CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Drama is undoubtedly the most interesting of all the literary products of human relationship. It is at once the most peculiar, the most elusive, and the most enthralling of all types of literature. It is so deeply associated with and dependent upon the whole material world of the theatre with its thronging crowds and its universal appeal: that it lies so much near to the deeper consciousness of the nation in which it takes rise. The great dramatist accepting the condition of the theatre, realises that the theatre demands as a first requisite a fable and all that a fable employs and proceeds from that, to present a richer, a deeper, a profounder or a more poignant impression that the mere action itself could have conveyed. A play is not like a novel or a poem, because the playwright must put his ideas for his play into so many words on paper; it is all too easy to read them as if they work like those in other books. A composer of music writes a notation for the sounds in his mind, but the fullness of the music is heard only in performance; so is it with Drama.

Drama is a social activity where the playwright always translates his thoughts into terms of the theatre, splitting his mind into two or more minds, those of his characters each with an individuality and life as his own. The playwright only speaks through his actors, who must in turn transform his words into signals of sight and sound to the spectators in the theatre. Therefore, the reader of the play must be ready to see and hear in his mind's eye and in his mind's ear. Hence, Drama is a form of art in which the artist imagines a story concerning persons and incidents, without himself describing, narrating
or explaining what is happening. Drama presents reality on the stage and visualises the life images as it happens in real life.

Drama like any other literary and artistic genres, attempts to present perspectives on ‘truth’ and it has moved from the styles of Chekov and Ibsen. There are two ways in which this illusion of reality can be created: either by the construction of a purely imaginary world, or by the reconstruction of the world of appearances with man as the central figure (Tennant 58).

Correlation between perception and communication form the crux of all art. It is true to the art of drama. Being a mirror to life, drama is concerned with the understanding of reality. Reality is complex; it embeds the static absolute truth with the changing facets of human life. It encompasses the worlds of eternal truth and material existence. Dramatic form adds the third dimension to it, an ephemeral existence deriving from the momentary interaction of author, spectator and performer. A careful glance at the Greek concept of form and the successive variations upon it shows that the variable factor in form is the changing face of reality. Francis Fergusson rightly says that it is this very general conception of drama as a mode of understanding and a reflection of culture, which is assumed in so much contemporary thought and criticism (Prasad 3).

Aristotle defined form as an imaginative reconstruction of reality. This is the classical concept of imitation. Natural phenomenon was the mere face of ultimate reality for the Greek, but for the Neo classicists the material existence assumed the ultimate
value. This new drama was an image of human action in a material world. In place of the poetic mystery of the metaphorical form of the Greek drama, one witnesses conformity to pre-established standards of order. This spirit of life dictated the concept of form and it remained the mode of the European theatre throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and still continues to affect the shape of drama.

Another formal variation in the art of drama is the gift of Romanticism. Romanticism expanded the Aristotelian concept by adding a newer mode of reality – human consciousness. This form finds its finest utterance in Shakespeare. The art of Realism in drama emerged as the response of theatre to the Age of Science. Realism was essentially scientific and rational in character and was anti-aesthetic and anti-romantic. School of Realism consists of fierce realists like Emile Zola, Gustave, Flaubert, Turgenev and Tolstoy. The huge gain of scientific spirit in the portrayal of realistic matter paved the way for Naturalism. An objective portrayal of closely observed reality, the adoption of scientific method and a belief in determinism are the chief tenets of Naturalism. But this photo-phonographic recording of reality proved absurd in no time. The tirade against ‘the fatal futility of fact’, commenced almost simultaneously with the rise of Realism. From among the addicts to this realistic form, some deviated to spiritual Naturalism. The great dramatists of the realistic era transcended the limitations of this form. Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, Strinberg’s *Dream Play*, Chekov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, Tolstoy’s *The Power of Darkness*, contain chromosomes for a form different from Realism.

As a reaction against Naturalism, there came into existence Expressionism. It has been likened to X-ray photography. The term Expressionism originated in painting and only later came to describe a literary phenomenon. John Willet finds in Weidenfeld’s
Expressionism, the term used as early as 1850 to describe modern painting. He also quotes it as having been used in 1880 to describe, "those who undertake to express special emotions of passions" (Weidenfeld 25). This term 'Expressionism' is anti-realistic in rejecting the superficially plausible and the normal in favour of the abstract and concentration on passion. It emphasizes subjective vision, rather than the objective and distorts reality in order to intensify the effect. It is romantic in attaching particular importance to the intensity of the vision and the role of the artist who expresses it.

One characteristically expressionist preoccupation is with extreme states of tension-psychological and pathological. The painting which particularly reflects this is Munch's The Scream (1893), which appeared during the period of French Avant Garde Theatre. Subject matter, lines and colours create the impression of a feverish, hectic, exaggerated state of mind, for the painting conveys not only emotion and tension, but the essence of the movement as well. Almost as of writing and of painting, Bahr writes of the spirit of Expressionism:

Man screams from the depth of his soul, the whole age becomes one single, piercing shriek. Art screams too, into the deep darkness, screams for help, for the spirit. That is Expressionism. (Furvus 48)

Expressionists are profoundly interested in psychology. This involves the acceptance of a convention. It presupposes a lucidity of mind that the average man, or indeed any man, does not possess. Expressionism dramatizes the inner life of man, representing what is passing in his soul. The Expressionistic technique aims at unraveling the inner life of man with all its bewildering complexity; it does seek to create the
characters that are living human beings. The figures of personages in the expressionistic plays are devoid of individuality. They have no background or personal character. Expressionists do not hesitate to present depersonalized characters; symbolic types are substituted for human beings.

Change of techniques happened time to time with the theatre all over the world. Though Britain remained the seat of literature and the origin of most of the –isms, the change in political equations after the world wars flipped the American literary scene. It is not to say that, Literature in America was at a rudimentary stage. Factors like devaluation of money, industrialization, southerners shifting to the North and the culture shock they experienced in the non-human, value-free industrialized North, aggravated the conflict that was already there at the minimum level. More and more writers emerged dealing with the conflict in all its realistic dimensions that the writings proved to be materialistic, romantic, and expressionistic at the same time. A brief survey of the American Theatre will bring this aspect to a better focus.

The story of American Modern Theatre consists largely of efforts to cut drift from the earlier trends of the American stage. One can go no further than this in an effort to find distinctive attributes in American drama; one can say that American humour tended to be broader and more robust than European humour. American theatre used bludgeons more frequently than rapiers in attacking absurdities in private and public behaviour. Americans were far less left at writing high comedy and did so less frequently than the British. Americans were
less brittle and pointed than the French,
less airy than the Viennese,
less sentimental than the Hungarians
less metaphysical than the modern Italians (Gassner 771)

Americans also favoured a speedier type of playwriting than what prevailed in Europe and were moderate in experimentation. Except in the case of O'Neill's work, they avoided the extreme stridency that characterized the German expressionist stage after the First World War, the utilitarian theatre that the Russians favoured after the Revolution, and the odd surrealism that the French made fashionable in Paris. American theatre after 1918 possessed

vigour without fanaticism, speed without turbulence, skepticism without bitterness, interest in ideas without metaphysical complexity and except for a brief period during the depression, awareness of social reality without marked propagandistic bias (771)

The work of America's modern dramatists is part of a single cultural stream to which novelists, poets and even painters and composers contributed. The drama of the 1919-29 decade was one manifestation of maturing creative expression and of rebellion against the values dominant during the early years of the century. Similarly, the plays of the next twenty years reflected the shifting concerns of dramatists, as well as of other writers and artists, as they faced the depression years and the onset of the Second World War. One may therefore take into consideration the overall directions in the theatre, bearing in mind always that a ‘trend’ is not the same thing as a work of art and is never a substitute for it. To begin, from the beginning, America has a theatrical past and may be
it is incorrect to assume that a modern theatre was suddenly born. The theatre moved into the modern world gradually in a stream of mingled currents, some of them fairly observable in America decades before 1920.

The American Theatre started fumbling toward maturity during the eighteen eighties and nineties, having produced little during the earlier part of the century. The first decade of the new century brought only slight improvement. Human relations began to be treated with more candour. Awareness of social problem too grew. It cannot be said that the Commercial Theatre before 1920 produced vigorous drama of ideas, penetrating studies of reality and plays transfigured by deeply personal expression. A minor revolution in the theatre came to an end after the First World War, and the result was the drama that made its first appearance with O'Neill has moved towards the middle of the century with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.

Modern American Drama as a whole may be described as a brew concocted of domesticated naturalism and expressionism, sophisticated comedy, drama of ideas, cheeky treatment of American manners, protest against puritanical morals, and revolt against the middle class values of the post war period (773)

In 1919, upon returning from war service, a member of Washington Square Amateurs founded America's first professional art theatre, The Theatre Guild. The 'revolution' in the American Theatre was effected largely by the Province town Players' productions of O'Neill's early sea pieces and of his longer dramatic experiments – the plays in which he passed beyond realism or naturalism and at the same time incorporated
modern life. Modern American Drama gave personal expression to modern man's conflicts and experimented with methods of symbolizing them. They gave dimension to the themes of race, labour, the artist's struggle in a materialistic society and the duality of love and faith. They dredged up for the audience the weird shape of desire and anxiety. They have given dramatic expression to the unconscious which Freudian psychologists were making a household word among educated and semi-educated people.

During the twenties, in short, the rebellious playwrights were by no means an isolated phenomenon. Their works were part of the cultural awakening of the United States, which produced

no literary giants but gave rise to a great many artists who placed self-expression above conformity and regarded the prevailing manners and values of their environment with skepticism and distaste (775).

They steeped their plays in moods of longing, anxiety and doom, thus creating a poetic drama in spite of an inability to supply a language equal to the dramatic turbulence of their plays. For them Drama was a reality and not an entertainment.

In the thirties, the emphasis was on American playwrights. The 'Theatre Guild', took the lead from its antecedents, the Province Town Players and the Washington Square Players, devoted a great deal of energy to the discovery and promotion of native American Playwrights. The dramatists of the thirties looked longingly at the National Theatres of France and Russia, and they sought to enliven their own drama and to stimulate their own public demand for an American National Theatre by copying those established institutions, not only in terms of techniques and organization but also by
calling for and emphasising playwriting as an autonomous literary activity of the stage. The result was a plethora of dramatic work by native writers which can only be seen as an important development in American Literature.

While the 1930s saw a virtual hey-day for comedies by George, Kaufman and Moss Hart, for musicals and family dramas and for the sentimental comedy of William Saroyan, it also saw the genius of Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman and Clifford Odets. The playwrights of the 1930s used the experimentalism of earlier decades to open new realms of intellectual, social and philosophical inquiry. They used and perfected techniques developed by their predecessors; they believed they were a new age and proceeded to do and say things no playwright had done or said before. For this reason the 1930s represents the end of an experimental age and the beginning of another.

A great number of American dramatists of the 1930s attempted to make their plays sounding boards for social and political reforms, setting them, to borrow Krutch’s analogy, in front of a ‘back drop’ of social issues and moral assumptions, which they considered vital to the American public; often their characters mouthed political polemics of the day and almost just as often, the result was more an essay than an art. They attempted to interpret their society. "In doing so, they were angrier; they were generally less subtle; they were, with few exceptions, humourless" (Mendelson 284).

The agitation and propaganda – agit-prop – plays of the late 1920's and early 1930s were offered as straight propaganda. Not all the protest writers wrote agit-prop plays. Some handled social issues in a more universal manner and they attempted to offer
alternative political philosophies and economic theories as panacea for the depression-
torn society of their audiences and for mankind in general.

The development of modern American Theatre as quoted in *The Theatre in our Times* by John Gassner, "a reflection of social realities in the United States" (Gassner 282). Some playwrights offered plays with strong leftist sentiments, and Marxist propaganda plays which deal with strikes, anti-fascism and class struggle. Some others wrote plays about social evils of a different kind such as political and social corruption, housing problems and the lack of understanding between people within a social framework.

Some playwrights might have put in Herculean efforts to wed polemic and literary endeavour not by 'masking' their social or political arguments with plot and character, but by honestly examining the society they observed around them and by using such techniques as literary naturalism to demonstrate the hopelessness of individual aspirations in the face of seemingly omnipotent social forces of environment, or the futility of dreaming in a world of nightmarish reality. The continuing search for a play, which both entertained and informed, marks the decade as a period of major development in the American Drama. For not only did the experimentation of these writers in both form and content finally yield a mature, responsive and relevant social drama, but also establish an identity for the drama in the United States.

The playwrights of the 1930s actively attempted to make art an instrument of the people, a spokesman for and arbiter of their problems, and hopefully a source of their ideas for change. The development of the American Drama during the nineteen thirties
saw the establishment of the social drama as a permanent part of the American stage. As Krutch puts it, it was drama, “whose moral, intellectual or social implications involve a revolution in the attitude of audience toward moral, intellectual or social questions” (Krutch 42).

Three distinctive stages of development are evident in the decade beginning with the first years of the depression. The first phase, 1929-1933, saw attempts at ‘hard-line’; Marxist drama by such writers as Claire, Paul Sifton and Elmer Rice failed while the social comedy of writers like Philip Barry and S.N.Beheman succeeded. It moved from mild lampooning of mores and convention to biting political satire as is seen in Maxwell Anderson's, *Both Your houses*. The second phase, 1933-36, saw the advent of the social critics on stage as Marxist and communist didacticians, whose plays such as Clifford Odets’ *Writing for Lefty* or Sidney Kingsley's, *Dead End* synthesized the elements of agit-prop with the more acceptable forms of Broadway plays to offer a drama which declaimed, exhorted and informed its audience but entertained it as well. The third phase, 1937-1939, began with a softening of the ‘hard line’. Marxist position gave way to attempts to synthesize political and social activism with the well-made plays such as Odets’ *Golden Boy* or Helman's *The Little Foxes* and ultimately came a full circle as Philip Barry's *The Philadelphia Story*, effectively combined social comedy and social criticism into a play which illustrated the need for unity and understanding between all elements of American society on the eve of an international crisis. Rather than being either a ‘retreat’ from reality or an exercise in polemic, the social drama of the 30s provided a corner stone for subsequent writers and brought the American Drama into the modern period.
The 1930s comprised a trying period for the theatre, and for the nation as a whole. As artists and men of their times, they were assailed, by two major anxieties, fear of the collapse of American society and fear of the triumph of fascism, foreign and native. They faced a world to which sophistication and Bohemianism were no longer acceptable response. In general, the mood of the thirties was often somber, even if not desperate, often rebellious, even if not down-right, revolutionary. The story of the 'thirties' is, nevertheless, by no means a record of stalemate. A wave of idealism and protest lifted the drama and the theatre from despondency. New forces gathered strength in the theatre, as in the cultural life of the nation as a whole. New theatrical groups came to the fore, even when their resources consisted of little more than a determination to produce art or to raise an outcry.

To understand the continued force and the extension of dramatic talent among American playwrights, one must understand the temper of the country during the decade of unemployment and the literary stream as a whole. The country's writers were, in the main, no longer content to jibe at the vulgarity of Main Street, to exalt art as an escape from the humdrum world, to glorify sophistication, to exploit the discoveries of Freud, to fulminate against puritanical morality, and to call for sexual freedom. Nor did they air their contempt for the machine as an enemy of an individual who faced together-unemployment, lack of means of subsistence and social prejudice. Hence a literature of social protest, variously described as rebellious, a portion of the theatre of the nineteen thirties could be called revolutionary. When the decade ended, Europe was already engaged in the Second World War and new challenges were arising to bedevil the playwright and his audience. But as a result of the war time industrial boom, the economic situation of the theatre in the nineteen forties seemed greatly relieved.
The demand for entertainment increased rapidly, but the other incalculable difficulty that a number of dramatists had to overcome during the decade of the forties was the disappearance, to a great extent, of the social enthusiasm of the thirties and of the groups that it had sustained. One of the conspicuous tendencies of the decade, especially after 1945, was the rise of literature of disillusionment with communism, socialism and even New Deal Philosophy. The war naturally provided a stimulus to the writing of war plays, antifascist drama, and works of liberal sentiment. Immediately after the war, a certain degree of democratic enthusiasm also made itself felt, taking the form of attacks on racial discrimination.

It may be construed that the foundations for American drama have been firmly laid since 1918, and the past eight decades have brought a variety of achievements. Gassner, in his “Modern Drama from Oscar Wilde to Eugene Ionesco” states,

Realism has been used with vividness; social drama has acquired vigour and fire. Naturalism has not only dealt with tabooed subjects but has become permeated with poetry and feeling (Gassner 785).

Since the early twenties, American playwrights have shown an adeptness at folk drama and a promise in the direction of fantasy. It has been no small achievement to have developed two kinds of comedy: a ‘low’, unliterary type that has the virtue of being briskly shrewd and a ‘high’ comedy that has glittered, now and then with keen edge, whether dealing with manners or with ideas in conflict. Moreover, American dramatists have not bound themselves to any particular technique; they have not hesitated to move from a play written in a realistic mode to one conceived in imaginative theatrical form.
The interpenetration of the truth of everyday life with the truth of imagination has appeared, in differing degrees, in the plays of O'Neill, Wilder, Maxwell Anderson, Connelly, Saroyan, Williams, Miller, Albee, Inge, Shepard and even Odets. When American theatre arrived at maturity, it absorbed two originally divergent aims of the modern European theatre – that of the realists and naturalists and that of the symbolists and expressionists. American playwrights unquestionably have achieved a place in the history of American letters and culture. As they took their place in the theatre of modern ideas, they developed effectiveness. A number of them achieved sincere appreciation and expression and made American Drama worthy of regard as a form of literature.

They wrote with force and point; they developed a sense of form; and they found expressive technique that carried playwriting beyond mild manifestations of realism and sentiment (785).

During the forties and early fifties, the older playwrights continued to write and stage their plays; some of O'Neill's best works belonged to that period. The writings of William Saroyan and Thorton Wilder, though quite different, were closer to post war Drama in their use of fantasy and free form. In the postwar generation of playwrights, however, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller determined the earliest directions of drama. Although very different in temperament and style, Williams and Miller shared many common concerns – the discrediting of the American Dream, the isolation of the individual, even within the family, and his solitary search for values in a chaotic world. Both writers continued with variations and dominated its stage for well over a decade. The greatest number of plays in the post war period fit a strictly commercial concept of theatre.
Broadway, a name of a street in New York City became a label attached to the commercial theatres of that city – Broadway was for all intents and purposes the entire American theatre for roughly the first half of the twentieth century. The era of Williams and Miller marked the Zenith of the Broadway Theatre. In the fifteen years following the Second World War, the next generation of American dramatists, built on the discoveries of the past and on the psychological dramas of earlier writers, to carry the Broadway-based American theatre to its highest accomplishments. This period, 1945-60, produced the greatest plays of America's greatest playwrights. The drama of the fifties turned away from the direction set in the thirties. Although some playwrights, notably Arthur Miller, continued to address social and political issues by dramatizing their effect on the everyday domestic lives of ordinary people, other led by Tennessee Williams, returned to the focus on psychological exploration that had been the concern of the realistic dramatists of the 1920s. Their concentration was not so much on explaining abnormal behaviour through Freudian analysis but on expressing and illuminating the emotions that lay beneath both normal and abnormal behaviour. Along with them it introduced many known dramatists like Genet, Brecht, Beckett, Pirandello, Ibsen and Chekhov.

Until the end of the fifties and the beginning of the 60s, American theatre meant production on Broadway in New York City, frontal staging in a building designed exclusively for theatrical performance. The audience was carefully separated from the players and the dramas performed were species of light comedy, musicals and serious plays that dealt in social criticism. The anti-commercial revolt of the Washington Square players in New York and of the Province Town Theatre on Cape Cod, gave birth to the Off-Broadway in New York. The Off-Broadway theatre, especially during the fifties
helped with new honesty and resourcefulness to remake American Drama. Authors, actors and directors of this theatre took risks, they showed greater awareness of Avant-Garde movement in Europe; and above all, they saw the changing character of American society, challenging its values and assumptions. Dedicated to protest, they were also ingenious in their art. The trans-Atlantic devices of the Theatre of the Absurd or the Theatre of Cruelty no doubt influenced them. The most popular dramatists of the Off-Broadway theatre were William Hanley, Arnold Weinstein, William Synder, Jules and Feiffer. Later the production of a play on Off-Broadway became expensive as they began to turn to the financial rewards of larger media. To make matters worse, 'The Living Theatre', the most experimental one on Off-Broadway, faced a threat of closure for the non-payment of taxes.

American cultural life began to emerge from the phase of moralistic and anti-intellectual willingness in the middle 1960s. It was a presumption of national consensus that disguised division and critical social problems. Although a stream of social criticism did appear in the 1950s, it took its theme from the assumption that American society was basically unified and pleased with its material condition. It also focused on issues such as the threat to the individual from the impersonal structures of business corporations and government or the quality of entertainment made by the mass media. The major characteristics of the new society were a drift towards homogenization of life style and a disagreement of social and cultural interest. There was resistance towards racial injustice and women were granted full equality.

America was described as a consumer's paradise for there was a rapid increase in the industrial field that produced innumerable products for its own use and export. This
led to the rise in gross national product, and science and technology seemed to rise exponentially. Rapid advance in scientific research and technological application in industry, communication and transportation enhanced the growth of living conditions resulting in more ease and convenience in travel and communication.

The economy of the country rose and this promoted more job opportunities for the workers. The pervasiveness of material well-being eroded the older notions of an oppressed class. The invention of machinery increased production. Urban life became more sophisticated due to such advances. The role of the media and the theatre reached its height and the younger generation gave much importance to modernization in every aspect neglecting the older Agrarian mode of life. The change that was sweeping through America affected the life of the people adversely as well. There was social dislocation such as poverty, more population and class conflict. Over mechanization led to stress and the realization of the danger to the ecosystem. There was a common notion that the older ways were better, healthier and more American, while the modern ways were seen as offensive, threatening and dehumanizing. Writers like Riesman and Mills were concerned with problems that were recognized in America as basically the domain of the sociologist, social classes, the hierarchies of social structure, marriage and family life, population shifts and urban life, wealth and poverty. The significant increase in the sociologists practicing this form of analysis of the individual's loss of power, insignificance and loneliness appeared in the literature of the post war era.

Social philosopher, Lewis Mumford, in his post war book, *The Myth of the Machine* (1967) and *The Pentagon of Power* (1970) described the life in America during this period as machine life, due to the influence of science and technology. Instead of
functioning actively as an autonomous personality, man will become passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal, whose proper function will either be fed into the machine or strictly limited and controlled for the benefit of depersonalized, collective organization.

In the year following 1975, the economy of the country experienced its sharpest decline. It was during this period that the production decreased and the inflow and outflow of commodities was limited. Inflation, high unemployment and increased competition, from foreign trade/industries contributed to a deep apprehension in the American work place. Richard Barnet in his work *The Lean Years* states "the country had strained its capacities and had entered an age of scality" (Wade 96). America was forced to acknowledge its limits and many wondered whether the nation could lay claim to the promises of the American dream any longer. Without the engine of an expanding economy, the welfare – state policy could not sustain itself. Many dismissed the Federal Government as indifferent and ineffective, a view aggravated by the abuse of the Watergate affair. Apathy bred resentment, Jimmy Carter characterized this state of affairs as "a condition of malaise" (Wade 96).

The postwar suburban expansion of Los Angeles broke like a tidal wave over a previously rural life style. The geographical west was changed to the New West with the sudden destruction of the traditional and agrarian way of life. Eventually Los Angeles had a population kick back. Weird government industries came up and people had work. Such was the circumstances and the age in which Sam Shepard was born and brought up. All these changes influenced him a lot as a citizen and as a playwright. Shepard is the product of Post World War II. It was a time when a new kind of society emerged. It was
described as a post-industrial, capitalistic, consumer and media society. The society changed its trend with a rapid rhythm of fashions and styles. The influence of Television advertising and theatre had a great impact on society. The construction of super highways and the introduction of automobiles marked a radical break away from the pre-war society.

Media-generated myths grew with such speed during this period that it lost all connection to the reality from which it had sprung. It became hollow and influenced all aspects of America's cultural identity but was not capable of sustaining its inhabitants. The impact of such cultural images and the inability of those images to sustain meaning is evident in Shepard's work. Shepard's literacy interest began with the Beat writers of the 1950s with whom he felt a spiritual affinity. There were many theatres which encouraged new playwrights. Western American drama began with the religious ceremonies of the American – Indians whose ritual dances and songs dramatized myth.

"America both in the spectacle of fleshing out the continent and in the drama of incarnating itself as idea had been the essence of theatre" (Herman 3). Ordinary play going began as an entertainment. The dramas performed in the theatres were a species of light comedy, musical and serious play that dealt with social criticism like, war being considered a horror and the family as destructive or as psychological exploration. The theatre produced dramatists like O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albe. The theatre simultaneously went through great changes in the fifties and sixties. The combination of ideas and social life helped to shape the American theatre of this period. Great events and radical, intellectual and cultural currents combined to change the theatre. The war in Korea and Vietnam, the economic crunch initiated by the Arab oil embargo of 1973 aroused a great response in the form of Street and Guerrilla theatre.
In 1957, as a ramification of the Off-Broadway, Off – Off-Broadway came into being with the production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. It was staged at Greenwich Village Coffee House called 'take 3' in the month of September. In a sense it was a reaction against Off-Broadway. The most notable centres of the new theatre were Joseph Cino's, The Caffe Cino, the Judson Poet's Theatre, organized by Al Carmines, assistant minister of the Judson Memorial Church, where many of the performances took place; Ellen Stewart's resourceful La Uama Experimental Theatrical Club; Theatre Genesis, run by Ralph and Cook, lay minister of St. Mark's in the Bowery Church and Joseph Chaikin's the Open Theatre, which included some of the most active participants in Off-Off Broadway. In style, Off-Off Broadway favoured short and striking plays. Rarely naturalistic, it was comic in devious and disturbing ways, and consummately American in violence or extravagance. Though its artistic and political tempers were mainly radical, it avoided direct statement, preachment, and ideology. As Joseph Chaikin puts it, "We are trying to make the theatre, to make visible the human situation at a time when things could be different"(Chaikin 153). Though a great many playwrights contributed to Off-Off-Broadway, several are particularly known for their flair and stamina in the genre. Paul Foster, Jean Claude, Van Itallie, Frank O'Hara, Lanford Wilson, Joel Oppenheimer, Megan Terry, Ronald Tavel, Moria Irene Fornes and Rosalyn Drexler may be listed as those who contributed to the diversity of Off-Off Broadway. There were also painters, dancers, sculptors and musicians who helped to broaden the conception of theatrical events. It was the Theatre Genesis that opened in 1964, that gave Sam Shepard a chance to stage his plays.
Young and prolific was Sam Shepard, when he wrote for Off-Off Broadway characterized by a special subjective vitality and a highly visual sense of drama. Sam Shepard, known early in his life as Samuel Shepard Rogers, held various odd jobs, including one on a ranch. He became fond of working around live-stock-horses and chickens and sheep and showed a champion ran at the Los Angeles County Fair, and thought he might take his father's suggestion and become a veterinarian. He went to jail in a town called Big Bear because he gave the finger to the Police chief's wife; he turned over some cars, drank, learned about drugs, he loved to watch cowboy actors riding in the Rose Bowl Parade. He acted in the local community theatre and he wrote his first play. Though interested in writing – at the time the big influences on him were the beat generation writers, Fenlinghetti and Corse and Keronac – he enrolled in a Junior college to major in education. After three semesters, he dropped out. There was also "this big fight with my old man and at that point I fled" (Kroll 69-70). Shepard told biographer Shewey

his father "had a real short fuse". He had a real tough life – had to support his mother and brothers at a very young age when his dad's farm collapsed. You could see his suffering, his terrible suffering, living a life that was disappointing and looking for another one. It was past frustration; it was anger (Shewey 3)

More often than not Shepard was the brunt of that anger. What became one of the paramount themes of his later plays, the dysfunctional family and a son's confrontation with the father-figures, was thus hard-wired into Shepard at an early age.
Hooked up with a troupe of actors, he toured the country playing in churches, until he landed in New York early in 1963. In New York the making of an American Playwright began with a name change: Samuel Shepard Rogers became Sam Shepard. With a painter friend, Charles Mingus Jr, he rented an apartment on the Lower East side. Living was cheap in that area, and from the rest of the country it gathered new arrivals who had come to try to make art. People were arriving from Texas and Arkansas and a community was being established, stimulated by this scene, specifically by a jazz crowd that he was running with, Shepard's career took off in a burst of feverish playwriting activity. While working as a waiter at a Greenwich Village Night Club, he learned that the head waiter was looking for new plays. Ralph Cook was to inaugurate Theatre Genesis in the basement of St. Mark's – in – the Bowrie in 1964. He read his waiter's work, and the result was Shepard's first productions – *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden* and "the discovery of Shepard in its major achievement to date" (Smith 11).

The theatre sought not only to provide aesthetic experience but also attempted to change the world and redefine it. The theorists Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, through their books *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958) and *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) helped to shape the theatre. Artaud saw the theatre as transformational magic. According to him "Theatre would react against language and Psychology and plot in favour of disturbing imagery and gesture. It would uncover truth away from traditional theatre buildings in a mystical space" (Herman 18). Grotowski's Poor Theatre was rich in ideas that appealed to the Avant-Garde. Grotowski like Artaud advocated the revelation of truth through the integrity of performance. Performance for Grotowski was the very subject of the theatre. The acting exercise of Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre started with the body in motion, for
the central focus of its production was on sound and movement, actors chanting and moving together in physical and aural concert. Chaikin created an extraordinary ensemble company that celebrated the presence of the actor and discovered ways of uniting mind with body through the actors’ realization of a transforming text. Shepard owes a debt to the Open Theatre's transformation exercise, in which actors would quickly change personalities from scene to scene within a single work, often without apparent psychological motivation. Such influences changed the theatre.

The seventies saw the full emergence of the American theatre with the work of Robert Wilson, Richard Forman and Lee Brewer. Their work was described as the "Theatre of Images" (Herman 8) by Bonnie Marranca. A kind of modern impulse came into the American theatre. The theatre had always been an amalgam of all the arts. Fragmentation, collage, experiment, integrated use of other arts was seen to take its place in the theatre. The crossover of painters and sculptors into the theatre occurred in the late fifties and sixties and plays were staged in art galleries. But by the mid-seventies, due to a changed mood in America, Post-Watergate and Post-Vietnam quiet and conservatism, there was the slow decline of the theatre. The Open Theatre had closed and the Living Theatre began to break up into splinter groups.

From an emphasis on public, political and ritual art there began to grow an emphasis on performance ensembles - communities of actors playing their trade without heed to politics. Though the artists worked productively, the sense of a fomenting experimentalism diminished. Although aesthetic reasons were the cause of this fall, Bigsby identified this problem as social. He claimed, "The theatre was no longer felt to be at the centre of cultural life as for a time it had seemed to be" (Herman 9).
The theatrical diminution of the mid-seventies, which carried over to the early eighties, seemed rather a result of a profound shift in cultural and technological habit – the new cross-generational allegiances to electronics, to recorded music, film, television, cable and VCR.

Jefferson the politician, Emerson the philosopher, and Whitman the poet revealed different insights into the undefinable and mythical American dream. Jean de Creve Coeur in the eighteenth Century to Walter Lippman of twentieth century had examined and analysed, what it meant to be an American and who Americans were. Historians, novelists, poets and commentators depicted the events of the land and attributes of people related to the American dream. Through the perspective of the American dream, the American past and present can be understood. The search for individual values, realization of self potentialities, self reliance, individuality and sense of personal identity in society was the realization of the American dream. J.T. Adams wrote, "The American dream was not a logical concept of thought. Like every great thought that has stirred and advanced humanity, it has a religious emotion, a great act of faith, a courageous leap into the dark unknown" (Harrison 10). Sam Shepard envisioned the American Society as having lost its promise, independence, opportunity and close ties to the land. The modern age had become, according to him, a chaotic world in which individuality, freedom and identity were a question for man. William Faulkner defined the American dream as "a Sanctuary on the earth for individual man: a condition in which he could be free not only of the old established closed-corporation hierarchies of arbitrary power which has oppressed him … held him individually thrilled and individually impotent" (Harrison 186).
The beginning of the American literary consciousness could have been only the feeble echoes of the European models. Then America has become a land of imagination that sends its signals to the spirit of man to understand its originality. As Garff B. Wilson says, "As a whole, American society was remarkably homogenous. One could travel 3000 miles east and west and fifteen hundred miles north and south and see the same flag, hear the same language, and observe the same culture"(Wilson 188) "Americans enjoy the highest standard of living, and it costs more to live in America than in any country of the world: 'the cost is not only in dollars and cents', novelist Henry Miller says, but in sweat and blood, in frustration, ennui, broken homes, smashed ideals, illness and insanity" (Chaudhuri 97).

Warner has observed that the disorder of American life between the civil war and World War I was due to some factors like,

… the rise of the industrial city and the mass society, the accelerating material complication and the impersonality of civil life; the cycles of financial and depression and of labour unrest, coinciding with what was understood by contemporaries as the closing of the frontier and the filling out of the national domain; the continual displacement of population from country to city and suburb and from region to region. East or West or South to North; the steady flooding in of immigrants without experience of the older Anglo American traditions of culture and polity, their own traditions being wrenched and eroded in the process, the prolonged national advance in wealth and population; the corresponding redistribution of political power and authority; and above all ruthlessly
disruptive incursions of capitalist enterprise, competitive and unrestricted, upon the organism of society and upon the continuities of social behaviour and expectation. (Warner 11-12)

There was no denying of the material success of the emerging condition of industrial society. Some writers expressed the darker way of modern city life and the crushing pressure on individuals. American civilization is only recently coming to conscious awareness of art not as a luxury but as a necessity of life.

In Henry Brandon's opinion

The American play is pre-eminently active, relatively unreflective as such. It deals with nothing it cannot act out. It rarely comments on itself; like the people, it always pretends it does not know what it is doing. It must be something rather than be about something. But when a play does both at once it is most highly prized. It is a hard school to go to, but in my opinion the best one of the present time. (Brandon 57)

After the world war, attempts were made to create a modern drama that reflected the life of the people at the moment. Authors at times found heroes for their works among America's wealthy industrialists, sometimes middle class families. The great events and the radical intellectual and cultural currents of the fifties and sixties combined to change things in American theatre.

In the sixties the New York theatre scene consisted of three levels. There was Broadway, the centre of Commercial Theatre, Off-Broadway, which presented some new
works as well as revivals of classics not economically viable on Broadway, such as those by Ibsen and Strindberg and Off-Off Broadway (OOB), which presented some new works as well as revivals of classics not economically viable on Broadway, devoted to experimental works and often housed in bars or lofts in Greenwich village and on Manhattan's Lower East side, with little or no admission charged. The most celebrated OOB groups, in addition to Theatre Genesis, were the Caffe Cino Le Mama Experimental Theatre Company, the Open Theatre and the Judson Poet's Theatre.

Sam Shepard is considered by many critics to be the most important playwright in the Off-Broadway theatre movement. His unique blend of styles using mythical American heroes, rock and roll music, poetically unconventional language and his ability to create vivid dream-like images set Shepard apart from more traditional American playwrights. No other American playwright has won more than two Obie awards, while Shepard has collected eleven.

Shepard debuted at Theatre Genesis on October 16, 1964 with the double bill *Cow Boys* and *Rock Garden*. In 1956, he presented *Up to Thursday* and *4 H Club* at Theatre 65, *Dog and Rocking Chair* and *La Mama, Chicago* at Genesis and *Icarus's Mother* at the Cino. In 1996, he received the first of several grants, this one from the University Minnesota and presented *Fourteen Hundred Thousand* at the Fire House Theatre in Minneapolis; that same year *Red Cross* was given at the Judson.

Shepard continued to demonstrate his multi-dimensional talents during the 1990s. *States of Shock* was produced in 1991 and *Curse of the Starving Class* in 1997. The signature Theatre in New York City devoted a whole season (1996-97) to plays by Shepard.
He was awarded the American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Drama in 1992. In 2000 a revised version of Shepard's play *True West* was nominated for Tony Award for Best Play. That same year, his stage work, *The Late Henry Moss*, debuted at San Francisco's Magic Theatre. He also appeared as actor in such films as *Hamlet* (1990), *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999), *All the Pretty Houses* (2000) and *The Pledge* (2001) and in *TV Production as Purgatory* (1999), *Dash and Lilly* (1999) and *Shot in the Heart* (2001).

Shepard spoke about the vanished frontier in his plays. The frontier was an important factor to Shepard. In the American imagination the frontier was the sacramental land, free, pre-civilized space where man was free from legal and domestic restraints as long as he obeyed its rules. Shepard projected the dramatic illusion of vastness, a sense of space and dream vision in his plays. He was the playwright of the countryside which lurked on the edges of wilderness and the desert. Importance was given to the landscape – the cosmos, the nation and the self with others. The cosmic landscape was a historical, archetypal and often spiritual. It gave an overview of the global, national and personal behaviour. The national landscape was historical, mythic, secular and a surrealistic vision of America – The landscapes of the self was temporal because the self usually grouped for its existential identity through the reconstruction of American mythology in media. These landscapes shared the common territory, the frontier. "The frontiers of territory became the frontiers of mind" (Orr 109).

Turner's thesis defined the western frontier as the single major influence on American culture. All subsequent ideas on the west were derived from this thesis. It was not the European origin that influenced the national history and American character but
centuries of westward movement that characterized the thrust of American history and culture. Turner believed:

… to the frontier, the American intellect owes its striking characteristics, the coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, the practical inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients masterful grasp of material things, lacking in artistic but power to effect great ends, that restless, nervous energy, the dominant individualism, working for good and evil and with that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom – these are traits of frontier or the existence of the frontier.

(Turner 37)

The frontier was a symbolic place of retreat for the unrestricted imagination in search of new forms and directions of personal, national, cosmic aspirations. The frontier, to Shepard, symbolized those open spaces where law, order and social restrictions had never invaded and primitive longing for individual power gained release. It also represented conquest, the settling of territory by means of violence and an alien environment where outlaw cowboys staked out the land and claimed their victim. The transformation in social structure and deterioration of individual character lay in the absence of geographical location. The freedom of the mind which the open space had encouraged and the sense of mobility which man had enjoyed in the presence of an ever-moving frontier were closed, as geographical space, which trapped and confined man, who sought refuge in many aggressive activities.
All these developments in the face of a vanishing west led the Americans to a
desperate search for the return to the west, to a revitalization of the western spirit and a
longing for these myths, images and symbols. Shepard's attachment to the west made him
experiment with the western themes against the failure of the Americans to find their
roots and self-images in a traumatic, contemporary world. America fell into a social and
psychological crisis, into a void. Shepard recognized the hollowness in the surrounding
culture from which came the impetus to write in a very renewed way and this started off
his career as a playwright. The tension between an American wilderness and the new
industrial civilization struck a responsive chord in Shepard. It was in the late fifties and
early sixties that he began his career and established himself as one of the best American
playwrights. Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson began with Off Off - Broadway during
which Shepard discovered his strength. He had learned a good deal from those who had
gone before him – Beckett, Brecht, Albee, Brook and Chaikin. The clearest theatrical
influence on him was Joseph Chaikin, actor, director and founder of the Open Theatre.
The two playwrights who had a direct impact on his work were Beckett and Handke.
Brecht's influence on Shepard was apparent in the late sixties and early seventies.
Shepard had read the classics; he spoke about Marlowe, Sophocles, Shakespeare,
Strindberg and appreciated them. He always thought O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into
Night* as truly a great American play and was influenced by him. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting
for Godot* (1953) turned Shepard towards drama. He was intrigued by its rhythmic
language and his earliest plays were heavily derivative of Beckett's style.

Repertory acting with the Bishop's company led Shepard to Manhattan, where he
brushed tables and wandered as a cowboy about the city. He started writing in his late
teens with little experience of the theatre. Before establishing himself as a playwright, he wrote song lyrics, brief vignettes and short plays. Working as a waiter at the Village Gate, a night club, he met Ralph Cook, then the head-waiter and thereafter Artist Director of Theatre Genesis. Shepard worked with him. Ralph Cook encouraged him to write a play and the result was two one act plays, *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden*, the first production of Theatre Genesis. It opened on October 10, 1964, one month before Shepard's twentieth birthday. When these two plays were favourably reviewed by Michael Smith of the *Village Voice*, Shepard's career was launched.

Shepard came to New York with the intention of becoming an actor. He became a successful playwright but not a successful actor though he had acted in few movies. Lester of the *New York Times* named Shepard "the acknowledged genius of the Off Off - Broadway Circuit" (Kolin 387). Most of his early plays dealt with rock and roll music, Hollywood stars, political theme, myth, alienation and family theme. The major trend in American society was the constant and vigorous reappraisal of old world values and the counter trend was the assertion of those values. By the sixties the failure of these values exploded the myth of civilization and the stable society. Both the new and the old worlds embarked on a search for their own authentic values. One of their major codes of identity was music, particularly rock music. Shepard was addicted to heroin. Amphetamines and rock music grew into personal and artistic obsessions for Shepard in the mid sixties. His work was characterized by a willingness to submit to images provoked by drugs or illness and he resisted to reshape or subordinate these images to rational structuring.

Shepard wrote more than fifty plays, including one-act plays, monologues such as *Killer's Head* (1975) and word-music-gesture collaborations like *Tongues* (1981) and
Savage/Love (1981), a theatrical performance both written with actor and director Chaikin. Shepard produced Hawk Moon: A Book of Short Stories, Poems and Monologues (1973). His first play Cowboys was rewritten and published as Cowboys #2 in 1971. He won the Obie award for eleven plays written by him. He produced forty-two plays in just over half the number of years. According to Esslin "he is contemporary American theatre" (Kolin 387). Shepard's earliest plays were spontaneous outpourings; the plays were uneven and inconsistent with radical shifts of character, tone and even dramatic mode. Some of the plays were so personal that they required biographical footnotes, for example The Holy Ghostly (1969) in which the son rejects and kills his father, is filled with details of characters based on Shepard and his father.

The play, Cowboys #2 portrayed young men in the contemporary city and The Rock Garden dramatized mutual incomprehension within a family. One repeated theme in the plays was the need of the individuals to be recognized in a world that gave him no particular identity to start with. In such plays as Cowboys, Melodrama Play (1967), The Unseen Hand (1969) and Action (1974), characters repeatedly experiment with alternative identities and behaviour, trying to find something that would be real to them. Icarus's Mother (1965) is a play of self destructive energy and desire to escape the fragmentation of the material world. Chicago (1965) is a play of vivid stage imagery, a fantasy-comedy about a young man in a bathtub pretending to be at the beach. Shepard describes this fantasy to block out the reality. Red Cross (1966) is an interesting play that provides a good introduction to Shepard's work. The second group of plays, La Turista (1967) was written by Shepard in Mexico under the influence of amphetamines. Forensic and the Navigators (1967) is a blend of pop music and crime that portrays the...
contemporary world. In his view, alienation from the spiritual goes hand in hand with alienation from the past. He also believed that the culture which is dissociated from its past is in great danger. In *Fourteen Hundred Thousand* (1966), Shepard portrays the emptiness due to the replacement of villages by dehumanizing cities. *La Turista* is an obscene parody of human beings who are compared to Frankenstein’s monster. These plays also won the Obie award for him. Though he was a celebrated playwright during his time, Shepard did not abandon acting in movies.

By 1970, Shepard was widely regarded as the leading Avant-Garde playwright of his generation. In *Operation Sidewinder* (1970) Shepard depicts almost every facet of American society – the military and the counter-culture, black revolutionaries and the white middle class uprooted because of materialism and alienated from spiritual values. Shepard cancelled the premiere of *Operation Sidewinder* at Yale when a group of a drama school students, protested his portrayal of black revolutionaries. The play was about a kind of escape from the changes in life. In 1970, Shepard took his wife, O-Lan Johnson and his child Jesse Mojo, to England, where he hoped to join another band. Living on slim royalties and the remainder of his grant funds, Shepard produced his break through play, *The Tooth of Crime* (1972). The title was taken from a sonnet by Mallarme, read to Shepard by Patti Smith. The play shares a view of the world similar to Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* or Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1969). The play was first produced at the open space in London under Charles Marowitz's direction. During 1974, Shepard and his family ended their three year residency in England and moved to Marine Country, north of San Francisco, where he wrote *Action* and chose Nancy Meckler to direct the play. It was the first time a woman
was directing a play. He returned to America in 1974 and became associated with San Francisco's Magic Theatre. In the years following the seventies, Shepard gradually abandoned the collage-like style of his early plays for a more consistent domestic realism in which bizarre events take place but the dramatic modes or reality does not change. *Angel City* (1976), *Suicide in B Flat* (1976) and *Seduced* (1979), are a criticism of the different aspects of American culture.

Shepard received an Obie in 1977 for *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), which is more of an autobiographical play. It is the first play in which Shepard's mature style is seen. Shepard's mythic preoccupation was high at this time and the play was quickly recognized as an exploration of the myth of the family. Shepard had switched from the themes of rock-n-roll, the psyche of the artist in chaos of booming Hollywood, myth and father-son relationship to wholly personal and family themes. The play offers a metaphor for the human condition through the representative power of realism, the same method used by Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill and the mainstream of American Drama.

Shepard's greatest play, *Buried Child* (1978) offers a powerful dramatic metaphor for both the corruption of the American spirit and the hope for its salvation. *Buried Child* and *True West* (1980) are realistic in setting, straight forward in plot and coherent in character. These plays are called American gothic and are an attempt at Greek tragedy. Shepard himself called them a family trilogy. Shepard won a Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child* and even had to face severe criticism. Most of the critics saw him obsessed by father-son conflicts, quest to return home and escape from American materialism into an interior life. In the course of his career, Shepard collaborated with Joseph Chaikin on *Tongues*, a piece for voice and percussion, which they performed together at the Magic
Theatre. Shepard attempted another play *Fool For Love* (1983), a theatrical study of inescapable and uncontrollable human passions. Watt considered this play to be Shepard's "Purest and most beautiful play" (Kolin 400).

Shepard was at the height of his career but his married life with O-Lan, was collapsing because in his career as a movie star, he was involved in an affair with the actress Jessica Lange with whom he co-produced and co-starred in films. Finally Shepard divorced O-Lan in 1984. Shepard's contact with actresses like Betsy Scott and his relationship with Jessica Lange had an impact on his work. This resulted in another play, *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), his most complex play which deals with the context of the American nuclear family psychology. The play has an almost O'Neill-like theme. It deals with the superiority of fantasy over realism as a means of coping with life. Shepard's plays had always portrayed women in a negative role. He had shown women battered and subdued by patriarchy. Shepard's work coincided with one of the most exciting periods of the Feminist movement. The Feminist movement brought significant changes in the roles, perception and representation of women. The freedom to control their reproductive rights gave the American women the courage to pursue political, economic and social advances. But in Shepard's plays, women are represented as stereotypes. Florence Falk states: "in plays of Sam Shepard the Cowboy is the reigning male; consequently, any female is, perforce, marginalized" (Falk 182). Shepard remained controversial and provocative as a playwright.

Shepard was obsessed by the American culture. Auerbach noted that his subject was America, "the American land which has become unproductive, sterile and the American family that no longer nurtures its children" (Auerbach 7). Shepard had real
love for the popular myths of American culture and nostalgia for the lost age of innocence. Shepard strove to portray the America he saw around him. His immense success in this sphere is what has made Shepard one of the greatest playwrights of the twentieth century.

Sam Shepard's characters from the 1960s come across as maladjusted refugees from the society they find insufferably paradoxical (Hoffman 17). Many of his plays are expressionistic in nature. As a playwright who has expressed his anxiety of his times, he cannot but apply this technique because it is a successful style that "is indicative of a stressful, anxious psyche, a sensibility fearful of its contacts with reality" and "The accent on anxiety and on crystalline form as being typically the motive force and creative manner of Expressionist work does touch upon certain truths" (Cardinal 92-93). Shepard's plays are a kind of spurts of energy at emotional level and this is one of the reasons why they seem indigestible to human reason. His "early plays took the form of action, paintings with an Expressionistic apocalyptic roughness…" (Coe 58). And sometimes an Expressionist feels it compulsory "to express himself in terms of malaise, neurosis, nihilism" (Cardinal 42). Shepard has made use of all these elements in his plays. He makes clear his attitude towards playwriting and plays in an interview.

Because it seems to me theatre contains all the other arts. You can put anything in that space – painting, film, dance music, it can all be contained. Whereas in other arts everything is narrowed down, a spatial art like theatre is unlimited – there is every possibility (Oppenheim 81).
Thus he becomes an expressionist in his technique, as he has been labeled as absurdist and post-absurdist by his critics. Anyway, he "has real playwright's gift of transposing his feelings and visions into drama as a mere matter of praxis" (Feingold 72).

The author of over fifty plays, the winner of eleven Obie awards, a Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child*, a New York Drama, Critics Circle award for *A Lie of the Mind*, a Golden Palm award for his screen play *Paris, Texas* and an Academy Award nomination for best actor in the Right stuff, Shepard has cut a wide swath in American arts and letters since the 1960s, creating a highly eclectic – and critically acclaimed – body of work. The Shepard oeuvre ranges from the experimental and surreal one – act plays of his Off-Off Broadway days to the more realistic two – and three – act ‘dysfunctional family’ dramas of his middle period, and on into the new millennia with further contributions to the stage, such as *The Late Henry Moss*.

Shepard is considered the pre-eminent literary playwright of his generation, the most important American dramatist since Edward Albee. He has also directed plays of his authorship, played drums and guitar in rock bands and jazz ensembles, and acted in major feature films. His movie appearances include leading roles in *The Right Stuff* and *Country*, and he has contributed to the world of literature with the short story collections *Cruising Paradise: Tales and Great Dream of Heaven: Stories*. However such pursuits are a sideline for the man News week's Jack Kroll called the "poet laureate of America's emotional Badlands" (Kroll 90). Despite his success in Hollywood, Shepard is primarily a playwright whose dramas explore mythic images of modern America in the nation's own eccentric vernacular. Shepard has consistently stressed artistic integrity rather than marketability. As a result, Shepard plays have overturned theatrical conventions and
created a new kind of drama filled with violence, lyricism and an intensely American compound of comic and tragic power. It was in the 1990s that revivals of his earlier plays finally landed the auspicious and more lucrative Broadway venue.

Shepard's modern cowboys, drifters, farmers, and other offspring of the frontier era yearn for a purer past that may never have existed as they quarrel with family members. Journal of Popular Culture contributor George Stumbolian (86) maintained that, like many of his fellow playwrights, Shepard "knows that the old frontier myths of America's youth are no longer a valid expression of our modern anxieties, even though they continue to influence our thoughts”. Shepard seeks a new mythology that will encompass all the diverse figures of American cultural history together with the psychological and social conditions they represent.

Shepard seeks a new mythology that will encompass all the diverse figures of American cultural history together with the psychological and social conditions they represent. His plays achieve their appeal by concentrating on contemporary characters that re-enact this continuing American theme in setting fraught with images drawn from frontier gothic. He dramatizes a world caught between the past and the future. America's violent frontier lies in the back of his characters' minds beckoning them back and keeping them from entering the future.

In 1976, Shepard turned his vision towards family and wrote *The Curse of the Starving Class*, one of the biggest tragedies about the country America which was moving from an agricultural society to an urban, industrial society. He has said that the break-up of the family is not particularly American; it is all over the world. As he was
born in America, it comes out as the American family. He thought for many a years that it is boring, uninteresting to write about the family. But the interesting thing, felt Shepard, about taking real blood relationship is that the more one starts to investigate those things as external characters, the more one sees they are also internal characters. Mythology has to come out of real life.

Towards the latter part of the seventies, Shepard turned his attention from experimental writing to family realism. When asked about the change of direction in an interview with Jennifer Allen, he said,

I'd been writing for ten years in an experimental maze-poking around, fishing in the dark. I wasn't going anywhere – I felt I needed an aim in the work versus just the instinctive stuff, which is very easy for me to do. I started with character, in all its complexities. As I got more and more into it, it led me to the family. I always did feel a part of that tradition but hated it. I could not stand those plump that were all about the 'turmoil' of the family. And then all of a sudden I realized, well that was very much a part of my life, and may be that had to do with being a playwright, that you are somehow shared beyond yourself.(Allen 59)

The theme of the past, present and the future represented by the East – West encounter continues to be the dominant theme of Sam Shepard's plays. For example in The Curse of the Starving Class, the inextricable relationship between ‘Curse and Starvation’, joining the past with the present provides an apt metaphor for this process.
When one looks for the origin of these metaphors, one finds it in the psychology of man in his West Land expansion.

*The Curse of the Starving Class* is the first play in what would become Shepard's mature style; there are no magical phenomena, sudden character transformations or mixtures of reality and myth, just a family in their home, experiencing the events of a two-day period. Granted, family, home and events are all unusual, but they are not impossible, and when the play offers a metaphor for the human condition, it is through the representative power of realism, the same method used by Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill and the main stream of American drama.

Shepard's Pulitzer Prize winning *Buried Child* is a seven character play that probes family dynamics in the American tradition of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, but Shepard does it in an utterly original style and with a modernist twist that reinvents and reinvigorates the form.

*Buried Child* takes place on an Illinois farm … American heart land. Before it is over, it has migrated in tone closer to the emotional state of Appalachian West Virginia, not so far away geographically but a world away sociologically. It is a very dark vision, indeed, but Shepard then clothes this bleak portrait in a unique combination of genuinely funny comic dialogue, puzzling and unresolved contradictions and an atmosphere charged with foreboding menace and the threat of violence. Drawing out these seemingly contradictory tones and keeping them in the right balance to knit the whole together on stage requires finely tuned acting and direction and Shepard has proved his uncanny talent. Shepard focuses on the complex consequences of incestuous relationship. As the
Curse remains the focal point in *The Curse of the Starving Class*, in *Buried Child*, the image of the *Buried Child* remains pivotal to the play. Like *The Curse of the Starving Class, Buried Child* exhibits compelling motifs of decline. *Buried Child* stands as a landmark work in the writer's career, earning Shepard his Union card as a Great American Playwright – the Pulitzer Prize.

With *Buried Child*, Shepard creates a contemporary American ‘home coming’, another ‘long day's journey into night’. As in O'Neill's plays, in Shepard play a family secret is explored and finally exposed. And as in both O'Neill's and Pinter's plays a woman disrupts the familial equilibrium. While Shepard is very concerned with the question of male violence in *Buried Child*, he also explores the nature of paternity. In the end, *Buried Child* demonstrates that the law of the father is oppressive and that the family it creates is dysfunctional and violent.

*Buried Child* is often described, together with *The Curse of the Starving Class* and *True West*, as belonging to Shepard's ‘realistic family plays’. This critical simplification fails to take into account the play's underlying symbolism. The misfortunes of Shepard's mid-western family proclaim the demise as well as the endurance of the American Dream, which entailed both independence of mind and action and, what is usually forgotten, an organic bond with nature.

Shepard's ironic mode provides the key to the deeper meaning of *Buried Child*. The family depicted represents a private, closed, highly individualistic universe that exists beyond the conventions of the society (Marranca 109). Shepard penetrates into another world, a world behind the form. The surreal mystery gradually emanates from the
unknown and gets suffused without causing a break. For this reason, Thomas Nash may justly call Shepard's mode ‘ironic’ (486). In Northrop Frye's words, it "begins in realism and dispassionate observation" and moves steadily towards myth (42). Critics feel that Shepard strikes a "balance between naturalistic detail and the wilder, more secret landscapes of being … between the banal and the strange … He makes us believe in the unexpected because he conjures it out of very ordinary things" (Richardson ii).

Shepard is more conventional and realistic in *True West*. The focus is on the traditional confrontation in the family leading to open conflict between the brothers. Shepard's obsession with the West drives him to direct confrontation between civilization and slavery; the East and the West; the complacent cocooned, self-centred money oriented Eastern intellectual and the rugged irrational, independent, self-respecting and anti-intellectual of the West. In his essay, ‘The Frontier Myth’ on stage from the nineteenth century to Sam Shepard's *True West*, Richard Walterberg notes “*True West*, as its name implies, represents Shepard's most direct attempt to deal with the incompatibility of so called old Western ideals with new technological and bureaucratic values”(Turner 233). While Turner's thesis of the frontier furnishing the forces dominating American character and provides the ground for the nineteenth century Western play viable for Shepard's time. He says, "Shepard … rejects all hope for a successful marriage of civilization and savagery and concentrates on the vicious self-destructiveness of the off spring" (Turner 233).

In Shepard's next play, *Fool For Love*, the father becomes the focus of attention as a powerful attempt is made to expel him from the lives of the characters. In this play Shepard returns to the use of an obvious anti-illusionistic device. Not only does the father
disturb the harmony of his progenies' lives, but he also represents a threat to the play's dramatic illusion as he sits in his rocking chair swigging Jim Beam outside the frame of the proscenium. The father in *Fool For Love* is in the incarnation of the old man in *True West* whom we never see. As an interesting digression, he is also an almost exact likeness of Shepard's real father. Further similarities between the playwright's dramatic fathers and his actual father are borne out of this excerpt from Motel Chronicles:

> My Dad has a collection of cigarette butts in a Yuban Coffee can. I bought him a carton of Old Golds but he wouldn't touch them. He sheered at my carton of cigarettes, all red and white and ready-rolled. He spent all the food money I'd give him on Bourbon. Filled the ice box with bottles. Had his hair cut short like a WW II fighter pilot. He gleamed every time he ran his hand across the bristles, said they used to cut it short like that so their helmets would fit it. Showed me how the Sharpnel scars still showed on the nape of his neck … My Dad lives alone on the desert. He says he doesn't fit with people. (Shepard 55-56).

Written during this time of personal crisis, *Fool For Love* exhibits Shepard's preoccupation with the male ego and its compulsions. The play also exhibits interest in the woman's perspective. Declaring his desire to take this leap into a female character, the playwright self-consciously tried to explore the male – female relationship in a more balanced manner.
Set in the worn confines of a south western roadside motel, *Fool For Love* depicts a volcanic encounter between Eddie and May, long time lovers who share not only a scarred and tumultuous past but a common biological father. Eddie travels across the country – 2480 miles, he reports – and attempts once again to reclaim his half sister/lover. The Old Man, father of the two, watches the encounter from an imaginative space adjoining the motel room; the text tells us he exists only in the minds of the characters, yet he frequently converses with his children and at times participates in the dramatic action.

It could also be observed that *Fool For Love* exhibits extremely volatile emotions and a physicality unsurpassed by any of the author's other plays. The text disallows intermissions and indicates that the piece is to be performed relentlessly. Eddie and May physically abuse each other on numerous occasions. It is revealing that this play that includes ‘love’ in its title should be so devoid of tenderness. *Fool For Love* is a drama of bondage and escape, expressing Shepard's ambivalent feelings toward the female position, and more often than not, the interaction between the play's couple has to do with affection than libidinal gamemanship.

Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* makes a summary of what he experimented with his other family plays. Love, violence, incest, repressive, ruthlessness, loneliness, disintegration of the family and exploitation are some of the themes that he takes up here too. Linda Hart rightly observes, "His point is as clear as it was in the quartet of family plays that precedes *A Lie of the Mind*, the cause of the psychological disease passes from parents to children; the family's buried secrets eventually surface to demand confrontation; the truth of our experience collides with the lies of our mind"(Hart 106).
The level of domestic violence in Sam Shepard's, *A Lie of the Mind* is off the Richter scale with several explosions and constant rumbling throughout. *A Lie of the Mind* is an unsettling dissection of family loves and loyalties and their bitter cousins – suspicion, resentment, betrayal and more than a hint of deep-seated hatred. In Shepard's harsh world, parents disappoint and dissemble and siblings prod each other in all the most painful places. In *A Lie of the Mind*, the people are imprisoned by their pasts and their families; the way people in their separate prisons can talk back and forth, with virtually no understanding the way, the history and the present state of the American West shapes lives and determines decisions, the fragility of love and the warm oppression of family. In a fragmented, counter-pointed pair of narratives, we witness the consequences of what we have come to call 'domestic violence’. Jake in a fit of rage has beaten Beth until they both think she's dead; both of them spend the play in mental ruins, she dealing with ‘brain damage’, he dealing with what seems a history of perhaps histrionic instability and rage. Each is enveloped in, trapped in, nourished by a weirdly dysfunctional family.

Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* restlessly roams around the human condition, mapping out ways in which people function in families, romantic relationships and in the world. It is essentially a love story, the two lovers both having to work around the lies their minds tell them. Beth because of the brain damage inflicted on her by the man she loves, Jake because of what he has done to the woman he adores. Beth is an astonishing embodiment of a woman struggling through terror, pain and emotional scar tissue. The parents in *A Lie of the Mind* are no exception to the parents in Shepard's family plays. It is a study of loneliness and desperation as well as the painful ways in which people inflict each other. Beth and Jake both have brothers who try to act as voices of reason.
Both have mothers who take them back home without any curiosity about the horror that brought them there.

Of all the Shepard's characters, Beth and Jake in *A Lie of the Mind* are the most profoundly shattered victims of gender-conflict and nuclear family psychology. In this play Shepard expands his cast of characters to include two families as he continues to explore all facets of the domestic battles he has been staging for the past decade. As *A Lie of the Mind* opens, Jake chokes out a crazed confession of murdering his wife, Beth to Frankie who listens with mounting horror. Jake and Frankie resemble the split-self brothers as Lee and Austin in *True West*, the former filled with brutal anger and violence, the latter open to sensitive discussion and reasoned compromise; Jake is a close cousin to Eddie in *Fool For Love*. Minus the cowboy gear, Jake resembles Shepard's former protagonist in his dented capacity for love. Together with Shepard's screenplay hero Travis in *Paris, Texas*, Jake and Eddie form a threesome of heroes who cannot separate love from possessive desire. In *A Lie of the Mind*, Shepard concentrates on the causes and effects of domestic violence. The immediate result of Jake's unchecked assault on his wife is presented with shocking effect in the second scene as the play shifts to Beth's hospital room where she struggles to comprehend what has happened to her. Left for dead by Jake, Beth was rescued by her brother, Mike, who found her badly brain-damaged, her speech seriously inhibited, her motor skills badly impaired, and her thought processes confused and dramatically limited.

In *The Late Henry Moss*, unveiled in 2000, the title character is once again the dear old destructive Dad, a seedy, hard drinking figure who has shown up in many of Shepard's plays both in the unwashed flesh i.e. *Buried Child* and *Fool For Love* and as
the Son – Warping center of memorably spun anecdotes in *True West*. As the title indicates Henry Moss, dipsomaniac dad is a corpse and revives in flash backs which re-enact the events leading up to his puzzling demise. Recalling the ferocious male-sibling spat in *True West*, the play focuses on Henry's two sons who are reunited by his death after seven years of estrangement.

**The Late Henry Moss** is the final battle in the mythic father-and-son war that Shepard has been writing and rewriting his entire life. The authoritarian and abusive father who is frequently alluded to but rarely seen in Shepard's plays takes center stage in the play and he is dead. The old man's death forces the reunion of his two estranged sons, who proceed to battle it out-ostensibly over the circumstances of their father's death, but really about the love-hate relationship that kept the three of them at one another's throats when he was alive and kicking. While the ‘true’ Henry Moss is not much prettier than the tyrant who exists in his son's minds, he has a terrific story to tell about being cursed to live out his last days as a living dead man as punishment for the abuse he inflicted on his wife and children.

Henry: That's not what I wanna be known for – Breathing and yelling!

What the hell is that! I've got lots of qualities besides breathing and yelling so … (LHM 48).

The connection between the Moss brothers and other Shepard siblings and assorted relatives and acquaintances are branches of different family trees.

Ray, the suspicious young brother worries like a ferret at clues that there may have been a climatic encounter between the father and Earl the older sibling whose more
laid-back approach marks desperate denial. Their clashing accounts of family history
constitute a violent battle for possession of the past and by extension sway over the
present. Henry may be dead but in spiritual terms, he died while still breathing. He, an
alcoholic, left his family behind long before, watched by a scared Earl, after beating up
his wife. A vicious streak runs in the male line of this booze – fuelled family and nobody
is safe.

As in a number of Shepard's earlier works, *The Late Henry Moss* portrays a
reunion of two estranged brothers haunted by an absent father and an unresolved
common history of domestic violence and familial betrayal. Here, however, the absent
father is physically present at the centre of the play's world instead of being evoked
through exposition or subtext. Shepard's play of the dead father's emphatic presence and
the nuances of the brothers' relationship to each other, complements as well as echoes the
playwright's earlier works.

*The Late Henry Moss*, concerns more than two brothers and a father engaged in a
fateful and fatal reunion. This is a play in which the errant Mosses debate notions of
honor, duty, and responsibility, ideas for years banished to the margins of their
impoverished social world as they struggled with various ‘tokens of guilt’. Like those in
*Curse of the starving Class, Buried Child*, and *A Lie of the Mind*, the family members
of *The Late Henry Moss* experience the pressures of a dimly perceived scourge. The
buried truths of the past, repressed through years of denial and subterfuge, are sources of
disconnection in the family. No wonder the father claims that he does not even recognize
one of his sons. Love is absent in *The Late Henry Moss*. Isolation is the norm. Denial
becomes both a source of comfort and anguish. A willed ignorance stabilizes this family.
The ‘curse’ must be passed on, especially as seen in Earl, who has in effect become his father much as when Nolte, playing the son of an alcoholic, became, like his father, a drunken misanthrope in the film *Affliction* (1999).

Family situation is the crucial subject of American drama. In American plays family life embodies an important dilemma, one which reflects the strains of a changing family structure. By viewing how the family is portrayed in American Drama, one can discover a habit of mind, a pattern of values and ideology, which has larger implications. The image of family life then may be a revealing point at which social history and literature intersect.

The history of America coincides with the emergence of the modern family system. William J. Goode has described the emergence of modern family life in the following way:

> Wherever the economic system expands through industrialization, family patterns change. Extended kinship ties weaken, lineage patterns dissolve, and a trend toward some form of the conjugal system generally begins to appear – that is, the nuclear family becomes a more independent kinship unit. (Goode 6)

The independence of the nuclear family system both emphasizes family life and leaves it vulnerable to many sorts of strains. This is true in a culture as distrustful of institutions and hierarchies as America has been. The isolation of the nuclear family and the corresponding intensity of family feeling has made the family a source of great hope and of great disappointment.
Americans demand much of the family, making it the focus of their dreams of harmony and the chief obstacle to their realization, the nightmare to be escaped. Their thoughts and dreams are ambiguous. Their attitudes towards family life cluster around contending family ideals. They are at war with and dependent on these ideals. They strive for freedom and are appalled by loneliness. They reject family structure and yearn for its security. These conflicting images which their culture presents are shown in a variety of forms. Especially in drama, they re-enact their anxieties about family life.

American drama in the twentieth century has been strikingly pre-occupied with problems of family life. The most characteristic moments are realistic scenes of family strife and squabble and bliss wherein conflicting themes of freedom and security recur and are expressed as dilemmas of family relations and personal psychology. The degree to which the American playwrights have taken up the subject indicates their overwhelming concern for the family. Since American Drama reached its maturity half a century ago when Eugene O'Neill first matched serious intent with accomplishment, playwrights have been zealously devoted to the problems of family life, most often rendered in a realistic style. As a result, whatever other themes and concerns one can identify, though there are many, American Drama is also in a fundamental way, domestic Drama. Best playwrights like O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Clifford Odets, Edward Albee, Loraine Hansberry, William Inge are best remembered for their family-centred plays.

In American family plays connections with an outer society are tenuous, often merely a matter of surface verisimilitude, and the impulse is toward the private life of the family. The society in which the family exists may be a trap or a constraint but it is not
simply more families or a generalized condition of life as it tends to be in an American play. The drama of family life is so crucial that the greatest act for the playwright is to make peace with it rather than to understand it. The family becomes the whole world rather than one aspect of it.

The world of American family drama shows a concern for family failure and destruction. The power of these plays comes from the intensity of this concern. There is a touch of the expose about American family plays. The audience sees what life is ‘really’ like, that is, the family battleground. Reconciliation is not often part of this reality. The most powerful impulse in American plays comes out of the dilemma of family escape and loss. Harry Levin has remarked that:

> Literature, instead of reflecting life, refracts it. Our task, in any given case, is to determine the angle of refraction. Since the angle depends on the density of the medium, it is always shifting and the task is never easy.

(Levin 552)

The imaginations of the American Playwrights are stirred by family possibilities – heroic opposition, tragic oppression or agonized longing.

What is remarkable is not only that Americans write domestic drama but that they write little else. American playwrights have flirted with expressionism – in order to intensify the emotions of family life – and more recently, with absurdism. But if accomplishment is a measure, American heart is in the realistic family play. They are not brought on the stage occasionally for the sake of realism but are the result of a vision of the family as part of a larger social fabric. The drama of family life is so crucial that the
greatest act for the playwright is to make peace with it rather than to understand it. The family becomes the whole world rather than one aspect of it. In American family plays the protagonist searches for freedom and longs for security. He may escape from the family, may triumph over its oppression, or may be destroyed by it. If he survives, he recapitulates the struggle in his own marriage or with his own children. Or, as survivor, he is left alone and anguished by the loss of family. Whatever else the play is about, it is likely to be rooted in these struggles. Experience outside the family is explained away in terms of large abstractions about life and through generalizations which assume a democratic sameness in the rest of the world, or such experience is ignored. The crucial action is that which goes on within the family.