

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction that explains the research. The points include Research Background, Statement of Problem, Research Objective, Research significance, Previous Studies, and Definition of Key Terms

1.1 Research Background

American Buffalo is an American play penned by renowned playwright David Mamet. Since its premiere in 1975, '*American Buffalo*' by David Mamet has been considered a seminal work in American theater, earning critical acclaim and securing its status as a classic of American theater. This play's enduring popularity and reputation as a classic make it an essential piece of American play. David Mamet became well-known as a prominent modern American dramatist because of *American Buffalo*.

Debuting at the prestigious Goodman Theatre's showcase production, this play achieved critical acclaim, with the Play Critics Circle recognizing it as the best American play (Bertin & Mamet, 1981). Mamet won the Obie Award for Best New Dramatist. Clive Barnes of the New York Times effusively praised Mamet, declaring him "the man who can write" for this play. David Mamet rose his reputation as a dramatist due to the play's widespread popularity.

American Buffalo emerges as a work that provocatively challenges conventional notions of language, character, and history. *American Buffalo* delves into the character's struggles asserting their individuality and the conflicts that arise when friendship and profession are mixed. The play also examines the corrupting influence of power and how individuals try to restore justice through robbing and cheating. In *American Buffalo*, the character's actions often lead to unexpected

consequences. For example, their attempts to assert power and control over their lives often result in further chaos and loss.

Set in a run-down Chicago pawnshop, the play unfolds as a character-driven exploration of loyalty, deception, and the relentless pursuit of the American Dream. At its core, *American Buffalo* revolves around three central characters: Donny Dubrow, the owner of the pawnshop; Teach, Donny's volatile and unpredictable friend; and Bobby, a young man who works for Donny and becomes entangled in their scheme. The plot revolves around a botched burglary plan devised by Donny and Teach, motivated by their belief that they can secure a valuable coin collection from one of Donny's customers.

The play is famous for its dialogue filled with conflicts, tensions, and contradictions that stretch the gap between what the characters say and what they mean. Mamet employs conversation in a way that betrays a lack of comprehension and communication, leading them to give up on the break-in. Compared to other plays by David Mamet with themes similar to *American Buffalo*, such as *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *American Buffalo* shows up with its uniqueness. *American Buffalo* itself has a plot built with solid use of irony, and the scope of the setting is only in one place, focusing on the dialogue of the characters in it. It is much different from other plays with similar themes to *American Buffalo*, where the tension is helped to build not only by revolving around one conflict in conversation but also other additional actions. It is creating a sense of irony in the play.

David Mamet is renowned for his skill in incorporating irony into his works, and *American Buffalo* is no exception. Mamet's mastery of dialogue in *American Buffalo*, laced with irony and layered with subtext, creates a world where appearances are deceptive, and true intentions are hidden. In his exploration of irony, Mamet skillfully highlights the lines between virtuous and morally wrong. The playwright employs a multitude of slang and robust vocabulary, crafting a narrative where character tensions are palpable, even in the absence of significant action within the play. The character's interactions are fraught with tension, humor, and an underlying sense of tragedy—all accentuated by the pervasive use of irony.

American Buffalo exemplifies a structural prowess that surpasses the realms of traditional literary irony theories. While (Tanaka, 1973) posits that formal elements like subject, structure, characterization, and style serve as ironic conduits, *American Buffalo* transcends these notions. The language employed in the play becomes a subtle yet powerful tool, shaping the ironic undertones throughout the plot. Every carefully chosen word and nuanced manipulation of language contributes to an overarching ironic effect, infusing the narrative with layers of meaning. The subject matter of this play encompasses themes, ideas, and overall content that express irony.

The manipulation of subject matter becomes a canvas on which irony is painted, allowing readers to reevaluate their preconceived notions. The structural elements of the play, such as plot organization and narrative structure, also the author expressed the use of irony. Authors often employ structural irony by presenting events or information contrasting with the reader's or character's expectations. This incongruity within the narrative structure creates an ironic effect, inviting readers to engage with the text more deeply as they question the conventional order of events (Wright, 1953).

Furthermore, the exploration of irony in *American Buffalo* extends seamlessly into characterization. Mamet, with his astute understanding of the intricacies of human nature, leverages this literary element to infuse his characters with depth and complexity. In alignment with (Tanaka, 1973) assertion that irony permeates through various formal elements, Mamet employs characterization as a potent tool for expressing irony. The play's characters emerge as distinct entities, each possessing unique personalities, beliefs, and motivations.

Through the lens of irony in characterization, Mamet introduces layers of complexity into the development of these characters. The individuals in the narrative often express beliefs or make decisions that sharply contradict their true intentions, creating a tapestry of inner conflicts, vulnerabilities, and moral dilemmas. Mamet's deliberate use of irony in characterization serves as a vehicle for a more nuanced exploration of the human condition, allowing readers to delve into the intricacies of the character's inner worlds. Likewise, it influences the

development of the plot by creating profound and surprising conflicts. Its presence reveals the gap between the expectations of characters or readers and the actual reality. This intentional misalignment between expressed beliefs and true motivations adds richness to the characters and deepens the comprehension and perception of the overall plot within the story.

The characters in *American Buffalo* dialogues are often marked by contradictions and miscommunications, underscoring the idea of irony uses in literature. This play also utilizes several other ironies, including verbal irony, dramatic irony, situational irony, and others. Ironies found in this play classified the same with types of irony introduce by Perrine (1966) and Colebrook (2004) books. *American Buffalo* incorporates such as dramatic irony for the readers to gain insight into the character's true motivations that the characters themselves lack. It creates a sense of anticipation and tension, as the readers know more than the characters, exposing language's limitations as a reliable communication tool. The character's actions and misunderstandings contribute to the play's central theme of deception and betrayal, questioning the stability and certainty of language in conveying intentions.

Another element of irony in *American Buffalo* is the contrast between the character's pursuit of the American Dream and the corrupt and unethical means they employ to achieve it. The play exposes the irony of how the pursuit of wealth and success, often associated with the American Dream, leads to the degradation of moral values and the erosion of genuine human connections. The characters, mainly Teach, embody this irony as they prioritize material gain over friendship and ethical behavior. Another aspect of irony in the play is the juxtaposition of the character's grandiose aspirations with their mundane and insignificant lives. The characters, who see themselves as rugged and influential individuals, are trapped in a small junk shop, engaging in petty schemes and arguments. This irony highlights the gap between their self-perception and their actual circumstances, emphasizing the futility of their pursuits.

Despite their vulgar and immoral actions, the character's use of powerful and poetic language adds another layer of irony. The eloquence of their speech

contrasts with the base nature of their behavior, highlighting the dissonance between their words and actions. Situational irony exists throughout *American Buffalo*, where unexpected outcomes and events contradict the characters and readers' expectations. The heist plot, mainly, is rife with situational irony, as the character's efforts to steal a valuable coin collection result in unforeseen consequences. This kind of irony challenges the idea that meaning is fixed and can be easily determined, as events do not unfold as intended, leading to unintended consequences that question the reliability of language as a straightforward means of conveying meaning.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in further identifying the use of irony in David Mamet's *American Buffalo*. Irony plays a crucial role in enhancing the depth and complexity of the play. Irony subverts the readers' expectations, creating surprise and anticipation within the story and affect the development of the characters and plot.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Irony, as a subtle yet powerful literary device, plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and character dynamics in modern American drama. In *American Buffalo*, David Mamet employs various forms of irony to critique societal values and expose the moral ambiguities faced by the characters. The interplay of verbal, dramatic, situational, and cosmic irony within the narrative serves as both a commentary on the corrupting influence of power and a mechanism for character development. However, the influence of these ironic elements on the progression of the plot and the psychological complexity of the characters remains underexplored in existing literature. By examining how irony functions as a critical tool in *American Buffalo*, this research aims to uncover its role in questioning the prevailing social norms and highlighting the tension between appearance and reality.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the research background, the researcher's interest lies in conducting a comprehensive analysis of the concept of irony as it is manifested in the renowned play "*American Buffalo* ." This research aims to delve into the intricacies of irony within the play, with a focus on revealing the underlying perception of the characters and plot. To achieve this objective, the researcher has formulated two key research questions. These questions are as follows:

1. What kind of irony used in *American Buffalo*?
2. How do the ironies in this play affect the development of the characters and plot?

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the research background, the researcher's interest lies in conducting a comprehensive analysis of the concept of irony manifested in the renowned play "*American Buffalo* ." This research aims to delve into the intricacies of irony within the play, focusing on revealing the underlying perception of the characters and plot. To achieve this objective, the researcher has formulated two key research questions. These questions are as follows:

1. To identify the differet types of irony used in *American Buffalo*.
2. To know how the ironies in this play impacts the development of the characters and plot.

1.5 Research Significance

1. Theoritically
 - a. This research aims to expand the field of literary studies by deepening the understanding of irony, especially in the context of modern American drama. Through a detailed analysis of verbal, situational, dramatic, and cosmic irony, this study is expected to enhance comprehension of how irony contributes to character and plot development.
 - b. This research is also expected to serve as a reference for students or scholars interested in studying irony in dramatic works, particularly those written by

David Mamet, and to provide a foundation for further studies on the use of irony in modern literary drama.

2. Practically
 - a. This research aims to provide information and insights to readers of *American Buffalo* about how irony can reflect the complexity of social and moral values in the context of individual struggles against life's challenges. By understanding the irony in this play, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the characters, their relationships, and the messages the author seeks to convey.

1.6 Previous Studies

Previous studies serve as valuable points of reference and guidance, offering insights into various aspects, including topics, individuals' names, geographical locations, terminology, historical accounts of notable figures, and more. These references can come from various sources, such as books, journal articles, or theses. Consequently, previous studies assume a pivotal role in the realm of research, serving as foundational materials that inform the development of ongoing research, and they function as points of comparison and augmentation for subsequent research. In this research, previous studies that became a reference for researchers in this research are as follows:

1. *The Irony in Ang Lee's Life of Pi* (Krishnapatria, 2021), written by Kriswanda Krishnapatria, this thesis analyzes irony in Ang Lee's 'Life of Pi' through a cinematographic lens. The research method used in the article is descriptive-analytic and dialogue analysis. The theory used in the article includes the concept of irony based on MacDowell (2016), Abrams and Harpham (2011), and Arp and Johnson (2008).
2. *Irony in Kate Chopin's Selected Short Stories* (Hassan & Tayib, 2020) is a thesis by Hazha Salih Hassan and Chinar Kamal Tayib. The article discusses the use of irony in Kate Chopin's selected short stories, specifically "The Story of an Hour," "The Storm," and "Desiree's Baby." The research method

used in the article is a literary analysis of the stories, focusing on the presence of irony, its functions, its relation to the theme or message of the story, and the reasons behind its use. The article does not explicitly mention a specific theory being used. However, it explores irony as a powerful literary device to convey the author's ideas and critique society.

3. *An Analysis of Irony in "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut*.JR (Oktarini, 2020) is a thesis written by Rahayu Oktarini. This research focuses on identifying the use of irony in Kurt Vonnegut's short story "Harrison Bergeron" to critique the government's system of equality and highlight the absurdity of the society depicted. The researcher employs a descriptive qualitative research method to identify verbal and situational irony in the story, ultimately concluding that the author uses irony to express criticisms and convey a deeper meaning. The research method used in the article is descriptive qualitative research with textual methods. The theory used in the article is irony theory, which focuses on identifying criticism, innuendo, or contradictory meaning in the short story.
4. *Irony in Charles Diken's Oliver Twist* (Trisnawati, 2019) written by Ika Kana Trisnawati, Sarair, & Maulida. This thesis explores the use of irony in Charles Dickens' novel, *Oliver Twist*. It discusses the different types of irony used and explains the reasons behind Dickens' choice of irony. The article also provides specific examples of irony from select chapters of the novel, emphasizing how Dickens uses irony to criticize the treatment of people experiencing poverty in British society and highlight the innocence of the main character, Oliver. It specifically focuses on the three types of irony used in the novel: verbal, situational, and dramatic. The research method used in the article is descriptive analysis, which involves studying the sentences and events in the novel to identify and categorize the types of irony used. The article does not mention any specific theory used in the analysis.

This research is different from the four previous studies above. The object of research used in this research differs from the object of research in these previous studies. The research object in this research is David Mamet's *American Buffalo* play, published in 1975. Previous research studies above have employed various approaches, including cinematographic, literary, and textual analysis. While previous research primarily references journal articles, this research also intends to consider alternative sources such as critical analyses of play, books, or texts relevant to *American Buffalo*. These sources may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dramatic work.

Moreover, previous research studies have explored different themes, such as irony in historical contexts, social critique, and the author's messages. This research aims to connect these themes with potential themes in *American Buffalo* and how irony is utilized to support these themes. One commonality between this research and previous studies is the shared focus on American literature. Although this research is centred on play, it still falls within the framework of American literature, much like the previous research that delved into various American literary works. This shared focus allows for a broader exploration of the role of irony in American literature. It highlights the interconnectedness of literary themes and techniques across different genres within American literature.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Irony

Irony is a literary device where there is a contrast between what is expected to happen and what actually occurs. It often involves a discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between what is said and what is meant.

Play

A play is a form of literature written for performance on a stage, typically involving dialogue and action between characters. Plays can vary in genre and style, including comedy, tragedy, drama, or a combination of these.

Characters

Characters are the individuals who populate a story, play, or narrative. They can be human, animal, or even symbolic entities that drive the plot forward through their actions, dialogue, and interactions.

Plot

The plot is the sequence of events that make up a story. It typically includes the exposition (introduction of characters and setting), rising action (events leading to the climax), climax (the turning point or highest point of tension), falling action (events that occur after the climax), and resolution (the conclusion or outcome).

Characters and Plot Development

This refers to the progression and evolution of both the characters and the plot throughout a story. Character development involves changes or growth in the personalities, motivations, or relationships of the characters, while plot development involves the unfolding of events and conflicts that drive the narrative forward. Character creation is important because it can convey the author's message, mandate, intent, and purpose to be accepted and understood by the readers.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a systematic sequence of approaches used to address the research problem. This study aims to explore two key points: the types of irony used in David Mamet's *American Buffalo* and how these ironies affect character and plot development. The analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting the different forms of irony that Mamet incorporates into his play.

This study uses an objective approach, as *American Buffalo* relies heavily on various forms of irony to depict the complexities of human behavior. To answer the first research question regarding the types of irony in the play, the researcher utilizes Perrine's (1966) theory on verbal, situational, and dramatic irony, as well

as Colebrook's (2004) concept of cosmic irony. These theoretical frameworks help identify how irony manifests in the dialogues and actions of the characters.

Meanwhile, to address the second research question, which examines how irony impacts character and plot development, the researcher applies the theories of character and plot progression from Freytag (1908). By analyzing the interactions between the types of irony and the development of the narrative, this study seeks to demonstrate how Mamet uses irony not only as a literary device but also as a tool for deepening character complexity and advancing the plot. This dual focus on irony and narrative progression will provide a comprehensive understanding of the play's thematic and structural intricacies.

