

Glengarry Glen Ross: Act 2.1 (to Levene: "...and I'll tell you who to blame is Mitch and Murray")

"They stole the leads... Christ. What am I going to do this month?"

The second act picks up the threads from Act One and opens in the ransacked real estate office the following morning. During the night, the office was burgled and the valuable Glengarry leads stolen. Detective Baylen is on the scene, questioning the salesmen one by one. Roma arrives first, focused entirely on his own priorities: he wants to know whether his big sale to Lingk from the previous night was filed or lost in the break-in. That deal would secure him the Cadillac prize, so disregards the chaos around him. Meanwhile, Aaronow grows increasingly nervous about being interrogated, his anxiety bubbling under the surface.

Levene then enters, buoyant and triumphant, announcing that he closed eight properties late the previous night, a comeback he hopes will restore his status. As he revels in success, Moss storms out of the office, furious at Baylen's accusatory tone, quitting in rage. Tension escalates as personalities clash and priorities collide, creating a mix of savage yet darkly comic confrontations amid the disorder.

Knowledge Check

Try to answer these questions from memory:

1. What is NOT a part of the ransacked scene?

- (a) Missing telephones
- (b) Broken glass
- (c) Smashed computers
- (d) A boarded up window

2. Where does Baylen conduct his interviews?

- (a) Downtown
- (b) In Williamson's office
- (c) At Levene's desk
- (d) In the foyer

3. Who told Roma about the break in?

- (a) Moss
- (b) Aaronow
- (c) Levene
- (d) Nobody

4. What does Roma sneering call Williamson's remaining leads?

- (a) Your 'deadbeat leads'
- (b) Your 'nobody tickets'
- (c) Your 'nostalgia file'
- (d) Your 'waste of paper'

5. Why does Roma think the police won't solve the crime?

- (a) There's no evidence
- (b) They're stupid
- (c) Everyone has an alibi
- (d) Actually, he thinks they will solve it

6. What advice does Roma give Aaronow about his police interview?

- (a) Give them what they want to hear
- (b) Make sure to cover your tracks
- (c) Always tell the truth
- (d) Don't give anything away

7. To whom did Levene make a sale?

- (a) Bruce and Harriett
- (b) Marina and Lesley
- (c) Oscar and Josie
- (d) Mike and Ashley

8. How much is the sale worth?

- (a) Forty-six grand
- (b) Sixty-nine grand
- (c) Eighty-two grand
- (d) Ninety-one grand

9. Levene talks about eating Mrs Nyborg's...?

- (a) Banana bread
- (b) Crumb cake
- (c) Victoria sponge
- (d) Plum torte

10. What old nickname does Roma use for Levene?

- (a) Shelly 'The Dream' Levene
- (b) Shelly 'The Machine' Levene
- (c) Shelly 'The Closer' Levene
- (d) Shelly 'The Man' Levene

Understanding and Interpretation

1. The opening of this Act is frantic and has potential for chaos and conflict. How many different things are going on at one and the same time? What characters' different priorities clash? Can you unpick the threads of this scene?
2. Like a snake shedding his skin, we see a different side of Roma when he returns to the office. How does Mamet contrast Roma's dialogue and character between the end of Act One and beginning of Act Two? What does the beginning of Act Two let us see about Roma?
3. Conflict erupts between Moss and Roma. What are the roots of their argument? Why does it boil over in this part of the play?
4. Both Roma and Levene upbraid Williamson during this part of the play. What do they find particularly objectionable about Williamson? How do they use language against Williamson in ways they don't use against others?
5. Levene retells the story of his sale from the night before. How does the language, tone, and atmosphere on stage change during his retelling? What makes this an important moment for both Levene's character and the play as a whole?

Literary Study: *Mamet's abrasive language*

"Are you talking to me?"

The only mellifluous (soft and musical) words in David Mamet's play are those of its title: *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Otherwise, most of the language is abrasive, reflecting the cut-throat nature of the salesmen and the business they are in. If the characters aren't barking out the harshest four-letter expletives, then they're speaking in the jargon of a trade in which 'leads', 'closing', 'sits', and 'the board' are holy imperatives. There's only one speech in which we hear about such intimacies as sex and loneliness and that speech turns out to be a prefabricated, pre-rehearsed sales pitch! The salesmen are trying to unload worthless tracts of Florida land to gullible victims. It's a subtle irony that the real estate is packaged into developments with names like 'Glengarry Highlands' and 'Glen Ross Farms' – the only pleasant-sounding words in the play.

In this part of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Mamet turns up the heat by using fragmented, rapid-fire dialogue and giving his main characters – especially Roma – an aggressive tone. Characters constantly interrupt one another, leaving sentences unfinished and creating a sense of hostility. For example, when Roma storms in at the start of the scene, he, Baylen, and Williamson speak over each other, signalled by frequent use of ellipsis (...) between the lines. It's not clear to Roma whether his contracts were stolen the night before. However, he's as much at fault for Williamson's lack of clarity, repeating the same question over again and not giving Williamson time to answer. His language is laced with profanity and imperatives ("you reclose it... you owe me a car...") which turns Roma's speech into a weapon for asserting dominance over Williamson and the other salesmen. The rhythm of the dialogue is relentless, with short, clipped lines that mimic real-life arguments and amplifies the chaos in the ransacked office. Every word feels transactional and combative, as Roma fights to protect his own interests. Even the way he speaks to Aaranow ("Yeah. That's swell. Yes. You're right. How are you?") comes across as condescending and manipulative rather than comforting and sincere. While we may laugh at the cops-and-robbers hijinks, we nevertheless also witness the men on the edge of unravelling. No wonder the play is so full of profanity; as they are pushed to the edge of ethics, and beyond, their moral degradation is echoed in the language they use.

Activity

Mamet's dialogue in *Glengarry Glen Ross* and his other plays is famous for its sharp edges and distinctive rhythms. Throughout Act Two, Mamet uses language to create conflict, convey character, and shape the tone and atmosphere on stage. Collect and mind-map Mamet's use of language by skimming and scanning Act Two. Create branches for different categories of language such as:

- Abrasive / Hostile** – harsh and aggressive language that creates tension or antagonizes
- Accusatory / Confrontational** – language that suggests blame or challenges others into conflict
- Demanding** – insistent or forceful, pressing others for answers or information
- Demeaning / Cutting** – belittling or insulting to others; mocking language intended to ridicule
- Profane** – filled with swearing and raw emotion
- Competitive** – seeking to outdo others
- Transactional** – focused on making deals rather than making connections
- Manipulative / Deceptive** – language designed to mislead, evade, or influence others

Feel free to amend or add to these categories based on what you discover in your investigation of Act Two. For each category, add examples from the text and brief annotations explaining how Mamet's language reveals character, builds tension, or reflects the themes of the play.