascribes positive qualifications to the properties he sells to the point of immorality. This tendency is evident in his talks initially, and later in the play, with Lingk. He starts with first selling him the land and later trying to deceive him into not backing out of the deal.

On the other hand, Levene is the least effective salesman on the team. The play starts with his argument with Williamson, the agents' supervisor, about getting good leads to clients who will actually buy land. However, Levene's out-of-touch approach leads to consistent failure to break his string of bad luck. Rather than adapting and changing their approach, Levene and his colleagues Moss and Aaranow continually blame their circumstances. However, Roma's lack of compassion towards clients coupled with a strong hunger for financial gain allow him to say anything that would help him reach his goal of closing a deal. His value of seeking success at any cost reaches the level of malevolence and cheating. This is strikingly apparent in his first dream-like talk with Lingk in comparison to his last talk, when he completely attempts to blind him from the truth that he has three days to legally cancel a financial deal (93). Thus, immorality and manipulation are common traits in all of the characters but how they are applied towards the ultimate goal of financial success is different. This statement appears clearly in the central event near the end of the play as a consequence to the initial event.

The initial event has completely different effects on Roma and Levene. Roma remains consistent with his client in trying to close the deal. Levene, however, tries everything that is

underhanded and illegal to get to the good leads but in futility, because they are given only to successful salesmen. Although both characters differ in their levels of success, they are similar in their lack of morality. While Roma manipulates his client, Levene attempts to manipulate the system. The central event of the play is the robbery of the real estate agency, signifying a loss of hope that has reached absolute despair for all the agents of the company. It looks like an inside job, but Roma, being the most profitable agent, is not considered a suspect, especially with his superior selling abilities. The shady conversations between Moss and Aaranow, about breaking into the office and stealing the Glengarry Glen Ross client information to sell to other salesmen for a large sum of money, suggest they are the culprits.

A pattern had arisen from the initial event to the central event. The characters who complained most about the system and refused to adapt positively, in order to succeed as salesmen, are the same people responsible for the system's demise and the failure of their agency.

At the end of the play, manipulation is what motivates all the characters, as a detective is in the office and is investigating everyone. The only two characters who remain calm, because they are innocent of the crime, are Roma and Williamson. By contrast, the three remaining characters, who have plotted earlier, or were aware of the office robbery, are manic and destructive to themselves and others. First, Moss becomes angry at Roma for being the most successful salesman and at Levene for, allegedly, closing an eighty-two-thousand-dollar deal (71). This is only a manipulation tactic to try and quit before getting fired and the detective discovering that he is the one who stole the leads. Second, Aaranow snaps at the detective for being firm with him, which comes from his feelings of guilt and complicity in the crime. Although Aaranow only listened to Moss's plan and did not participate in it, he already promised Moss not to tell anyone

(45). In other words, Aaranow does not want to tell on his colleague and acts completely oblivious of the event through his façade of anger.

At that point Roma's attempt to distract his client Lingk from reclaiming his money and cancelling their transaction turns futile. Lingk, having come by the agency to stop their deal, discovers that the place was robbed, and Williamson's failed attempt to help Roma with a lie scare off Lingk completely.

Finally, Levene inadvertently reveals to Williamson that he robbed the place and sold the leads. That revelation, that Levene was the key perpetrator responsible for breaking in and selling the client information, is the main event of the play.

The events prior to this pivotal moment help the audience understand more about the character of Levene. Not only is he manipulative, but also, he is destructive to himself, the agency, and Roma. First, he pretends as if he does not see all the signs that say his eighty-two-thousand-dollar deal is a hoax and not worth anything. Levene's act is an attempt to clear his name from the robbery through a mirage of success that puts him on level with Roma. However, Williamson lets him know that the family that bought the land from him are living in extreme poverty and cannot possibly fulfill the deal financially. In consistency with the theme of manipulation which guides the whole cast, first, Williamson provides Levene with the failing leads to trick him and deliberately cause his failure. Second, when Levene discovers that Williamson knows he is the criminal, the former tries to bribe the latter in order to free himself from the police investigation. Then, Williamson tells him that he cannot even accept his bribe, which does not exist. A clear cyclical pattern emerges: Levene is willing to do anything objectively wrong or illegal to get what he wants, but he is not as skilled a trickster as his coworkers. He lies, breaks into the office, steals, and wrongfully sells other people's work product in order to prove to himself and others that he is

still a successful salesman. In the end, all of his attempts reach an inevitable failure. Therefore, though Levene is not the main subject of this paper, his contribution to the events of the play and the course of action is undeniable.

The supporting characters further reflect Levene's inability to reach success as a salesman. Ross and Aarallow share the same sentiment, that of feeling wronged by their sales agency; and it is this very sentiment that causes the events to take place.

That leaves the character of Roma. In order to play him, an actor should be aware of the other characters, and of their needs and values, to achieve a better understanding of, and approach to, the performance. Roma is a skilled opportunist who is capable of using the situation to his own advantage and at the expense of others, and the following character analysis delves further into this point.

Character Analysis:

Richard Roma, as mentioned before, is the most successful, largest earner for the real estate firm he works at. This is due to the consistency between his personal values, which are brutal competition and ruthless success seeking, and his super-objective. Roma's values run parallel with the given circumstances of the play, especially with what is valued at his agency. One detail sets him apart from his peers: his success at any cost. His objectives align with his desire to remain on top of the sales record in order to win the prized Cadillac; but mainly, his super-objective is to dominate all the other salesmen of the agency, vanquish competition, and secure his top salesman position at any cost. His immoral disregard to the financial welfare of his clients as seen in his interaction with Lingk proves his trickery skills that exceed his coworkers. Roma maintains this super-objective throughout the play and beyond, as his sales are the highest grossing even after the office is robbed. The alignment of his values, objectives, and super-objective guide him throughout, and they safeguard him against the given circumstances that arise when the crimes are committed against the office.

In addition to determining objectives and super-objectives, another valuable technique for the actor is to provide adjectives for their character, guiding his or her choices while avoiding the pitfalls of emoting, indicating, or planning ahead. If an actor knows how to describe himself as the character, there should be less need to think about the mood or behavior in the action taken. For example, Richard Roma can be described as a dancer whose moves, actions, and words are clean, sharp, precise, smooth, and decisive. This initial approach to character, which is informed by my understanding of the Michael Chekhov technique, is a road map into the psyche of the character,

one way to discover where his impulses come from and to reach what end. The actor then continues to be guided by the words and stage directions of the playwright.

Before jumping into a deeper discussion of this physical and mental approach to a role (in the next section below), I would like to explore the character of Richard Roma from a linguistic and historical perspective.

I suggest that certain linguistic aspects of a text may sometimes be useful for an actor, both in further understanding a character and his/her identity in the course of the play. In his first and last names, the sound /r/ is recurrent in Richard Roma. This sound can call up feelings of a revving machine or a growling animal, both of which provide a sense of alertness, readiness to combat, and release of tension. Of course, while the focus here is on the meaning suggested by the sound, there cannot be tension in the actor's instrument. One must ensure that the meaning manifests in the performance organically. I suggest that the vibration inherent in the /r/ sound is essential to the name of the character, as vibration equals motion and energy. In accordance with this idea, Richard Roma is always moving throughout the play and never static in the office or the restaurant, focused solely on closing deals and gaining financial profit.

Richard is called Ricky throughout the play, which provides sharpness and acuteness to the name with the repetition of the vowel sound /i/ and the intrusion of the consonant /k/. The short nickname adds to the decisiveness of the character referred to earlier. In his last name, the vowel /o/ is introduced in Roma followed by a schwa, and both induce a sense of wholeness, inclusion, and continuity. In addition, the nasal, bilabial consonant /m/ introduces a Zen-like effect of calmness to the character's name. This detail corresponds with how very rarely he raises his voice compared to his peers, like Moss or Aaranow, conserving rather than wasting his energy.

Therefore, the linguistics of a character's name, the sound of that name, can sometimes help with an actor's choices and deepen their understanding of that character.

The name Richard Roma can also suggest certain historical inferences in the listener's ear that an actor can also use to create a character. In some approaches to acting technique, an actor would work on the lineage of his character and choose who he is in any historical period, according to his/her name and character traits. In the case of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, with its all-male cast and the overtly competitive nature of its story line, the historical references make sense to be very masculine. For example, Richard invokes the image of Richard Lion Heart, the crusader from the Middle Ages. The name and the historical figure are synonymous with active, masculine, goal-oriented ideas of conquering and achieving. Moreover, the last name Roma suggests the Caesars of the Roman Empire and all their accomplishments.

Keeping these two historical references in mind while preparing the character and doing actual research in these areas, could deepen an actor's understanding of what they can bring out in performance. An actor can portray Roma as no ordinary man, but one capable of excelling and maintaining his success across time and in spite of changes in his cultural environment. For example, the negativity expressed by his fellow salesmen throughout the play does not affect Roma's progress, whose very name evokes an overtly aggressive, competitive nature.

Approaching the Role:

Physical preparations through Alexander Technique and Michael Chekhov movement are essential elements in my approach to the role.

First, Alexander Technique is a fundamental part of my physical work, focusing my attention on the energy of the character by ensuring my instrument is clear of any unnecessary tension or negative consuming energy. Lying-down work is where I make sure my spine is completely free and my other joints are dependent on it while still being capable of movement without tension. This work is effective at clearing the body of negative energy that might interfere with the performance of character on stage. Then I would start standing up and sitting down, followed by walking, all while internalizing the motto I learned in my Alexander classes to let the neck be free so the head goes forward and up, the back lengthens and widens, and the legs go forward and away.

Mind you, all of this remains at the level of actor work, as I realize that not all characters have good use of their body. That said, Richard Roma is drawn as a very tactical person who is aware of his energy and moves and speaks decisively.

Second, I would start to apply the Alexander work into the speech and normal movement – standing up, walking, gestures – of Richard Roma. How successful and exceptional he is at his work would translate into his body use and posture. Accordingly, I would attempt several trial-and-error mannerisms on the way to discovering the most authentic, non-pre-planned ways for Roma to move freely and genuinely.

Contemporary dancing classes are very helpful to me, since the movement patterns are physically precise and sharp. If I were to choose to have Roma to move like a technical dancer, it

would align with his overtly competitive performance as a salesman in the play. Therefore, dancing classes combined with Alexander Technique would guide Roma's movement into a fully shaped character with depth and purpose, beyond the spoken word, as the actor would be fully aware of his physical decisions. Admittedly this is not the only method of approaching character, but it feels aligned with how this particular character is shaped through this play. Richard Roma's de facto leadership of the office must be expressed inwardly and outwardly whenever he is on stage.

Finally, I will use the tools of Michael Chekhov's movement work to discover the psycho-physical reality of the character of Richard Roma. In Lenard Petit's book, *The Michael Chekhov Handbook for the Actor*, he states that Chekhov's movement technique "awakens a creative state" and holds the promise of Artistic Freedom (Petit 17). Here are some of the many ways I imagine exploring the role of Richard Roma using Chekhov's tools if I were to work on this character in an actual production.

I would begin by using the Four Qualities of Movement, identified by Chekhov as Molding, Flowing, Flying, and Radiating (Petit 25). Molding is the form of movement I would use during the foul language and harsh speech that Roma employs while speaking to Williamson, such as, "Then I'm over the fucking top and you owe me a Cadillac" (Mamet 54). In this excerpt, Roma expresses thoroughly that he does not find the office robbery to be a legitimate reason for him to not obtain his prized vehicle. Accordingly, while saying these lines, actor movement of a sharp, cutting nature is apt, for it allows an extra layer of precision on the way to a decisive victory.

As for Flowing, this quality of movement appears in the mannerisms Roma might use to persuade Lingk to buy land from him, while they sit in the Chinese restaurant (Mamet 48). Although I would not depend on one quality of movement for a whole scene, Flowing is the most applicable type to depend on in this case. The way Roma takes his time imagining and visualizing

how life should be, how people remember life, and how one should accept all aspects of one's being, is related to Flowing with freedom, trusting, and appreciating the joy of life. However, this all comes with the deliberate purpose of turning a random lonesome man at a bar into a client. In his sexist, morally ambiguous speech, Roma attempts to convince Lingk of making the deal through bending social rules and norms. First, he starts with comparing life's problems to the bad smell of train compartments and follows that with justifying sleeping with underage girls (47). This specific tactic is applied to shape Lingk's immediate ideas about how hard life is and turning them into seizing the day with whatever might bring him instant gratification. Second, Roma continues on this course with talking about the little details in life that bring real happiness through capturing fleeting pleasurable moments of sexual desire and adventures with no regard to future consequences. Again, here Roma is deliberately focusing Lingk's attention on what he is about to offer next, which is buying land from him and not considering whatever subsequent financial circumstances that may arise (49). Roma in this instance is similar to a hunting predator, or a shark, Flowing around his prey. To explain, he finds a lonesome man drinking alone at a bar and provides him with a bait in the form of a long, seemingly authentic, unassuming speech. Nonetheless, his real motivation is to convince Lingk of the presence of a better life than his loneliness at the bar with a simple map to a piece of land in Florida (50). Thus, this whole speech is a marketing ploy that has nothing to do with what Roma believes personally. This immoral technique is so well crafted to the point that Roma has to introduce himself by the end of the exchange. In other words, after knowing for sure that Lingk is an approachable customer, he introduces himself and follows then with his main motive of speaking with him, which is closing a financial deal. In addition, the aspect of Flowing is beneficial to me as an actor, as I am looking for ways to deepen the bond

between Roma's chosen words and his physical being. The prior analogy of Roma as a shark is a helpful manner of practicing Flowing through his speech.

Flying and Radiating appear consistently in Roma's behavior. In Chekhov, Flying relates to following impulse and letting go while trusting your ability to survive. Roma can fly like a bird of prey that hunts and roams the air. With Roma, these feelings appear not only when he apparently stands up for Levene – after Roma mistakenly thinks Levene had made a huge sale – but also by the end of the play. However, Roma's motivation here is questionable as his own survival is what is guiding his actions rather than comradery. As Lingk leaves the office, right before Baylen asks for Levene, Roma supplies Levene with a huge compliment. In this instant, Roma merely appears to be Flying above his super-objective of maintaining superiority in his profession; instead, he shows kindness and generosity to his colleague. Nevertheless, by the end of the play, Roma reveals that he has a deal with Williamson to steal some of Levene's leads in order to remain as top salesman (107). Once again, Williamson is an active agent in the manipulation, as he not only gives Levene bad leads but provides his good leads to others. Therefore, at least in this moment, Roma manages to survive the risk of not reaching his super-objective through pretentious graciousness and comradery. His super-objective defines him, and the readers and audience are introduced to the same side of the character, one that transcends competition and seeks victory to the level of hurting clients and colleagues. The movement of Flying corresponds with these features, and it can appear in the slightest gestures that help viewers understand that the character is consistent in this manner.

Furthermore, Radiating can be an additional choice for the actor in order to reach the suitable feeling of the character from scene to scene. For example, I can radiate anger and disdain while speaking to Williamson (106). However, I can radiate brotherly love and respect while

speaking to Levene (105). In addition, Radiating can be added to the three movements above and felt through the actor's instrument while delivering his speech as Roma. Furthermore, I can change how I radiate in a single scene with Molding, Flowing, or Flying. In a single sentence, I can radiate different emotions and express them physically during the rehearsal period to be more comfortable with using my body as Richard Roma, rather than the actor portraying him.

Continuing my treatment here of Chekhov, I suggest that reading *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For the Actor* by Lenard Petit would be an essential element in my preparation for the role of Roma.

I create an Imaginary Body for the character, which helps me realize his regular everyday movement, like walking, sitting down, standing up and so forth. All his movement would originate from a center in his body, which can be his mind, chest or core. The center can be more specific according to how impulsive or restrained the character is. There are three main Imaginary Centers in the body: The head is the Thinking Center, the chest is the Feeling Center, and the Lower Body is the Willing Center. Choosing one of these centers helps to discover what kind of person a character is. Everyone has all three of these capacities, but we tend to lead with one. I can ask myself, is Roma primarily a Thinker, a Feeler or a Do-er?

Richard Roma, being a hyper-competitive, captain-of-industry type who can maintain uncanny success in a negative environment that brings others down, has his core as his center. The impulses for his actions would derive from his gut and his pelvis, as he trusts his own selling techniques and does not shy away from being deceptive to make a sale. Choosing Roma's core as his center allows for a more primal form of impulse, as opposed to choosing his head, where his ideas are, or his chest, where his emotions lie. From this starting point, the idea would be for the physical composition of Roma's Imaginary Body to guide my own actor body into responding

authentically, without thinking about the character's impulses. In other words, if I understand that the Imaginary Body of Richard Roma is guided by his core as the center of impulses, my own core would respond accordingly. Of course, this would only happen after an extensive rehearsal period, during which I would habituate my body to this choice. Ideally, inhabiting the Imaginary Body would not be a dire process but rather a culmination of the above-explained character preparation.

Working on Psychological Gesture (Petit 48) during the rehearsal process, using Chekhov's approach, can be helpful to the to the playing of action. The Psychological Gestures allow the actor to know what action he/she is playing at a certain moment. Accordingly, I would spend time before every rehearsal working on my own, developing the Psychological Gesture I have chosen to fully absorb the feeling of the action. In addition, I would incorporate the use of the Qualities of Movement with the Psychological Gestures, blending both techniques. For example, Roma uses the Psychological Gesture of placing – or manifesting something to its place – while speaking down to Williamson in a deliberate action to belittle him (Mamet 106). In a further example, when Roma addresses Levene positively, telling him that he has done well as a salesman, I might employ the Psychological Gesture of lifting, while moving as if Flying. The preparation methods are not necessarily distinct from one another; they can be incorporated without energy expenditure, allowing the actor's body and inner life to feel at one with the character. Similarly, the voice and speech of the actor, through dialogue, might incorporate the feeling of different sounds as discussed above. Ultimately the goal is for the merging of vocal and physical preparation to reach a level of beauty – of style – that is unforced and achieved through complete Ease (Petit 25).

Throughout this playful preparation, I can select an Archetype for Roma that expresses the character's identity, such as The Hero, The King, The Fool, etc. It is the "I Am" of the character.

Archetypes have been present since Plato's time, and they can assist the actor in the identification of the character's actions. I should be able to translate them physically and emotionally without too much mental interpretation that might block the natural impulses of the character. For example, to raise my voice at Moss for his insults to Levene, this impulse should be personalized and characterized with Roma, in order to be at one with my action. Here, I borrow the Archetype of the Devil: Roma, seemingly, wishes to defend Levene and deflect Moss's verbal attack, and he helps whoever is in need. However, his real motivation is to remain top salesman while making a deal with Williamson to steal Levene's leads. In this case, the Archetype of the Devil allows for the manipulation and evil plotting of Roma to be manifested in physical energy, while tricking Levene into thinking that they are friends. If the gesture of the Devil can be incorporated into the rehearsal process when working on this particular part of the script.

Finally – and continuing the application of Chekhov's techniques – the Feeling of Form in the character of Roma is present in his identity as a successful man and a capable salesman. His physical form might arise, for example, from me as the actor taking dancing and boxing classes to add more masculinity and lightness to my movement. Thus, Ease and Form are blended with my actor's understanding of Roma's identity and his actions/objectives in each part of the play; and these two elements – Ease and Form – would naturally bring beauty and a sense of the whole to the performance.

The Four Brothers, which Petit defines as four common characteristics that harmoniously bind artistic work together are very helpful in character creation (Petit 26). After Ease and Form, Beauty and Entirety arise from the consistency and the truthfulness of a character's actions, needs, and objectives. Put another way, if the alignment of everything that makes Roma a full human being is emotionally clear, there would be no obstacle hindering his full manifestation by the actor

to the audience. The full arc of his character with its beginning, middle and end would be clear for the play and consistent with the initial, central, and main events.

The most beautiful acting moments happen when the audience forgets the difference between character and actor. In such moments, audience members are spectators to larger life events that transcend their day-to-day existence.

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