

David Mamet: Biographical Details

David Mamet was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 30, 1947. His father was a labor lawyer and his mother a schoolteacher. After his parents' divorce in 1958, Mamet lived with his mother and sister. He played football, wrestled, and was a voracious reader. In 1963, he moved to North Chicago to live with his father and attend the private Francis Parker school where he first took drama classes and played the lead in a musical. He also worked backstage at Hull House theatre and at the famous improvisational Second City Company.

Mamet studied literature and drama at Goddard College in Vermont, where he received a B.A. degree in 1969. His first short play, *Camel*, was written to fulfill his thesis requirement. During his time at Goddard, he spent a year "in the field" at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre in New York City, where he studied the Stanislavsky system of acting under the direction of Sanford Meisner. During his college years Mamet's summer jobs included work as an actor and "specialty dancer" with several theatres. Following his graduation in 1969, he worked in Montreal with a company based on the campus of McGill University. He then returned to Chicago where he worked as a cab driver and, for almost a year, in the office of a "dubious" real estate firm. The latter experience is clearly evident in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. In 1970, Mamet taught acting at Marlboro College in Vermont, where he wrote *Lifeboat*, based on his experiences with one summer job. The following two years, he taught at Goddard and, while there, presented the first versions of *Duck Variations* and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. *Duck Variations* was subsequently presented in Chicago in the fall of 1972, marking the first production of a play by Mamet in his hometown. In the fall of 1973, Mamet moved back to Chicago. *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* was presented by the Organic Theatre Company in the summer of 1974, drew large audiences, and was awarded the prestigious Joseph Jefferson Award. In 1975 he completed *American Buffalo* and that work was presented by the Goodman Theatre with critical and popular success. On January 23, 1976, *American Buffalo*, with a new cast, opened at St. Clement's theatre in New York City, receiving generally positive notices. Mamet moved to New York the next month. That summer *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *Duck Variations* opened at the Off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre, where they would enjoy a long run; in February 1977, *American Buffalo* opened on Broadway and was awarded the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

Mamet's career flourished throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with such notable works as *Edmund* (1982), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983), *Speed-the-Plow* (1988), and *Oleanna* (1992). He also ventured into film during this period, writing the scripts for *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), *The Verdict* (1982) which won an Academy Award nomination *The Untouchables* (1987), and *Hoffa* (1992). His success as a screenwriter led to opportunities as a director, including the films *House of Games* (1988), *Homicide* (1991), and *Oleanna* (1995), all of which he also wrote.