

Glengarry Glen Ross: Act 1 Scene 3

"I do that today which I think will make me secure."

In Scene Three, 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. 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

How well do you know this scene?

1. What smells bad, according to Roma as he commences his long speech?

- (a) Train compartments.
- (b) Downtown Chicago.
- (c) America.
- (d) The restaurant food.

2. What does Roma generalise about people?

- (a) We're all insane.
- (b) We're all queer.
- (c) We're all afraid.
- (d) We're all sinners.

3. What 'befuddles' people, in Roma's opinion?

- (a) Middle-class morality.
- (b) Family responsibilities.
- (c) Suburban ennui.
- (d) Impossible dreams.

4. Where does Roma say he refuses to live?

- (a) In the suburbs.
- (b) On the streets.
- (c) In England.
- (d) In hell.

5. Which of the following is NOT a disaster that Roma says might happen to people?

- (a) A bank closing.
- (b) A plane crash.
- (c) A nuclear accident.
- (d) A house fire.

6. When discussing life's uncertainties, what does Roma say he will have?

- (a) A plan.
- (b) Good friends.
- (c) Faith.
- (d) A reserve.

7. Which of the following is NOT something Roma suggests property might represent?

- (a) Money.
- (b) Freedom.
- (c) Security.
- (d) Comfort.

8. According to Roma, what is the secret to coping with life's uncertainty?

- (a) Live without fear.
- (b) Ensure financial security.
- (c) Know what you know.
- (d) Trust in yourself.

9. What is Lingk drinking?

- (a) Manhattan.
- (b) Old-fashioned.
- (c) Gin and tonic.
- (d) Gimlet.

10. What does Roma spread out on the table in front of Lingk?

- (a) A wad of cash.
- (b) The menu.
- (c) A sales brochure.
- (d) A map of Florida.

Understanding and Interpretation

1. Describe your first impressions of Ricky Roma. How is Roma different to the men we have met so far in the play?
2. What is Roma's essential life philosophy, as he explains it in this scene?
3. Who is Lingk? What is his role in the scene?
4. What do you consider to be effective about Roma's sales-tactics in this scene? How do his tactics compare to Levene's and Moss' tactics?
5. How important is the structure and sequence of Act 1? Would this scene have been as effective if it was placed first, for example, or before Moss' successful manipulation of Aarabow?

Important Theme: *Morality and Conscience*

"Bad people go to hell? I don't think so."

There is no mention of morals or morality or even business ethics in Glengarry Glen Ross. Morality and ethics are not part of the workplace operating manual. In Roma's pseudo-philosophical discourse to Lingk, he says that he does *"that today which seems to me correct today."* While Roma accepts that there may be an absolute morality (such as the existence of heaven and hell) 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. They are immoral and, at times, even amoral, as if the concept of morality doesn't even exist for them!

Therefore, deception is at work on every level. We see lying, storytelling and fantasy as a way of thinking and working: certainly, there seems to be little truth to anything anyone says to anybody. Even the land that the salesmen are trying to offload onto gullible customers is described as 'crap' – their entire enterprise is built on lies and fantasy. Throughout the play, the characters immediately turn to deception when they are in a tight corner - which is most of the time. Moss, for example, tricked Aaranow into agreeing to rob the office and Levene constantly retreats into the 'fantasies' of the past to justify his sense of entitlement when it comes to getting better leads. 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 One, Scene Three: *"You think that you're a thief? So What? ... You fuck little girls? So be it."*

Activity

Think about the theme of morality and conscience – or, more precisely, the absence of morality and conscience – in Act 1. Do all the characters illustrate that, when pushed into a tight corner, morality comes second to simply getting ahead? For each character, identify one key quotation that you would use to support your view:

Character	(Absence of) Morality and Conscience?	Key Quotation
Levene		
Williamson		
Moss		
Aaranow		
Roma		

Important Character: *Ricky Roma*

'The true reserve that I have is the strength that I have of acting each day without fear.'



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

Richard Roma (Ricky or Rick, for short) is in his early forties – so still has the drive and hunger to succeed that characterises the most successful salesmen in the office. In fact, he is the star salesman, top of the board, and confident of success each time he goes out on a ‘sit’. When we meet him in Act One Scene Three, he seems to be talking to a friend – but it turns out that he’s merely softening up his latest mark, one James Lingk, for a sales pitch. Success and failure are easily measured in this play: to succeed is to get money, and to fail is not. However, the men’s whole notion of themselves is caught up in this zero-sum game. If they don’t make a sale, their whole sense of self is destroyed. For Roma, then, selling is not just a job – it’s his entire persona. It is who and what he is, and the audience can never know if the words he speaks are what he really thinks, or if everything that comes out of his mouth is just a ploy to ‘close’ that next deal.

In his extended speeches in this scene, Roma espouses his philosophy: that people are held back by both morality and fear of loss. They need to find a way to get what rightfully belongs to them. His manifesto is of extreme individualism – and Roma stays true to his hollow belief system later in the play, turning on both Lingk and Levene when it suits him. Any suggestion of loyalty or co-operation is at best disposable, and, at worst, a smokescreen covering up Roma’s true intentions. The audience can be sure of only one thing – Roma will always say and do what’s best for himself.

Activity

Roma’s extended speeches (or **monologues**) in Scene Three are not only ambiguous, but almost perverse. He insinuates himself into Lingk’s personal space in a way that’s more like an old, close friend than someone he just met at the bar. He speaks, not like a salesman, but more like a priest absolving Lingk of moral concerns (and even confessing a few of his own hidden secrets) or possibly a psychiatrist giving advice or life-coaching. Investigate Roma’s shifting personality by re-reading his extended speeches and tracing uses of language that position him in three different ways: confessor/priest – psychiatrist – old friend.