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The Voysey Inheritance

by Harley Granville-Barker

Adapted by David Mamet

STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Tracy C. Davis
Barber Professor of Performing Arts
Professor of Theatre and English
Northwestern University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2

Biography and Major Works of Harley Granville Barker 3

Biography and Major Works of David Mamet 6

The Voysey Inheritance: Synopses 9

Historical Contexts: 16
- -Debt, Credit, and Business Ethics in Edwardian England
- -Social Divisions
- -The Edwardian Family

Suggested Teaching Points 20
- -Language in Barker and Mamet
- -Business Ethics
- -Gender

Glossary 23

Additional Sources 26

Productions of *The Voysey Inheritance* 28

INTRODUCTION

The Voysey Inheritance is the name given to two plays: a five-act play written by Harley Granville-Barker (produced by the Royal Court Theatre in 1905) and a four-act adaptation by David Mamet (produced by the American Conservatory Theatre in 2005). In the intervening century, many standards of playwriting changed. Mamet drops six characters, tightens the plot, and turns the focus more concertedly on Edward Voysey's ethical dilemma. It is not a question of which play is better: they both suit the customs of their time. Granville-Barker's characters describe more of their internal process, whereas Mamet's are shown taking action, and this reveals their dispositions. Thus, in Mamet, character is demonstrated rather than remonstrated. Granville-Barker depicts an entire three-generation family, including in-laws and grandchildren, revealing the dynamics of each married couple and the inter-dynamics between the six Voysey siblings, whereas Mamet focuses on the Voysey siblings and their relationship to the Voysey firm's long-standing client George Booth. The mother is retained by Mamet, but without Granville-Barker's running joke of her conversation-stalling deafness, a counterpoint to her all-seeing knowledge of her husband's financial double-dealing.

Most of the plot twists are retained by Mamet, but more sparingly contrived. Mamet introduces Edward's trip abroad and the revelation of a planned elopement, which serves both to give Major Booth cause to chide Edward, and Alice and Edward a way to show that their marriage will set them apart from their family. The way that the couple comes to agreement is handled in a masterfully tacit meeting of minds.

Mamet places all the action in the Voyseys' dining room, eliminating the idea that the private world is normally shielded from business affairs, which makes the exigency of shooing women away from business discussions more pointed than in Granville-Barker's original version, which oscillates between the office and the Voyseys' Chislehurst home (in the southeastern outskirts of London). Granville-Barker uses Major Booth's wife Emily (a mousy adjunct to her imperious spouse) to repeatedly show this idea: Mamet generalizes it to all the women, especially Honor who cannot bear to hear the details, and cuts Emily (as well as her son and in-laws Beatrice and Denis Tregoning) entirely, which makes Alice's presence for the scene of reckoning in Act IV all the more striking. In Mamet, Alice unites with Edward because they find true partnership in each other's values and personality; in Granville-Barker it is because she recognizes his flaws and values them as humanity.

BIOGRAPHY AND MAJOR WORKS OF HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

by Tracy C. Davis

Harley Granville-Barker began as an actor, achieving the status of a *wunderkind* while still in his twenties by joining with some of the greatest talents of his generation to run the Royal Court Theatre. He helped to bring this down-at-heel theatre, in the residential neighborhood of Kensington, to the attention of intellectually-inclined theatergoers by presenting ambitious seasons of plays by George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, Henrik Ibsen, Gerhardt Hauptmann, and Arthur Schnitzler from 1904 to 1907. His own play, *The Voysey Inheritance*, was presented at the Court in 1905 and stands the test of time as a condemnation of corruption, cut-throat self-interest, and male prerogative. His first wife, the actress Lillah McCarthy, was an active suffragist and may have helped to guide his moderate socialist politics toward gender critiques. His second wife, the heiress Helen Huntington, persuaded him to retire prematurely from the theatre and channel his energies into non-fiction writing and Shakespearean editing and criticism. Notable in his time for advocating a state-supported “national” theatre, Granville-Barker’s later writing garnered prestige but little momentum. Two plays written in his retirement are all but forgotten in lieu of *The Voysey Inheritance* (his most produced play), *Waste* (written in 1907 but banned until 1936), and *The Madras House* (produced in 1910).

from Dennis Kennedy (ed. and author), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*

Barker, Harley Granville (1877–1946), English actor, playwright, director, manager, critic, and theorist. Born in London, he was the son of Alfred Barker and Elizabeth Bozzi-Granville, herself a variety performer. Self-educated, he began acting in 1891, writing plays in 1895, and directing in 1899. As an actor Barker excelled in roles that combined intelligence with romantic dreaminess, and G. B. Shaw thought his subtle but natural playing particularly suited for lover-poets like Marchbanks in *Candida*, Tanner in *Man and Superman*, Cusins in *Major Barbara*, and Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, the last two written with Barker in mind. But acting did not appeal to him and he gave it up in 1911. At a time when directing was barely acknowledged in England, Barker built on the models of André Antoine and Max Reinhardt and almost single-handedly transformed the quality of production in London. His first assignments were under the limited auspices of the Stage Society, but at the Royal Court Theatre from 1904 to 1907 he established himself as the major reformer of the Edwardian stage. With his business manager J. E. Vedrenne, he mounted almost 1,000 performances, mostly of new works (or new translations of Euripides by Gilbert Murray); 701 of the performances were of eleven plays by Shaw. Barker collaborated with Shaw in staging his plays, and directed all the others himself. He also acted a number of important roles. In 1906 he married the actress Lillah McCarthy, soon after they played opposite each other in *Man and Superman*.

Barker's own play *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), mounted in the second season of the Court venture, remains one of the masterworks of the Edwardian stage. But his other plays, which are highly nuanced in thought, did not much appeal to Edwardian audiences, who sometimes found them incomprehensible. Unlike his friend and mentor Shaw, Barker was closer in method to Anton Chekhov, putting action under the surface. Despite his subtle method, Barker did not avoid important and controversial issues: *Waste* was banned in 1907 because of its twinned subjects of abortion and politics, and *The Madras House* (1910) openly treated the economic domination of women using the embryonic fashion business to analyse contemporary sexual relationships. …

He divorced Lillah McCarthy and in 1918 married a minor American writer, Helen Huntington, who disliked the stage, most actors, and especially Shaw. Her wealth allowed them both the freedom to write. Hyphenating his name to Granville-Barker, he appeared remote and lost the support of his theatrical allies, who believed he had abandoned the battle for a life of luxury. He attended to the stage from a distance, in books like *The Exemplary Theatre* (1922), *The National Theatre* (1930), and *The Use of Drama* (1944). …His most enduring critical work is *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1927–46), the first major Shakespeare study to attend to practical matters of staging.

In recent years Barker's plays, which now seem prescient in style and theme, have attracted serious attention. In 1975 the Royal Shakespeare Company produced *The Marrying of Ann Leete*, which in Barker's day had only two private performances by the Stage Society in 1902. In 1985 the RSC

mounted *Waste*, which also had been given only two private performances (1907) because of its trouble with the censor. The Royal National Theatre presented a lavish version of *The Madras House* in 1977, *The Voysey Inheritance* was seen there and in many venues in Britain and North America in the late 1980s, and even Barker's difficult late plays were at last given productions, at the Orange Tree Theatre in London, directed by Sam Walters. Between 1988 and 2002 the Shaw Festival in Canada undertook to establish Barker as a major playwright by producing most of his plays under the direction of Neil Monro, and the Edinburgh Festival mounted a major retrospective in 1992 which included productions or public readings of most of his work. At the same time Barker's general contributions have been re-evaluated and his importance for modern theatre securely acknowledged, so that he is now seen as one of the twentieth century's leading innovators.

Major Works by Harley Granville-Barker

Plays:

The Marrying of Ann Leete (1901)
The Voysey Inheritance (1905)
Waste (1907)
The Madras House (1910)
The Secret Life (1923)
His Majesty (1928)

Non-fiction:

Schemes and Estimates for a National Theatre (1908), with William Archer
Farewell to the Theatre (1916)
The Exemplary Theatre (1922)
On Dramatic Method (1931)
The Use of the Drama (1945)
Prefaces to Shakespeare (1927-47)

BIOGRAPHY AND MAJOR WORKS OF DAVID MAMET

photo credit Brigitte Lamcombe

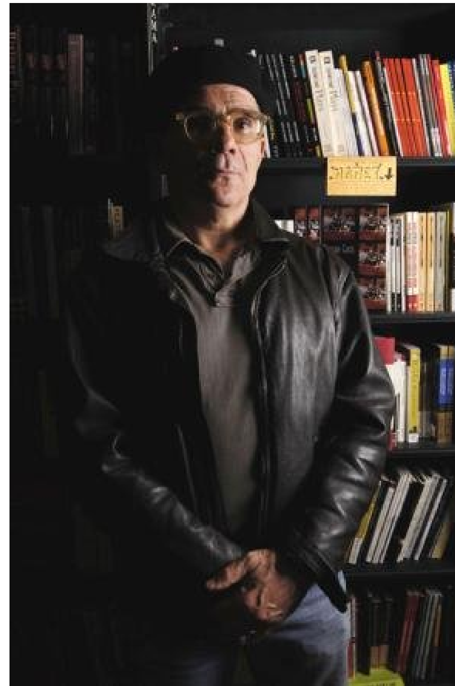

photo credit Amanda Edwards/Getty images

by Tracy C. Davis

David Mamet's protean artistic work spans several genres and forms: he has directed many films and written children's stories, poetry, screenplays, numerous books of fiction and non-fiction, and of course drama. Best known for his style of hard-hitting, fast-talking, and testosterone-laden characters in *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Speed-the-Plow*, he has recently explored a surprising range of distinct styles and themes. In *Oleanna*, a two-hander depicting interactions between an male assistant professor on the verge of receiving tenure and his student — a young woman frustrated by the experience of college, unclear about her course's intellectual content, and involved off-stage with an unidentified "group," assumed to be feminists — Mamet depicts a teetering power disequilibrium with devastating consequences for both characters but without definitive resolution. In *Boston Marriage*, Mamet surprised critics by writing for an all-female cast, yet despite the turn-of-the-century elegance and witty dialogue the action is as concerned with scamming and scheming as any of his earlier highly masculinized plays. In his screenplay for *The Winslow Boy*, Mamet adapted a 1946 play by Terence Rattigan about an actual Edwardian legal case brought by the incensed father of a boy accused of a minor theft at his prestigious public school. The family's honor is at stake, but their status is ruined in the process of achieving exoneration. In the meantime, at the fringes of the plot, the boy's elder sister participates in the women's suffrage campaign; despite loyalty to the father, her politics would — by silent implication

— undermine the masculinist privileges that maintain systems of family patriarchy, educational privilege, and legal redress that preoccupy the ostensible action of the play. In *The Voysey Inheritance*, Mamet returns again to England in the Edwardian period, adapting a play by Harley Granville-Barker about the clash between family honor — maintained by a veneer of deceit — and legal ethics. Like some of his best known plays and films, *The Voysey Inheritance* is preoccupied with how men run enterprises: they exert questionable personal ethics while appalled witnesses look on, look away, or momentously step in. Here, not only the family's status is imperiled by white-collar crime, but two important themes demonstrate the reverberations of ethical consequences: the ability for artists to be sustained and their artistic production to be underwritten by others' financial dealings in the capitalist marketplace, and the viability of love and marriage in the face of changing self-perceptions tied to social status.

from Scott T. Cummings, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, ed. Dennis Kennedy

Mamet, David (1947–), American writer and director. Born and raised in Chicago, Mamet returned there in 1973 after studying and then teaching at Goddard College in Vermont, and joined the vibrant Off-Loop theatre scene as a playwright and co-founder of the St Nicholas Theater Company. Early influences included the plays of Pinter, a year of Meisner training at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, and Chicago's Second City comedy club, where he worked as a busboy one summer. In Chicago he met the director Gregory Mosher, who would direct many Mamet plays, starting with the 1975 première of *American Buffalo* at the Goodman Theatre. After winning an Obie award Off-Broadway in 1976, the play opened on Broadway in 1977 and thrust Mamet into the national spotlight, partly for its earthy and liberal use of profanity. Its taut naturalistic tale of three lowlifes who botch the theft of a coin collection introduced some of Mamet's enduring themes: characters caught in cycles of trust and betrayal, vernacular speech as a desperate effort to achieve meaning, the rough-and-tumble intimacy of machismo, and the spiritual vacuity of post-industrial capitalist culture.

These themes were advanced in two major works of the 1980s, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984), about a group of unscrupulous Chicago real-estate agents, and *Speed-the-Plow* (1988), about two Hollywood insiders and the innocent woman who comes between them. *Oleanna*, Mamet's provocative take on political correctness and sexual harassment, sparked controversy when it premièred in 1992. His subsequent plays, including the quasi-autobiographical *The Cryptogram* (1994) and *Boston Marriage* (1999), effected a more serene, and sometimes even relaxed, demeanour. In the 1990s the prolific Mamet concentrated more on his film and prose careers. He began writing screenplays for hire in the 1980s (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, 1981; *The Verdict*, 1982; *The Untouchables*, 1987) and

directing his own scripts (*House of Games*, 1987; *Things Change*, 1988). Later films written and directed by Mamet include *The Spanish Prisoner* (1997), an adaptation of Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy* (1999), and *State and Main* (2000). All told, he has written more than two dozen screenplays and directed nearly a dozen films. *Writing in Restaurants* (1986), his first collection of essays, memoirs, and occasional pieces, was followed by more than half a dozen other volumes. He also published novels, collections of poetry, and children's stories, but his status as playwright remains high. For the idiomatic rhythms of his dialogue, the desperate bravado of his characters, and the menacing immediacy of his plots, he ranks as one of the most important American dramatists of the twentieth century.

Selected Works by David Mamet

Plays:

The Duck Variations (1972)
Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974) (adapted for film as *About Last Night….*)
A Life in the Theatre (1977)
American Buffalo (1977)
The Sanctity of Marriage (1979)
Glengarry Glen Ross (1982)
Edmond (1982)
Prairie du chien (1985)
The Shawl (1985)
Speed-the-Plow (1988)
Oleanna (1992)
Boston Marriage (2000)
Voysey Inheritance (2005)
Redbelt (2006)
November (2008)

Screenplays:

The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981)
The Verdict (1982)
House of Games (1987)
Oleanna (1994)
Wag the Dog (1997)
The Spanish Prisoner (1998)
Winslow Boy (1999)
State and Main (2000)
Hannibal (2001)
Heist (2001)

Non-Fiction:

Writing in Restaurants (1986)
On Directing Film (1991)
True and False (1997)
Bambi vs. Godzilla: on The Nature, Purpose, and Practice of The Movie Business (2007)

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE SYNOPSES

	Granville-Barker	Mamet
Act I	Voysey's office in Lincoln's Inn, an October morning. Mr. Voysey arrives for work, demonstrating his authoritative manner and command over his clerk, Peacey. Edward, his son and partner, disheveled through lack of sleep, confronts Mr. Voysey over discrepancies in the firm's accounts. Mr. Voysey reveals this as his inheritance from his own father, so the fraud has been going on for thirty years. Instead of rectifying his father's errors, he blithely reinvests clients' money to this day, compounding the problem. Is it wrong to bring comfort to your parent by going outside the strict letter of the law? He gambles his clients' funds without security, except for his own reputation, regarding this as his life's great work and noble achievement. This is to be Edward's inheritance. Voysey will not repent, and the decision falls to Edward about whether to expose or perpetuate the misdeeds during the remainder of his father's lifetime. Voysey urges Edward to join the extended family at their home in Chislehurst for the weekend, to mingle with the family and pretend that nothing has changed.	The library of the Voysey country home, Sunday evening after dinner. Edward, the third generation of Voyseys in the family firm of solicitors, is preoccupied with business and neglecting his presumed fiancée, Alice, who good-naturedly seeks his attention. Peacey, the Voyseys' clerk, briefly appears to give Voysey senior some papers. The second son, Major Booth Voysey, hectors his fellow diners about the value of conscription to improve the "fundaments of honor" in British men. Ethel, the Voyseys' second daughter, frankly tells her father that she desires a generous check for her wedding present. George Booth, a client since the late Voysey ran the firm, pesters Mr. Voysey for advice about his investment options. Finally alone, Edward confronts his father about his discovery: clients' capital and investments have been systematically appropriated and so they, the firm, and the Voysey family, are without substance. Edward is aghast at the discovery, but Mr. Voysey calmly explains that the practice began with his own father. He has been covering his own investments with entrusted funds, paying clients' regular dividends, and shifting capital assets when *needed* by clients to make everything look all right. No one ever asked for a balance sheet, so the fraud has been undiscovered for thirty years. Mr.

		Voysey regards his actions as honorably covering his own father's mistakes, so he (not his unknowing clients) spent his life in worry. Edward regards it as outright theft. All their personal gains, including Ethele's promised marriage gift, come from this activity. Knowledge of it is Edward's inheritance, along with the business.
Act II	The Voysey family's Chislehurst dining room, after dinner, one day later. The Voysey household is introduced: Major Booth (self-important and pompous), Ethel (the youngest, who brazenly instructs her father to give her a check for her wedding present), and Alice's fiancé Denis (a non-entity of a man relative to Major Booth). Edward, preoccupied and depressed, is aloof from conversation. His cousin, Alice, valiantly tries to draw him out. A fellow diner, George Booth, is a fixture in the household; he is Mr. Voysey's age and a thoroughly congenial bachelor. Major Booth bosses his spinster sister Honor in a fruitless search for his favorite cigars, bemoaning the household's disorganization as if it were her fault. Alice and Edward have a tête-à-tête about her recent travels as he continues to crack nuts for her to eat. Clearly, they are comfortable confidants: he used to propose to her incessantly but has left off. Edward's sister-in-law Beatrice (married to his younger brother, Hugh) converses with Alice about Ethel's most recent pre-marital buying spree. Beatrice expresses her distaste at the Voyseys' ill-manners and disorderly home. Beatrice is unhappy in her marriage: she entered into it because she wanted to be an author and	Same setting, a year later, just after Mr. Voysey's funeral. Edward gathers the family and discloses the their financial situation. Voysey's will bequeaths the family over £100,000 but there is no money to disburse: the firm owes clients two or three times that much. Edward has covered up the swindling for the last year, but announces his intention to put the firm in bankruptcy and restore every possible asset to clients. Trenchard, the eldest son, argues that the family should hold onto as much as the law will allow, even though their wealth is ill-gotten. Major Booth Voysey, the second son, is torn. Mrs. Voysey, who has secretly known about the schemes for decades, has her own wealth secured elsewhere and leaves the others to argue. Edward discloses that it was his father, not as was claimed his grandfather, who began the swindling scheme. The earliest record of irregularities is only ten years old and concerns the accounts of George Booth — close friend to the family since Edward's grandfather ran the firm. He is wealthy enough to weather his losses, but Edward is wracked with guilt about the smaller accounts. He has been trying to reconcile these accounts out of his own

	Hugh, an artist, had just enough money to make that possible. The women retreat to the billiards room where the men have gathered. George Booth and Mr. Voysey enter in mid-conversation, the lawyer trying to dissuade his client from transferring stock. George Booth avows his complete trust and implicit compliance in all of Voysey's advice. Unlike Edward, whose virtue is principles, Mr. Voysey's is personality. George Booth goes home and Edward, at last, has the private conversation he sought with his father. All the family's wealth and comfort comes from Voysey's double dealing. If he is to stay in the firm, Edward insists upon knowing the full status of the accounts as they stand. He will halve his own salary and offers conditions including cancelling Ethel's £5,000 dowry. Mr. Voysey patronises and hectors his son on his philosophy: one must *look* prosperous to be taken into the confidence trick that is modern business. Their interview terminates when Honor and Mrs. Voysey — very deaf —enter and fuss affectionately over Mr. Voysey's health.	money but without sacrificing the whole family's assets only six or seven shillings in the pound can be paid out to all the firm's claimants. Mr. Voysey took pride in his financial exploits, even though scrupulous people would call it gambling, at best. His children consider the repercussions of revealing his crimes: their oldest family friends, Edward's old nanny, and even the vicar who gave the funeral service (Colpus), were defrauded. Hugh, an aspiring artist, recognizes at last how his father's "artistry" underwrote his own pursuits. Trenchard, a lawyer in his own right, is sympathetic with Edward's plight: for him it is a question of law. Major Booth admires his father's heroism, worries principally about the family's honor, and advocates the status quo: for him it is a question of public opinion. In a private conversation with Edward, Alice explains that her inheritance is intact because she learned to look after it herself. They discuss the undesirability of ruining the poorest clients just because the law has no respect for means; this is where discretion and judgment can be applied, keeping the scandal out of the newspapers and Edward out of jail. Ultimately, Alice supports Edward in his inclination to go bankrupt and publicly claim responsibility.
Act III	The Voyseys' dining room, a July afternoon a year later. The maids converse about the preparation for a luncheon following Mr. Voysey's funeral. Major Booth and his wife, Emily; Trenchard, the eldest Voysey child; and George Booth offer	Same setting, two days before Christmas, nearly a year and half later. Peacey helps Edward get ready for a short trip to the continent. Peacey asks for his customary Christmas bonus, £200 in "hush money" to pay his son's

	condolences to the widow. Edward summons the family together, excluding Alice. Hugh, an unkempt artist, explains that Beatrice is working in America; Ethel is also unable to attend because she is pregnant, but her young bridegroom stands in for them both. Only Honor visibly grieves. Edward informs them that despite Mr. Voysey bequeathing more than £100,000, no money exists to disburse. Edward explains his father's crimes and his own intention to put as much right as possible — with the family's contributions — to pay clients more than six or seven shillings on the pound prior to discovery and his own inevitable trial. Major Booth and Denis express concern about their status. Trenchard suspected problems and Mrs. Voysey knew for most of her marriage about her husband's activities. Trenchard denies his father's claim that the irregularities began with Mr. Voysey's father, and Edward has found only one account — George Booth's — dating back more than ten years. This fiction of his own "inheritance" was Mr. Voysey's self-justification, an artistic touch by the criminal that complemented his boasting. Major Booth is concerned about family honor when this news is exposed. Trenchard, a fellow lawyer and disinherited anyway due to quarrels with his father, offers Edward professional assistance. Major Booth wants Edward to valiantly spend his life secretly trying to right what he insists is a three-generation wrong, regarding his father (and therefore Edward) as salvagers of an earlier misdeed. Hugh takes it all calmly. In a tête-à-tête, Alice explains to	expenses at Cambridge. Like his own father, who also worked for the Voyseys, he knows all the firm's secrets. Peacey is content for the Voyseys to steal on his behalf, but Edward no longer steals from clients, is very near setting all the accounts right, and refuses to maintain the old arrangement. Peacey proposes to blackmail Edward by exposing what he knows. Hugh bemoans the British public's faith in the laws and money market. He offers Edward his allowance (£250 a year settled on him by his father which enabled him to make a respectable marriage and pursue his art) to help the firm's clients. He will make a break with his old life, separate from his wife (who has her own income from writing), take nothing from the family's trust, and go away. George Booth informs Edward that he has never felt the same confidence in him as he did in his father, and wishes to withdraw all his securities from the firm. Edward explains his financial situation: half of George Booth's capital was siphoned off by his father. This is the exposure Edward has long anticipated. George Booth is unsure whether to prosecute and bring about the fate Edward knows will come sooner or later, if not from his client then another, and in the meantime he toils to make up his father's deficits.

	Edward how her own guardian coached her to look after her money herself. They discuss Edward's options and she checks his tendency toward martyrdom. He decides to spend a year improving the accounts of small vulnerable clients before declaring bankruptcy and turning himself in.	
Act IV	The office, December, sixteen months later. Edward, occupying his deceased father's role, goes through routine business with Peacey. Peacey requests his customary hush money and Edward refuses to pay it. Peacey threatens to resign and expose the firm. Edward reasons that he has nothing to lose by such an eventuality. Peacey leaves in high dudgeon. Hugh, disheveled, comes in for a chat with Edward: he wants to give up his allowance and try to make a go of it on his own. His allowance had enabled him to marry; now he will separate from Beatrice, and she can live on her own income as an author. Hugh departs when George Booth arrives for an appointment. George Booth abruptly announces that he wants to withdraw his securities from the firm. He has never trusted Edward the way he did his father. All at once, Edward is shocked and relieved. Edward explains the circumstances: he cannot give his client half of what is due him. George Booth insists on proof that it is Mr. Voysey's fault. Edward, hysterical, thanks him for ending his masquerade. He welcomes prosecution in order to be released from his prison of complicity.	The same, Christmas Eve. Honor and Alice prepare Christmas parcels for the poor. Edward has delayed his trip by a day so he can be with the family during the holiday. Ethel's plans to marry are stopped by lack of money. Major Booth confronts Hugh about his decision to separate from his wife, who in turn is distraught that there is too little money. Hugh longs to escape from the family; Edward seems aloof from it just when he is most embroiled in concern for it. George Booth, who has absented himself from his customary Christmas dinner with the Voyseys, tells Edward that after informing Colpus of the swindling, he has decided not to prosecute out of love for the Voysey family. Despite his desire to assist the least well off clients, Edward has had to follow the law's prescriptions and restore his clients' assets in proportion to their accounts. Instead of ruining the firm, George Booth proposes to remove his remaining assets from Edward's control, take a £1,000 a year annuity from the firm, and accept gradual repayment out of the firm's profits. By insisting upon being paid first, this would impoverish smaller investors in exchange for George Booth's silence. Colpus urges Edward to accept the bargain, citing scripture

		to support his cause. For once in the play, Alice remains present in the room during a business-related discussion and so George Booth forces her to hear his ugly revelation: that Edward plans to meet a woman in Europe. In fact, the woman is Alice and they planned to elope. The smash is about to come, and Edward expects to go to jail. Ethel has left, piqued at her situation; Hugh and his wife have left, separately; only the eldest sister Honor — busy distributing useful gifts to George Booth and his servants — will go on much as before.
Act V	Two days later, 9.30 pm Christmas Eve, in the Voyseys' dining room. George Booth is shown in. He has begged off his invitation to dinner but come later to speak with Edward. He has told Colpus, the vicar, about their mutual defrauding, yet he comes to say he has decided not to prosecute. He and Colpus demand return of remaining capital, a regular allowance, and return of the rest of their capital gradually out of the business's profits. Edward finds this hilarious. Honor presses George Booth to personally deliver gifts she has parceled for him and his household staff, and Edward sees him out. Beatrice, Honor, and Mrs. Voysey occupy the room, performing routine chores. Honor advises Beatrice that the Major is presently being told of the imminent separation — he is the last to find out — by Emily, Major Booth's mousy downtrodden wife. The Major confronts Beatrice about this news. Hugh enters, vociferously resentful of Major Booth's bullying and braying. His disregard for earning infuriates	

	Beatrice: they have irreconcilable differences but cannot separate because they cannot afford to do so. Mrs. Voysey lightheartedly encourages them to separate, confident that nature will make them gravitate together again. Beatrice means to leave Hugh as soon as her income enables her to do so. Hugh wants to be on his own, free of his family and its stultifying hypocrisy and obligations. He envies Trenchard who, by quarreling with their father got free of him. Beatrice and Major Booth speak at odds about Hugh's character and how best to handle him, and about Beatrice's disappointments in marriage. Alice consoles Edward that despite his travails he has not been left — like Honor — to be a mere assistant to his father. Edward reveals his recent discovery that Mr. Voysey had once put the books right, but then fifteen years later started appropriating again: this was Mr. Voysey's creative outlet. Edward's great deed has been to protect his poorer clients at the expense of the richer ones. Edward, at last alone with Alice, tells her that the smash has come. She chides him for being deliberately unhappy lately, neglecting his pleasures and himself. This "disgrace" and burden is a blessing, making Edward's true wicked self come through. Alice cherishes this show of humanity, and knows that prison will make him even more the man he truly is, not the prig he had sometimes seemed. She scolds him for no longer proposing to her, so he does so and she accepts. In friendship and camaraderie, they will join together. She is proud and praises him for abandoning all fear.	

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

-Debt, Credit, and Business Ethics in Edwardian England
-Social Divisions
-The Edwardian Family

by Tracy C. Davis

Debt, Credit, and Business Ethics in Edwardian England

By and large, businessmen were well treated in eighteenth-century literature, but from the 1840s, when the British economy boomed, matters shifted. Mrs. Trollope, Mrs. Gaskell, and Charles Kingsley all wrote novels about unappetizing men of business, and in subsequent decades Charles Reade, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and D.H. Lawrence followed suit. Bounderby (*Hard Times*, 1854) and Merdle (*Little Dorrit*, 1855-7) are prototypes, but for each Scrooge and Dombey Dickens also created a Cheeryble brother, Meagles the banker, and Clennam the business manager. Industrialism caused the masses to suffer, but occasionally an individual industrialist broke the mold in fiction as in life. In late-Victorian British society, the hard-nosed businessman still elicited disgust but the lawyer — bound by professional bodies, educated at university, and essential confidant of high society — usually got off more easily. Mr. Tulkinghorn in *Bleak House* is a notable exception, but he is amply set off by other characters abounding in moral scruples who are true gentlemen, in nature and conduct as well as bearing.

According to Asa Briggs, gentlemen are "the necessary link in any analysis of Victorian ways of thinking and behaving."[1] The question of who qualifies to be a gentleman was long since resolved in favor of solicitors. In Victorian society, lawyers and men of business were necessary compatriots. Industrial-based wealth was new, and self-made, and even if such men bought ancient lands and titles in order to live like gentlemen they remained tainted by their exploits on behalf of personal gain. Public school educated gentlemen, by contrast, were inculcated to put "duty before pleasure, service before self, public good before personal gain"[2] rather than a competitive profit-based individualist entrepreneurialism, and this is the class from which lawyers were drawn. In the Edwardian period, the professions grew rapidly: Britain had begun its conversion from a manufacturing and exporting nation to a service economy, and this significantly increased the need for highly educated white-collar workers handling the insurance, finance, and legal business of the economy. The prestige of lawyers grew along with their power. The Voysey children show how this presses upon an ethical sense and divides one century from the other.

In *Major Barbara*, Shaw is ambivalent toward the industrialist. Can wealth-makers measure up to gentlemanly ideals? Harley Granville-Barker turns

[1] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London: Longmans, Green, 1959) 411.

[2] Neil McKendrick, "'Gentleman and Players' Revisited: the Gentlemanly Ideal, the Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture," in *Business Life and Public Policy*, ed. Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 119.

this trope on its head: can the gentleman who is trusted with stewarding others' accumulated wealth be trusted? If not, then the basis of British finance — the stocks and bonds and shares that represent others' *legitimate* accumulation and utilization of wealth — is undone. If the stock market and the annuities it generates are not in trustworthy hands, risk cannot be attributed merely as a problem of market success or failure, but thunders into the backbone of British institutions entrusted with educating lawyers and regulating their behavior through ideals forged in common by boys on the playing fields of elite public schools who become men within the grassy quadrangles of ancient universities. Rapacity, underhandedness, and greed are to be expected in those who convert raw materials into manufactured goods, but decidedly *not* amongst those who are subsequently entrusted with managing that accumulated wealth. So, for clients to be swindled by a gentleman in *The Voysey Inheritance* is not only a literary turnabout but a scenario indicative of fundamental unease with the financial system, class system, and professions.

In Ibsen, the legacy left (or impressed upon) one generation by another is a frequent theme (think of *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *John Gabriel Borkman*). These legacies are inescapable, no matter what the younger generation tries to do. This idea pervades modernist drama. In Shaw, it surfaces as moral indignation over what one *class*, represented by an elder generation, visits upon another, represented by a younger generation (think of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*). In *The Voysey Inheritance* one generation copes with the moral grey area created by the actions of its elders: the actions to be taken consequent of discovery not only brings the generations into conflict but also one social group into a clash with its fellows. This is a recurrent idea in Edwardian drama, along with debates about the circumstances that can "justify," explain, or mitigate a theft along gender and class lines (as in John Galsworthy's *Justice* and *The Silver Box* and Githa Sowerby's *Rutherford and Son*).

Social Divisions

The issue of class pervades *The Voysey Inheritance* in another way. Just as Granville-Barker draws distinctions between types of the upper-middle-class (lawyers and financiers versus manufacturers and other barons of wealth such as George Booth), it shows this class torn by the ethics both of its betters and those beneath it. For the middling class, governed by Samuel Smiles's doctrine of prudent spending — ensuring that both ends meet in any budget and expenditure — personal responsibility bred peace of mind and harmonious inter-class relationships. Credit was the grease that kept shopkeepers and the middle class on good terms. Owing money *across* class lines was perfectly normal, even if Smiles recommended a more sure-fire path to solvency, but the middle-class was not supposed to owe money to itself.

The truly wealthy — the Duke and Duchess of Teck, for example, who lived in Kensington Palace on an annual allowance of £10,000 — owed vast sums in the late-Victorian period without a twinge of conscience. Despite heavy encumbrances, they continued to move in the best circles and could simply

retreat to the continent when creditors pressed too hard for payment. When pressed to pay a bill of ₤762.14s.2d, Algernon Moncrieff in *The Importance of Being Earnest* responds: "Pay it? How on earth am I going to do that? You don't suppose I have got any money? How perfectly silly you are! No gentleman ever has any money."[3] Amongst gentlefolk, therefore, seeming wealthy evidently brought benefits: more business opportunities and social connections yet also more social ties with pecuniary obligations. Voysey handles this by pretending that his accounts agree: he establishes a pyramid, shifting assets from one client's account to another and siphoning off the difference for himself.

Nineteenth-century law was not settled on the distinction between outright larceny and other forms of dishonesty. The organizing principle was rather the nature of the relationships violated or endangered.[4] If his deceit had been exposed during his lifetime, Voysey could be accused of "larceny by a trick": essentially, as trustee he entered into a contract but did he intentionally violate it from the outset? This was muddy ground: did he commit larceny or merely acquire property by false pretences? The former was a crime, the latter merely a misdemeanor. If he took possession of assets intending to shepherd them honestly, but made a mistake, then subsequently appropriated money dishonestly, he had legal grounds for thinking himself in the right.[5] The matter was not cleared up by statute until the 1916 Larceny Act.

The Edwardian Family

Mamet twins the play's drumbeat, financial ethics, with romance in the opening scene's refrain of "he has lost all interest in me." Alice's joshing barb, a prompt to Edward to drop the concerns of business and attend to her, becomes a keynote. Echoed by Mrs. Voysey, without understanding, it becomes an allusion to business; echoed by George Booth, innocently, it is displaced back to Edward and Alice's interminable and inconclusive wooing. In this masterly way, Mamet gives us the play in a nutshell: Edward's legitimate worries, Alice's insight and patience, the Voysey family's predilection to deflect from pressing issues, and the Voysey clients' misplaced focus on loyalty and friendship.

In the final Act, Mamet clearly draws the patterns of worthiness. Men — apart from Edward and his artist brother Hugh — claim lofty motives but act for themselves and damn the consequences for others. Women — particularly Alice and the eldest Voysey sister, with the propitious name of Honor — act with charity toward others, seeing and respecting with true family-feeling. As the family firm's financial misdealings are on the verge of public disclosure, multi-generational friendships are smashed, Hugh's marriage unravels, Ethel's marriage cannot happen, and Edward is on the verge of a trial leading to inevitable imprisonment. The Voyseys' "inheritance," therefore, is to have

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[3] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act II.
[4] Graham Ferris, "Larceny: Debating the 'Boundless region of Dishonesty,'" in *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social Panic, and Moral Outrage*, ed. Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2005) 73.
[5] This is not absolutely clear cut, but that is my point: Victorian judgments of such cases — with considerably less of value at stake — were made in the absence of legislation. See Ferris 79-80.

catastrophes accumulate one upon the other. But this is not tragic: Hugh feels liberated, Ethel is wrong to base her prospects upon others' ruin, and Edward acts honorably to lessen the blow to small investors, insofar as he can, without compounding the malfeasance. The play begins with gentle repartee about Alice and Edward's romance, and technically it ends as a comedy when Alice reveals their conjoined future in the final line.

Rather than assuming at the outset that Edward is honest, Granville-Barker has him prove it through action. But what constitutes honor is precisely the play's point: to George Booth, honor is the loyalty of friendship harnessed to the protection of self-interest; for his namesake Major Booth Voysey, honor is militaristic, bolstered by posture and bombast. The law itself knows no honor, only procedure, and Edward seeks to compensate for his clients' misplaced trust in it and in the profession he pursues. Alice is the least deluded of the characters: her guardian removed the blinders from her eyes when she came of age and insisted that she learn to take care of her own wealth; to do otherwise would make her an easy mark and unworthy of a fortune she did nothing to generate. She does not merely stand by Edward as his difficulties are revealed, then intensified: she unites with him in fuller understanding of human nature. Unlike Ethel, whose marital prospects rest on tangible assets, or Hugh, whose separation is delayed by quarrels about money, Alice and Edward embark on marriage thoroughly knowing and admiring each other, and regard each other's good character as sufficient endowment for happiness. It is the economy with which Mamet expresses the development of this tacit understanding that makes the play a tantalizing vehicle for actors.

SUGGESTED TEACHING POINTS

-Language in Barker and Mamet
-Business Ethics
-Gender

Language in Barker and Mamet

Mamet's predilection for punchy vernacular language is turned to ironic effect in *The Voysey Inheritance*. At the beginning of Act I, he puns on "interest," likening it to Edward's lack of demonstrable attention to Alice and George Booth's investments; and at the beginning of Act II George Booth repeats the phrase "great credit" as an accolade to how well Mr. Voysey's funeral went off. In his adaptation of this Edwardian play, he privileges the concise phrase, the character-revealing slip, and the relentless forward movement of the plot, all typical of naturalist dialogue. His hallmark style of overlapped speeches with trailing ellipses, probing repetition, questions without objects, non sequiturs, and rhythmic momentum — which some critics regard as naturalist and others as highly stylized — is not abundant in the play but it does appear in patches. Two passages from Act I illustrate the idea. In the first, Edward has just confronted his father with the discovery of irregular accounts.

Edward: I…
Mr. Voysey: I can't hear you.
Edward: Yes. I did.
Mr. Voysey: And you found?
Edward: Are you testing me?

In Granville-Barker, the same moment transpires with explicit agony and grief on Edward's part, peppered with an accusing glance, whereas Mr. Voysey hurtles details of the firm's accounts. For Mamet, the interchange reveals innermost character through a contest of wills. For Granville-Barker, language is an accessory to emotion and exposition: Edward is distraught but Mr. Voysey is perfectly calm. He establishes character through this extreme contrast.

Later in the same scene, Mamet depicts volatility in the power balance. It may seem that Mr. Voysey has turned the tables and is interrogating Edward.

Mr. Voysey: In fact, the bonds — you say the bonds are missing.
Edward: They are missing.
Mr. Voysey: From which you conclude?
Edward: I concluded at first that you had not handed me all the papers connected with —
Mr. Voysey: You said there were two cases.
Edward: Yes. The Hatherley trust.
Mr. Voysey: Quite so.
Edward: (*With one accusing glance*) Trust.
Mr. Voysey: Go on.

Edward: Oh, Father. . .
Mr. Voysey: I know, my dear boy. I shall have much to say to you. But let's get quietly through with these details first.

And then Mamet returns to giving the kind of exposition that preoccupied Granville-Barker all along as explicit set-up of the circumstances of Voysey's dealings.

QUESTIONS:

• How do playwrights render character through dialogue? What comprises this beyond just the content of a speech?
• A century elapsed between Granville-Barker writing *The Voysey Inheritance* and Mamet's adaptation. What characterizes Mamet's rendering of a "period piece"? Does Granville-Barker's style seem more "dated"?
• What makes Mamet's adaptation distinctive? What "work" does this give actors in each case?

Business Ethics

The Voysey Inheritance exposes ethical missteps in business, but also dramatizes the dilemma of how to proceed once the missteps are discovered. This is a perennial theme in the business world.

QUESTIONS:

• Consider how *The Voysey Inheritance* relates to recent scandals such as the Enron affair and Conrad Black's trial and conviction. How do people of business justify their actions? What constitutes culpability? Where does the law stand on this?
• What importance does public revelation of accusations play in how people are judged and treated?
• Are Edward's actions ethical? Should he immediately expose his father's actions? Should he try to protect his clients' likelihood of receiving a greater proportion of what they are owed by delaying his own bankruptcy and exposure?
• What are the ethics of living off another's ill-gotten gains? Is there any member of the Voysey family who has a greater claim (or better-justified position) for retaining the status quo?

Gender

Repeatedly, female characters choose to leave the stage or are shooed off by men when matters of business come up. This is equally true of routine discussions as revelation of the Voysey firm's status. Everyone's future is tied up in the facts of the business and Edward's decision about what to do, yet Mamet shows us a clear pattern of what are masculinized topics (business) and what are

feminized topics (recreation, marriage, and emotion). There are two exceptions: when Edward gathers his mother and siblings after Mr. Voysey's funeral in Act II, and when Alice tries unsuccessfully to flee during George Booth's unpleasant confrontation in Act IV.

QUESTIONS:

- How does Mamet illustrate gender roles through women's patterns of coming and going from the stage? Contrast Mrs. Voysey, Honor, and Alice.
- The relationship between Edward and Alice is strained until the play's final moments. Evidently, Edward used to seek her promise of marriage persistently but when he learns of his father's dealings he ceases to ask her. How do they reach an agreement to marry?
- What would Edward and Alice's marriage mean in comparison to the more conventional marriages depicted in the play? Consider Mrs. Voysey's knowledge of her husband's business, Hugh's (unseen) wife's independence through writing, and Ethel's goal of a comfortable married lifestyle?
- What is Honor's role in the family as an elder unmarried sister? How does she find meaning in her life? Why does she regard her life as unchanging?

GLOSSARY

Bankruptcy

In Victorian England, bankruptcy was just one of several forms of legal recourse for insolvent debtors. More often, individuals and traders who owed more than they were worth and had no hope of repaying were subjected to the indignity of debtor's prison, where they waited in custody while their creditors picked over their assets. Meanwhile, Scotland developed a system of humane bankruptcy which, by the Edwardian period, England adopted nearly intact. It is the same principle governing US bankruptcy today: when a person voluntarily enters into the legal condition of bankruptcy their financial affairs are handled in trust by a lawyer (or, in England, usually a chartered accountant) who takes control of their assets, negotiates with creditors to achieve a plan for reimbursement of a percentage of debt, and distributes the dividends in due time. Such a system enables the bankrupt debtor, when eventually released by the court, to resume life unencumbered. When Edward Voysey anticipates bankruptcy, he foresees the end of his firm, seizure of all assets that are related to the business, cessation of all allowances paid to his family from the firm's books, and debarment from the legal profession. In addition, the criminal activities initiated by the late Mr. Voysey would probably result in Edward's imprisonment because he did not disclose the problems as soon as he became aware of them.

British pound (£)

•There are 20 shillings in the pound, so when Edward speaks of returning 6 or 7 shillings on the pound this is approximately one third of his clients' paper worth. If he managed to repay 10 shillings on the pound they would receive 50% of their entrusted assets.

•There are many ways to measure the comparability of currency across time. In Voysey's will, he bequeaths approximately £100,000. In 2007 US dollars, this is somewhere between $7,500,000 and $15,412,000, depending upon what statistic is measured, with the average value coming out at around $11,000,000. Given that the widow has her own wealth, this would leave the Voysey children very well off, if the money existed. When George Booth offers to accept an annuity of £1,000, the retail price index converts this to around $156,000 in today's currency; other measures would set it higher but the point is that it would give Booth a more than comfortable but not exceedingly lavish living. When Peacey attempts to extract his customary £200 Christmas bonus, this is something like $22,000 in today's currency, a sum high enough to motivate a clerk to silence by enabling his son to attend university and thus move the family up in the social and commercial pecking order. Hugh's annual allowance of £250 is worth around $27,500 — little enough for him to walk away from but enough to make his wife balk at its loss.

For more conversions, see http://eh.net/hmit/

Capital

Capital can be human (as in skills and labor), monetary (as in ready cash), real (as in land and buildings), or intangible (as stock representing the cash invested in a business or corporation). In the mid-Victorian years, the creation of joint stock companies became easier to achieve and soon more and more people put their savings into this form of capital. This created a new class of investors — from the Reverend Evan Colpus to Edward Voysey's former nanny — who entrusted lawyers and other financial experts to take care of their assets until cash might be needed in times of want or retirement.

Conscription

Major Booth Voysey calls for conscription — the compulsory enlistment of men in military service — nearly a decade before The Great War (1914-18) broke out. He regards this as a character building asset for the nation, even though during the Boer War (1899-1902) the nation had been appalled to discover the poor health and weak constitutions of working-class men who joined up. The Major may see this as a leveling measure, pulling men of all classes into an honorable period of national service, an antidote to the soft lives he sees his brothers living.

Consols

An abbreviation for Consolidated Annuities, the government securities of Great Britain. Like stocks and bonds, these were sold on the stock market and their value fluctuated.

Lucky bag ("a lucky bag into which he dipped")

A bag, at fairs and bazaars, in which, on payment of a small sum, one dips one's hand and draws an article which may be of greater or less value.

Society (Major Booth Voysey is "almost in society")

"Society" is invoked here to indicate not the general sociological meaning but the upper 10,000 or so of English people who considered themselves — through fortunes, family history, and personal connections — to be the elite of the nation. As a commissioned Army officer, General Booth Voysey has *nearly* attained admission to the elite, and might circulate on its fringes at social occasions. Neither of his brothers in the legal profession (Trenchard and Edward) nor his artist brother can aspire to this.

Solicitors

Whereas in the US every lawyer admitted to the bar is a barrister *and* solicitor, in England these functions are separated. Only a barrister may

argue a case in court, however solicitors do all the other routine work of the law: preparing legal briefs for barristers, writing wills and contracts, giving legal advice, and handling funds in trust. It is the latter capacity in which the Voysey firm falls foul. Granville-Barker definitively locates the Voyseys in the most prestigious part of London's legal community, Lincoln's Inn, and therefore they are barristers. Mamet elides the distinction.

Speculating

Speculation involves thoughtful deliberation of weighty matters. This conjectural activity extends to the hypothetical drawing up of a scheme and, in the financial realm, activity undertaken on the chance of profit. Thus, the word's connotations range from the most intellectual and abstruse of activities to the most irresponsible gambles taken in the marketplace.

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PRODUCTIONS OF THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

First presented at the Royal Court Theatre (London) in 1905, *The Voysey Inheritance* is Granville-Barker's most frequently revived play. Produced recently at the Royal National Theatre (London), the Mint Theater (New York), and Walnut Street Theatre (Philadelphia), Granville-Barker's play can now be compared to a streamlined adaptation by David Mamet, first presented at the American Conservatory Theater (San Francisco) and now at Remy Bumppo.

Excerpted Reviews (see following pages):

Granville-Barker

A. Mint Theatre, New York (1999-2000)
B. Royal National Theatre, London (2006)

David Mamet

C. Atlantic Theater, New York (2006)

A. THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

Written by Harley Granville-Barker
Directed by Gus Kaikkonen

Mint Theater, New York
June-July 1999; January-February 2000

> With George Morfogen (Mr Voysey), Robert Boardman (Trenchard Voysey), Lisa Bostnar (Beatrice Voysey), Chet Carlin (Mr. George Booth), Kurt Everhart (Peacey), Sally Kemp (Mrs. Voysey), Jack Koenig (Major Booth Voysey), Sioux Madden (Alice Maitland), Sevanne Martin (Ethel Voysey), Arleigh Richards (Honor Voysey), Kraig Swartz (Edward Voysey)
>
> Set Design Vicki R. Davis; Lighting Design William Armstrong; Costume Design Henry Shaffer; Original Music Ellen Mandel; Dialect Coach Amy Stoller.
>
> Running time: 2 hours and 45 minutes, plus one 15 minute intermission 1/12/2000-2/13/2000; opening 1/18/2000 (a re-opening of original 6/14/99 - 7/3/99 run) Mint Theatre Mint Theater, New York.

Elyse Sommer, "The Voysey Inheritance," *CurtainUp*, January 2000.

In this world one is either the master or servant of money --- Mr. Voysey, Sr., a solicitor who's mastered the manipulation of money without undue stress on his conscience.

Kraig Swartz & George Moforgen (Photo: Michael Gottlieb)

While there's enough being written about the business of keeping theatrical enterprises afloat, business as a subject for plays is not popular with most playwrights. A few exceptions to this from the past couple of decades were *Glengary Glen Ross* (1984) about life in a high pressure real estate firm, *Other People's Money* (1989) about a group of Wall Street sharks headed for a hostile takeover and *The Substance of Fire,* (1992) about a floundering publishing business. In 1997, Sir David Hare smartly introduced the financial disaster of the Lloyds of London Names program into *Amy's View*. All these plays succeeded critically as well as at the box office.

Until more playwrights make use of the business world's limitless possibilities for fascinating and timely plots and subplots to appeal to and challenge audiences, we can rejoice in the Mint Theater's excellent revival of Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 drama, *The Voysey Inheritance.* Old-fashioned in its decor and costumes, elegant and very English in its manners and style, this very satisfying play is vitally up to date in the ethical cunundrums it poses.

The business enterprise at the heart of this drama is a highly respected and respectable family law firm, Voysey & Son, specializing in trusts and estates.

Its plot complications stem from a practice started by the firm's founder -- instead of keeping money entrusted to the firm where it belonged, he dipped into their capital to speculate in the stock market. While the clients always received the interest due to them on their capital, they would have been in for a rude surprise had they wanted to cash in their accounts.

As the play opens the firm's founding father has long been dead and the current Voysey Sr. (George Morfogen) wealth has brought in his son Edward (Kraig Swartz) as junior partner and to be his successor. When the sensitive and idealistic Edward learns about his “inheritance” and how deeply some of pater's recent investments have eaten into their clients' capital, he is appalled.

A moral tug of war between father and son follows into which the rest of the Voysey family is drawn. The shift from the Voysey offices to the family home in suburban Chislehurst makes for a play that for all its discussion of nuts and bolts financial facts also works as an entertaining drawing room comedy. Designer Vicki R. Davis deserves top honors for the ease and elegance of these scene changes within the confines of the small stage.

The actors bring the needed diversity and idiosyncratic tics to the Voyseys and the characters outside the family circle. George Morfogen as the senior Voysey exudes the self-confidence and commanding presence of a man who has balanced a respectable life with a penchant for risk taking. Kraig Swartz is his perfect opposite as the conscience-ridden Edward who is forced to confront the rest of the family with truths they'd rather ignore. He is particularly good in one of the play's best scenes, a confrontation with the smarmy head clerk (a pitch perfect performance by Kurt Everhart) who adds an upstairs/downstairs flavor to the “inheritance.”

The most interesting character among the women is Beatrice Voysey (Lisa Bostnar), a writer who knows a thing or two about moral compromise, having married brother Hugh (who remains unseen) for his money. As she explains her pragmatism, “fine feelings are as much a luxury as clean gloves.”

Obviously, with so many characters entangled in the fallout from Edward's decision about how to best deal with his unwanted inheritance, there are no pat morals and neat conclusions to tie things neatly together. If you remember what I said about this play working as much as a drawing room comedy as a business and finance drama, however, you won't be surprised that the playwright has provided a touch of romance.

Like his friend and contemporary, George Bernard Shaw, Granville-Barker had many interests besides playwrighting. He was an actor (originating the role of Marchbanks in Shaw's *Candida)*, and theatrical administrator who established the first modern repertory company in the English-speaking world. Once you see this second incarnation of *The Voysey Inheritance* at the Mint you'll also want make a note to catch the playwright's other well-known and rarely produced *Waste.* It's scheduled to play at the American Place in March, as the second production in the Theatre for New Audiences' new season.

B. THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

Written by Harley Granville-Barker
Directed by Peter Bill

Royal National Theatre, Lyttleton Theatre, London
April-September 2006

With Honor Voysey (Lucy Briers); Mrs Hugh Voysey (Beatrice) (Kirsty Bushell); Ethel Voysey (Isabella Calthorpe); Alice Maitland (Nancy Carroll/Claire Cox); Denis Tregoning (William Ellis); Mr Voysey (Julian Glover); Hugh Voysey (Martin Hutson); Mrs Voysey (Doreen Mantle/Helen Lindsay); Mrs Booth Voysey (Emily) (Sarah Mowat); Mr Booth (John Nettleton); Peacey (John Normington); Ethel Voysey (Claudia Renton); Mary (Anna Steel); The Rev. Evan Colpus (Roger Swaine); Trenchard Voysey (Mark Tandy); Denis Tregoning (Joseph Thompson); Edward Voysey (Dominic West); Phoebe (Julia West); Major Booth Voysey (Andrew Woodall); Christopher Voysey (Cameron Cleaver/David Perkins)

Set Designer Alison Chitty; Lighting Designer Hartley T A Kemp; Music Terry Davies

Rhoda Koenig, "Family's nasty business still provides fun a century later," *Independent* (London), 26 April 2006

The inheritance that Mr Voysey passes to his son and partner, Edward, is worse than a poisoned chalice - it's an empty one. In Harley Granville-Barker's play of 1905, which rings uncomfortably true today, the elder Voysey has been defrauding his clients for more than 30 years, first to repair his own father's malfeasance, then because he liked it.

As Edward (an appealing Dominic West) prepares to take over the firm from his father - who then, in his last act of good timing, drops dead - he must choose whether to face the music or to keep robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Peter Gill's splendidly crisp and well-cast production - far livelier than the 1989 Richard Eyre production in the Cottesloe - gets tremendous fun, both subtle and broad, out of the various Voyseys and their responses to the news that "pater" kept them all happy through embezzlement.

Andrew Woodall, as Edward's older brother Booth, is a hilarious model of empty pomposity, no sooner hearing the truth than rewriting it, and ordering everyone to live up to his copybook notions of propriety.

Mother (Doreen Mantle), cosily upholstered and conveniently deaf, says calmly that she knew about it all along and that she'll toddle off to bed now. Voysey's elderly best friend (John Nettleton) is devastated to learn that his own funds have been plundered, especially when he has led such a high-minded life: "I've not needed to take the bread out of other men's mouths by working."

The only weak spot is, unfortunately, Julian Glover as Voysey, who bellows his entire part, ignoring the juice to be squeezed out of its emotional blackmail and sexual rivalry; his confession to his son is actually a boast that, by sailing close to the wind for so long while keeping his nerve, he is more of a man than his boringly moral heir.

Sex, however, stays implicit in the play - a big reason that Granville-Barker is only a pale shadow of Ibsen. Edward has asked Alice (bewitching Nancy Carroll) to marry him several times, but only when she learns the truth about the firm does she become interested in him. One year later, she suddenly announces that she loves him and falls into his arms. The part has been improved by some judicious cutting that makes Alice less of a selfish prig, but is still bloodless and unrealistic.

The play as a whole is too long and leisurely, and the last scene undramatic.

Kirsty Bushell, however, makes the most of the astringent part of Beatrice, Edward's sister-in-law, who looks at the facts of marriage as squarely as the Voyseys avoid those of finance. “I loved him enough to marry him,” she says of her husband, “but for some of us that's not much,” while reminding the exquisite Alice that she owes her idealism to her £800 a year: “Fine feelings, my dear, are as much a luxury as clean gloves.”

C. THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE

Written by Harley Granville-Barker, Adapted by David Mamet
Directed by David Warren

Atlantic Theatre Company, New York
December 2006-January 2007

> WITH: Rachel Black (Honor Voysey), Christopher Duva (Trenchard Voysey), Steven Goldstein (Mr. Peacey), Peter Maloney (George Booth), Katharine Powell (Ethel Voysey), Judith Roberts (Mrs. Voysey), Geddeth Smith (Reverend Evan Colpus), Samantha Soule (Alice Maitland), Michael Stuhlbarg (Edward Voysey), Fritz Weaver (Mr. Voysey), Todd Weeks (Hugh Voysey) and C. J. Wilson (Major Booth Voysey).
>
> Set Design Derek McLane; Costume Design Gregory Gale; lighting by Jeff Croiter; music research and sound by Fitz Patton; music director, David Chase; dialect coach, Stephen Gabis.

Audiovisual Tour of the 2006 New York (Atlantic Theatre) Production
http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2006/12/07/theater/20061206_VOYSEY_AUDIOSS.html

Charles Isherwood, "Harley Granville Barker, Not Glengarry Glen Ross,"
***New York Times*, 7 December 2006**

The mustaches barely twitch when doom strikes. Hearing the unwelcome news that the family firm has been in the business of embezzling for two generations, the men of the Voysey clan remain as unruffled as the figures in the gilt-framed Gainsboroughs surrounding them in their elegant parlor. As proud members of the British upper classes reared under Victoria, they are not about to let the discovery of corruption in the family and the possible ruin of innocent clients set their stiff upper lips quivering.

Arriving midway through the first act of the Atlantic Theater Company's crisply acted, largely engrossing revival of Harley Granville Barker's "Voysey Inheritance," in a canny new adaptation by David Mamet, this tableau of decorousness in the face of calamity is as amusing as it is damning. For the quiet gravity isn't just good breeding; it's actual indifference.

Edward Voysey (Michael Stuhlbarg), who has just inherited the reins of the firm and breaks the bad news, is the only member of the family moved to shame at the discovery that the just-deceased paterfamilias had been bilking clients to support his brood in style. Edward is determined to call in the law, come clean, and face the consequences.

His gradual discovery that this principled path may not be as easy to pursue as it seems forms the substance of Granville Barker's play, an eloquent,

deftly plotted tale of pervasive rot in the upper realms of British society that has been cleanly refitted by Mr. Mamet for a new theatrical century.

Mr. Mamet has specialized in plays about men behaving badly, which explains his attraction to what might seem a musty 1905 drama of manners and morals. Granville Barker was a major figure in the British theater for almost half a century: an actor, director, producer and playwright who championed Ibsen and Shaw and wrote a series of minutely detailed books about staging Shakespeare that are still in print today. But his own plays are infrequently produced in the United States, although "Waste" was staged by Theater for a New Audience several years ago, and the enterprising little Mint Theater, which resurrects possibly worthy but largely forgotten works, got its hands on "Voysey" before Mr. Mamet did. (The Mint is also producing Granville Barker's "Madras House" this season.)

Any fears that Mr. Mamet would take too free a hand in adapting the play, translating the quaint lexicon of genteel English — "I say" and "Good God" and "My dear boy" — into more, ahem, vivid language, are quickly put to rest. Nary a curse word is heard amid the handsome chatter.

Mr. Mamet has merely recropped and reframed Granville Barker's portrait of a family in crisis, shrinking the play to two acts and one set, excising a few characters and subplots, and providing stylistically apt dialogue to hide the seams. So skillful is his knife work that when the drama shifts into idle in a few windy passages between the neatly spaced turns of plot, you may wonder what Mr. Mamet could possibly have cut out.

Fortunately, between the pleasing sumptuousness of the production, fluently directed by David Warren and gorgeously designed by Derek McLane (sets), Gregory Gale (costumes) and Jeff Croiter (lighting), and the sharply etched performances, there is plenty to distract you from the rare longueurs.

The wonderful Fritz Weaver plays Voysey père, whose casual admission, in the first scene, that he has been monkeying with the business sets Edward on his voyage of disillusionment. (The business is a firm of solicitors, which translates, practically speaking, to personal bankers or brokers.)

Coolly explaining to his perturbed son the practice of borrowing from one client's account to pay dividends due to another, he sighs, "Oh, why is it so hard for a man to see clearly beyond the letter of the law!"

It is not so hard, if such double vision serves a man's personal interest. After their father's sudden death and the revelation of his free-form accounting, Edward's brothers profess perfunctory shock and dismay. But they also begin bringing him around to the idea that little good will come from airing dirty laundry that had, after all, been kept from public view for 30 years with little injury to any of the parties involved.

The practical Trenchard (Christopher Duva), the black sheep of the family, essentially recuses himself from the discussion. Hugh (Todd Weeks), a dilettante artist, comes to admire the pater's, well, artistry, in keeping the firm afloat for so many years through his financial shenanigans. Major Booth Voysey, the archetypal "what-ho!" Englishman, seizes the moral high ground from under

Edward, professing outrage that his brother would even think of disgracing the family when all might come right again if only he, Edward, put his mind to it.

"It's strange the number of people who believe you can do right by means which they know to be wrong," Edward muses in a faintly Shavian turn of phrase. Granville Barker, famed for his performances of Shaw, shared his interest in interrogating the ethics of Victorian society. If his analysis is neither as harsh nor as deep as Shaw's, and his richly upholstered dialogue never crackles with quite the same head-spinning dialectical wit, his plotting is felicitous and his characters vivid and lifelike.

Mr. Warren gives his cast scope to blend sly commentary with precise interpretation. Mr. Stuhlbarg imbues Edward with a tense emotionalism that sometimes feels out of place among the crystal and solid furniture, but he feelingly evokes Edward's anguish as he tries to reconcile the interests of the family and the clients while retaining at least a shred or two of self-esteem.

C. J. Wilson provides a delicious piece of demi-caricature as Major Booth. Other standouts among a cast without a weak member are Rachel Black, in the small role of the grave daughter of the family, Honor Voysey, and Peter Maloney, hilarious and poignant in his red-faced dismay as George Booth, a family friend who entrusted the whole of his estate to the Voyseys.

Outraged and aggrieved as he is, even this character sees a way to forgive the betrayal as long as his monetary interest can be protected, or indeed augmented. Human nature remaining largely fixed, Granville Barker's study in the psychology of self-interest hardly feels remote in this respect. Nor does his critique of the prevailing ethics in the chummy world of finance in Victorian Britain. As any number of recent scandals in the business world remind us (Enron, anyone?), the freedom of businessmen with good connections and respectable facades to pursue their ruthless ends unpestered by moral qualms, to say nothing of legal consequences, is a story that remains as fresh as tomorrow's stock options.

Charles McGrath, “Theater: Mamet revisits an Edwardian script,” *International Herald Tribune*, 12 December 2006

Fritz Weaver, left, and Michael Stuhlbarg in a scene in “The Voysey Inheritance.' (Sara Krulwich/The New York Times)

I’d be hard to think of a theatrical pairing less likely than David Mamet, the tough-talking hard guy, and Harley Granville Barker, an Edwardian playwright, director and matinee idol whose work, though daring in its time, is seldom put on anymore without a whiff of musty drawing room and mothballed frock coat. But there are a number of affinities between them: a bent toward dark and sometimes uncomfortable themes; a liking for plain, colloquial language; and — as evidenced by Mamet's adaptation of Granville Barker's play “The Voysey Inheritance,” which opened last Wednesday at the Atlantic Theater Company — a mutual fascination with greed, guilt and financial corruption.

This theme is “one of the enduring staples of Western civilization,” Mamet, who has famously explored the seamy underside of capitalism in plays like “American Buffalo” and “Glengarry Glen Ross,” said in a recent telephone interview.

The Edwardian's distrust of wealth was short-lived, however. By the time he was 40, an age when Mamet was still making his name, Granville Barker, or Granville-Barker (he added the hyphen at the behest of his American-born second wife, who was a Huntington of the railroad Huntingtons), had more or less retired both from the theater and from the socialist principles he learned from his friend and mentor George Bernard Shaw. Before ultimately settling in Paris, he lived on a vast estate in Devon, and began the work for which he is best known today, his multivolume series of “Prefaces to Shakespeare.”

These prefaces, which came out between 1923 and 1946, drew on what was then new scholarship, but also on Granville Barker's own theatrical experience when in the early years of the 20th century he was among the best known and most influential figures in British theater, an innovator and a radical of Mamet-like proportion.

Granville Barker, who was a pioneer in the movement to found the National Theater, more or less invented the idea of the modern artistic director who shapes every aspect of a production. (Before he came along, staging and blocking, for example, were often left to the stage manager.) He championed a naturalistic style of acting to replace the old manner of posturing and declaiming and he rescued Shakespeare for the stage by treating him as a playwright, not a museum piece.

He was also an activist of sorts, and in both his own plays and those he chose to put on he emphasized social concerns and often controversial themes. His play “Waste,” finished in 1906, was censored for 30 years because of its frank treatment of abortion.

Unlike Mamet, who was a bit of a late bloomer, Granville Barker was a prodigy. At 14 he was sent to Miss Thorne's, a theatrical training school in Margate, and by 17 he was acting in London. He wrote, directed and starred in his first play before he was in his mid-20s.

In 1906 Granville Barker married Lillah McCarthy, a great leading lady, and for a while they were a celebrated theatrical couple. He ditched her in 1916, however, for Helen Huntington, whom he married two years later. She was a divorcee 10 years older, not nearly as glamorous as McCarthy, and what Granville Barker saw in her besides her money is a puzzlement. After the marriage Granville Barker dabbled a little in the theater, but never with the same conviction.

The best of his plays are not unlike some of Shaw's: a little stagy and creaky by today's standards, perhaps, but redeemed by a relevance that never seems to wear out.

“The Voysey Inheritance” is about an Edwardian version of the Enron scandal. In the course of the play, Edward Voysey (played originally by Granville Barker), a third-generation member of the family firm, discovers that the business is in fact a pyramid scheme, looting one client to pay off another. He then has to decide whether to keep the fraud going, in hope of making at least partial restitution, or bring it all crashing down.

Mamet said he first read “The Voysey Inheritance” years ago. He added that during a conversation a few years ago he and Carey Perloff, artistic director of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, agreed that “The Voysey Inheritance” ought to be rejuvenated. “I thought it was just cocktail chatter,” he said, “but then she called and said, 'We have a slot for you.'“ The slot was for spring 2005, and so Mamet quickly set about trying, in his words, to refashion a “play that was written for the dramatic expectations and cultural attention span of a Victorian audience.”

The result was a piece of theatrical plastic surgery, in which the patient emerged looking much svelter and smoother, but without any telltale bruising or

suture marks. Mamet even cleaned up some of Granville Barker's language, eliminating a moment when Edward calls another character a “Jew” for demanding his money and threatening to expose the firm.

He also trimmed a five-act play into a crisp two-acter that takes place on a single set. Much of Granville Barker's dialogue appears verbatim, but where necessary Mamet composed his own, in seamless Granville Barker idiom.

“'The Voysey Inheritance' is a very well-made play,” Mamet said. “But by our contemporary standards it's a little obvious.” He added that economic considerations also played a part: “In the old days the audience expected a play to last three or four hours. They expected production values and a lot of scene changes. They expected a lot of characters. The theater could support all that, but today it just isn't supportable. That's why I trimmed it in terms of length and trimmed it in terms of sets.”

“It's the same story as in Trollope's novel 'The Way We Live Now,'“ Mamet said, explaining why he was drawn to “The Voysey Inheritance” in the first place. “What is capital? How does society work? What is money? It's Adam Smith all over again. On the one hand you can say money is meaningless: it doesn't really exist, and so everything is really all about trust. You can also say that means it's all about crime.”

John Lahr, "Pocket-Picking: Stealing from the rich and from the poor," *New Yorker*, 18 December 2006

"All classes are criminal, we live in an age of equality": Joe Orton's subversive mot came to mind as I listened to the craven upper-middle-class palaver of Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 play "The Voysey Inheritance" (directed by David Warren, at the Atlantic Theatre Company, in a muscular adaptation by David Mamet). Granville-Barker, who was an actor and director as well as a playwright, was largely responsible for staging the productions that established George Bernard Shaw's popularity in Britain; his own well-constructed plays display the influence of Shaw's early dialectical and social-realist affinities. For this story, set in the mahogany library of the Voysey family's luxurious country house, Granville-Barker turns the notion of property-as-theft into what the Edwardians would have called a ripping yarn. As it turns out, every stick of upholstered furniture, every scrap of fine food, every charmed detail in the affluent Voysey tableau is built on fraud—a scam perpetuated over two generations by successive heads of the family's distinguished law firm—until Edward Voysey (Michael Stuhlbarg), the dour, dutiful son of the current scion, uncovers accounting irregularities in his father's books and confronts him. "The firm is bankrupt," Edward says to the beloved, ailing paterfamilias. "What have you done with the money?"

"The Voysey Inheritance" returns Mamet, whose "American Buffalo" and "Glengarry Glen Ross" are two of the finest plays about the spiritual attrition of American capitalism, to his favorite subject: business. "You know what is free enterprise?" Teach, the punk in "American Buffalo" who plots to steal a valuable coin collection, says. "The Freedom Of the *Individual* . . . to Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit . . . In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit." In "The Voysey Inheritance," theft is of a more refined sort, and rapacity is hidden beneath a veneer of respectability. But, if Mamet writes with his pinkie finger up, he is nonetheless mining his familiar dark-comic mother lode of barbarity disguised as practicality. In order to protect the family fortune, Mr. Voysey (the urbane Fritz Weaver) has, unbeknownst to his clients, siphoned off capital from their trust funds and estates into his own account, from which he doles out interest, so that the customers never know they've been bilked. The strategy is a form of gambling; in this game of catch-up, the father bets that he can outperform the market, filling his own pockets while replacing what he has stolen.

To Edward, the discovery is a cataclysm. "We have defrauded everyone who has trusted us," he says. Rather like a con man explaining the art of three-card monte—"Business nowadays is a confidence trick," Mr. Voysey says in the original version—the father coolly takes his scandalized son through the accounts, a house of cards that has grown ever higher on his thirty-year watch. The fraud was what Mr. Voysey calls "my inheritance." "I'd hoped it wasn't to be yours," he says, while rationalizing the crime as a heroic attempt to protect both the firm and the family's name. "We do what we must in this world," he says. "Was I to see my father ruined and disgraced without lifting a finger to help him? .

. . Not to mention the interest of the clients." Against Mr. Voysey's slick defensive sophistry, the play pits Edward's clear-eyed staunchness. To him, two wrongs don't make a right. The scene builds artfully, until the jejune Edward finds himself boxed in by his father's revelations. "You're my partner, and my son," Mr. Voysey tells him. "And you'll inherit the business."

In collapsing a five-act play into two, Mamet has shrunk the original struggle between father and son, especially the swaggering of Mr. Voysey, styled by Granville-Barker as a bit of a "buccaneer" who browbeats his timid, self-conscious son for his lack of business acumen ("You're about as fit for this job as a babe unborne") and for his bookish interest in philosophy ("Your ethics of this and your ethics of that, the sort of garden oats which men seem to sow nowadays"). By cutting back the family politics and making Edward a blunt, stalwart terrier from the beginning, Mamet substitutes combative urgency for social satire; he raises the stakes both of the emotion and of the brutality.

Mr. Voysey's subsequent death puts Edward in charge of the firm. He chooses to expose the fraud, and devotes himself to recouping the money. The family is forced to turn over the bulk of its inheritance. The real bankruptcy facing almost all the Voyseys, however, is moral. The remainder of the evening savors the secret ambush of Edward's relatives as they try to bend principles and justify their greed. Edward's bombastic older brother, Major Booth Voysey (C. J. Wilson), invokes his late father's bravery in dealing with "such a frightful task." Mr. Voysey's corrupt accountant, Mr. Peacey (Steven Goldstein), gets stroppy at the idea that he'll be getting no Christmas bonus and at the implication that he is a thief. "Worse than a thief," Edward says. "You're content that others should steal for you." Peacey counters provocatively, "And who isn't?" The moral maze gets even more complex when Mr. Voysey's best friend, George Booth (Peter Maloney), and the family clergyman, Reverend Colpus (Geddeth Smith), join forces—in a sort of class action, which Mamet dramatizes from what was merely exposition in the original—to strike what they conceive of as a Christian deal. They will not prosecute if the firm agrees to pay interest on the loss until it is made up. Their "Christian impulses," however, are simply another push for profit. "You'd impoverish the smaller investors, in return for your silence," Edward says, laughing away their modest proposal. His response underlines the fact that "The Voysey Inheritance" is, in the end, not so much about business as about honor, a concept that can seem almost Chaucerian in our soiled times.