AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
Carey Perloff, Artistic Director       Heather Kitchen, Executive Director

PRESENTS

WORDS on PLAYS
INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

The Voysey Inheritance

BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER
ADAPTED BY DAVID MAMET
DIRECTED BY CAREY PERLOFF
PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH KANSAS CITY
REPERTORY THEATRE, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
PETER ALTMAN, PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
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GEARY THEATER
MARCH 18–APRIL 17, 2005

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A.C.T. is supported in part by grants from the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.
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CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF
THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE


CHARACTERS AND CAST

*Mr. Voysey* Ken Ruta

*Mrs. Voysey* Barbara Marsh Oliver

*Their Children*

*Trenchard Voysey* Mark Robbins

*Honor Voysey* Cheryl Weaver

*Major Booth Voysey* Andy Murray

*Edward Voysey* Anthony Fusco

*Hugh Voysey* Stephen Caffrey

*Ethel Voysey* Lauren Grace

*Alice Maitland* René Augesen

*Peacey* Mark Robbins

*Mr. George Booth* Gary Neal Johnson

*Reverend Evan Colpus* Julian López-Morillas

SYNOPSIS

**ACT 1.** The library of the Voysey family estate, an evening in autumn, after Sunday dinner. Alice Maitland, Edward Voysey’s longtime friend, playfully accuses Edward of having lost interest in her. Edward’s mother, Mrs. Voysey, who is slightly deaf, enters and, hearing this talk of “lost interest,” chastises Edward for talking about business. George Booth, an old family friend who entrusts his financial affairs to the Voysey family firm of investment solicitors, comes in, followed by Mr. Voysey (Edward’s father) and Peacey, Mr. Voysey’s assistant. After receiving instructions from Mr. Voysey, Peacey departs to return to London as Major Booth Voysey, Edward’s brother, arrives from the dining room, con-
tinuing his discourse on military conscription. Reverend Colpus, the local vicar, also enters from the dining room, and Mr. Voysey talks to him about a recently unveiled chapel window that was designed by Hugh Voysey, the artistically inclined youngest brother, and paid for by funds donated by Mr. Voysey. Ethel, the favored younger daughter, who is engaged to be married, comes in, followed by Honor, the eldest sibling (and still unmarried). The sisters encourage the Voysey men to leave business alone and retire to the billiard room. Ethel, who likes nothing more than giving her father opportunities to spend his money on her, wants to discuss the terms of her wedding present.

Mr. Booth reveals that he doesn’t have the same confidence in the financial abilities of Edward, who is designated to take over the firm, as he has had in Mr. Voysey. Mr. Voysey and Mr. Booth adjourn to the billiards room, leaving Edward and Alice alone. Hurt by Edward’s apparent lack of affection, she leaves.

Mr. Voysey returns to fetch Edward, but Edward stops his father to talk. He confronts Mr. Voysey with a shocking discovery: after spending the weekend going over files at the firm’s office in London, Edward has realized that his father has bankrupted the business—and their family and clients along with it. Ethel interrupts, oblivious to the tension, to remind the two men to come along and to scold Edward for discussing business on a Sunday evening. With Ethel gone, Edward continues with urgency. It seems that, although the firm’s clients continue to be paid the interest to which they are entitled on their investments, the principal of their accounts has disappeared, and the accounting records have been doctored to cover up the disappearance. Mr. Voysey tries to deflect Edward’s questioning, but finally admits that he, as well as his father before him, have been systematically defrauding the firm’s clients, using their capital to invest in high-risk ventures and pocketing the difference to finance the family’s luxurious lifestyle. Mr. Voysey tells Edward that there is no need to worry; his financial acumen has kept the scheme going for years and the clients are none the wiser. Mr. Voysey also divulges that Peacey, his assistant, knows all about the scheme. Edward is shocked by his father’s callousness and to learn that he will have to take over the scheme when his father is gone. This is the “Voysey inheritance.”

**Act II.** The library, draped in mourning, the following August. Edward calls together the family members, who have just returned from Mr. Voysey’s funeral. Edward announces that, although their father’s will leaves certain sums of money to each of them, there will, in fact, be no inheritance for any of them. He reveals the nature of Mr. Voysey’s scheme and explains that every penny of the family’s inheritance belongs by right to the defrauded clients of the firm. Edward wants to make restitution to the clients, as much as is possible with the funds remaining in the estate; he will most likely be forced to stand
trial and declare bankruptcy. Mrs. Voysey announces to everyone’s surprise that she has known about the scheme for a long time and has, in fact, kept her own money quite separate. Trenchard, an attorney and the least-favored son, advises his siblings not to accept culpability or to relinquish their inheritance. Mrs. Voysey tires of the discussion and excuses herself, taking Honor with her.

Edward, Major Voysey, and Trenchard continue to discuss the matters of fraud and inheritance. Taking Trenchard’s advice, Major Voysey agrees that he is not culpable in the matter and refuses to hand over his inheritance. Trenchard is concerned for Edward’s well-being, and they discuss ways to keep him clear; Edward remains committed to his idea of putting the firm right and paying the price himself.

Edward and Hugh discuss their father’s character. Hugh wonders how family friends who are also clients, like Mr. Booth and Reverend Colpus, will fare when the news hits. Major Voysey defends his father’s choices and believes they need not feel personally implicated in his father’s crimes or personally obligated to repay any debt, even though all of their money, the fortune on which they were raised, was in fact stolen. Concerned with safeguarding the family’s reputation, he extols their father’s virtues—Mr. Voysey was a loyal and faithful husband, a loving father, and a generous member of the community.
Edward, however, refuses to carry on the family’s legacy of deception and theft. Trenchard and Major Voysey depart.

Alice enters and, after Hugh excuses himself, she and Edward are again alone. She tells him that she knows what has happened and that he is her chief concern. Alice reminds Edward that he must live in the real world, and that she understands the reactions of his siblings. She herself was forced to learn to take care of her own money when she came of age. She was taught that, because she hadn’t actually earned the money, she never really had any right to it, and therefore shouldn’t be surprised or annoyed if anyone else should try to take it away from her. She doesn’t feel sorry for the firm’s clients; they have no more right to their money than she does, and she believes Edward is being unnecessarily heroic in giving himself up. Edward is worried about the poorer clients, however. Some of them, like his old nurse, will be beggared by the firm’s bankruptcy and exposure of the scheme, while the better-off clients will still have more than enough money. But the law is not concerned with providing restitution according to need, and therefore the most-deserving victims will suffer. Alice asks if there isn’t some way to protect them; Edward admits that he has already put one case right in the year since he discovered the scheme. He believes he can help the most needy clients if he were to delay exposure and bankruptcy for a while longer. Alice supports him in that course of action.

Act III. The library, 16 months later, Christmas Eve morning. Signs of mourning are gone and the room is partially decorated for Christmas. Peacey has brought some last-minute papers for Edward to sign before leaving on holiday. While Peacey has known about the true state of the Voysey business all along, his silence comes at a price—200 pounds paid him at Christmas each year by Mr. Voysey, as it was paid to Peacey’s father before him. Peacey now asks Edward for his yearly payment, but Edward refuses. He will not be blackmailed. When Peacey threatens to expose the scheme, Edward calls his bluff. Edward, who has in the past year put right a remarkable amount of the firm’s accounts, says that he has
no intention of veering from his moral course. Peacey tells Edward that Mr. Voysey also once had the accounts as “right as rain,” but could not resist the temptation to start embezzling again. The implication is that Edward is so much like his father that he, too, will be unable to avoid temptation. Edward ignores this accusation and continues to instruct Peacey in what needs to be done while he is away. Peacey takes one final jab at Edward, implying that his entire lifestyle is a fraud, before taking his leave as Hugh enters.

Hugh informs Edward that he and his wife, Beatrice, are separating. Edward asks Hugh not to say anything to the rest of the family until after Christmas. Hugh wants to return his inheritance money to Edward so he can live without guilt and Edward can escape the terrible burden left by their father. Edward tells Hugh that he has no fear of discovery, which he believes is inevitable, and that he is prepared to face the consequences. Edward has set the accounts nearly right and tells Hugh that he need not beggar himself.

Mr. Booth now enters to tell Edward that he has come with rather unpleasant business. He wants to withdraw all of his assets from the firm. He explains that he has never had the confidence in Edward that he had in Mr. Voysey and that now, for the first time in his life, he is worried about money. Even before Mr. Voysey died, in fact, he had decided that his affairs could never remain under Edward’s control. Edward, aware that the withdrawal of Mr. Booth’s assets will deprive him of the capital necessary to finish reconstructing the accounts of the other clients, begs Mr. Booth to reconsider. When Mr. Booth refuses, Edward reveals that, if Mr. Booth withdraws now, he will get less than half of what he believes he’s worth from the Voysey firm. Edward explains that the firm, while under his father’s control, has robbed Mr. Booth, as well as all of the other clients, of their principal. Mr. Booth is aghast at this news and scolds Edward for slandering his dead father. Edward, happy finally to be relieved of his burden, tells Mr. Booth that he should press charges, and that he is grateful to him for bringing the whole stressful scheme to light. Although the responsibility for the situation obviously lies with Mr. Voysey, Mr. Booth blames Edward for putting him in an awful dilemma: either he must accept the loss of half of his fortune, or he must ruin the family of his dearest friend, a family to which he once felt he belonged. He wonders how Edward can be so cold and heartless to him and asks whether or not he is his father’s son. Edward replies, “Indeed I am.”
Act IV. The library, that evening. The library is now fully decorated for Christmas. Honor and Alice are arranging gift baskets as Edward and Ethel enter, followed by Hugh. Ethel is confronting Hugh about his separation from his wife when Major Voysey arrives with the intention of interrogating Hugh himself. Alice pushes past Major Voysey to leave as Ethel tells Hugh that his wife is upstairs crying. Hugh explains that she is crying because she wants more money, but Hugh refuses to “dilute [his] art for money.” Ethel, who is furious that she cannot marry because she has no dowry, accuses Edward of distancing himself from the family and caring only about work. Ethel and Major Voysey exit as Mr. Booth enters and asks Hugh to leave him alone with Edward. Once they are alone, Mr. Booth tells Edward that he has decided, with the help of his old friend Reverend Colpus—who was also quite shocked to learn that he, too, has been robbed—not to prosecute, because he could not bear to see the family disgraced. He has arranged a repayment plan: Edward is to immediately repay whatever amount of Mr. Booth’s capital still remains and to continue paying Mr. Booth yearly interest on the capital he should have amassed. Edward shall pay off the missing capital in annual installments. Edward immediately identifies this scheme as ludicrous, which upsets Mr. Booth.

Alice enters with Reverend Colpus, who tells Edward that he will offer him the same deal as Mr. Booth. Edward continues to stand his moral ground against these two men, who are demanding their “pound of flesh” at the expense of the other, poorer clients. Mr. Booth becomes further enraged and dams Edward for forcing him to besmirch Mr. Voysey’s name. When Edward calls Mr. Booth’s offer shameful, Mr. Booth reveals that he knows about Edward’s plans to run off to France and spend the holidays there with a woman. Far from being shocked by this revelation, Alice seems unmoved. As he prepares to exit, Mr. Booth promises to see Edward branded a thief and jailed. Honor enters and gives Mr. Booth a Christmas basket to take home with him. She laments the fact that Hugh and his wife, as well as Ethel, have all left; the family is scattered for the holidays. She asks Alice why Edward would want to spend Christmas alone in France; Alice reveals that she was planning to join him there so they could get married. Edward tells Honor that “the smash has finally come” and he is relieved, even though it will surely mean prison for him. He tells Alice that he won’t make her wait for him; she confirms that she couldn’t wait. Major Voysey enters, demanding to know what Edward has done to his family. He orders Alice out; she says that she was just going—and that she’s taking Edward with her, to France, to be married.
HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER:
AN UNKNOWN PIONEER

BY PETER ALTMAN

Harley Granville-Barker (1877–1946), at the centenary of the premiere of The Voysey Inheritance, stands as one of the most intriguing and influential pioneers of British theater still remaining in its shadows.

Granville-Barker's impressive career included prominent success in five branches of theatrical life: as an actor, director, producer-manager, critic, and playwright. Virtually
everyone of theatrical note in the age of Shaw knew him. Yet his profile is known today by only a fraction of those who are familiar with such other theater authors of his period as Wilde and Barrie.

The causes of this unfamiliarity are many. The play some consider Granville-Barker’s greatest, Waste, was banned by Britain’s censor when new and took years to reach public production. Other works too progressive or too controversial for commercial producers were introduced only in short runs to small (if enthusiastic) audiences in new-writing repertory seasons. While there are many books about aspects of Granville-Barker’s life and art, no comprehensive modern biography (like Michael Holroyd’s of Shaw) has yet been written. But perhaps the main explanation for Granville-Barker’s limited recognition may be his divorce from a much-admired leading actress and his following marriage (to a wealthy American), after which he left the country where he had become a leader to live primarily in North America and France. Sources disagree about whether Granville-Barker left London because of the preference of his second wife, Helen Huntington, or because he wished to avoid hostility generated by his abandonment of his first wife, Lillah McCarthy, or simply because he craved change, but during his last three decades he visited or worked in England’s metropole only rarely.

Granville-Barker’s life in the theater began with a sequence of roles as a child actor. He apparently was sent to school very little and never attended university. His first appearances onstage included acting at the Spa Room in Harrogate, Yorkshire, at 13, his London debut in The Poet and the Puppets at 14, and the title role of Richard II at 21. By his mid 20s he was acknowledged as a gifted leading man, and he was the first to play a range of now-famous star parts in some of the most important plays by his contemporary and mentor,
George Bernard Shaw, including Cusins in *Major Barbara* and Jack Tanner in *Man and Superman*.

In his 20s Granville-Barker also became established as a leader of the movement to reform British theater, to make it less about spectacle and escapism and transform it into the cradle of a New Drama that explored social issues, was inspired by Ibsen, and featured naturalistic staging and realistic psychology.

Granville-Barker can be viewed as one of the artists who invented the idea of the modern theater director, successor to the earlier British figure of the star actor–manager—like Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree—a model of strong interpretive leadership comparable to Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre, and the founder of the 20th-century succession of powerful British directors including Guthrie, Brook, Hall, Nunn, and now Hytner. Historian Samuel L. Leiter judges Granville-Barker to have been “without any question England’s first great modern director. His presence was a crucial one in the evolution of the modern British theater.”

Shaw and drama critic William Archer were among the leading forces campaigning around 1900 for new theaters committed to plays and productions different from those that catered to middlebrow Victorian taste. Perhaps the most important initiative of this kind was a series of presentations made during 1904–07 at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square, Chelsea, a couple of miles away from the West End, where most major London playhouses are still congregated. Granville-Barker, with J. E. Vedrenne, produced about a thousand performances of an astonishing variety of plays, including work ranging from Euripides to Maeterlinck to Galsworthy, scraping together the necessary money, recruiting the artists, and ultimately securing the beachhead for Shaw’s eventual triumph as the most published and performed British dramatist in 300 years. In this line, Granville-Barker also became the leading advocate of the idea of a non-commercial British national theater, a sort of peer of the 17th-century Comédie Française, where a company of artists could play classical literature and substantial new drama.

Granville-Barker (right) in the title role of Schnitzler’s *Anatol*, with Nigel Playfair.
in repertory. The essay *Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre*, by Granville-Barker and Archer (1904), has been widely acknowledged as the bible of the campaign, which after a long struggle finally led to the establishment of the present National Theatre and construction of its three-stage home on the Thames's South Bank.

No definitive edition of Granville-Barker's plays exists yet, so it is difficult to state with authority exactly what he wrote. We do know that certain plays were rewritten more than once, to include variations. For example, we have a text of *The Voysey Inheritance* published in 1905, and a rather different one that Granville-Barker rewrote for the play's 1934 London production. Whatever the textual issues, advocates of Granville-Barker have promoted his plays vigorously in recent years—though he may not be known to most Americans, the Royal Shakespeare Company has produced *The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1975) and *Waste* (1985, with Judi Dench), and National Theatre productions have included *The Madras House* in 1976 and *Voysey*, adapted and directed by Richard Eyre. Voysey has also been produced for British television, and the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, staged seven Granville-Barker plays between 1988 and 2002.

These plays reveal a perceptive and vivid writer who often shared Shaw's Fabian socialist politics but took a more intuitive, at times oblique approach. Granville-Barker clearly and greatly admired Shaw, but his own plays leave much suggested rather than said; the action tends to veer in surprising directions, characters seem to feel more than they can express. Moral and social judgments are ambiguous. Granville-Barker was definitely a critic of conservative platitudes, profoundly sympathetic to inner impulses, and indeed he gave one of his most personal plays the title *The Secret Life*. On the other hand, he was very
like Shaw at his best in his fairness to characters who are not heroes. Like a director who must elicit believable performances from all the actors in a cast, Granville-Barker followed a strong instinct to give his characters good reasons for being unabashedly who they are, whether he wanted us ultimately to approve of them or not.

Some of Granville-Barker’s excellence in creating character probably was fostered by his experience as an actor. A strikingly handsome man, he must have had great range to be able to triumph in parts as different as the immature poet Marchbanks in Shaw’s *Candida* and Anatol, Schnitzler’s serial seducer.

Granville-Barker had keen perception of the inner life of women living in a society where they were mostly expected to behave conventionally and put propriety first. The representation of Amy O’Connell in *Waste*, swept up by passion at a country house party, then compelled to present herself pregnant and in need of aid to her lover, a prominent politician, is startlingly modern. In another category entirely, the frankness of Peacey in *Voysey*, declaring he has known of his boss’s financial machinations for years and with no qualms about seeking continuing payment as the price of coverup, is also exceptional portraiture, framed in a world gradually revealed to be based on concealment and denial of fiscal realities.

Realities of money in real life led to the end of the Granville-Barker–Vedrenne Royal Court seasons. A few years afterwards, Granville-Barker redirected himself and focused on a now almost legendary series of Shakespeare productions at London’s Savoy Theatre. Avoiding pageantry and romantic acting, Granville-Barker strove in these interpretations for realism in behavior and a stripped-down modern look in design favoring a thrust stage; it’s probably not an overstatement to say that these productions foreshadowed the emphasis of British and American Shakespearean production for the next hundred years.

During World War I, as many aspects of British life were shell-shocked, Granville-Barker accepted directing jobs in the United States, lectured, and ended his marriage to McCarthy. He and Huntington (who apparently had no love for either Shaw or Bloomsbury politics) took up a life new to him. Thereafter he still did some directing, but critical writing became a major concentration, especially his now famous prefaces to Shakespeare; he also wrote a series of translations of Spanish and other plays. Compelled to abandon his home in Paris by the approach of World War II, he was a figure out of context in New York and Canada during that war, while in his 60s. His reputation has gradually grown in our era, however, and it is likely that his renown will continue to grow in the new millennium.

Peter Altman is producing artistic director of Kansas City Repertory Theatre.
HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER: A CHRONOLOGY

PREPARED BY LAURA MUIR

1877 Harley Granville-Barker is born on November 25 in London to a tubercular young surveyor and his considerably older wife, a professional reciter. He is brought up to be an actor.

1891 Makes his first stage appearance in Vice Versa at the Spa Room in Harrogate, Yorkshire, at the age of 13.

1892 Makes his London debut in The Poet and the Puppets, a parody of Oscar Wilde by Charles Brookfield.

1895 Joins a Shakespearean touring company led by Sir Phillip Ben Greet. Over the next several years, Granville-Barker acts in numerous productions by Greet and William Poel, whose interpretations represent an attempt to break away from Victorian style.

1899 Granville-Barker writes his first play, The Marrying of Ann Leete.

1900 Joins the Stage Society, dedicated to new writing and staging approaches. Appears in Das Friedenfest, seen by George Bernard Shaw. Shaw subsequently casts Granville-Barker to play the young poet Marchbanks in the first production of his play Candida.

1901 Joins the Fabian Socialist Society, serving on the Executive 1907–12.

1903 Shaw and Granville-Barker stage The Admirable Bashville at the Imperial Theatre.

1904 Granville-Barker becomes manager of London’s Royal Court Theatre. During 1904–07 the Court produces 988 performances of plays by Shaw, international writers, and new British playwrights, including Granville-Barker’s The Voysey Inheritance (1905).

1906 Granville-Barker marries actress Lillah McCarthy.

1907 Ends his relationship with the Court. Waste is banned, followed by a campaign against theatrical censorship. Produces Elizabeth Robins’s Votes for Women!

1909–10 American impresario Charles Frohman takes over the Duke of York’s Theatre in London’s West End and hires Granville-Barker to direct. Granville-Barker’s own play The Madras House and Shaw’s Misalliance are produced, but when a number of playwrights, including Henry James and Somerset Maugham, fail to deliver their promised works for production, the collaboration ends.
1911 Granville-Barker and McCarthy take over the management of London's Little Theatre and present Fanny's First Play, which Shaw has written especially for McCarthy. It runs for 622 performances. Granville-Barker writes Rococo.


1914 At the beginning of World War I, Granville-Barker serves in the Red Cross. He writes Vote by Ballot. Granville-Barker and McCarthy go to New York, where his productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream and Shaw's Androcles and the Lion are presented at Wallack's Theatre. At the end of the season, McCarthy returns to England; Granville-Barker stays in the United States and falls in love with American novelist and poet Helen Huntington, first wife of railroad heir Archer Huntington, who had helped finance Granville-Barker's theatrical endeavors.

1916 Granville-Barker writes Farewell to the Theatre.

1917 Enlists and is transferred to Special Intelligence.

1918 Divorces McCarthy and marries Huntington.

1922 Publishes The Exemplary Theatre and writes The Secret Life. Granville-Barker and Huntington settle in Paris. He begins to write his famous prefaces to Shakespeare, which become cornerstones of Shakespearean criticism.

1928 Writes His Majesty, his final original play.

1937 Becomes director of the British Institute of the University of Paris.

1940–45 Fleeing Europe at the start of the French campaign in World War II, Granville-Barker and his family travel to Spain and then on to the United States, where he works for British Information Services. He lectures at Harvard University and in Canada.

1946 Returns to Paris, where he dies on August 31, at the age of 68.

**PLAYS BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER**

*The Marrying of Ann Leete* (1899)  
*The Madras House* (1910)  
*Vote by Ballot* (1914)  
*Farewell to the Theatre* (1916)  
*The Voysey Inheritance* (1905)  
*The Secret Life* (1922)  
*Waste* (1907)  
*His Majesty* (1928)  
*Rococo* (1911)
HE MEANS BUSINESS
David Mamet on The Voysey Inheritance

BY JESSICA WERNER

“WE LIVE IN AN EXTRAORDINARILY DEBAUCHED, INTERESTING, SAVAGE WORLD,
WHERE THINGS REALLY DON’T COME OUT EVEN. THE PURPOSE OF TRUE DRAMA
IS TO HELP REMIND US OF THAT. PERHAPS THIS DOES HAVE AN ACCIDENTAL, A
CUMULATIVE SOCIAL EFFECT—TO REMIND US TO BE A LITTLE MORE HUMBLE
OR A LITTLE MORE GRATEFUL OR A LITTLE MORE RUMINATIVE.”

—David Mamet, Three Uses of the Knife

D uring a recent phone call from his writing office in Los Angeles, reached shortly after
he had completed the final script revisions to his new adaptation of The Voysey
Inheritance, David Mamet was notoriously cagey about interpreting his own plays, insisting as he has in prior interviews that “good playwriting should leave you with questions.”
Yet, in talking about the process of adapting Harley Granville-Barker’s 1905 drama for
contemporary audiences, he expressed an ardent fascination with the timelessness of the
ethical quandaries at the heart of this Edwardian drama. Mamet spoke revealingly about
greed, malfeasance, and moral imperatives, and about living in a world beset by both
personal and corporate corruption—the same themes that run through many of his best-
known plays and screenplays, and which he has expressed in the unmistakably sharp,
blisteringly articulate language that solidified his reputation as one of the finest linguistic
craftsmen in American drama more than 25 years ago.

FINDING WHAT IS TRUE
Mamet has admired Granville-Barker’s work ever since he saw a production of The Voysey
Inheritance in 1989 at London’s National Theatre. “I was struck by what a very good play it is,” Mamet said, “but I found there was a kernel inside the play that could be made much
stronger. Tastes and fashions have changed since the Victorian [theatergoing] public and
their four-hour plays. Carey [Perloff] completely agreed with me that perhaps one could
cut Voysey down and find the center of the artichoke, so in a moment of wild abandon I
said I’d adapt it.”

Mamet’s career as an adaptor of classical drama includes four works by Chekhov (Vint,
The Cherry Orchard, Three Sisters, and Uncle Vanya [the basis for Louis Malle’s Vanya on
42nd Street], as well as an acclaimed screen adaptation of Terrence Rattigan’s 1946 play, The Winslow Boy, based on the 1910 trial of a teenage cadet wrongfully accused of stealing. Mamet’s 2002 play, Boston Marriage, a refined drawing-room comedy of manners, was also set in the same era (1900). “I don’t know why, but I’ve always loved the Edwardian period,” said Mamet. “I’ve been a fan of Kipling all my life, and of Victorian and Edwardian codes of gentility and honor.”

In interviews and in many of his own essays, Mamet has extolled the virtue of a writer’s ruthlessness in excising from a script any dialogue that isn’t precise and doesn’t serve a dramatic purpose. He believes that “a good writer is one who throws out what most people keep,” and likens the challenges of updating a vintage script like The Voysey Inheritance to those he faces while honing the language in his own original work. “The essence of the art of being a playwright is being able to cut. That is the thing which, above anything else, separates someone who is serious about writing drama and someone who is a hobbyist. A hobbyist falls in love with his own creation, and a dramatist actually understands the relationship between the play and the audience, and it doesn’t matter how abstractly good a line or a scene is. If the audience goes to sleep, what have you gained? You’ve gained nothing.

“That’s how you write a play: You do a lot of writing to figure out what the hell the play’s about and throw out three-quarters of it and write it again and look at it and find out what that play’s about and throw out three-quarters of it and write it again. It doesn’t matter if you’re trying to rewrite your own work, or [adapt] William Shakespeare or Granville-Barker. The question is always, What is the scene actually about? What is true? One is constantly learning to anticipate the audience [reactions], and always thinking in terms of the actors. They have to speak the language, so if it’s not rhythmic and beautiful and fun, they’re going to have trouble saying it. As Lewis Carroll wrote, ‘Take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself.’”

Complicit in the Take
Ever since the 29-year-old Mamet’s American Buffalo—about three crooks in a Chicago junk shop scheming to rip off a rare-coin collection—opened on Broadway in 1977, he has trained his unsparing eye on the inherent dramatic potential in situations where an individual’s sense of propriety and fidelity to a higher purpose are at cross purposes with the coarser desire to get ahead at all costs. His Pulitzer Prize–winning Glengarry Glen Ross (1983) has become a true American classic, portraying with scathing hyperrealism the plight of middle-aged salesmen struggling to survive against cruelly steep odds by peddling undesirable real estate. Mamet has described American culture as grounded in the idea of
“strive and succeed . . . that one feels one can only get ahead at the cost of someone else,” and this nexus of conflicting impulses in economic life has proved a source of ongoing theatrical inspiration. “The purpose of the theater, to me,” Mamet said, “is to examine the paradox between the fact that everyone tries to do well, but that few, if any, succeed.” Reflecting on the genesis of American Buffalo many years after writing the watershed play, Mamet said he “was interested in the idea of honor among thieves; of what is an unassailable moral position and what isn’t. What should cause a man to abdicate a moral position he’d espoused?”

Edward Voysey, the hardworking son in The Voysey Inheritance, can be seen wrestling with the same questions after realizing that dismantling the family firm’s criminal legacy won’t necessarily guarantee his relatives or their clients’ freedom from grim consequences. It is hardly surprising that Mamet would be captivated by Granville-Barker’s dramatic inquiry into whether or not it’s possible to live an ethical life within a society that accepts corruption as its status quo.

Mamet and Perloff, in preparing for The Voysey Inheritance’s premiere at A.C.T., agreed that the play’s early-20th-century setting has a startling correspondence to our current cultural climate of epidemic corporate scandals and ethics investigations. The Voysey family’s crimes may in fact reveal an “inheritance” of dubious commercial practice that is as much our own as it is Edward’s. Mamet’s plays, especially Glengarry Glen Ross, have repeatedly explored, he has said, “something that is current in the collective unconscious of the country: the idea of the difference between business and fraud, what’s permissible in the name of getting a living and what isn’t.” He has posited, over the course of more than two decades writing about the iniquities and hypocrisies he euphemistically calls “business,” that, in a capitalist economy, all relations are to some degree commercial and thus everyone becomes complicit in the take. Mamet asks whether it’s ever possible to buy into the materialistic dream of success and not succumb to seizing more than one’s share. And, is it possible to imagine an economic system, in fact a world, that doesn’t reward mendacity? The Voyseys’ overstuffed lifestyle, ensconced at the family estate in Chislehurst, is based on a generations-old tradition of deception. “Drama is basically about lies,” Mamet has said. “Somebody lying to somebody.”

Far from being surprised that characters like Mr. Voysey—the paterfamilias who has defrauded his clients, just as his father did before him—really exist in our world, Mamet remains resolute that it is human nature, in a society thirsting for material gain, to be corrupted by wealth. “I think we are corrupt by nature,” he says flatly of the universal tendency to transgress. “The oddity is not that people act in a corrupt, immoral fashion, but that people have the capacity once in a while to actually do good.” When asked about the
historical particulars of the Voyseys’ crime, set against the height of the British Empire, Mamet said, “I don’t know if the [root of the problem] is imperialist. I think it’s more basically just rapacious. Sometimes it expresses itself as imperialist, and sometimes it expresses itself as ‘corporatocracy,’ antagonism, and greed, which is what this particular play is about. This is always in society because we are basically raptors. Even when we want to do good, we often end up doing evil. And when people do have the capacity to act as exemplars, we call them ‘heroes.’

“What makes Voysey such a good play is that it is about something essential rather than something which is superficial. A lot of drama is heralded as ‘yummy’ because it touches a superficial nerve, and it’s fashionable, but a better play is not talking about fashion, it’s talking about morality and ethics and human interactions. And what’s happening here, in The Voysey Inheritance, is the same thing that’s happening with Adelphia and [Dennis] Kozlowski and the South Sea Bubble [the first great stock market crash in England, in 1720]. Every generation rediscovers its own excesses and its own degradations, and they always turn out in retrospect to be the same ones that the previous generation had, just under a different name. So, what’s the difference between Enron and Teapot Dome? It’s the same thing.”

The prosperous investment lawyers bilking their clients in Granville-Barker’s world of Edwardian decorum might not be so different from the scheming salesmen in Glengarry Glen Ross, themselves the middle-class blood brothers of the small-time thugs in American Buffalo. “I think it was Thorstein Veblen who said that behavior at the very, very bottom of the social ladder and the behavior at the top is exactly the same,” said Mamet. “What’s the difference between the guy with a gun in the alley and the Adelphia guys? The guy with the gun might cause physical violence, and the Adelphia people might bankrupt the families.”

**AVOIDING EASY ANSWERS**

One of Mamet’s singular strengths as a writer is his ability to develop characters who, regardless of their errant behavior or ethical plight, still elicit some crucial degree of understanding from audiences. He was drawn to the drama of the Voysey family in part because each character has his or her own well-founded reasons for promoting a particular course of action once the family’s fortunes are revealed to be hanging in the balance. “You have to be sure every single character has a defensible position,” said Mamet. “Because it would be easy for us to laugh at the evil conniver or the buffoonish son, or the terrible behavior of these people, but then what you are doing is writing a melodrama with good guys and bad guys and it devolves into comical farce. We have to be able to put ourselves into the shoes of every character and say, What would I do? Drama is really about conflicting impulses within the individual. That is what all drama is about.”
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID MAMET

Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright and two-time Oscar nominee, director, essayist, novelist, and poet David Mamet has been a force in American theater since 1976. When his first staged plays, Sexual Perversity in Chicago and American Buffalo (later filmed with Dustin Hoffman and Dennis Franz), both opened in New York that year, Mamet won the Obie Award for distinguished playwriting and American Buffalo was voted best play by the New York Drama Critics’ Circle. In 1978, he received the Outer Critics’ Circle Award for his contribution to American theater. In 1984, Glengarry Glen Ross won Mamet another New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for best play, four Tony Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize; it was made into a major motion picture in 1992. Other plays include Edmond and The Cryptogram (both Obie Award winners), as well as The Water Engine, A Life in the Theatre, Lakeboat, The Woods, Speed-the-Plow, Oleanna, The Old Neighborhood, Boston Marriage, Faustus, and Romance (which had its world premiere at the Atlantic Theater Company in February). He has adapted four works by Chekhov (Vint, The Cherry Orchard, Three Sisters, and Uncle Vanya), and Harley Granville-Barker’s The Voysey Inheritance. Spartan marked Mamet’s ninth film as writer-director. His critically acclaimed debut feature film, House of Games, was selected to close the New York Film Festival in 1987. His next films were Things Change, cowritten with Shel Silverstein; Homicide, which opened the 1991 Cannes Film Festival; Oleanna, the only film Mamet has adapted and directed from one of his plays; The Spanish Prisoner, which became one of the most popular independent films of 1998; The Winslow Boy, adapted from the Terrence Rattigan play; and State and Main. Mamet has also won acclaim for numerous screenplays, including The Verdict and Wag the Dog (both nominated for Academy Awards for best screenplay) and The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Untouchables, We’re No Angels, Hoffa, and The Edge. He has also written children’s plays and books, numerous volumes of essays, and a book of poems. He has taught acting at his alma mater, Goddard College, as well as at the University of Chicago, the Yale School of Drama, and New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, where, with William H. Macy, he established the Atlantic Theater Company in 1985.
COMPLICITLY YOURS
Carey Perloff Discusses the Seductive, Slippery Slope of Money and Ethics as Dramatized in The Voysey Inheritance

BY WILLIAM H. CRITZMAN

Business scandals are as old as business itself. The Voysey Inheritance, Harley Granville-Barker’s dramatization of financial and familial malfeasance in turn-of-the-20th-century Britain, explores timeless themes of fraud, corruption, and greed. In a recent conversation, director Carey Perloff reflected on the all-too-familiar seductiveness of fraud, the makings of an ethics-driven play, and Voysey’s continuing relevance in contemporary American culture.

WILLIAM H. CRITZMAN: HOW AND WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO DIRECT THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE AT A.C.T.?
CAREY PERLOFF: I first encountered Voysey about seven years ago when the late, great [Bay Area director] Albert Tackazauckas staged it with students in A.C.T.’s Master of Fine Arts Program. One of the great things about having a school is that you can keep certain literature—especially big, classic plays—alive that you might not otherwise see produced. I was absolutely riveted by this play. I have to admit that at the time I hardly knew Granville-Barker, so I made it my business to get to know his work, because I thought this particular play was so remarkable, both intellectually and emotionally. I read Waste, another great Granville-Barker play, about abortion, and when I was in London [in 1997] Tom Stoppard took me to see a production of Waste directed by Peter Hall [at the Old Vic].

I found myself wondering why it is that this writer is so unknown in a country that is inundated with Shaw. There are many reasons for that, I think, but in my completely subjective point of view Granville-Barker is the better writer: he combines in his plays the dialectic of
Shaw with the mystery and complexity of, say, Chekhov or Pinter. I think Granville-Barker’s characters are much more surprising, less mouthpieces for the writer himself [than Shaw’s characters]. Like Shaw, Granville-Barker was an actor and a director and a producer, as well as in later life a great writer on Shakespeare. And he was willing to wrestle in his plays with issues that often weren’t talked about in polite company, like abortion and money.

**WHAT MADE YOU THINK THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO DO THIS PLAY?**

When I’m thinking about planning a season, I always try to take into account what is happening at that moment in the culture. When we were looking at plays for this [2004–05] season, the Tyco scandal was beginning to come to light and Martha Stewart was about to be sentenced. Obviously over the last 15 months corporate ethics has become a national preoccupation. One of the questions that fascinates me now is, How has it happened that we’ve turned into a country that is so unbelievably, systematically unethical? Not coincidentally unethical, but actually intentionally, systematically unethical. In fact, the systems we have created make it almost surprising that people are at all ethical, in terms of money—for example, until recently the same accounting firm was allowed to be the financial advisor as well as the auditor for the same corporation.

The Adelphia case is my favorite of the recent corporate scandals; I became fascinated with the Rigas family. [Adelphia Communications founder] John Rigas is the paterfamilias, in a [Pennsylvania] town that literally became absorbed by the spider web of his family’s company. When Adelphia crashed and burned, and it came to light that it had been robbed of its assets by the family, the town just did not want to prosecute the family. Rigas had funded the public library, the civic center, the skating rink, the bowling alley. To my mind, Rigas is the contemporary figure most like the senior Mr. Voysey: he not only has the veneer of being a good family man and the philanthropist who kept his own alive, but people actually believe he is a good man. He himself is bewildered that anyone would want to punish him for what he’s done. And two of his three sons are also implicated.

The shocking thing for me is that men like Rigas, and Kenneth Lay of Enron and Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco, seem to have no concept of any wrongdoing on their part, even though they’ve bilked their companies and their investors out of billions. The [second] Kozlowski trial is going on now, and he said on the first day—I had to write it down because I thought it was so amazing—“I firmly believe that I never did or intended to do anything wrong.” This was said without irony. I thought, Why has this issue come up again, now, in our culture? And why is it so rarely dealt with in the arts? Actually, money is a dramatically fruitful subject of investigation, but it’s rarely written about. Maybe that’s because theater people don’t make any money, so they don’t know enough about deal-making to write about it! [Laughter]
JUST AS THESE REAL-LIFE CORPORATE CRIMINALS SEEM ALMOST UNSTOPPABLE, THE VOYSEY FIRM HAS GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT FOR SO LONG. WHAT ALLOWS THIS LEVEL OF SYSTEMATIC FRAUD TO CONTINUE?

At the center of this play is [Mr. Voysey,] a brilliant, charming, intelligent family man, a lawyer who primarily deals with estates and trusts who has made a practice over his career of taking money entrusted to him, speculating with that money for his own profit, and pocketing the difference. He is clearly a man of enormous financial acumen. He takes the safe trusts that are returning 4%, invests their principal in ventures that yield up to 40%, and pockets the difference. He then uses the proceeds to send his children to Oxford and give them dowries and to live well in a beautiful house (in a town aptly called Chislehurst). He is also deeply engrained in his community. One of the ways we find that out is when, early in the play, the vicar comes to thank him for a window designed by his son Hugh for the local church. Guess who paid for it: Mr. Voysey.

In working on this play, you realize that one of the reasons Mr. Voysey was never brought down is because it wasn't in anybody's interest to do so. He's given all this money to the church. The family gives thoughtfully personal, practical gifts to their servants and other less-fortunate people in town. It's an odd combination of generosity and patronage that keeps their entire community afloat. So in whose interest is it that the Voysey family should fall apart? No one in that community.

Modern philanthropy works in much the same way, which is why few people in Houston cheered when Enron came down. That company's philanthropy helped pay for the ballet, the symphony, the opera, the museums, the theater. And the Rigas family paid for virtually every civic building in Coudersport, Pennsylvania; their taxes constituted close to 40% of the town's annual intake. Who really benefits from their downfall?

Watching these corporate scandals evolve, I began to realize that things don't change because it doesn't seem to be in anyone's interest that they change. We are all implicated. We're beneficiaries of the philanthropy; some of us even admire the chutzpah of the culpable executives. And some of us are just jealous that we're not on the inside track that enables Martha Stewart to call [ImClone ceo] Sam Waksal and trade stock based on his tips. We don't get those phone calls, but if we did, we might do exactly the same thing.

COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CHARACTERS IN THE VOYSEY HOUSEHOLD? IN WHAT SORT OF DELUSIONAL WORLD ARE THESE PEOPLE LIVING AND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EDWARD BURSTS THE BUBBLE?

The funny thing is that they discover that everything they have ever possessed—their pocket money and clothing, their food, their home, their education, their position in soci-
ety—has been paid for with money stolen from others. The family wealth was created entirely by fraudulent bookkeeping. One of the reasons they’re all complicit, which represents a phenomenon I find fascinating in family dynamics, is that nobody has ever stopped to ask where the money came from, while remaining perfectly happy to spend it. If this were really a play about morality and the children were so moral, somebody somewhere along the line would have said something. But they’re all very happy to leave things as they were. They are all bred to privilege. Ethel, for example, is the ultimate cupcake, who thinks that the nicest thing she can do for her father is offer him opportunities to buy her things—that’s how she’s been bred.

Alice [Maitland] is one of the most interesting characters, in that she is the least naïve. She is the most realistic about money. She basically says to Edward, I didn’t earn this money, I don’t have any sense that it is mine or that I deserve it. I also know that other people are always going to try to take it away from me, so I go in with my eyes wide open. She has no time for false moralism from Edward.

Edward, too, is a product of his upbringing. I think Edward stumbles upon the family secret probably because Mr. Voysey has left his papers out in a way meant to ensure that he will find out. Of course Edward’s momentarily shocked to discover not only that his father has done wrong all through his career, but that his father before him was also involved. Quite precipitously, both for the right and the wrong reasons, Edward gets involved in the same schemes himself. At first, he is forced to take on the family legacy. But then he gets caught up in the fascination of keeping the game going. When he is finally asked what he gets out of it, he simply says, “Occupation.” What else is he going to do with his life?

**THIS PLAY IS VERY MUCH ABOUT OCCUPATION; EVERYONE’S OBSESSED WITH BUSINESS. WHY IS THAT?**

The concept of work can be a very seductive and motivating force, as is morality. Edward is both more and less moral than the rest of the family, but he comes to really enjoy his work. Watching the Voysey children discover that they have lived on the ill-gotten life savings of their fathers’ clients, and then work their way around to concluding that they’re not culpable for its theft, is one of the great experiences of modern drama. But why would they have any kind of moral compass, growing up in that family? On the other hand, they were raised by a man who was generous and kindly to them and who loved them dearly. One of the most delightful moments in the play is when their mother, who they all think is so vulnerable and in need of being sheltered from the truth, reveals that she has been aware of the scheme all along and has in fact been smart enough to protect her own personal assets.
EDWARD’S JOURNEY AS A CHARACTER IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING. HOW DOES HE GAIN A SENSE OF SELF WHILE GOING DEEPER INTO FRAUD?
I think Edward comes to know who he is by taking his family obligations seriously, by fully honoring the legacy. He actually comes to realize that he’s capable of a lot more than he had thought. If you look at it in real dollar terms, over the course of 18 months or so the family debt to its defrauded investors, which they say is hundreds of thousands of dollars (millions in contemporary terms), is very close to being settled when George Booth comes in to pull his money out. So Edward has actually done extremely well.

WHAT ABOUT THE PLAY’S EDWARDIAN SETTING IS STILL RELEVANT TODAY?
Edwardian England was permeated with an imperial sensibility, as is the contemporary United States. The play’s period is pre-stock market regulation. The United States went through a period of much stricter regulation, and now we’ve gone through a phase of deregulation, which allows for a dangerous lack of oversight. Look at the utilities industry. We’ve discovered that those blackouts a few years ago were artificially rigged and that Enron was a big player in the scheme. At the time, anyone who made that accusation was considered a crazy conspiracy theorist. But the fact is, that’s exactly what happened. This kind of thing is not at all unusual.

WHAT MAKES FRAUD SO TIMELESS?
It’s seductive. It’s easily covered up. And it’s often perpetrated by seemingly respectable people. White collar crime takes more effort to unmask and is woven into the life of a community. You pull one titan down and the entire service industry falls down, because the communities are so interwoven. Today those communities are simply much larger than in the early 20th century. The town in Voysey is affected in the same way. Another fascinating aspect of the issue is the effect of exposure and then confession, or lack thereof. What happens after a corporate criminal is exposed? Martha Stewart [Living Omnimedia] stock is trading near all-time highs. She is likely to come out of jail a more successful businesswoman than she went in. What do we learn from that? It’s kind of unbelievable, but people do say that in America second acts are always possible. What that ultimately means, however, is that fraud is ok, as long as you come out stronger than you went in.

IS THIS WHY MR. VOYSEY IS UNABLE TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO CONTINUE THE SCHEME EVEN AFTER HE’S SET EVERYTHING STRAIGHT?
Absolutely. It’s a high-stakes game, and Mr. Voysey knows he’s very good at it. It’s like gambling. I think once you’re in the game, it’s very difficult to get out of it again, for two
reasons. One, you get very used to living a certain lifestyle. Mr. Voysey would have had to realize that, in order to keep the books right, his sons would not be able to go to Oxford, his family would not be able to go on living in that beautiful house, nor would he be able to give Ethel the dowry her social position demands. He could never admit that on his watch. And the other thing is, it’s the fun of the game. He obviously enjoys it and realizes he’s good at it. The same thing happens to Edward. For people like you and me, we look at people like Kozlowski and think, Once you’ve made your first 10 million, what’s the next 25? What on earth would you do with it? So clearly it’s not about what one can buy with the money, it’s about the thrill of the chase.

**That’s what makes Edward’s journey so fascinating. When he stands up to George Booth and declares that he is indeed his father’s son, it’s as if he’s saying, “How dare you ruin my game.”**

Precisely. And one of the great ironies of the play is that Edward’s as good at it as his father ever was, but no one else realizes it, because he doesn’t have his father’s dramatic flair for playing the kindly and generous patriarch. There’s George Booth saying he never really trusted Edward, but he’s in much better hands with Edward and should have stuck it out. The game Edward is playing, however, is one of restitution. Restitution is a very slippery thing, because once a theft has happened and somebody is held responsible, who deserves to get their money back first? How does that work? In a bankruptcy trial, for instance, who deserves to get paid first? The small shareholders, who risked the most, proportionally, and are perhaps the most naïve? Or the large investors, who are less likely to suffer from the loss and perhaps the most financially savvy? Or the people who invested most recently? I think Granville-Barker addresses in this play the seductively slippery slope of manipulating money, of embezzling, of thinking you’re doing the right thing when you’re doing completely the wrong thing.

**So after all this, where are we going at the end of the play?**

That’s a tough question to answer. I think the ending of the play is deeply ambiguous. The genius of the play, as with any great melodrama, is that each character is somehow right in his or her own point of view. You shouldn’t, as an audience member, be able to sit back and point your finger at any particular villain or hero. You can’t categorically say, Oh, I see, the moral is that Mr. Voysey was a terrible man, but his upright son saves the day. It would be easy for us to laugh at the terrible behavior of these people, but what’s scarier is to realize that there isn’t really any single individual to blame; it’s the entire environment. They’re all complicit.
The play forces you to ask yourself, Would I behave any differently? If this were my family, under these circumstances, would I tell the truth? Why? To destroy the honor and financial well-being of my family, for what? Will anybody be better off if I do expose the fraud? How is justice best served? Those are the interesting questions. There are no easy answers.

**HOW DID YOU COME TO COMMISSION DAVID MAMET TO ADAPT THE PLAY?**

When I was thinking about who has written well about money, the only people I could think of were Granville-Barker and David Mamet. Mamet writes better about deal making and the thrill of the chase than any American writer ever has. It happened that Mamet was in San Francisco for the premiere of *Faustus* [at the Magic Theatre] and he came to see me. He asked me what we had going, and I told him that one of the things we were working on was *The Voysey Inheritance*. To which he said, “Oh, that is the great play of the early 20th century. I'll adapt it for you.”

I asked him to do several things: I asked him to make it one set instead of two, so we could focus on the family, the edifice of this family that turns out to be completely artificial. I also wanted it to be taut and lean, and didn’t want to spend stage time shuffling back and forth between an office in London and the house at Chislehurst [the two settings of Granville-Barker's original text]. I asked him to streamline characters and to cut through to the meat of the drama. And he had to do it in two months. I thought he’d never do it, but on September 1, as agreed, there it was on my desk, and he’s done a lot of work since. One of the fascinating things about what he’s done is that, just as he did with *The Winslow Boy*, Mamet has found the heartbeat of the original text. He has left the play in its period; he’s kept its dialogue. He’s just exposed the spine of the story in a wonderful way. The result is a remarkable meeting of a contemporary playwright and an earlier playwright in dialogue together.

**WHAT HAS MAMET BROUGHT TO THE PLAY THAT WASN’T IN THE ORIGINAL?**

Shape. Mamet is an extraordinary sculptor. That’s his genius. All of his plays demonstrate an unerring sense of rhythm and of how to build suspense. He really understands how plot unravels. If you look at *Glengarry Glen Ross*, it’s just brilliant how he keeps those balls in the air; in that play, too, he’s more interested in the chase than in pointing the finger at a wrongdoer. I think Mamet ultimately thinks that everyone is complicit in “the game.” At the same time he doesn’t want to make it easy for the audience. He likes mystery, and he likes saying just enough but no more about a character, so the audience has to work, to lean forward and make their own guesses. It leaves a lot of room for actors, and makes the audience’s experience that much more exciting. You don't have to answer it all for them. He also has enormous respect for what Granville-Barker has written.
A GLIMPSE INTO THE BUSINESS CLIMATE OF EDWARDIAN BRITAIN

BY LAURA MUIR

In the early decades of the 20th century, the British Empire encompassed nearly two-fifths of the world’s land area and held sway over roughly half a billion people, about one quarter of the world’s population at that time. The empire’s territories were scattered across every continent and ocean, and it was frequently described with some truth as the dominion on which the sun never set.

The Edwardian era between 1901 and 1910—the climax and pinnacle of this imperial age—was a time of tremendous prosperity and remarkable wealth in Britain. It is in the heart of these Edwardian years that The Voysey Inheritance is set. Industry and commerce were thriving, spreading British technology, governmental and educational institutions, and the English language around much of the globe. Although Great Britain itself represented only three percent of the empire’s land mass in the first decade of the 20th cen-
tury, its laws and currency were imposed upon many millions in Australia, India, and throughout Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and parts of North and South America.

By the time of Edward vii’s coronation in 1904, the Industrial Revolution had long since matured in Britain. The rapid industrial growth, which had begun in England during the middle of the 18th century, spread over the next 150 years to many other countries, including the United States. By the turn of the 20th century, England’s once largely agrarian economy had been thoroughly transformed into one based on mechanized manufacturing, significantly increasing the amount and variety of British products produced for export. Contemporaneously, the old colonial system of trade had been replaced by free trade, which tested long established business ethics in Britain. Businessmen and entrepreneurs seized the opportunities that came with this new age of international commerce and built great fortunes.

Periods of great innovation and economic expansion also create opportunities for fiscal malfeasance. With more goods to be exported to a giant empire—and to keep the economy ever expanding—business in the Edwardian age was transacted across international borders at an almost frantic pace, not uncommonly in disregard of local laws. The expanding overseas markets demanded stiff competition and expense, which often came in the form of tariffs; to adapt, business practices grew more clever with each year. The Voysey Inheritance takes place within this climate and explores the ambiguous ethical terrain of its time.

As the situation in the years following 1900 developed, the British Empire’s policies of laissez faire and imperial manipulation of market forces, which had fueled prosperity since the industrial revolution started, were beginning to falter. The empire also faced growing external threats from the United States and Germany, whose economic growth, productivity, and political influence were outpacing Britain’s.

By Edward vii’s death in 1910, World War i was at hand and the one-time imperial giant’s world domination was already diminishing, although it would be mid century before colonial disengagement officially began. The British Empire, built over centuries through conquest, settlement, and expansion of trade, was—unperceived by many—at the beginning of its end.

“It’s strange the number of people who believe you can do right by means which they know to be wrong.”

—Edward Voysey, in the second act of The Voysey Inheritance
Looking back on a century of unprecedented wealth creation and scores of rags-to-riches success stories that celebrate the American dream, there is, of course, another, darker tale to be told—a hundred years of greed and scandal, swindles and scams, cons and crooks.

From relatively small-time frauds at the beginning of the century to major Wall Street insider trading scandals in the go-go 1980s, the past 100 years were rife with a notorious cast of characters who left their smudges on the world of business.

Some were criminals who went to jail for their wrongdoing; others were speculators who simply miscalculated and lost millions—or billions—of other people’s money. Some scandals have sunk into oblivion, while a few episodes shook up the system enough to generate real financial reforms.

The human weakness for greed is as old as the species itself. But the economic growth and technological innovation that powered the 20th century provided the chaotic backdrop that allowed unseemly business activity to flourish, notes Richard Sylla, a professor of economics at the Stern School of Business at New York University.

Times of great innovation—such as investor excitement over electric utilities in the 1920s or the growth of sophisticated financial tools such as derivatives in the 1980s and ’90s—have opened the door to wrongdoing or massive failure by people who may have had legitimate ideas initially but then went too far, Sylla said. Even such figures as Michael Milken, the demonized “junk-bond king,” was an innovator who changed the financial system by opening up a new market for high-yield securities issued by smaller companies, he said.

“What the 20th century has done is develop mass markets and the ability to accumulate great wealth—and that has tempted people to make end runs around the law,” Sylla said. “So you see someone like (Barings Bank rogue trader) Nick Leeson, who toppled this very famous bank . . . the shocking thing was one whippersnapper could do this.”

There are legions of stories of financial scandal throughout the century, but here are some of the most memorable:

One of the earliest of the century’s financial rogues was Italian immigrant CHARLES PONZI, whose name has the dubious distinction in American business slang of denoting his particular type of fraud. The dapper Ponzi, who served time in Canada for forgery
before setting up business in Boston and London, discovered he could buy international postal coupons abroad, then resell them in the United States for a higher price. In what’s now known as a “Ponzi scheme,” or pyramid scheme, Ponzi pooled money from his initial investors, who made a profit off the venture, thus attracting more investors. But soon, Ponzi stopped buying the coupons altogether and paid off the early investors with the money poured in by the latecomers. Needless to say, the scheme ended poorly. The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression spurred the downfall of many dubious business enterprises. One of the biggest early-20th-century scandals was the international scheme operated by 

Ivar Kreuger—aka “the Swedish match king”—who held a virtual monopoly over household match production in Europe. After World War 1, Kreuger, backed by U.S. capital, loaned money to war-torn countries in exchange for monopoly rights in the match business. But Kreuger’s business began to founder amid the world financial tumult of the late 1920s, and in 1932 he committed suicide. After his death, it was discovered that his accounts were falsified—and U.S. investors had been fleeced out of millions through the fraud.

Meanwhile, one figure who survived major scandal was electricity tycoon Samuel Insull. Like the late ’90s craze on Wall Street for Internet companies, the 1920s were marked by an obsession with the growth of electric utilities. The British-born Insull, head of Commonwealth Edison Co., built a utility empire though highly leveraged borrowing. He aggressively promoted his companies’ stocks, but the companies were toppled during the Depression and investors lost their shirts. Insull fled to Europe in the 1930s, but was extradited to stand trial in Chicago for fraud and embezzlement. He was tried three times, but acquitted each time.

In the wake of the stock market crash, the newly formed Securities and Exchange Commission took on Wall Street, while Wall Street’s “Old Guard” strongly resisted the oversight. When the federal government unveiled new requirements on disclosure of personal finances, a former president of the New York Stock Exchange and one of its most prominent members, Richard Whitney, was found to have dipped into a pension fund for stock exchange employees and stolen from his own customers. Whitney pleaded guilty in 1938 to embezzlement charges and served time in federal prison.

The Whitney episode helped quiet Wall Street’s resistance to SEC regulation, Sylla notes, making it one of the century’s scandals that did result in major change. “When Wall Street sort of protested against the New Deal beating up on them, it was found that it [the Street] wasn’t as clean as supposed,” he said.

The 1940s through ’60s were relatively quiet in terms of major financial scandal. “There’s a lull because of the Depression, which had kind of an equalizing effect,” says Paul Argenti,
a professor of management and corporate communication at the Tuck School of Business Administration at Dartmouth College, who has studied greed in American culture.

One notable scandal during this era, however, was the federal indictment in the mid '60s of a group of major electrical manufacturers, including **General Electric and Westinghouse**, on price-fixing charges and conspiracy to fix government bidding on electrical equipment. The companies were forced to pay stiff antitrust penalties, some of the biggest fines ever levied by the government until then.

The 1970s brought the scandal involving mutual fund syndicate **Investors Overseas Services**, founded by Bernard Cornfeld. After investors began to sell off during a market downturn, Cornfeld was replaced with financier Robert Vesco, who was accused of looting the company of $224 million and subsequently fled to the Caribbean. Vesco was later sentenced to a 13-year prison term in Cuba on unrelated charges stemming from allegations that he tried to produce and market a miracle cancer drug to overseas investors without the communist government's knowledge.

**The '80s: Wall St. Scandal Comes of Age**

In 1986, the SEC announced that **Ivan Boesky**, who engaged in a risky type of speculation called arbitrage, agreed to pay back $100 million and pleaded guilty to insider-trading violations. Boesky was later sentenced to three years in prison on one felony count of conspiracy to make fraudulent statements to the government.

One of the figures Boesky implicated was **Michael Milken**, the head of the junk-bond operation at investment bank Drexel Burnham Lambert Inc., who along with his firm was charged with securities fraud. Drexel went bankrupt, while Milken was sentenced to ten years in prison.

The other big financial scandal of the '80s was the collapse of several savings-and-loan associations. The central figure of the debacle was **Charles Keating, Jr.**, the former chief executive of Lincoln Savings & Loan in Irvine, California, which was seized by regulators in 1989. Keating, convicted of securities fraud for allegedly looting the S&L and bilking investors of $200 million, served more than four years in prison before the charges against him were thrown out. After extensive legal wrangling, Keating agreed [in April 1999] to plead guilty to four felony counts in a deal that will keep him from returning to prison.

In the '90s came the Barings affair, in which Singapore-based options trader **Nick Leeson** broke the 227-year-old bank by hiding $1.4 billion in trading debt he had accumulated. The Dutch financial group **ING** rescued Barings in 1995, and Leeson was released from prison in July 1999 after serving a reduced term for fraud and conspiracy.
...**MARTIN FRANKEL**, a Connecticut money manager, was arrested in Germany in September [1999] after a four-month international manhunt. Frankel is accused of bilking more than $200 million from insurance companies in five states and using the money to buy mansions, cars, diamonds, and gold.

[Also in 1999,] the former chairman and CEO of Keefe, Bruyette & Woods Inc., **JAMES MCDERMOTT, JR.**, was arrested and charged with insider trading. Federal authorities allege that he passed inside investment tips to a porn actress with whom he had a relationship.

**RISK TAKERS**
While not resulting in criminal charges, several of the century’s most notorious financial episodes involved financiers who saw huge opportunity for riches but ended up massively miscalculating.

In one case, the Hunt brothers—Texas oilmen **NELSON AND WILLIAM HUNT**—got in over their heads by trying to corner the market on silver. The run-up in prices, from less than $10 an ounce in mid 1979 to nearly $50 in early 1980, led people to sell heirlooms and melt down old silver quarters. But when the boom collapsed, the Hunt brothers ended up with about $1 billion in losses and charges of market manipulation by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission.

And [in 1998], Wall Street was roiled by news that the multibillion-dollar hedge fund **LONG-TERM CAPITAL MANAGEMENT** was near collapse. The fund, headed by Wall Street veteran John Meriwether, was nearly forced to liquidate billions of dollars in investments to meet minimum capital requirements before the Federal Reserve stepped in to negotiate a $3.6 billion bailout from top investment banks.

**WHO’S TO BLAME?**
So what is the end result of all of these episodes? Major business scandals and financial failures often bolster the public’s suspicion of Wall Street and corporate America, while some episodes have led to greater government oversight of business and the downfall of once high-flying moguls. But Sylla says that for the most part throughout the century, Americans have tended to brush off financial scandals unless their own self-interest is involved.

“These are people who are in some way crossing over the line, but as long as the economy is doing well, people say ‘that’s too bad,’” he said of the century’s gallery of rogues. “It’s when things aren’t going well, it’s then that we look for scapegoats and think that the government should have prevented all this from happening in the first place.”

CORPORATE SCANDALS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Former HealthSouth Corp. CEO Richard Scrushy, whose trial began in January 2005, faces as many as 450 years behind bars on 58 charges, including fraud and money laundering. Scrushy is the first CEO tried under the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, passed by Congress in July 2002, which increased white-collar criminal fines and prison time as much as tenfold. He leads an unprecedented parade of half a dozen CEOs and other top executives on trial in 2005, as the three largest U.S. stock exchanges still struggle to recover from the record $7.5 trillion decline in market value from March 2000 through September 2002. On trial are Scrushy, former WorldCom Inc. CEO Bernard Ebbers, and former Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski and his chief financial officer, Mark Swartz. They may be joined this year by former Enron Corp. Chairman Kenneth Lay. All are likely to face longer prison terms than executives in savings-and-loan and insider-trading scandals of the 1980s and 1990s.

More than 60 CEOs or presidents have been charged under federal law with corporate fraud in the past three years, according to the U.S. Justice Department. Among the executives charged since 2002 are former Adelphia Communications Corp. Chairman John Rigas, housewares-company founder Martha Stewart, and ImClone Systems Inc. founder Sam Waksal.

The simultaneous trials of CEOs are unprecedented in U.S. history, says Lawrence Mitchell, a law professor at George Washington University in Washington.

Those on trial may be victims of their own success, says Mitchell. Until CEOs turned into celebrities after the Standard & Poor’s 500 Index quadrupled in value in the 1990s, regulators were more likely to fine corporations accused of white-collar crimes, instead of seeking criminal convictions of individuals.

The Sarbanes-Oxley Act strengthened the SEC’s hand. The law allows the SEC to place fines in a fund to benefit the victims of corporate fraud—shareholders, rather than the U.S. Treasury—increasing the commission’s incentive to seek large penalties that would help investors. By September 2004, the SEC had imposed 15 fines of more than $50 million, dwarfing the Xerox record, according to the SEC’s Web site.

Until the law was passed, the commission had to show that officers or accountants were “substantially unfit” before seeking to bar them from serving on corporate boards. The law lowered that standard to “unfit.”

In the fiscal year ended September 30, 2004, the SEC sought to bar 161 officers and directors, quadruple the 38 in fiscal 2000.

Below is an overview of some of the corporate scandals recently in the news.
ADELPHIA

John J. Rigas, his sons Timothy and Michael, and former assistant treasurer Michael C. Mulcahey have been accused of massive fraud that cost Adelphia, the nation’s sixth-largest cable company, $2.5 billion. The government is seeking forfeiture of that amount. The indictment alleges that the Rigases looted the company “on a massive scale,” eventually driving it into bankruptcy. The indictment also charges that the Rigases looted Adelphia’s assets and used the company’s bank accounts as a personal piggy-bank to fund such endeavors as buying the Buffalo Sabres hockey team and building a golf course. After a four-month trial in 2004, John and Timothy were found guilty on 18 counts of conspiracy, securities fraud, and bank fraud. Sentencing has been postponed until March. Both men are seeking appeals. In addition to the criminal charges, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the new management of Adelphia have filed civil charges against the same defendants.

Rigas and the other defendants have maintained their innocence, arguing that Adelphia’s directors approved the majority of the transactions in question. However, former Adelphia Vice President for Finance James R. Brown and Timothy Werth, former director of accounting, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and securities fraud and testified against the Rigases. The Wall Street Journal estimates that Adelphia investors lost $3.5 billion from the stock’s high in 1999.

ARTHUR ANDERSEN AND ENRON

Energy giant Enron, once the nation’s seventh-largest company, collapsed in December 2001 after an accounting scandal was uncovered. Under the supervision of CFO Andrew Fastow (and with approval from the board and auditor Arthur Andersen), Enron established numerous “off-the-books” entities to hide company debt. The off-the-books deals made millions for Enron employees, including Fastow, who were partners in these enterprises. Hiding the debt increased Enron’s paper profits and boosted the stock. When Enron’s stock—which guaranteed the partnerships—fell, the debts reappeared in Enron’s books. Enron may also have manipulated electricity prices to profit during California’s power crisis. Enron insiders sold $1 billion in stock before the company collapsed into bankruptcy.

Arthur Andersen, afraid of alienating a major client, approved the off-the-books partnerships. Andersen then shredded Enron documents when a government investigation loomed.

In the wake of the scandal, Arthur Andersen faced the unusual situation of having its entire firm indicted on criminal charges. The CEO of the firm resigned and the lead auditor for Enron, David Duncan, pleaded guilty and testified against Enron. Andersen was
found guilty and fined $500,000. Andersen has stopped practice as an accounting firm in the United States but is still facing lawsuits by creditors and Enron shareholders.

On May 1, 2003, an additional round of charges came down in the Enron case. Fastow and his wife, Lea, are accused of skimming profits from the company’s wind farm operations and tax evasion. In addition, former Treasurer Ben Glisan, Jr. and former finance executive Dan Boyle have been charged with securities fraud, insider trading, and falsification of accounting and tax records. Seven former members of Enron’s broadband and Internet group have been charged with securities fraud, wire fraud, and money laundering.

Fastow has been indicted on upwards of 70 counts. Enron’s former treasurer pleaded guilty and was given a five-year sentence. Glisan has also pleaded guilty and is cooperating with investigators. Former Enron Chairman and CEO Kenneth Lay faces seven counts of fraud and conspiracy, as well as charges of bank fraud and three more counts of lying to banks about his plan to use loans to buy Enron stock on margin. Former Enron CEO Jeffrey Skilling could receive a prison term of as long as 325 years if convicted on 35 charges of fraud, conspiracy, and insider trading. One-time Chief Accounting Officer Richard Causey could get 265 years on 31 counts. Skilling and Causey are accused of being in on or knowing about various schemes to manufacture profits and hide debt in the years leading to Enron’s crash. Lay, Skilling, and Causey have all pleaded not guilty; their trial is set to begin in January 2006.

**GLOBAL CROSSING**

On Christmas Eve of 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it would not seek the indictment of Gary Winnick, founder and chairman of Global Crossing, a Bermuda-based company that built a 100,000-mile fiber-optic network connecting more than 200 cities in 27 countries. Winnick sold $734 million worth of stock, including $123 million in the weeks before the telecommunications company began to collapse.

**IMCLONE SYSTEMS INC.**

Sam Waksal, founder and former CEO, was charged in 2002 with insider trading and pleaded guilty to six counts, including bank fraud, securities fraud, conspiracy to obstruct justice, and perjury. In October 2002, Waksal pleaded guilty to a six-count indictment, including charges he tipped off his daughter, Aliza, about the Food and Drug Administration’s decision not to approve ImClone’s cancer drug Erbitux. In June 2003, Waksal was sentenced to seven years in prison. He was also required to pay $3 million in fines and $1.26 million in restitution. He began serving his sentence as a minimum-security facility in Pennsylvania in July 2003. Waksal is also banned for life from ever leading another public company.
Waksal and his father, Jack, agreed to a final settlement of all charges with the SEC in January 2005. Under the agreement, Waksal will pay the $3 million penalty, and his father will return $2 million in profits. The two men neither admitted nor denied any allegations. (Martha Stewart, a friend of Samuel Waksal, is serving a five-month sentence for lying to investigators about her own sale of ImClone stock.)

ImClone and Bristol-Myers Squibb resubmitted Erbitux to the FDA after favorable results in a European trial. It was approved in February 2004.

MERRILL LYNCH AND CO.
In 2002 the press reported extensively on the role played by stock analysts at Merrill Lynch in the financial scandals of the Internet bust. Among the most damning evidence used by New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer were e-mails written by star Internet stock analyst Henry Blodget that praised companies to investors while denigrating them privately. Merrill Lynch agreed to pay a $200 million fine for issuing fraudulent research. The company also changed its payment practices, prohibiting analysts’ payments from being related to the firm’s investment-banking work. Henry Blodget was fined $4 million and banned from the securities industry for life. The SEC is investigating the implications of Merrill’s research reports, and some investors have filed suit against the company.

TYCO
In 2003, Tyco International, Ltd. filed a $400 million lawsuit against former chief financial officer Mark Swartz, claiming he looted the conglomerate for his personal gain. Swartz already faces criminal charges of corruption, conspiracy, grand larceny, and falsifying records filed by government prosecutors, who say he and former CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski stole $600 million from Tyco. Former general counsel Mark Belnick was also indicted.

The trial against Kozlowski and Swartz for “enterprise corruption” got underway in New York City in September 2003. While they and Belnick all pleaded innocent, former Tyco director Frank Walsh pleaded guilty to fraud. The six-month trial ended in a mistrial in April 2004. In their retrial in New York state court, Kozlowski and Swartz are accused of taking $150 million in unauthorized bonuses. The two men face 31 counts of stock fraud, falsifying business records, grand larceny, and conspiracy. The most serious charge carries a 25-year prison term.

Tyco has an entirely new executive board and has restructured its debt. Tyco asked a federal judge to dismiss securities fraud claims against the company, arguing that the troubled conglomerate was the victim of deceit by former senior executives, according to court papers.
QWEST
In February 2003, the Justice Department handed down a 12-count criminal indictment against three former Qwest employees: former CFO Grant Graham, former senior vice president Thomas Hall, former assistant controller Bryan Treadway, and former vice president John Walker. All four pleaded innocent to artificially inflating Qwest revenues to meet Wall Street targets. Four of the counts each carry a penalty of ten years in prison and a $1 million fine. The others are punishable by five years in prison and a $250,000 fine. In addition, the SEC has filed civil charges against those four and four others.

In early October 2003, the SEC announced a $25,000 settlement with a former sales director at Qwest. That executive, Loren Pfau, was accused of making secret deals in order to up the company’s revenue numbers.

WORLDCOM
The Wall Street Journal called the WorldCom scandal “the biggest accounting scam ever,” estimating the fraud in the books at $11 billion.

After the first discrepancies came to light in June 2002, CFO Scott Sullivan was immediately fired. He has since pleaded guilty to fraud and conspiracy charges and testified against his former boss, former CEO Bernard Ebbers, as part of a cooperation agreement with the government.

Former WorldCom CEO Bernard Ebbers, who was pushed out in April 2002, has been accused of securities fraud in the state of Oklahoma and is currently on trial on federal charges of fraud, conspiracy, and filing false documents with regulators and faces up to 85 years in prison if convicted on all counts. Federal prosecutors charge that Ebbers master-minded the fraud so that WorldCom could meet Wall Street’s profit estimates and slow the decline in its stock price.

In addition, four individuals formerly involved with WorldCom’s accounting have pleaded guilty to related charges: Controller David Myers, Director of General Accounting Buford Yates, Jr., Director of Management and Reporting Betty Vinson, and Director of Legal Entity Accounting Troy Norman.

WorldCom filed for bankruptcy in July 2002. The SEC accepted a fine from WorldCom of $500 million in cash and $250 million in stock.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS MENTIONED IN THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

BY PAUL WALSH AND WILLIAM H. CRITZMAN

“AH, AH, MAY WE NOW THE CLOTH IS DRAWN, PROCEED TO BUSINESS.”
Perhaps George Booth makes oblique reference here to the curtain or veil in the temple of Jerusalem that barred access to the Holy of Holies from all but the most holy (Exodus 26:31, 33).

“JUST THESE INDENTS TO SIGN...”
Indents were deeds or sealed agreements between two or more parties. Some say the name is short for “indentures,” others that it is a reference to the fact that the documents were indented at the top for easy identification or security.

“What of the Australian bonds, Mr. Peacey?”
Investment bonds in select parts of the British Empire—India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc.—paid high dividends but were not without risk, especially as the financial and political situation shifted in Europe prior to World War I.

“And in the office, working double-tides all weekend.”
Today we would say “work day and night” or “work around the clock,” but in earlier days one referred to the tide. “Working double-tides” is a nautical term that refers strictly to performing three days’ labor in two, working by the night tide as well as by the day.

“Of course I’m hot and strong for conscription.”
Major Booth Voysey is ahead of his time, arguing for military conscription, which was not introduced in Britain until 1916. The issue had been hotly debated since the defeat of the French by the conscript Prussian army in 1872. Modernization of the eccentric Victorian army was begun by Viscount Haldane in 1905. The transition from the amateur colonial army of Victorian times to a modern professional army was not quite complete at the outbreak of World War I.

“Perhaps I’ll chuck the service, and go into the house.”
Major Booth Voysey suggests that maybe he will resign his military commission and run for a seat in the House of Commons. As a Member of Parliament, of course, he would continue to be of service to the Empire and to himself, though not in military service.
“DENNIS AND I HAVE DECIDED THAT WE WANT NO WEDDING PRESENT... WE WANT A CHECK.”
Ethel is referring to the dowry she must have in order to marry her fiancé. At this early point in the 20th century, it was still necessary for women of certain social status to bring a financial asset to the arrangement of marriage.

“OF COURSE, IF YOU, IN YOUR BENEVOLENCE, DECIDE TO ADD SOME ‘TRIM-MIN’S,’ IN THE SHAPE OF A . . . TURKEY CARPET, WELL.”
Using an art form dating to the 13th century, Turkish (or Persian) carpet weavers are known for producing the most beautiful carpets in the world using materials ranging in fineness from wool to silk. Imports like Turkey carpets came into vogue in England in the late 19th century when the British Empire made trade between the West and East extremely profitable.

“FORTY-TWO PERCENT IS PLEASING.” / “THAT’S WHAT IT IS: YOU’RE A BUCCANEER.”
In the standard sense, a buccaneer is an unauthorized pirate, and the word dates from the 17th century to describe looters of the Spanish West Indies shipping trade. Here, Mr. Voysey uses buccaneer to describe Mr. Booth’s needless speculation and adventure in high-return investments.

“YES, I SHALL SAVE THE CITY, SHOULD YOU FIND ME JUST THE ONE HONORABLE MAN.”
Alice paraphrases Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 18: “If I find in Sodom 50 righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.” Eventually Abraham got Yahweh to agree to spare the city for the sake of 20 righteous men, but only Lot could be found.

“ARE YOU A SHOPKEEPER RUINING OUR EVENING.”
By calling Edward a shopkeeper, Ethel demotes Edward’s social status to what we would call middle class and thus reminds him that his behavior lacks gentility.

“Consols” or “consolidated annuities” were secure government bonds that paid a fixed annuity. Growth of the British national debt after establishment of the Bank of England
in 1693 produced a confusing variety of bonds, which Prime Minister Henry Pelham began to consolidate around 1751. Consols offered a fixed and secure rate of interest, paid by the Bank of England. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Consols constituted the major part of the national debt and were a reliable index to the state of national credit.

Young Hatherley (a client of the Voysey firm) is to receive his full estate when he comes of age on his 21st birthday. The £6,000 estate would have an equivalent purchasing power today of approximately £1,100,000 or $2,098,300 by current conversion rates.

“YOU KNOW THAT I’M HEAVILY INTO NORTHERN ELECTRICS.”
Electricity was first being widely distributed to northern England just around the turn of the 20th century. In 1904 the first electric trams were introduced in Gloucester as electric currents quickly spread across the country. Northern Electrics was one of a series of private electric firms battling for territory and market control. The stock problem referenced here is due to a shareholder dispute.

“AT THE BEST I’LL BE STRUCK OFF . . . ONE’S LIVELIHOOD GONE.”
To be “struck off” is to be stricken from the register and so unable to practice one’s profession. Lawyers are debarred but doctors and other professionals are “struck off.”

“I WANT A MAXIM GUN PLANTED IN REGENT STREET . . . AND ONE IN THE HAYMARKET . . . AND ONE IN LEICESTER SQUARE AND ONE IN THE STRAND . . . AND A DOZEN IN THE CITY.”
In 1885, the American inventor Hiram Maxim demonstrated the world’s first automatic portable machine gun to the British army. Maxim used the energy of each bullet’s recoil force to eject the spent cartridge and insert the next bullet. The Maxim machine gun would therefore fire until the entire belt of bullets was used up. Trials showed that the machine gun could fire 500 rounds per minute and therefore had the firepower of about 100 rifles.

Regent Street is a major shopping street and thoroughfare in London’s West End. The Haymarket is a street in the St. James district of London, also in the West End, that houses a number of high-class restaurants and two major theaters (the Theatre Royal and Her Majesty’s Theatre); it has been a theatrical location at least since the 17th century. The Strand is also a famous road in London, linking Trafalgar Square to Fleet Street (traditionally the home of the British national press) and the City of London. Often referred to simply as “the City,” the City of London forms the historic and financial center of Greater London. A critical part of the British economy, the City contributes about one-sixth of the UK’s gross national product. By placing machine guns in each of these locations, Hugh
would take out a significant number of the people who control and operate what are, in his mind, the exploitative forces of capitalism.

“OH EDWARD . . . YOU CLANK THE CHAIN WITH THE BEST OF THEM.”
This is the chain of servility and degradation—the chain by which we are bound to succeed, to carry on. Hugh’s lament here is that he wants to be free from these chains and to live a life bound by nothing but his own ability.

“IT SAYS ‘THE POOR ARE ALWAYS WITH US . . .’” / “YES, BUT DOES IT FOLLOW THAT THE WORLD MUST BEAR WITH THE RICH?”
The paraphrase is from John 12:7–8, in which Jesus tells Judas Iscariot not to criticize Mary Magdalene for having saved a pound of costly ointment rather than selling it and giving the proceeds to the poor: “Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with ye; but me ye have not always.”
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the “Voysey inheritance”? What are Edward’s options when he learns the true nature of his inheritance? What would you do if this inheritance were left to you?

2. What similarities do you see between Edwardian Britain as depicted in the play and the present-day United States? Do you think the play has continuing relevance today? Why or why not?

3. Which Voysey family member do you like best? While watching the play, with which characters do you identify; with which ones do you disagree? Do you think the position of any family member is more justifiable than the others? How do you think you would fit into this family?

4. What happens to the family when Edward reveals the family secret? What do you think each character is thinking at that moment? How are their reactions similar; how are they different?

5. What is Trenchard’s role in the family? As the eldest son and a solicitor, Trenchard would be expected to take over the family business; why is Edward the favored son instead?

6. How does each of the Voysey children see the world? What is the role of each in the family? What element of society does each represent? What do they have in common? How do they differ?

7. What do you think of the women in this play? Alice Maitland and Mrs. Voysey have each retained control over their own financial affairs. Why is that? How does that experience affect their attitude toward Mr. Voysey’s fraudulent activities and Edward’s course of action? How do they differ from Ethel and Honor? What do you think will happen to each of the sisters at the end of the play?

8. What makes Mr. Voysey so confident in defrauding his clients, particularly Mr. George Booth? Why do you think Mr. Voysey, even after getting things “right as rain once,” returned to stealing from his clients? How is Edward like his father? How is he different?

9. Do you think Peacey is more or less culpable than Mr. Voysey or Edward for taking 200 pounds each year in exchange for his silence? Why does he “deserve” his 200 pounds each year? Do you think Edward should or should not pay Peacey his annual “bonus”? Why does Edward refuse?
10. What role do the Voyseys play in their community? What specific examples are given in the play that demonstrate that role?

11. What are the implications of setting the final two acts of the play at Christmastime?

12. What does George Booth mean when he says he is acting upon his “Christian impulses”? Do you think George Booth is as good a man as he says he is? Do you think he deserves to be repaid ahead of the firm’s needier clients? What does the play have to say about the Christian church?

13. Describe Edward’s journey throughout the play. What kind of man is he at the start, and how does he change by the end? Do you think this change is for better or for worse?

14. At the end of the play, Alice and Edward leave to get married in France. What do you suppose happens after their wedding? Do you think Edward returns to England to stand trial?
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION . . .

ON AND BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER


ON CORPORATE SCANDALS AND BUSINESS ETHICS


ON AND BY DAVID MAMET


