Act 1 Scene 3

In Scene 3, Mamet introduces the character of Ricky Roma. He is the most successful man in the sales office, and as such his personality and cadence are a stark juxtaposition to the salesmen of previous scenes.

Roma is talking to Lingk, who is seated one booth over. He launches into a monologue about the illusion of security that human beings create in order to get through their lives. Safety nets are put in place every day in the form of bank accounts, relationships, or clean consciences, but they are just temporary shields against disasters that never really happen. Most of the things that people worry about do not happen, so all that anybody has is the moment; and should any misfortune come along, there is probably enough in your reserve to cover it. However, Roma feels that the ultimate weapon is living without the fear to begin with.

Roma sits in the same restaurant as the other characters, but he's not in the same place at all. While the other men bemoan the injustices looming before them, Roma is selling by using the oldest tactic there is - creating a feeling of invincibility in the mind of the unsuspecting Lingk, who will never know what really happened.

Knowledge Check

Can you answer these questions from memory? If not, skim and scan Act 1 Scene 3 to find the answers. Discuss your findings with a classmate or your teacher; record the significance of these moments in the play:

1. How is Ricky Roma different to the other salesmen in the play?

   • Significance:

2. What does Roma think makes people afraid to act?

   • Significance:
3. Describe Roma’s essential philosophy, as he explains in this scene.

- **Significance:**

4. Who is Lingk? What is Lingk’s role in this scene?

- **Significance:**

5. How does the nature of the conversation shift towards the end of this scene?

- **Significance:**

6. What is the position of all the salesmen at the end of Act 1?

- **Significance:**

**Important Theme:  *Morality, Deception and Conscience***

There is no mention of morals or morality or even business ethics in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Morality and ethics are not part of the operating procedure. In Roma's pseudo-philosophical discourse to Lingk, he says that he does "that today which seems to me correct today." While Roma purports to accept that there may be an absolute morality, he says, "And then what?" It is the very absence of morality which gradually dawns on the audience and frames the entire play. These people operate in a vicious jungle in which only the strong survive and nothing else matters.

Therefore, deception is at work on every level. We see lying and fantasy as a way of thinking and operating: certainly, there seems to be little truth to anything anyone says to anybody. Throughout the play, the characters immediately turn to deception when they are in a tight corner - which is most of the time!
Similarly, not one of the characters is troubled by conscience. Conscience does not seem to exist as a part of anyone's makeup. Again, it is Roma who mentions the concept in Act 1, scene 3: "You think that you're a thief? So What? …You fuck little girls, so be it?"

Discussion Point: social convention

Many American sociologists argue that the strict social conventions of the nineteen-fifties have all but disappeared in the twenty-first century. Others argue that a new set has developed that creates a false familiarity among new acquaintances. Which of these stances do you agree with? Can you cite examples as evidence?

Character Study: Roma and Lingk

1. Scene 3 is not only ambiguous but also strangely perverse. Roma takes on a series of roles in his interchange with Lingk: confidante, confessor, lover, etc. All of these roles are manifestations of Roma’s essential identity: salesman.

Can you find lines that demonstrate Roma’s fluid and slippery identity? (For example, lover, friend, psychiatrist, and priest.) What can you find? Create a table like this to record your quotations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ricky Roma’s Slippery Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confessor / Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In his extended speech, Ricky Roma espouses his worldview: that human beings are held back by morality and fear of loss and need to find a way to get what is rightfully theirs. It is a manifesto of individualism and consumption.
What do all these beliefs have in common? Taken together, what do they say about the world? Is there hope? Is there the possibility for collective good work?

3. In this scene, Mamet introduces the character of James Lingk. In a play largely about scheming, Lingk is the ultimate target: a trusting, sensitive, confused person in way over his head.

What do you think is Lingk’s objective in the story? He is unconnected to the machinations of Mitch and Murray; so, what does he want from Ricky Roma?

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**Office Gossip**

*The work of David Mamet is a direct descendant of the work of Harold Pinter, a British playwright who stated that words are not the vessels of meaning but rather tools used by the characters to conceal the truth and attack others.*

*Mamet often points to politicians who would speak pleasing platitudes to conceal their true intentions. Moments in American history when seemingly innocuous statements have been used as weapons in civil disputes include those used by McCarthy, Nixon, and Clinton. Why not research these examples?*

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“I don't want fucking shit and I don't give a shit, Lingk puts me over the top, you filed it, that's fine, any other shit kicks out you go back. You... you reclose it, 'cause I closed it and you... you owe me the car”

Ricky Roma, played by Al Pacino, in the 1992 film of *Glengarry Glen Ross*. 