CHAPTER II

EXPLOSIONS OF INNER TURMOILS

Man does not live by bread alone. His sustenance is ensured by harmony, trust, and security in the very ambience of the family structure. The absence of these, even in smaller proportions may drive him to loneliness, alienation, dislocation and ultimately to disintegration. All people all over the world strongly believe that home is the place for relationship that makes a well-knit family; home is the site that provides spiritual and emotional nourishment. Father is a symbol of identity and security and mother is a symbol of love and affection. Family guarantees a man to get rooted to his land, to his culture. Even a small crack that develops at any of these bondages automatically leads to fragmentation at the internal as well as the external matrix. The all-pervasive feeling of discontent nourishes the growth of hatred which is not only extended to others but ironically to the self causing great mental disturbance. This inner turmoil is bound to end up with an explosion that ruins the very basis of any purposeful structure, be it familial or societal.

Shepardian era, for various social and political reasons, experienced this drifting fragmentation and Shepard, the expressionist realist could not help shrieking in vain. His 'trilogy' as well as the other family plays mourn in groaning creaky loud voice, the disruption in familial relationships, the meaninglessness of discontinuous lives, the alienation that shatters the psyche of the people and the broken language that reflects the broken minds.
Curse of the Starving Class is a play that portrays "not just his own or even representative of all American families" (Oumano 124), but is also about American Culture. Curse of the Starving Class is the first play in the ‘family trilogy’. The concern with the family ties takes a more expanded scope in this play. The play is set during the state's postwar boom and a growing consumer economy. Shepard felt that society was drifting towards a way of life where the concept of family did not retain its meaning and was deteriorating. The family did not maintain the same old feeling of togetherness and a loving bond between its members but rather revealed the inability of its parents to defend their children. The dramatic element that remained constant in most of Shepard's early plays was the autobiographical presence of a young man haunted by unresolved ties to the family, father and personal heritage.

Shepard portrays a family that cannot nurture its children, that has become fruitless and sterile "as the betrayed American dream of the west" (King 54). He explores the disintegration and fall of the American dream with the family as a metaphor in Curse of the Starving Class. The sense of rootlessness, alienation, loss of love and freedom brings about the disintegration of the family. The play portrays an impoverished southern California ranching family on the verge of losing their home, their land and way of life.

The play is more about the individuals of the family who are not emotionally bound to each other and to the land which they want to escape from. Shepard gives importance to the wild west, the west that maintained all its agrarian values and strong ties to the land not affected by modernity. Shepard describes a family that is no longer viable. The family is not able to withstand the destructive forces crushing it from outside and disintegrates from within. The characters do not lead a satisfying life and are
deprived of all that they aim to achieve. The stage setting of the play enhances the
distorted view of the house. It has no doors, no walls and no confinement between the
inside and the outside of the house. It gives an image of violation not only within the
family but also from the outside world. So it stands as a house and not a home. The title
of the play suggests the underlying deceptiveness and the emotional barrenness which
makes the family, part of the starving class.

The relationship between man and nature from its earlier expression of a return of
man to the maternal womb of nature to its colonial implication is repeatedly echoed in
_Curse of the Starving Class_. The progress from an innocent, harmonious living in nature
to sexual violence and exploitation is Shepard's concern in the play. The male character
inherits this violence from successive generation. As he develops and turns Westward in
his inevitable march towards progress he tends to become more individualistic,
independent, exploitative and non-sociable. As a 'Victim of the civilizations course’ man
loses his human character, his capacity for love and affection, whereas woman continues
to preserve these impulses unaffected by the programme of civilization.

It is the colonial politics that shatters the land and infects the male psyche by
dissociating it from human relationship. The primal 'Curse' in _Curse of the Starving
Class_ lays in the civilizations' seductive inspirations to destroy the Edenic land of the
West. The play suggests that the 'Curse' of what man did in the past has a recurrence in
the present. It is transmitted into the psyche down the ages.

The ‘starvation’ is the subsequent result of the 'Curse'. The Americans destroyed
nature and created a wasteland in nature and themselves. The false dreams of creating an
artificial world on the debris of the natural one have its reflections in the mind. The curse of committing the crime of destruction of the virgin land results subsequently in the creation of a barren, deserted world, which has physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual implications. The games that were played on the West have their ruinous effect in American life, character and culture.

The play is staged in an American kitchen. Each character in this play has a unique role to play, engaged in his or her own thoughts in contrast to the other members of the family. The Tate family comprised of four members: The head of the family, Mr. Weston, an alcoholic, who proved to be a misfit as the head of the family, was prone to periods of abandonment. He was a very irresponsible father to Emma and Wesley; Ella his wife was a woman who survived by withdrawing into herself. Ella's character is similar to the other mother figures in *Buried Child* and *True West*. Ella lived in a state of distraction and pursued an illegitimate relationship with Taylor, her lawyer friend. She considered her husband a good-for-nothing man, capable of doing nothing. Father Weston and Mother Ella never tried to make a good home for their children to live in. Everyone in the family was concerned only about himself or herself.

*Curse of the Starving Class* opens in the wake of an act of domestic violence. Wesley, the only son of the family was cleaning the debris of the broken front door. The previous night his father had arrived home drunk and found that the door to the house was locked against him by Ella. In an intoxicated rage, Weston battered down the door with his body and then disappeared. This was the usual situation for the family encountered almost everyday. Benedict Nightingale describes the Tate family as
"less a refuge than a trap that seduces … and its roots and traditions are also its curse, an inexorable handing over of loss from one generation to the next" (Hart 73).

The picture of the broken door presents an image of chaos that the family is rooted in and it also suggests the broken relationships between husband and wife, mother and daughter, parents and children. The violent opening of the play is suggestive of destruction. Weston, as a father, violates the security of the family by trying to break into the house. He becomes a destroyer rather than a protector and is represented as an intruder into the family. Weston's action clearly depicts the lack of fatherly love and security towards his home and family that every member expects from the head of the family. In the case of Weston, there is only alienation, detachment and rootlessness, as a result he is not able to sense the damage he has done to his home as well as the family members. As Alder comments:

American dramatists – perhaps most prominently the two Millers, Arthur in almost all of his plays and Jason, in *That Champion Season* have come to associate the distortion and death of American dream with the failure of fathers, from some warped notion of masculinity to provide emotional sustenance for their families. Hung upon money, power, success, they are afraid or unable to say, let alone show, that they love. Where have all the fathers gone? Shepard shouts with all the rest (Alder 409).

The picture of the broken door presents an image of chaos that the family is rooted in and it also suggests the broken relationships.
Weston who epitomizes the Western male remains aloof, alien and detached from his family members. He thinks, "Family was not just a social thing, it was an animal thing" (CSC 186). He is deceived by the land agent, from the East, who gives him a piece of unproductive land in the desert, away from human habitation. He runs into debt and plans to sell the house to pay off the loan. On the other hand, Ella his wife, feels suffocated in an unsociable and broken family. She tries to sell the same house so that she can escape into her Eastern roots in Europe. She consults the lawyer Taylor, who had deceived Watson in his previous land – deal in the desert. The conflict between the wife and the husband, and that of the Western family and Eastern land agents, builds up the plot of *Curse of the Starving Class*.

The helplessness in overcoming the dangers of this hereditary curse which is beyond the control of man and the Government ruins this family; perhaps, inspires Ella to escape from the land that transmitted the disease. The nightmare in the male psyche that brought the land into ruin continues to exercise its power and control over women. Women in Shepard's plays as Doris Auerbach writes, "are of no help …… they are mere macho fantasies of familiar female stereotypes; castrating mothers and devouring sex goddesses, who offer no hope for transcendence" (Auerbach 8). Shepard creates his women characters as symbolic of Western images of men combined with the Women's Eastern values. When both Ella and Emma think of the male-violence as a curse in the family, the American male character like Wesley speaks about the hereditary infection in woman. Shepard's symbolic presentation of a lamp with maggots, which implies a girl's coming of age, suggests an infection carried through the periodic cycle. Wesley's remark to Emma, "you picked them (genes) up from Mom" (CSC 72), having sexual overtones,
speaks of a Western male's distrust and suspicion of a female. Ella's relationship with Taylor is not just on the land deal. Perhaps, she is sexy and a mother-turned prostitute and unfaithful to her husband. As a civilized Easterner, she has the problem of accommodating herself with the unattached, anti-intellectual figure of Weston. In her attempt to escape the West, she falls a victim to Taylor's tricks.

The ‘Curse’ seems inescapable. Ella follows the empty promises of a trickster and is cheated; Weston dreams of a new start in Mexico, but the debt collectors are close behind; Emma's fantasized life of crime is just a further commitment to capitalism – the perfect self-employment and therefore doomed. Since this is a Sam Shepard play, it is not surprising that the one faint and ultimately chimerical hope lies in the reintegration with tradition and the land. Weston explains how a return to the farm gave him back his sense of self. "Then it struck me that I actually was the owner. That somehow it was me and I was actually the one walking on my own piece of land. And that gave me a great feeling" (CSC 186). But Weston must run away again, to escape his creditors and Wesley can only remain by putting on his father's clothes and identity. "And every time I put one thing on, it seemed like a part of him was growing on me. I could feel him taking over me" (CSC 196). Losing one's identity is not a solution to the problem of achieving one's identity; and Shepard can only end the play with the story of a fight between a cat and an eagle, an unending and unwinnable struggle to the death.

The impending loss of the farm and the wreckage of the family that has in fact preceded it are symbolized not only by this confusion but by palpable theatrical objects: first, by the splintered door that opens the farm house indiscriminately to the outside world; by the loss of Emma's carefully nurtured 4-H Club demonstration chicken; by the
famished concentration of the whole family, but especially of the son Wesley, on the empty refrigerator, and the lamb's contracting a case of maggots, then being nursed back to health only to be butchered in the end by Wesley.

In contrast, the children, at the beginning of the play at least, are sober. Wesley questions his mother carefully about her hysterical response to Weston's drunken rampage of the previous night, and exposes her impulsiveness. At this point in the play, Emma is as sober as her brother. Her outraged speech on her mother's having boiled her 4-H club chicken takes place off stage – significantly, she cannot give vent to her anger on stage. The speech is a comic gem, but disguised by the comedy and Emma's tremendous volume is a sober idea of orderly growth and development, silly as it may have been to raise a chicken for the purposes Emma intended. She did, as she says, invest careful preparations over a full year only to have it destroyed in a moment by her mother's thoughtlessness.

Weston's repeated drunken forays and irresponsible spending alienated his wife Ella from him. Ella considered Weston unfit as a husband. He only increased debts for her. She had no faith in him with regard to the family property which she believed Weston would destroy. Even though Ella was aware that the man at the door was her husband, she called the cops because she was scared and believed he would kill her. Wesley felt Ella had violated the privacy of the family by calling in the police. The incident of the previous night did not have a great impact on Ella. The next morning, she entered the Kitchen to prepare breakfast and seemed very normal. She tried to justify her reason for calling in the cops and told Wesley that it was his father's responsibility to clear up the debris "You shouldn't be doing it. He's the one who broke it down" (CSC 135).
Wesley repaired the door and took up the responsibilities of his father. He tried to make some headway by fixing the door, his father had broken but he could not do anything about the family which was shattered beyond repair. The drunken outrage of his father had a great impact on Wesley. He became an open receiver sensing the space before him as "a big black world" (CSC 137).

Wesley was aware that he was vulnerable to his father's violence. He was defenseless. He described the events of the previous night to Ella as he experienced them. Wade describes Wesley's lengthy monologue as a "Whitmanian Soliloquy" (Wade 99), in which Wesley recounted lying in bed waiting for the return of his father, "I could hear the Coyotes … I could feel myself lying far below … Taking pictures of the enemy. Then I could picture my Dad driving it … feet walking towards the door. Sound of door not opening. Foot kicking door … whole body crashing. Mom screaming … Mom crying softly. Then stopping" (CSC 138). Wesley's monologue reveals the physical and emotional trauma. His father's voice and smashing of the door geared a sense of fear and antagonism that the seeds of his father's nature would germinate in him. It also presents his relationship to his father. Wesley was particularly sensitive about the family's insecurity which is evident in his monologue. His serious speech had little effect on Ella. She hardly gave importance to her son's words. Ella did not attempt to probe into the cause of her son's changing attitude. Instead she spoke to the empty space, before Emma, her daughter entered the scene. Emma was a smart, perceptive, imaginative and frank girl. Ella started advising Emma telling her that her first menstrual period was a normal physiological function and swimming may cause her to bleed to death, "I want you to know all the facts before you go off and pick up a lot of lies" (CSC 139).
Ella considered Emma's condition as a curse, the identity that was passed on in blood. The 'Curse' of the title manifests itself in different forms. The characters identify each other through the inheritance of a curse. But instead of uniting them, it in turn isolated them from each other. It was because of the curse that Ella inhibited Emma's freedom, self-definition and individuality. She defined the curse as an abstract force that invaded and surrounded all of them, "linking it to the onset of menstruation and reminding us of the burden of original sin" (Hart 71).

The curse did not keep Emma tied to the family circle: she constantly threatened to leave them, and finally did so. Emma as a young adolescent farm girl faced the same spiritual poverty. Emma had inherited her father's qualities. Weston was aware of the qualities he passed on to his daughter. He knew that "she was a fireball" (CSC 54). Emma entered the kitchen and replied to Ella's comments as though she was involved in the conversation from the beginning. Emma is represented as a spoilt child who intends to have her own way. She rarely responded to her mother. Emma enjoyed swimming and informed her mother about their neighbour's heated swimming pool. This is expressive of their class envy. Thoughts, feelings and words exist in a vacuum.

Lack of real contact and understanding is clearly brought out through Ella's relationship with her children. Emma was only engrossed in her own imaginary world and secretly dreamt of ways to escape from her family. She was absorbed in the A-4 club activities and lived like a typical Mid Western high school student. She prepared charts for a demonstration on how to cut up a fried chicken. Emma told her mother about the demonstration and asked her not to use the chicken. But Ella used the chicken and swore that she knew nothing about it. Emma, disappointed by her mother's action, shouted
furiously "... I raised the chicken from the incubator to the grave and you boiled it ... I
had to feed that chicken crushed corn ... so that you could take it and boil it" (CSC 141).
All her hard work had gone in vain due to her mother's forgetfulness. Emma's sense of
freedom and individuality was obliterated by her mother who attempted to make both
ends meet. Even Wesley who presented himself as a responsible person defied Emma's
argument saying 'Shut up out there! You should have put your name on it if you didn't
want anybody to boil it" (CSC 141).

_Curse of the Starving Class_ is based on the starvation of the Tate family. It is a
multifaceted starvation. It is a starvation for food, a starvation for an independent trouble
free life. The refrigerator is the family's fifth member. It witnesses the confusion, chaos
and vulnerability of the characters from the beginning to the end of the play. It is the
nodal point of connection between the family members which show their failure to unite.
Every alienated member of the family shares his or her feeling with the refrigerator.
Emma spoke lovingly to the refrigerator because it could neither understand nor talk back
and she blamed things on it. The fridge was seen as having the power to produce the
miracle of food.

Rootlessness cannot be overcome by escape since it is buried within the
caracters. They do not recognize themselves as part of the land that belongs to them.
Bigsby says that it is a play

about a lost lyricism, the collapse of dreams and hopes, the decay of
relationships. The family at the centre are the victims of gangsters and
confidence tricksters. They have allowed their farm to deteriorate, the
father turning to drink, the mother to the false promises of a land agent.
They are locked into a destructive cycle in which their dreams are finally
the source of their destruction. (Demestes 104)

Taylor was the first intender who brought about a division in the family. He
became one of the agents of the curse who had a share in destroying the family and their
bond with the land. Under the guise of helping Ella, he flirted with her. Taylor uprooted
Ella from her husband and also her children. He proved to be another exploiter who
wanted to replace the agricultural or rural ways of living with modernity thus destroying
the old west which destroyed the American dream, of man's ties to nature and land.
The land development business for Taylor was just an accumulation of property while for
Wesley it meant tearing himself from the past. Wesley described such force at work upon
his family as “a zombie invasion” (CSC 163) and he regarded Taylor as "the head
Zombie. He's the scout for the other Zombies … Filing through the door pretty soon"
(CSC 31). Taylor was the first Zombie to stroll unannounced into the kitchen. Strangers
like Ellis, Slater and Emerson, who were greedy men, who ruthlessly exhorted money
from Weston, walked straight into the family kitchen. Such unannounced entrance of
strangers because of the absent door represents the absence of fatherly love and security
that brings about attack and invasion from the outsiders. The lawyers and thugs in the
play represent the developers and real-estate hustlers who exploited Los Angeles post war
population boom by literally wiping out the tiny farming communities. "Post-Modern
America, with its shopping malls and fast-food chains, rapidly made the rural life – style
of Shepard's starving class family obsolete” (De Rose 94).
Weston had no idea about his wife's plans. He never remained at home and was considered just a visitor at the house. Weston entered with the same outrage of the previous night crashing over the garbage cans. He was a very big man, middle-aged in a dark overcoat. He carried a large bag full of laundry and 17 groceries. He found a live lamb inside the kitchen. He was so confused that he could not differentiate between the interior and the exterior. “In this the inside or the outside … Even with the door out it's still the inside (to the lamb). Right? (to himself)” (CSC 157). The home was left exposed by the dissolution of the family and estrangement of the parents.

The members of the Tate family searched for a physical fulfillment in a materialistic wasteland not realizing that it was hunger for spiritual nourishment that was killing them. For both Weston and Ella, the sale of the farm carried the promise of affluence, but they felt they had been cheated by the American dream and sought redress. The news of Emma's arrest evoked a variegated response from the members of the family. It did not seem to have any effect on Weston who was marooned at the table, gazing into the refrigerator, when Ella accompanied the police. The Tate family represented the remnants of the American dream. The central fact was loneliness. Each member of the family was cut off, from the other, isolated and hence lonely.

The inheritance of the curse destroys Wesley’s protective nature and he finds no release from the curse. The curse in the blood of the family members unites them biologically. Still the characters remain fragmented throughout, running from each other, isolated and disconnected and fail to link into a coherent sequence. The destructive explosiveness in the blood as Ella calls it acts as an agent uprooting the family.
"The curse controls from within and from without: it is both an internal, biological and psychological structure and an insidious invader that penetrates the family's enclosure" (Hart 71).

**Curse of the Starving Class** is realistic in setting, straightforward in plot, and coherent in character. Shepard deals with the theme of disintegration of the family through symbolic stories of the lamb, the eagle and ‘the eagle and the cat’. The eagle symbolizing manliness, power and fortitude is fed by Weston with the castrating testes of the lamb. The symbolism illustrates the historical event of the American as eagle hunting the Indian for power. But in the family ‘the eagle and cat’ episode has a different connotation. The fight between the cat and the eagle tearing apart one another in the mid air-crash represents the subliminal conflict between the father and mother. When they ultimately realize them fully and want to reintegrate themselves into the family it is too late.

The myth of America being the land of plenty and the guarantor of personal success for all has deteriorated, and Shepard is working to dramatise this fact. One metaphor presented in monologue is that of an eagle attacking a cat and carrying it into the sky, the bird unable to release the cat because the cat is unwilling to release the bird. The struggle ends as only it could, with both dying in an inevitable crash – a fitting image of self preservation leading to self-destruction.

**Curse of the Starving Class** does evolve by the last act into a 'ritual' drama, including the slaughter of the lamb. The play continually shifts from perceptions of straight realism into manipulation of realism as metaphor without much fore-warning.
Bigsby calls it "a realistic play, albeit charged with qualities which strain that realism in the direction of a metaphor" (Bigsby 239). He further adds that it is a play about the lost lyricism, the collapse of dreams and hopes, and the decay of relationships. The family at the centre are the victims of gangsters and confidence tricksters … They have allowed their farm to deteriorate, the father turning to drink, the mother to the false promises of a land agent. They are locked into a destructive cycle in which their dreams are finally the source of their destruction (240).

Often compared to Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and Pinter's *The Home Coming*, *Buried Child* is at its core a play of reunion. Shepard’s quasi-autobiographical writing and Motel chronicles recount a cross-country trip in which Shepard stopped to visit the Illinois home of his grandparents. *Buried Child* drawn from this experience and the character Vince, a musician who wishes to show his girlfriend Shelly, his heritage and ancestral home site, functions as an alter ego for the writer. The central dramatic question of the play concerns whether or not Vince will be remembered and may be embraced, by his relatives and the ambivalence Shepard felt towards his past is perhaps expressed in the confounding reception.

The men in the play are clearly linked to the darker aspects of human behaviour. Dodge, the patriarch, attempts to control the workings of the house from the living room sofa, but he is old, feeble and impotent. His wife, Halie, who is dressed in mourning at the beginning of the play, frequently refers to him as a corpse. The two sons, Tilden and Bradley, are not characterized very differently: one is a half-wit and the other is a menace.
with a wooden leg. The disparity between the people and the lush vegetables Tilden brings home is clear. Shepard's imagery is unmistakable; this middle-class home is the house of the dead.

In *Buried Child* the secret of the play is born out of an incestuous relationship between the mother and the son, Halie and Tilden respectively. But metaphorically it is the burying of innocence and youth. What could have been a fruitful benign world through a natural relationship with the land was denied by a wasteful, violent and exploitive relationship between man and nature. The sense of alienation and of lack of love in the family is echoed in the barren land. Like a 'Curse', this sense of lovelessness gets infused into the American youth and alienates them from maternal affection.

Dodge is the patriarch, parked for the most part on the sofa, coughing, drinking, smoking, complaining and spewing forth the funniest lines, sardonic and cutting. As an old man he is powerless and dependent, but he has not lost his voice. He complains that he is an invisible man. His two sons are also not quite all there. Tilden has returned home after having unspecified problems when he was living in New Mexico. He is a former All American Foot ball player, but now grubly and inarticulate and spends his time harvesting corn while Dodge insists that there has been no corn since 1935. Their other existing son Bradley wears a prothesis ... he chopped off his leg with a chain saw and now likes to sneak up on his father and shave his head. There was another son, Ansel, who was a basketball player, star and soldier, but was killed in a motel room under unspecified circumstances. It is a family of shattered hopes and undone dreams.
The *Buried Child* is the symbolic presentation of the burial of American innocence by the alien, violent and masculine figure of the father. A proud ambitious and exploitive father cannot tolerate his son developing feminine qualities. Tilden who lost tender human relations under the influence of his father later came back home and regained his lost world. The child who is buried is reborn in Tilden's home coming. Shepard's hopes for a revival of a last identity does not last long as it is once again destroyed by a savage world expressing exclusive ‘patriarchal values of violence and dominance’ (Auerbach 54). Vince, Dodge's grandson, with his final display of violence seems to emerge as the rightful owner of the land.

Vince, a forgotten member of the family like the buried child, goes unrecognized on his return home. But when he is referred to as a ‘murderer’ and a ‘midnight strangler’, he is recognized by everybody in the family. When Vince emerges in the degenerative process, he loses his previous identity and his girl friend Shelly, who could expose to the audience the secret that envelopes the family. In *Curse of the Starving Class*, the curse is inherited by Wesley, the son; and in *Buried Child* it is transmitted to the grand child. Although Shepard hopes for the future, it is somewhat tentative and uncertain. The younger generation, he feels cannot be trusted. Only mothers can have ‘visions’ of glory. Halie remarks on this uncertainty as;

> good hard rain. Take everything straight down deep to the roots. The rest takes care of itself. You cannot force a thing to grow. You cannot interfere with it. It's all hidden. It's all unseen. You just gotta wait till it pops up out of the ground. Tiny little shoot …. strong enough to break the earth even. It's a miracle …. May be it's the seen … (BC 132).
Halie gives birth to the illegitimate child at her middle age. Although Shepard does not speak the relationship between the mother and the son directly, he implies it in both Tilden's and Dodge's speeches. Tilden refers to the child indirectly:

We had a baby … He did. Dodge did. Could pick it up with one hand. Put it in the other. Little Baby. Dodge killed it (BC 104).

While Dodge is the third person here, ‘We’ implies Tilden and Halie. Also Dodge's speech further emphasizes the argument to draw the consequential evidence that the *Buried Child* belongs to Tilden and Halie. Dodge says:

Halie had this kid. This baby boy: she had it …. It lived. It wanted to be a part of us. It wanted to pretend that it was its father. She wanted me to believe in it. Even when everyone around us knew …. All our boys knew Tilden knew … Tilden was the one who knew better than anyone of us … Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness (BC 124).

The play envisages a strange mixture of hope and despair. Vince returns home, hoping to find a sense of himself, but with the mother absent, no one recognizes him. The men have nothing to offer to Vince. His female companion, Shelly, also expects that the family will live up to her Norman Rockwell type expectations: home is the site of sustenance and love. But as soon as Shelly enters the home, she realizes that none of her expectations will be fulfilled. Because Shelly is an outsider, though, she is a ‘nice door for the audience’. Her character delineates the dysfunctional nature of this home. It would appear, then, that Shelly gains status as a spectator, the possessor of the look.
As an outsider, she watches, observes and objectifies the action of the play. However, she is not entirely privileged, for she is part of the play. She does not entirely occupy the masculine position of spectator, for as character she herself is a spectacle. What is obviously significant is that Shepard has the audience identify with a female character perhaps another strategy that undercuts the power of the men in the play. Shelly sees more clearly than the other characters, who are caught up in the operations of a dead system and institution.

Vince's dismissive treatment by his relatives is only one in a series of bizarre happenings that subvert expectations of small town wholesomeness; as his companion Shelly, who comes from fast-paced Los Angeles, soon learns, “this is not the realm of turkey dinners and apple pie and all that kinda stuff” (BC 91). Rather, decrepitude resides at the core of this household, conveyed most graphically in the figure of Dodge, the semi invalid grandfather who lords over his thread bare couch and dilapidated farm house. His condition is made clear when his wife, Halie rails, "You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body!” (BC 76). The play creates the impression of a world winding down, and, given the prominence of ‘depletion’ in the work, it is telling that Shepard's first attempt to dramatise this material resulted in an unfinished script, curiously titled, "The Last American Gas Station and the title of this unfinished piece is mentioned in Don Shewey" (Shewey 104).

The final image of *Buried Child* challenges the viewer, for it allows no closure or easy understanding of what has preceded. As the *Buried Child* appears in Tilden's arms, Halie regards the yard from her upstairs window and notes its profusion of vegetables. An Easter like moment ensues, and Halie reports, "Its like a Paradise out there” (BC 131).
The work's ending is textured with many ironies, as this evocation of bounty plays against the child's purified corpse. This prickly conclusion has consequently provoked conflicting responses. Park Dixon Goist has written that *Buried Child* taps into "an American sense of confusion …. an uneasy feeling that somewhere in the past we made a tragic mistake which continues to haunt us" (Wade 102).

Halie's loyalty to men and to this family is particularly disturbing, given the confession Dodge makes in Act III. It is implied that Halie had a baby late in life, when Dodge and she had not been sleeping together. There is even some hint that the baby was born out of relationship between Halie and Tilden. The hint of the violation of the incest taboo is an important one, since it perhaps may be the founding principle of Patriarchy. The fact that women were not consulted in rigorous legislation and oppression of female sexuality and the construction of the incest taboo. Whether the incestuous relationship actually occurred is never entirely revealed, but the violation, incestuous or not, is great and symbolic of the threat feminine sexuality poses for patriarchy.

The very first image of the play is lack of communication and separation. Dodge, the dominant patriarch, a man in his seventies was a ceaseless drunkard who spent his days staring at a blank illuminated television screen. He kept himself confined to the living room sofa, covered with a blanket. Dodge attempted to control the workings of the house from the living room sofa, though old, feeble and impotent. He concealed a whiskey bottle beneath the cushions from the watchful eyes of his complaining and irritating wife Halie, who was the only female of the house. Dodge and Halie were immersed in their own interests, the husband enjoyed baseball reveries and the wife had a fancy for race track. Shepard was concerned with male violence. In *Buried Child* he also
explores the nature of paternity. The men in the play are clearly linked to the darker aspects of human behaviour. Halie lived a solitary life, in a private world of her own in an upstair bedroom. At the beginning of the play, Halie frequently referred to Dodge as a corpse for being always buried in the sofa, lifeless without rendering any help to the maintenance of the family.

Halie, dressed in black mourned for her dead son Ansel whom she loved the most. Throughout the play, the characters cling to male traditional forms and laws. Even the female character, Halie is entangled in patriarchal expectations. She is clearly dissatisfied with her relationship to Dodge at the beginning of the play. Rather than trying to change her attitude to men in general, Halie transferred her affections to other men, first to her son Ansel and then to a priest of the Church called father Dewis, after Ansel's death. Halie never fully participated in specific workings of her family life. She was male identified; she left her home to erect monuments in their honour and to search for more suitable male companionship.

Halie led a detached life sustained by the memories of the past; she had no one to rely on and saw the whole world passing from her window. She was interested in refreshing her past memories with glowing images of a blissful home life. Halie dreamt about making a happy and successful family but her hopes were just an illusion and even her memories were distorted. She rarely got out of her refuge and conversed with Dodge from her refuge itself. The play begins with the sound of Halie's voice coming from her bedroom upstairs, where she watched the rain coming down in sheets outside her window. While Dodge sat downstairs staring at the television set with no image and no sound.
Permanently rooted to the sofa, Dodge isolated himself from the outside world, trying to hide from and forget his family and his past. Halie meanwhile busied herself with pictures of the past and repopulated it with heroes to replace the monsters to whom she had given birth. She rarely came downstairs and retained a distance. This literal distance suggests the distance and gap in the relationship between the husband and wife.

Dodge accused Shelly of acting like "a detective or something" (BC 122) trying to uncover the truth. She wanted to get to the bottom of it. To Shelly, Dodge's attitude seemed incomprehensible. "What's happened to this family any way? (BC 112). Dodge had spawned a lot of children and there was nothing to remember about any of them. If Shelly was so interested in the family, she could ask Halie, who had "traced it all the way back to the grave" (BC 112). Dodge's irresponsible and unthinkable forgetful nature is projected as he does not have an account of the children he had fathered. According to Dodge's account, the true history of the story began from the grave of the \textit{Buried Child}. Finally Halie declared that Dodge's whole story was a lie. In \textit{Buried Child}, the family attempts to repudiate the physical bond, but its inexorable power reaches from beyond the grave to claim them.

Neither Dodge nor Tilden had the capacity to create links with the past, and acknowledges its return in any form. They were the key to family lineage, to the linking of the past and present and the identity that operated through them but they could not recognize family resemblances. Dodge's failure to identify his past is evident in his reply to Shelly which is the tragedy of the family. For Dodge, it was not a matter, how far back the line can be traced because there was "nothing but a long line of Corpses! There's not a living soul behind me not a one. Who's holding me in their memory?" (BC 112).
The Curse of not identifying one's own family heritage is passed on from father to son, that, at some point in time, it makes them similar to but profoundly alienated from each other. Dodge refused to be a father to his sons and the result was an unrecognized relationship. A mysterious fourth was buried and Vince was doomed to continue the line of corpses. Vince's search for a father ended at the grave of a child who in truth had no father.

The men and women in Buried Child are not only at odds with others but also with themselves. The self is not necessarily recognized, relationships are dismissed. Vince is unable to evoke any recognition from his grandfather and the projected images of the family members are fairly distant from the perceptible reality. Vince had taken on the role of Dodge. He hardly gave promise of the revitalization of the American family. Instead he became a destroyer, "I am a murderer! Don't underestimate me for a minute! I'm a Midnight strangler! I devour whole families in a single gulp" (BC 126). As Rene Girard wrote, "The world of reciprocal violence is one of constant mirror effects in which the antagonists become each other's doubles and lose their individual identities" (Orbison 517), Shelly, whom Dodge referred to as a "hoper, a life-affirming person" (BC 65) was unable to remain with Vince in his house of the dead. She left not in the hope of finding her identity but to escape the deadly familial relationships. She had remained in darkness for a long time and entered the life of light. She finally escapes from the mad house when Vince returns not to rescue her but to reject her.

A sick king presiding over a cursed, blighted land is an archetypal image that Shepard makes use of in Buried Child. It is a content for Shepard's assertion that community and belonging must be linked to family and biological roots no matter how
entrapping or destructive it is. Shepard also uses fertility images which have obvious links with the west.

Nature dominates the play with the sudden appearance of corn, the persistent presence of the *Buried Child* and finally the death of Dodge. Dislocations and dispossession are another aspect of the play. Dodge is first dislocated by Bradley and deprived of his blanket and later by Vince as his inheritor. His primary dislocation is caused by the birth of the unwanted baby whose fathership he rejects. He even refuses to recognize his past or to acknowledge the man in the old photograph. The family in any case does not hold together - made up of incomplete and fragmented members, who have a great deal of trouble in relating to each other, their memory is wholly unreliable.

Shepard presents the lost father – son relationship in the play by the father's rejection of parental ties and the son pursuing and assuming the persona of the father. To preserve the family's sense of being pure, the family carries out an unfamily tragic act of killing a child and thus destroys its capacity to be a family. America has decayed into an obscene parody of itself, as the family commits atrocities.

*Buried Child* stands for family attitudes and relationships and moral values buried at the backyard. *Buried Child* expresses a delighted, sterile vision of America, all hopes and promises buried with the murdered infant son of the American family" (Falk 198).

*True West*, the third play in the ‘family trilogy’, appeared two years after *Buried Child*. It is a civil way of family life, a show down between brothers. In its setting, it is the most realistic of all Shepard's plays, though its hyperbolic events and character
development push the play towards abstraction. Like *Curse of the Starving Class*, it explores the contradictions, in both the individual and the family, between socialized and unsocialised behaviour, rationality and unbridled emotion, words and action, confinement and freedom.

Shepard changed his setting from the mid-western farm house of the earlier family plays to a kitchen room in a Southern California suburb in *True West*. *True West* begins when a family is already split. The failure of the marriage of civilization with savagery represented by Mom and the old man respectively is suggested by their separation. When Mom, appears for a while towards the end of the play on her return from Alaska, the old man remains all the while absent from the scene. His attitude to life is revealed through Austin and Lee, his two sons embodying two cultures.

Austin, the younger brother a script writer for movies settled in the North, married and prosperous, is a true eastern middle-class urban intellectual who has come to the West to write a new script and to settle a deal with Saul Kimmer, the film producer. He stays at his mom's house during his absence. Lee, his elder brother, a drifter in the desert, wild, illiterate, belligerent and a loner is a true descendent of his father. He is on the scene to make money through stealing. Both are for making money, but when money is a necessity for Lee, for Austin it is for comfort, a dream that all Americans cherish.

Lee meets Austin in Mom's kitchen, while he is still working on his project. Austin as a Westerner has an inner desire to return to his roots. He cannot escape from the haunting memories of his past. Lee comments on his attitudes, "Isn't that what old guys did? ….. The forefather candle light burning into the night? Cabins in the
wilderness" (TW 6). The whole action of the play takes place in a single setting. The characters are confined within the four walls of the kitchen. Their action and interaction take place within this arena. In an America lacking a Western Frontier, the conflict between 'savagery' and civilization can only take place in the mind. The interaction and confrontation of the play’s two 'trapped' characters represent the conflict of contrary and inescapable elements of American consciousness, a conflict lying behind the apparently peaceful suburban façade of American life.

Shepard's setting in the suburb has its impact on his character. Austin born in the West, but easternised, comes to a place where he meets Lee who while turning towards civilization returns to the West. But their meeting does not yield any fruitful result in terms of a family reconciliation. Rather they continue to fight with each other. The core of the conflict lies in their desire to enter each other’s territory.

When Austin's future project reaches almost its final stage, Lee's "true to life stuff" Western stories make Saul Kimmer, the producer of Austin's future change his mind in favour of Lee's short stories thus causing the conflict between the brothers. The brothers turn hostile to each other and tension between them grows. The problem with Lee is that he cannot write for the new project proposed by Kimmer. Austin and Lee, ultimately reach a common understanding that Austin will write script for Lee and Lee will lead Austin to the desert. Their proposal seems to work well. This plan is however interrupted, however, by Mom's unexpected return from Alaska. She says, "you'll have to stop fighting in the house. There's plenty of room outside to fight" (TW 57). By this time, the house is in shambles. As a result of the brother's constant conflicts, the kitchen and alcove are littered with toasters, pieces of bread that Austin had
put in them, the contents of the kitchen drawers spilled out by Lee while looking for a pencil, Austin's smashed type-writer which he attached with a golf club and numerous beer cans. In addition, all of Mom's plants, which Austin was supposed to water, have died. To this display of her son's psychic and social confusion, Mom casually asks, “What happened in here?” (TW 54). After looking around more, she finally musters a laconic, “Well it’s one hell of a mess in here, isn’t it? (TW 54). This spacey response, apparently characteristic of her relationship with her sons, is topped by her insistence that they must all rush to the museum to see Picasso, who the newspapers say is going to be in town. Not even Austin’s telling her that Picasso is dead can turn her from her this idea. Finally Austin changes the direction of the conversation by saying he is going away with Lee.

Mom reacts to this with a surprise that puts the plan in a new perspective for Lee. He suddenly backs out of the agreement, causing Austen to enter fully into his new world of unsocialised behavior. Wrapping the telephone cord around his hands, he attacks her from behind and tightens the cord around his neck. In her usual uninvolved manner, mom tells Austen, “Well you can’t kill him” But he can, of course. He has reached that position Lee described earlier in which murder within the family becomes common. “I can kill him!” (TW 58), he says. “I can easily kill him. Right now, right here” (TW 58). Mom’s response is to pick up her bags and leave, announcing that being in home under these conditions “is worse than being homeless” (TW 59).

At the beginning of True West, there are hints of this pre-Christian conflict between the patriarchal and matriarchal orders. The play is set in the mother's home. Her neighbourhood is like Paradise. Her home is filled with vegetation. Lee describes the
suburban homes as being "Like a Paradise" (TW 12) and Austin subsequently comments, "This is a Paradise down here ... We're livin' in a Paradise" (TW 39).

These references to Paradise may be said to have the informality of a cliché' and the sibling rivalry between Austin and Lee is a fairly hackneyed literary motif; nevertheless, the biblical story of Cain is part of anybody's common cultural heritage, and any one of fraternal battle recalls it in some measure. Further, the more closely one looks at Shepard's play, the more reminders there are of the Pre-Christian conflict between Cain and Abel. One fairly common interpretation of the story in Genesis is that it was part of an effort by the invading Hebrews to discredit the matriarchal worship of the indigenous Canaanites.

According to this interpretation, the story of the Fall is at heart a symbolic exploration of the problem of evil. It underscores the impossibility of a patriarchal society that assumes the existence of a beneficent masculine creator accounting for evil. It lays the burden of original sin at the feet of the first woman. And the first offspring is Cain, the original murderer. In Genesis, blood sacrifice is required by the patriarchal deity Yahweh, and in *True West*, Lee is clearly allied with the masculine and violent values of this deity. Even Lee's vocabulary associates him with blood sacrifices. When Austin innocently offers to give him money, Lee furiously rejects the gift, calling it, "Hollywood blood money" (TW 8) and accusing Austin of attempting to use that money to 'buy off' the "Old Man" (TW 8). Throughout much of the play, references to the father, who is like the mother left unnamed, prompt in Lee a sense of reverence and pride, while in Austin such references provoke an outbreak of hostility, guilt or disgust. Thus, in the play, as in Genesis, the patriarchal and matriarchal systems clash.
In the second half of the play, Austin becomes more and more embittered and increasingly similar to his evil brother. Having in a sense been failed by the matriarchal deity, Austin neglects her rites. He lets his mother's plants go unwatered, forgets about returning to his wife and children, and begs Lee to take him into the desert. Meanwhile Lee, the creature of night, the desert, and the patriarchy, begs for Austin's creative assistance. Despite Austin's chiding that Lee is creating only illusions of characters drawn from "fantasies of a long lost boyhood" (TW 40), Lee's optimism about his story remains strong until Scene 7, when Austin tells him about his last encounter with their father. Lee's confidence is apparently shattered after he hears Austin's ludicrous description of their patriarch as a toothless, drunken beggar staggering from one bar to another and searching for the doggie bag of chopsuey that contains his false teeth (TW 42). Scene 8 opens upon a tableau of defeatism and desolation, framed by their mother's "dead and drooping" house plants (TW 43). That this opening tableau is symbolic and imbued with the irrational characteristic of myth is borne out by the chronology of the play, which suggests that only forty-eight hours have passed since Austin was watering the flourishing house plants in Scene 2. Both brothers have lost faith in themselves. Austin has transformed himself into a pale imitation of Lee by stealing toasters instead of TV. Meanwhile Lee has become an even more frustrated writer than Austin had been in Scene 1. He stands before us smashing a golf club into Austin's type-writer with the regularity and impassivity of a metronome. This scene presents one with the symbolic destruction of the West called Hollywood, with Shepard's three symbols of that world – the golf club, the typewriter, and the manuscript. For both the brothers Hollywood has proven to be no Paradise.
The final scene presents a mockery of matriarchal religion to balance the
dismissal of the patriarchy in Scene 7 and the parody of communion in Scene 8. First, we
see the comic ineptitude of brothers as writers. They argue over the clichéd line "I knew
this prairie like the back a' my hand" – eventually changing it to "I'm on intimate terms
with this prairie", even though they are aware of the sexual connotation of the words
(TW 51-52). It is too fanciful to see in this sentence a parody of matriarchal religion, with
its emphasis on the planting of seed in the soil of Mother Earth. But then Mom arrives
like a deus ex machina at the very moment that Lee repeats. “He's on intimate terms with
this prairie. Sounds real mysterious and kinda threatening at the same time" (TW 52).
Inspite of the fact that Mom is Mother Earth amid her wilted plants, she has not become
trivial, irrelevant, comic, and a little mad. Mom says that she has come back from Alaska
because she "just started missing all (her) plants" (TW 54).

Lee's outlook is understandable given the rupture evident in the family's history.
His mother and father have been separated for sometime. The alcoholic father figure of
the play may be modeled on Shepard's own parent – lives as a hermit on the desert. The
brothers have not seen each other in years, and the mother is currently on an Alaskan
cruise. This sense of familial bifurcation informs the play's geographical imagery, with
Austin and his mother associated with the North – Austin lives in Northern California
while Lee and the father are aligned with the South the Mojave and Mexico. The alienation and
animosity that can arise from family discord are emphasized when he asks about the
country's homicide rate and who most often resorts to violence; he answers his own
questions: "Family, People, Brothers, Brothers-in-law, Cousins. Real American – type
people” (TW 23).
*True West* begins when a family is already split. The failure of the marriage of civilization with savagery represented by mom and the old man respectively is suggested by their separation. When Mom appears for a while towards the end of the play on her return from Alaska, the old man remains all the while absent from the scene. His attitude to life is revealed through Austin and Lee, his two sons embodying two cultures.

The play’s plot harks back to the archetypal story of Cain and Abel – in the Byronic variant in which Cain, the peaceful tiller of the soil, is a sympathetic figure, while Abel, the smug slaughterer of sheep, is inexplicably favoured by a blood thirsty deity. As in Genesis, the action takes place to the East of Eden. Shepard sets his play in a southern Californian suburb, about 40 miles east of Los Angeles (Shepard 3).

In coming down from the lush north to write a romantic screenplay, Austin may be said to be acting in the service of love or Aphrodite and his earnings will be used to support his wife and children. His decision to write by candle – light reflects his attempt to establish a romantic mood appropriate to the story he is striving to create. Like Cain, Austin is associated with vegetation, in his mother's absence; he has vowed to tend her flourishing house plants. The first line in Scene-I underscores that duty, and Scene-2 opens with Austin "watering plants with a vaporizer" (TW 10). Like Abel, however, Austin is the younger of two brothers and he is clearly the better brother – kind, industrious and moral.

In contrast, Lee comes from the desert, like the nomadic Hebrews at the end of their exodus and the beginning of their conquest of Cannan. Somewhere in that vast desert Lee has communed with the ‘old man’ – the father whom Austin in his prosperity
has apparently abandoned. Lee is his sinister opposite and his questionable character is clearly suggested by his appearance:

- filthy white t-shirt, tattered brown overcoat covered with dust, dark blue baggy suit pants from the salvation Army, pink suede belt, pointed black forties dress shoes scuffled up, holes in the soles, no socks, no hat, long pronounced side-burns. "Gene Vincent" hairdo, two days' growth of beard, bad teeth (TW 2).

Lee is an outcast who prefers the company of the snakes in the desert to that of other men. A virtual illiterate, he makes his living by theft. For Lee, the candle light by which Austin works is reminiscent of the ‘old guys’, "The Fore Fathers" (TW 6). Most directly, the allusion is to the first settlers of the West, but the somewhat odd phrasing, the repetition, and the capitalization draws our attention to the masculinity of these fore fathers and may recall the Hebrew Patriarchs. Like those patriarchs and like Abel, Lee is associated with the sacrifice of animals. In Scene 1, he brags to Austin: “Had me a Pit Bull there for a while but I lost him …. Fightin’ dog. Damn I made some good money off that little dog. Real good money” (TW 9).

Shepard's concern with self-alienation and internal division carries over into the play's social order. As in his previous domestic dramas, True West enacts the erosion of belief structures and the duress suffered by the American family. In the play's second scene, Lee tells his brother of his late-night prowling and describes a nearby household:

"Like a paradise …. Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots hanging over the stove …. Blonde people movin' in and out a' the
rooms, talkin' to each other ... kind a' place you wish you sorta' grew up in, ya' know" (12)

Lee of course speaks from the position of a voyeur. His idealization of this domestic sphere, coloured by the imagery of TV commercials and magazine ads, highlights the dysfunction of his own family and reveals in Lee a disappointment that he and Austin grew up outside the shelter and security of the proverbial nuclear family.

Commenting on *True West*, Shepard has said: "I think we're split in a much more devastating way than psychology can ever reveal. It's not so cute. Not some little thing we can get over. It's something we've got to live with" (Coe 122). If Lee and Austin are images of this profound division captured in eternal conflict, May and Eddie in *Fool for Love* are fully realized and sympathetic survivors of this profound division between lovers who are, at least, half conscious of the split, but incapable of resolving it.

As *Fool for Love* opens, May sits inertly on a shabby motel room bed without responding to Eddie's efforts to draw her into action or conversation. When he offers to leave, the frozen image of dejection comes to life with sudden fury as May lashes out at her lover. The opening moments represent a lull in a violent lovers' quarrel that appears to have been going on for many years. Eddie, we learn, has traced May to a run-down motel on the edge of the Mojave desert, where she has gone to begin a new life, ending their fifteen-year old relationship because of his repeated infidelities. Having grown tired of his latest consort, an enigmatic ‘Countess’, Eddie has driven over two thousand miles to offer May the town – worn excuse that the Countess means nothing to him and that May is his real love. May alternates wildly between demanding that Eddie leave and
begging him to stay. She arouses his jealousy by dressing seductively for a date scheduled for that evening. The argument grows more violent.

May lives in the motel room. The first stage image features her body, bent nearly double in a posture of desperate emotional exhaustion, with Eddie offering succor. She has had an ongoing relationship with him – on again, off again – for years. It is sometime after their last breakup, and he has driven a couple of thousand miles out of his way to see her. They begin a low-level argument over the ‘Countess’, with whom Eddie is supposed to have had an affair, the immediate cause of their separation. Although May says she doesn't care, she also promises, "I'm gonna kill her and then I'm gonna kill you" (FFL 23). Now, however, Eddie has returned: "I'm taking you back, May" (FFL 24); he has everything worked out: a piece of ground up in Wyoming with "a big vegetable garden. Some chickens may be" (FFL 25). Although this makes May "Puke to even think about it" (FFL 25), when Eddie starts to leave, she embraces him for a kiss – then treacherously drops him to the floor with a kick in the groin. Eddie is a stunt man and rodeo cowboy, a ‘fantasist’ whose deal is "to dream things up" (FFL 26-27). Many times, May says to Eddie, you have "suckered me into some dumb little fantasy and then dropped me like a hot rock" (FFL 25). Of Eddie she says, "Anybody who doesn't half kill themselves falling off horses or jumping on steers is a twerp in your book" (FFL 30), while of herself she declares, "I got a job. I'm a regular citizen here now" (FFL 24) – she is a cook. Their interaction begins to seem a classic confrontation in the war between the sexes: the wandering, world–building male versus the stationary, nest–building female. The male is back after a spate of wandering, holding out the carrot of a nest fantasy, hoping to entice the female into his arms. The ploy appears not to be working.
The characters are ‘real’ and interesting – full-bodied, nervous denizens of the trailer and rodeo world of the new West.

Then things begin to happen that alter the neatness of such a conception. May admits she is waiting for a date. This prompts Eddie to go outside and return with a shotgun and a bottle of tequila. Their argument reaches a pitch and she tells him to get out. But when he goes, she is in agony, crawling around the room weeping and hugging the walls, as if her arms were aching to reach through the grasp hold of the departed Eddie. And now a third character makes a contribution: the Old Man, who is sitting in a rocker on a platform down left, a presiding genius of the play and for a time a baffling one. It appears that he is May's father; he tells a story of holding her in his arms in the pitch dark in a cow pasture, comforting her childhood nightmare. May needs comforting now and the association is clear. Until the whole of the play can be grasped, however, the Old Man is a confusing character, for in the theater it never becomes clear what Shepard makes plain in his printed text: "He exists only in the minds of May and Eddie"(FFL 20). After the Old Man's story, May hears Eddie returning and snaps out of her agonized body posture; she sits to drink some tequila as he comes in with a couple of steer ropes and starts lassoing bedposts. Several times in the play she will rearrange her posture to avoid letting Eddie know how she feels or what she intends to do.

Eddie seems to be in a lighter mood about the arrival of the date: he thinks there is no such person. He and May argue some more. He drinks more, back flips, crashing into the wall. There is another amplified boom. Tension builds. May decides to leave; she wants to call off the date. Eddie watches her go through the door, then follows her offstage and carries her back inside kicking and screaming. Calmly he puts his spurs on
getting ready for Martin, the date: "Give him the right impression (FFL 36). But before
Martin arrives, the countess comes in her Mercedes-Benz to shoot up Eddie's truck and
plunge the stage into headlight – streaked darkness. In a great fury May wants to leap out
at her and "wipe her out" (FFL 41). At this point Martin enters, tackling Eddie and
wrestling him to the floor under the impression that he is raping May.

During the Countess's attack Eddie is vehement that May must pack her things
and leave with him. Her answer is no. They stare at each other. At this moment the Old
Man comments that neither Eddie nor May resembles him – and thus reveals an Ibsen
like secret: that Eddie and May are brother and sister. The balance of the play from
Martin's entrance to the final curtain is concerned with details of the father's bigamous
relations with the respective mothers of the two lovers, with Eddie's revelation to Martin
that May is his half sister, and with the Countess's final attack on Eddie's property, the
destruction of his truck and the letting loose of his horses. The last episode leads to
Eddie's exist, followed by May – leaving Martin alone on the stage.

Eddie tells Martin, the Old Man was in a towering state of divided passion, a
state that devoured him even as in his nightly walk he devoured the dark fields as he drew
closer to the source of his agony. But May's tale is that her mother was abandoned,
forbidden to come any place near the Old Man, that she went on a frenzied search for
him, found him, and when after two weeks he disappeared forever, she just turned herself
inside out … I kept watching her grieve, as though somebody'd died. She'd pull herself up
into a ball and just stare at the floor" (FFL 53) – May's posture at the opening of the play.
Her narration ends with the fate of Eddie's mother – a suicide. And Eddie adds, to the Old Man,
"It was your Shotgun … She never fired a gun before in her life. That was the first time"
(FFL 54). In Eddie's tale, the oldman has come off better, so the Old Man is perturbed by what May has said. "Speak to her", he urges Eddie. "Bring her around to our side. You gotta' make her see this thing in a clear light (FFL 55). In both Eddie's and May's accounts of their romance it was love at first sight, the old romantic love of centuries – a flow of spirit across a space and then a passionate attachment unto sickness. "We got sick at night when we were apart, "She says, "Violently sick" (FFL 54) just as she had stated earlier: "I get sick everytime you come around. Then I get sick when you leave" (FFL 30).

It is a piece of family business, this hot, helpless enmeshing, and eternal love. It matters not a realistic wht that there has been incest between Eddie and May. Incest is a metaphor for the spirit that has encoiled their lives. That Martin is an adopted child is another metaphor; he has no family and is therefore bereft of this love, incapable of understanding it. His being is wholly outside the realm of this emotion, and the great staid foolishness he exhibits contrasts him with Eddie and May. To Martin the struggle of May and Eddie when he arrived at the motel was something like rape – he cannot quite say the word – and it summoned up his blood automatically.

But Martin is always either mistaken in these matters or incompetent. For the love that is on stage here transcends May's. “You know me inside and out. I got nothing new to show you" (FFL 35). It is entirely immaterial. It consists of shared imaginative flight-art if you will. When Eddie and Martin are waiting for May to get ready, Eddie tells Martin that he is going out with May just to be close to her – that after a while he need not take her anywhere. They could hang around the motel and tell each other stories. Thus there is no chance for him to engage May's imagination. But Eddie is a fantasist, and that is superior to any other quality he might bring to love. That is the meaning of the
Old Man's parable of being married to Barbara Mandrell. And when Martin is left alone on stage at the end, the audience must understand that they have been left in that motel room with a kind of blank. Love has gone its unpredictable way, leaving the storyless likes of poor Martin behind.

Female characters are given greater dramatic focus in *Fool for Love* and *A Lie of the Mind*. In *Fool for Love*, Shepard laboured in a self-conscious way to expose the mentality of aggression: he sought to engage "the otherside", what he called "the female side" (FFL 33). Eddie ascribes to the dreamscape of the American frontier and its promise of virgin territory. Early in the play Eddie tries to palliate May by detailing an idealized future – the two sharing a "piece of ground" in Wyoming, complete with a "big vegetable garden and some chickens may be" (FFL 25). However Eddie also evinces the frontier man's fear of domestication, of subjection to the home and hearth. The prospect of emotional commitment and the regulation of behaviour it would demand terrifies him. Like his father who led two lives going from one wife to the other, Eddie cannot commit or settle. His affair with the Countess, who hovers in a menacing fashion around the edges of the play, indicates the predatory nature of Eddie's character which urges conquest and adventure.

May is the first female in Shepard's writing to display a complexity of character and subtlety of mind; She exhibits both a willfulness and resourcefulness in her dealings with Eddie and proves a worthy combatant in the play's battle of the sexes. Her characterization nonetheless evidences stereotypical elements. She plays the vulnerable female to Eddie's hardened machismo, and when she informs Eddie that she can 'smell', his thoughts before he can "even think 'em' (FFL 23).
As in *Buried Child*, *Fool for Love* is created around the contradictory memories and gradual shocking disclosure of a closely kept family secret. But more so than in *Buried Child*, control of the past and of language becomes a commodity of power, and he or she who controls the past controls the present. Eddie and May each offer their own version of the past. While May is supposedly changing in the bathroom, Eddie recounts to the captive Martin how for years the old man split his time between two families, arriving and departing without warning or explanation. An absolute fool for the love of two women, he was possessed with an overpowering and irreconcilable need for them both. "It was the same love", the old man interjects, "just got split into two that's all" (FFL 63). Eddie and May were the offsprings of his divided love, living with their separate mothers, never suspecting each other's existence.

May's story includes the woman's side of the story: her mother's painful and obsessive love for a husband who repeatedly deserted her. In May's version she and Eddie are not brought together by the old man. They are lovers before they learn of their paternal ties. It is May's mother who tracks down the old man, "hunting for him from town to town" (FFL 70). May acknowledges the passion she shared with Eddie but juxtaposes it to her mother's consuming agony. While Eddie and May fall more deeply in love, May's mother endures torment each moment she is forced to live without her husband. In her daughter's passionate attachment to Eddie, May's mother begins to recognize her own dangerous obsession. She begs May and Eddie to stop seeing each other. Unsuccessful, she is determined to confront Eddie's mother with the truth. The other woman's reaction is simple and violent: "Eddie's mother – Eddie's mother blew her brains out" (FFL 73). Throughout May's story the old man tries to prod Eddie into
supporting an alternate view. But Eddie allows May to complete her tale and her words to bear the burden of truth. When May falls silent, the old man stands for the first time in the play. He leaves his corner, breaks the imaginary plane separating him from the lovers – thus shattering the theatrical barrier between their juxtaposed realities – and steps out onto the stage to confront Eddie. But Eddie confirms May's story, adding that it was the old man's rifle his mother used. May's story purges Eddie of his need to defend ‘the male side’ of the past. As the old man attempts to discredit May's revelation and to defend himself before his estranged children, Countess has set fire to Eddie's truck. The explosion is the material realization of the explosion of truth upon the old man's romantic memories: the destruction of his controlled illusion of the past and of his manipulation, through the lives of Eddie and May, of his hereditary male fantasy. As he crumples into an upstage corner of the room, flickering lights engulf him; the previously undisclosed death of his wife suddenly shakes the ground on which he stands. Eddie and May come together in a final moment of tenderness. They have purged themselves of their inherited obsessions and of the undying grip of the old man's memory. Whether present in the flesh or only in spirit at this ritual, the old man is forced to recognize that violent death and suffering, not these two lovers, are the offsprings of his selfish love. Eddie and May leave him huddled in the flames of his exploded knowledge and go their separate ways.

Eddie is repeating the same transient lifestyle that the old man had pursued, alternately running to and away from love that is offered by many women. In the end, it is clear that the old man has lived a fantasy life and has hoped for his son to do the same, without ever realizing the destruction that those fantasies can cause to others. Eddie and May's joint past fuels much of *Fool for Love*. Each of them carries their own
interpretation of the memory of their relationship. Eddie wants this memory to continue as reality into the future. That is why he has tracked May down to the motel room. May wants to escape the past and move on with her life as an individual. The memories seem to make this choice impossible. At the end of the play, Eddie effectively ends May's potential relationship with Martin by telling him about the roots of he and his half-sister's incestuous affair. May gets her opinion in, too, by finishing Eddie's story from her point of view. Eddie tries to use memory to try to control May, but she has grown beyond his manipulations. May has her own memories of Eddie repeatedly abandoning her, she has learned to use her bad memories of his desertions as reinforcement in refusing him.

Memory also comes into play in another way in *Fool for Love*. According to Shepard's description, the character of the Old Man is a figment of the siblings' imaginations. He is their father, but not really living in the same way they are. He is an independent reminiscence that addresses his children, primarily Eddie, as needed. The Old Man is more than a memory, however. Through Eddie and May's dialogue, the Old Man becomes upset when he learns that his memory of the past is wrong. While the Old Man knows his double life has caused his children's problematic situation, he learns that May's mother killed herself because of his double dealings. May also says some things that contradict the Old Man's memory of the past. He tries to get Eddie to make May see things his way but fails.

*A Lie of the Mind*, is not exactly a domestic play, for it speaks of the degeneration of frontier culture and the shape America was in the 80's and even today. Somehow the use of the American flag to wrap Jake's father, a ruined ex-airman, and his burial works to generalize these lost people into the lost American family. Beth's brother
the maniacally vengeful Mike, is transmogrified from a car coated occasional hunter into
a camouflage – clad guerrilla fighter by the time he herds the beaten, tortured and defeated
Jake into face Beth and the family – who have lost complete interest in vengeance or in
Jake. This makes one think of the transformed ignorance of America – from innocence to
denial, from Crusader to Torturer.

The traditional gender role in America asserts the power of men over women by
portraying men as naturally dominant, independent, aggressive, self-confident and
incapable of emotional support. The women on the other hand, are portrayed as independent
of men, loving and incapable of practical action. This polarity is more wider in the
content of the West. The split between the feminine and the masculine percolates into the
family. Shepard's treatment of the family has thus western overtone. He tries to overcome
the split by creating indigenous love between Beth and Frankie in *A Lie of the Mind*.

Beth puts on her father's shirt and says to Frankie that she "just feels like the man, Shirt
brings me a man. I'm a shirt man", and adds "Between us we can make a life. You could
be the woman" (LOM 57-58). Shepard creates such reciprocity through intermingling of
'woman – man' and 'man – woman'.

*A Lie of the Mind* opens with Jake telling his brother Frankie over phone that he
has killed his wife, Beth. He suspected that she had an affair with her male counterpart
playing the role of a seductress in a local theatre group. But she is actually alive with the
brain damage and is taken care of by her family members in Montona. Jake is the
stereotype of a violent, dominant and love-starved, cursed, sensitive, humanistic and
gentle. Jake and Frankie are analogous to Lee and Austin in *True West*, split selves but
suffer from a nervous breakdown and suddenly feels his wife's absence. Both, on the other hand long for their husbands even after the attempt for murder.

Jake retires into the darkness leaving behind Frankie and Beth. Within this framework Shepard includes a number of characters drawn from the two families who live in the closed world of their mind into which the light reality rarely penetrates. Frank Rich comments on this world: "It's the one shimmering constant in this work that characters are mistaking the living for the dead, one brother for another brother, sons for fathers, sisters for wives even, at one loony point, a man for a deer" (Rich 49). Through repeated confession and juxtaposition of sequences Shepard makes his plot highly complicated, in which he weaves a complex web of characters representing "violently love – Starved Hero who can only answer love with power and domination … submissive, vulnerable heroine who sacrifices herself for romantic ideology … the suffocation, possessive mother … (and) the brutal controlling patriarch …" (Hart 109).

Not only with Beth, who had been diagnosed with a brain damage, there is a grave advanced disorientation, but with all the characters. Each of the characters ceaselessly ask, "Who am I"? "Where am I"? And "Am I really related to these strange creatures around me? Ben Brantley calls” Lie of the Mind, as Shepard's richest and most penetrating play, a 20th century masterwork of a family portrait to be compared with Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night and Harold Pinter's Home Coming” (Brantley 1)

As in Buried Child, another tale of homecoming in the American heartland, Shepard in A Lie of the Mind excavates the profound ambivalence of Kinship. Yes, home
is where they have to take you in; it is also where they can suck any sense of autonomous self right out of you. While *Buried Child* leaned memorably towards exaggerated Gothic effects, 'Lie' sticks close to the honey grain of everyday domestic life. The members within each household, and their present and past selves are as flimsy as tissue papers. The walls – between parents and children, husbands and wives, older and younger siblings, the living and the dead – never stop tumbling down. It happens every minute inside those four walls one likes to call a home. Or rather each mind within these homes. The title of the play does not apply just to Beth whose injuries have impaired her speech and thought processes, nor to Jake who is given to psychopathic rages and paranoia, Beth and Jake embody the root reality of everyone else: Home, self, love, genuine connectedness are only necessary myths, always more real in the memory than in the flesh.

Shepard works his obsessive theme of the truth in art versus reality into this play as well. While there are many lies of the mind in this play, the one that functions as an immediate cause is Jake's conviction that his wife is having an affair. His jealousy is instigated by Beth's role in a play in which she acts as a seductress. As a method actor she practices becoming the character, and her rehearsals enter her personal life as she enlists her husband to read the lines of her leading man. Jake's suspicions multiply as he watches his wife transform herself. In particular he becomes obsessed with the ritualistic oiling of her body, an action she performs with growing regularity in preparation for performances. He interprets her lack of sexual interest as a sign of infidelity since he is unable to conceive of a woman whose career becomes self-absorbing. When she refuses to relinquish her role in the play, he assaults her.
In one rare moment, both sides of the stage are illuminated as Jake stands on the left holding the box that contains his father's ashes; on the other side Beth enters slowly in a low-cut satin gown, sits down on a satin draped sofa, and begins to rub oil into her breasts and shoulders. This silent juxtaposition connects Jake's unresolved grief for his father with the illusion he holds about his wife. When we meet Lorraine, Jake's suffocating and domineering mother, it becomes clear that Jake's Oedipal is still a very active part of his mental life. His transference of love – object from mother to wife is a process that Lorraine chooses to deny. Jake's intense fear of abandonment leads to physical violence when he is threatened with the loss of his love-object. Ironically Beth continues to long for her abusive husband even as she lies in the hospital painfully attempting to regain her speech. With her verbal capacity severely limited, Beth's childlike sentences, torturously executed, reverberate with complex truth about the urgent dependency and desperation of lovers' relationships. “My head is me. Heez in me. You gan stop him in me. Nobody gan stop him in me” (LOM 20).

As in the other domestic dramas, Shepard suggests that the problem lies within the minds of his male protagonists. The fact that Beth is a woman without a sense of self outside of her relationship with a man is a problem that Shepard does not directly address. From a profoundly male perspective, Shepard instead focuses again on father/son relationships, leaving his women characters to clean up the debris. The immediate action of *A Lie of the Mind* is contained squarely within the arena of gender conflict, but the origin of the conflict is in the father's relationship with the son.

The fathers are consistently cruel, violent, manipulative and demented. In *A Lie of the Mind*, Beth's father, Baylor, is detached from the family, absorbed in his favourite
part time, hunting a sport that allows him to redirect his power hungry and blood thirsty passion away from his family, rendering him a relatively innocuous pale shadow of Shepard's former fathers. Jake’s father being dead, the American flag that draped his coffin lies folded under his son's bed alongside the box that contains his ashes. According to sister Sally, Jake accomplished what Shepard's other dramatic sons attempted or dreamed of – killing their father. In a variation on Austin's story in True West about bar-hopping with his alcoholic father in Mexico, Sally tells her mother that she watched helplessly while Jake dared his drunken father to race him to the American border, stopping at every bar on the way. The son easily outdistanced his father who ran in front of the truck on the highway and was killed while Jake sat quietly drinking in a bar several miles up the road. Sally insists that Jake killed their father while Lorraine hysterically protects that her son is incapable of such a violent act. But as she witnesses her son becoming more and more like her husband, whom she despises and adores, Lorraine cries out in desperation, that this circle has to have an end. Lorraine is finally set alone with Sally, a daughter who has, really never known her mother's love. Together they conclude that all men are hopeless as they turn down the house with all their possessions and leave for Ireland to look up long-lost relatives.

Meanwhile, at their former neighbour's home, Meg is reaching a similar conclusion. A woman deadened by the absence of real feeling in her life, Meg slavishly attends her husband and children and accepts the emptiness of her existence in exchange for a quiet and orderly home. The superficial harmony of her life becomes hysterically distorted when her husband shoots Frankie in the leg, mistaking him for a deer, and brings him home for the women to nurse. With Frankie a wounded prisoner in her home,
her daughter unmanageably disturbed, and her husband callously indifferent, Meg begins to question some basic assumptions about nuclear family dynamics. With child-like insight Meg comes up with a basic theory: "the female needs the other, the male, but the male doesn't need the other, the female, in the same way … He does not know what he needs; so he goes off to be alone, and dies alone" (LOM 77). With this recognition she recommends that Baylor leave since all these women are such a burden to him. She refuses to wait on him anymore, leaving him immobilized in his easy chair with a bad back she tosses his socks into his lap, but he is unable to put them on his freezing feet.

*A Lie of the Mind* also examines the dynamics of sexual violence. Although the writer described it as ‘a ballad … a little legend about love’, *A Lie of the Mind* betrays its epic pretensions with a tale of love and loss that spills across the Western divide and fills its three – act frame to the brim. Shepard searches the pains and passion of sexual love as something of an analogue for the yearnings and divided heart of the nation itself.

The men of Beth's family also abide by deeply-rooted codes of male behaviour. Beth's brother Mike comes to his sister's defense, but his motivation issues from his wounded pride and anger that an outsider has violated his sister – as though she were family property. Beth's father, Baylor is another personification of the frontier mindset. He longs for life in the ‘high country’, away from civilization – meaning, away from women, driven by some unconsidered obligation to the rituals of manhood, Baylor hunts deer each season, even though he detests the cold and has no taste for venison. Beth relates to her mother, "he's hiding from us" (LOM 39) and later announces that her father "gave up on love" (LOM 45). In the domestic relations of both the play's families, one sees that masculine postures have promoted aggression and inhibited intimacy.
Sam Shepard's last work of the twentieth century, *The Late Henry Moss*, returns to the first subjects that long ago shaped the playwright's moral imagination. The play, Shepard says, "concerns another predicament between brothers and fathers and it's mainly the same material I've been working over for thirty years or something, but for me it never gets old" (Roudane’ 279). The familiar material, of course, negotiates the problematic condition of the American family and its wayward inhabitants. As seen in so many Shepard plays, questions of heredity, legacy, and legitimacy animate the stage, as do the status of the real and the ways in which the individual subjectivizes his or her own version of reality. Competing versions of reality, conflicting accounts of what precisely happened to Henry Moss and others who came within his orbit in the days preceding his demise fill the stage.

The drama raises debates about individual, familial, and cultural identity and memory, as it does about the relationship between abstract and concrete experience, fiction and reality, and, ultimately, about coming to terms with death itself. Shepard layers such debates with additional complexity and ambiguity by presenting the play's lead character as a ghost. As Shepard explains, *The Late Henry Moss* concerns "the father, who is dead in the play and comes back, who's revisiting the past. He's a ghost – which has always fascinated me. This is a play about a dead man walking. It is equally a play about a family afflicted by the inevitability of their lamentable biological and spiritual fate. Whereas in the earlier Pulitzer Prize play the buried child never had a chance to live, the about-to-be buried father in *The Late Henry Moss* lived for nearly seven decades, though his phantasmic presence redefines anti-heroism."
The Late Henry Moss revolves around the recent passing of the play's title character. His two estranged sons find themselves reunited after years apart, drawn by the death of their alcoholic father to his simple abode located near the outskirts of Bernalillo, New Mexico. As the play begins, Earl thumbs through a family photograph album while Ray examines a wrench in an old red tool chest. Their father's body lies in rest in a small anterior bedroom. While taking care of burial arrangements, the brothers immerse themselves in present confrontations and past recollections, sometimes reconstituted through flask back sequences that reveal not only what may have happened to Henry Moss during his last days but also what transpired years ago within the Moss family. Thus spatially and temporally, the play at times unwinds in a nonrealistic, and nonlinear, form.

The Late Henry Moss may be viewed as an autobiography. The parallels between Shepard's father and Henry Moss – the alcoholism, the shattering of doors and windows, the violence against wives and the attendant emotional injuries exacted upon children, the move from Illinois to New Mexico, the sheer implacable sense of anger that so consumes them, fathers who served in the air force, patriarchs who do not recognize their own children, the ignoble deaths of the fathers, and so on – invite such linkages. And Shepard hem-lined his personal experiences for imaginative materials both before and after his own father's death in 1984. Yet, despite the allure of interconnecting autobiography with The Late Henry Moss and the other ‘family’ plays, Shepard has never been "an autobiographical writer in the simple sense of dramatizing his own experiences" (Bigsby 183).

In fact, the most remarkable feature about The Late Henry Moss is its compelling presentation of a series of events which suddenly broaden to encompass experiences felt by too many audiences: the never-seen mother, the father, and the sons emerge as
bewildered figures, in the specifics of whose confrontations Shepard sets forth the entropic condition of the American family. Shepard's play, while regionally specific and very much about the Henry Jamison Moss family, is also informed by a larger cultural critique of the family in any part of the United States. Our conflicted sensory perceptions and experiences interfuse with Shepard's scripted performance and conflicted performers. *The Late Henry Moss* invites the audience to explore an extra-theatrical reality as Shepard plays, and replays through flashbacks, public and private structures of theatricality itself and the society it reflects.

In *The Late Henry Moss*, Shepard so successfully internalizes the terror-through inner webbings of heredity, legacy, and legitimacy – that the outer tensions of the public disappear into the inner anxieties of Henry. His fears become the conditions and consequences of his psychic state of mind. For Henry, as for his sons, the stimulus for terror ultimately comes from within. Thus there can be, in the lives they lead, no real survivors, no remissions of the terrible, and little chance to escape their fates. More often than not, it seems, the Mosses have been their own executioners. Self-afflicted and self-victims, Shepard dooms them to enact their downward journey, drifting further and further into voluble wonderment at themselves. The play, for Henry, has been a self-murder mystery.

Shepard sounds desperate that his attempt at reconciliation and reunion of the family does not materialize. It is perhaps because Shepard thinks that the irreparable loss that the land has suffered cannot be made good. The Americans, he implies, will continue to suffer for their primal sin unless the lost world is regained, which only seems a faint possibility and they will, therefore continue to dislocate and disintegrate.
But Shepard is too optimist a person to give up the battle. He envisages that some latent force in man or environment may kindle the directionless society to fight the battle, even if, it is a losing one. Fighting keeps up the spirit, even if, practically speaking, triumph is a mirage.