

# ENTERTAINMENT

## The hard sell in middle America

**Glengarry Glen Ross**  
Citadel/Rice Theatre  
through February 3

review by Olga Jagodnik

The Rice Theatre's Canadian premiere production of David Mamet's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the story of the seedy side of sales life, is among the best plays I've seen coming out of that theatre for a couple of seasons.

The observer can't help but feel empathy for the protagonists, and we certainly gain an understanding of what life is like as a salesman on the teetering edge of success and failure. Even the most hardened businessperson will learn to laugh about himself and his ploys.

A Chinese restaurant is the scene of the first act and the atmosphere is the same of all such places: vinyl chairs and booths, obligatory soy sauce bottles, salt and pepper shakers on the formica-topped tables and, of course, framed prints of Chinese embroidery. Stage Designer William Chesney doesn't have to go far for ideas, and though he is not especially imaginative, he does make us comfortable.

Opening night disasters are dreaded, but not unheard-of. Douglas Chamberlain who was to play the lead part as Shelly "The Machine" Levine fell ill only the day before opening night. Director William Fisher took over on opening night, playing it by ear—the lines were fed to him by earphone. The preview was cancelled, and on opening night reviewers were called and told not to come until things were under control and another actor could be chosen to take the part full-time.

Fisher obviously was unused to the role. His opening scene with his sales-boss, Williamson (played by William Forrest MacDonald), is hesitant, and though the lines are extremely taut with emotion, he has an almost constant smile tugging at his mouth. Hard to take him seriously, even though he's begging Williamson for some "decent leads." He'll pay for them if he must, but tomorrow—seems he's left his wallet in his hotel room.

David Main as George Aronow deserves enormous credit for his portrayal of one of the most insipid, gutless, foolish men you are likely ever to encounter. He makes a meagre living selling worthless property in Florida.



photo Bill St. John

The ransacked office of a flakey real estate firm is the scene in Act II of *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

He is asked to steal the office's "leads" by Moss (Jack Northmore) who uses intimidation and perverse logic interchangeably to overcome George's hesitation.

Once you've steeled yourself to the professional's salesman's dialect which consists mainly of the more profound four-letter word and its derivations, you'll enjoy the fact that its shock impact is reduced and its language becomes your language. It is an explicit way to communicate the harshness of life in the fast lane as a salesman, and the

selling game is one that we are all becoming increasingly familiar with.

It takes the cast a few scenes to work up the fervour to give the play the impact and emotion required to bring it to its resounding conclusion; however, this we have and the ending is as abrupt as were the opening lines. Fisher does himself proud in the final scene, in which he begs Williamson to go along with him. Williamson is a credit to his breed in that strength, not humanity, is his virtue.

## Poets in person

by Gilbert Bouchard  
and John Algard

"Writing is not recollection, but repetition," said visiting poet Eli Mandel.

Mandel, currently teaching at York University and holding the chair of Canadian studies at the U of C, spoke on campus Tuesday as part of the Salter speakers series.

Born in Estevan, Saskatchewan 62 years ago, Mandel has dedicated his life to poetry and poetics.

"Poets say the same thing over and over again," said Mandel. "Poems are dedicated to obsessions."

"Writing as rewriting, each poem is a new biography."

Mandel doesn't see himself leaving Canada, and describes himself as a prairie poet.

"My poetry is not as dark as all that: people have to write about ghosts and the past," says Mandel. "My poetry may be dark, but it is optimistic."

Mandel calls poetry "the connection between the words and the world."

Probably one of the more memorable lines from the Tuesday reading is when he said: "the truth is the long dead winter where we live."

The Salter series continues with French-Canadian poet Lola Tostavin on January 24.

Not part of the Salter series, but still a very noteworthy poet and guest to the U of A campus, Michael Ondaatje will be reading Monday Jan. 21, at noon in room AVL-3 in the Humanities building.

Ondaatje is a poet, novelist, film-maker, and one of Canada's best known writers. His works have won him critical acclaim both in Canada and internationally, and in 1970 he won the Governor-General's Award for Poetry for his book *The Collected Works of the Billy the Kid*, published by House of Anansi. Other books by Ondaatje include *Coming Through Slaughter*, a novel based on the life of Buddy Bolden, a pioneer jazz musician in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, and *Secular Love*, his latest collection of poetry published by Coach House Press in October 1984.

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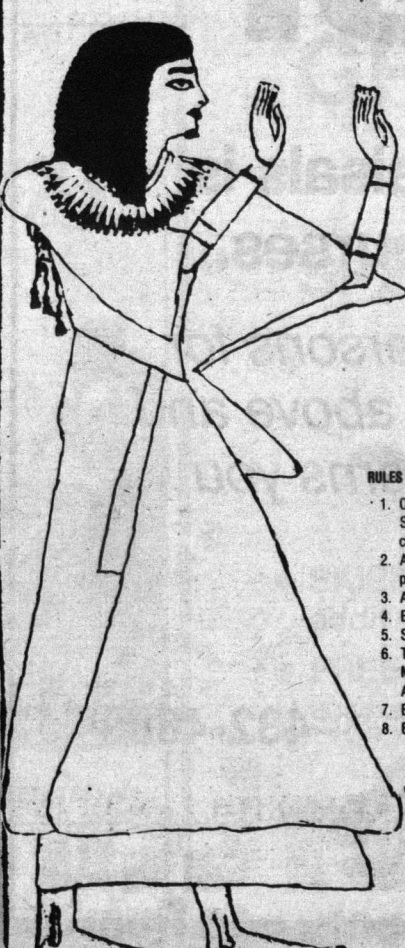
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