

### Speed-The-Plow Glossary and Explanatory Notes

Dedication Page: "This Play is Dedicated to Howard Rosenstone." Rosenstone was Mamet's long-time Literary Agent.

23: "Lord, I believe, aid thou my unbelief." Quotation from Mark 9:24, used jokingly here by Fox.

29: "Boy's Choice: Skate in One Direction Only." Parlance from classic roller rink socials and dances.

34: "Three Bags Full." This lyric from "Ba Ba Black Sheep," which succeeds "Yes, Sir, Yes, Sir," has special meaning in the military. It signifies extreme complicity, subservience, and willingness to fulfill orders.

35: "Master of the Revels." Historically, the right-hand man of the Lord Chamberlain, the British governmental official who licensed stage productions and approved their content.

38: "The Five Major Food Groups." The five major film studios: Fox, Paramount, Warner Brothers, Loews/MGM, and RKO.

41: "Young America at WORK and PLAY." Volume III of the largely distributed sheet music anthology *Young America's Music*. American families with young musicians could be expected to own the anthology in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

41: "Laura Ashley." Welsh fashion and furnishing designer. Her works are characterized by 19<sup>th</sup> century, floral, and Romantic-era patterns and the use of natural fabrics.

41: "First in war. First in peace. First in the hearts of Pee Wee Reese." This line, which originally ended with "First in the hearts of his countrymen," is taken from Henry Lee's eulogy of George Washington at a joint session of Congress. Pee Wee Reese, ten-time All Star and legendary shortstop for the Brooklyn (and later Los Angeles) Dodgers, was perhaps best known for his vociferous support of teammate Jackie Robinson's integration into baseball. Like Washington, history has lauded Reese with almost universal praise for his play and his leadership.

41: "Thy will be done." Excerpted from the "Our Father" prayer, used and adapted by many Catholic and Protestant denominations and organizations.

44: "The Bitching Lamp is Lit." Potentially a hockey reference. When a goal is scored in professional hockey, "The Lamp," a flashing light, is turned on and a loud horn is sounded.

34: "Hide the Afikomen." The Afikomen is a half-piece of matzoh eaten at the end of a traditional Passover Seder. Since the Seder can be very long, many Jewish families have developed the game of "Hide the Afikomen" to keep children engaged. In some families, parents hide the Afikomen and send the kids to search for it. In others, the children hide the Afikomen and ransom it back to their parents. Here, obviously, Fox is using the practice as a crude sexual metaphor.

59: "The Carnival of Venice." A popular German folk tune and showpiece for trumpeters, best known to Americans as the tune for "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?"

94: "Albert Schweitzer." A German musician, theologian, philosopher, physician, and missionary who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. Many scholars have referred to him as a kind of 20<sup>th</sup> Century version of Leonardo DaVinci: a universally respected Renaissance Man who excelled in nearly every endeavor.

94: "Chippy." A prostitute or highly promiscuous woman. Mamet is likely pointing to Edward Albee here, who used the term in nearly all of his plays in the 1980s.

95: "Baal Shem Tov." A Jewish mystical Rabbi from the 18<sup>th</sup> century who is considered the founder of Hasidic Judaism. The term literally means "Good master of the name."

#### *So What's With That Title, Anyway?*

"Speed the Plow" or "God Speed the Plow" is a popular folk tune that dates back to at least the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, though British, Scottish, and Irish Musicologists all take credit for the piece. By 1800, the tune had reached such wide-ranging popularity that Thomas Morton named one of his comic melodramas *Speed the Plough*. It became quite popular in the United States, with the first production starring the actor-parents of Edgar Allen Poe. Some scholars have argued that the sentiment behind the lyrics, a wish for farming success and prosperity, goes back to medieval times. As a phrase and gesture of well-wishing, divorced from the song, it dates back to at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In contemporary parlance, the phrase seems to be less a wish of good fortune than a gesture of subservience and acceptance of divine control. God, not man, speeds the plow. This is the sense Mamet claims he wanted to evoke with his title. As he stated in a *Chicago Tribune* interview:

"I remembered the saying that you see on a lot of old plates and mugs: 'Industry produces wealth, God speed the plow.' This, I knew, was a play about work and about the end of the world, so 'Speed-The-Plow' was perfect because not only did it mean work, it meant having to plow under and start over again."