SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC FORCE

The resilient nature of man, predictably, sustains life on earth. The annihilating forces may drive man to the edge of ruin but at the point of no return, almost every man stands firmly rooted to the ground and makes an attempt, in vain, most of the times, to battle it out like Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea*. It may be a losing battle but the very struggle brings a sense of achievement and a feeling of liberation.

Setting off in 'quest' of an identity is the characteristic marker of modern everyman. Made soul-sick with the battle fatigue, wrought by the bloody encounters in the world of rejection, exploitation, loneliness and isolation, man never buries himself under the ground. The irresistible dream of looking for a silver lining behind the darkest clouds always makes a man, a man. The 'quest' itself becomes the aspiration and the destination. Reassuming and reassuring themselves, people consciously crave for a rebirth. Rebirth may not promise a Utopia or may even chase them back to the desolate life but the brief spell of reaffirmation provides an opportunity to piece it together and to stand one's ground.

Shepard seems to affirm this philosophical perspective in his plays. Isolated, rejected and often pursued and exploited, his characters still believe that one solid monolithic structure they can cling on to is the family – an ambience of love and sympathy. Through this well-knit family, one can reestablish his roots, his culture, his identity and his language. Shepard always believes that one can feel 'connected to' only in the bond of 'blood relationship'. This may be one of the authentic forces but to be in
relationship means a lot and proves to be a significant one. Being in relationship, Shepard affirms, strengthens the starving malnourishment and hence underscores to have the quest irrespective of the end-result. It is an ironical situation where the dart of an arrow itself is conceived as the target.

*Curse of the Starving Class* dramatises the victimization which is the result of consumer society. This is presented by Taylor's speech to Emma. Taylor visited Ella to discuss the signing of deed. Unfortunately, Taylor was under no condition to hear Emma's warning about her father's temper. Weston inherited the curse from his father and would transmit it to the next generation, his son, Wesley. Emma was equally aware of the family traits. She commented to Taylor about Weston's inherited anger and aggressiveness.

He's got a terrible temper … A short fuse they call it. Runs in the family. His father was just like him. Wesley is just like Pop, too – Like liquid dynamite … It's chemical. It's the same thing which makes him drink. Something in the blood. Heredity. Highly explosive (CSC 152).

According to her, Weston's explosive nature would not stop him from doing anything, even killing was not beyond him. Wesley was left to take care of the house, while Ella and Taylor went for lunch. Wesley contemplated leaving the place. He dreamt of escaping to Alaska, an undiscovered country rich with possibilities. He told Emma that he hoped his parents would leave one day and would never return, leaving the farm to him to manage. Although their fates were inextricably united to each other, every member of the Tate family was locked in his or her own ruminations and enterprises. They lived in their own private dreams hoping that one day the rest of the family would
become part of the fantasy. But each of them resisted the efforts of the other to incorporate them into their plans. Emma scoffed at Wesley's vision of going in search of a new frontier where he desired to find freedom, and self-definition through employment. Wesley in turn dismissed Emma's dreams as a child's fantasy.

Wesley had brought a sick lamb into the house and built a pen for the maggot infested lamb in the kitchen. This action is indicative of Wesley's protective nature and of his assertion that he did not belong to the starving class. “You're lucky this is a civilized household… some one's hungry … his hunger eats you, and you're starving” (CSC 156). But actually Wesley found nothing in the refrigerator other than the artichokes brought by his father which he had picked up for half the price, Weston saw himself as "Mr. Slave Labour … come to replenish the empty larder" (CSC 36) Weston only succeeded in replenishing "the family's supply to primitive wilderness that contradicts its Veneer of socialized behaviour" (Mottram 135). Ella considered Weston's artichokes far from being a staple diet. The bread winner returned to feed his starving family but no one wanted to eat his dubious produce. Nothing in reality nourished them and any attempt to improve the quality of their lives was futile.

The lamb was inside when it should have been outside. There was no door to open or close. When Weston saw the animal, he thought for a moment that he was leaving the house, while he was in fact entering the house. The house, like the family, had become unfamiliar to Weston. Returning home and entering his kitchen Weston looked like a homeless person. He spoke to Wesley on his unthoughtful decision of purchasing the land and being cheated by Taylor. He felt glad because he had not settled the money as it was a wasteland.
The second act opens with Weston's decision to sell his property to pay off his debts to Slater and Emerson. Ella and Weston scheme behind each other's back to sell the property. It is this scheming and plotting between the two that deprives the children of parental care and love and threatens to undo the family. Weston wanted to escape to Mexico away from his debtors and all the responsibilities which he never tried to shoulder. He was going to sell the property to Ellis who owned the Alibi club. The revelation of the truth that Ella was selling the property annoyed Weston. He felt like killing Ella and Taylor. He sensed the presence of conspirers around him. He felt as if he was living in "a den of vipers" (CSC 170). He was in no way ready to bequeath the property, because as he claimed, "I'm the one who works! I'm the one who brings home food. This is my house … she can't steal this house away from me! It's mine (CSC 170). Weston's emotional outburst reveals that he has not severed his ties with the land. Ella who had gone with Taylor for lunch, had no sense of time. She had not returned the whole night and this enraged Weston all the more. Wesley was able to judge his father's mental condition. Ella's illegal relationship with Taylor destroyed the family unity. As Weston states: "He's with my wife! That's illegal! …. He thinks I'm just like him. Cowardly … he doesn't realize the explosiveness" (CSC 171).

Wesley consoled his father telling him that he would try and get a job and work in the same place and thus help develop the house. But by the time Wesley tried to redress the lost things, it was too late. In such an arresting situation Ella entered with a bag of groceries and emptied it in the refrigerator throwing Weston's artichokes out. Ella would rather starve than eat artichokes which she considered to be below her dignity. She considered herself to be the sole caretaker of the family and spoke ill of Weston.
Ella's dreams came crumbling down when Wesley informed her about the land being sold by Weston. Out of this conflict of artichokes and groceries, and sparked by Wesley's news that Weston had threatened to kill her, Ella defined the nature as the curse, "I can feel it. It's invisible but it's there … It comes even when you do everything to stop it from coming …. It goes forward too. We spread it. We pass it on … It goes on and on like that without us" (CSC 174-175). The curse played on the lives of the characters, who were dumb, helpless and cruelly victimized. Ella's description of the curse was not concrete and beyond explanation but it defined the human condition and was doomed to be repeated. The curse is finally inherited by Wesley towards the end of the play.

The family was in a state of total collapse when Ellis came with the deed of the sold house and announced his intention of changing the farm into a streak house. Ella yielded no new ways of escape, "this is no joke, you can't buy a piece of property from an alcoholic! He's not responsible for his actions" (CSC 176). Ella found no way of coming out of the trap. Even Taylor washed his hands off the business and left Ella saying", you people carry on as though the whole world revolved around your petty little existence … Waiting for your next move … And there will be nothing and nobody" (CSC 180). The characters are in a position to lose their identity because the farm that bound them had moved out of their hands.

During the course of the play, Weston appears in several different roles and in the third act he undergoes a kind of transition when realization of his responsibilities dawned on him. Weston's rebirth from oneself to another is phased by encounters with external reality, like the broken door, the maggot infested lamb in the kitchen, his absent wife and an encounter with the land. When he walked around his ranch which initiated a change in him,
Weston says, "a funny thing started happening to me … I started wondering who this was walking around in the orchard at six-thirty in the morning. It didn't feel like me" (CSC 186). This self-estrangement led to the birth of a new self and a sense of communion with the land that he owned. He became aware of the physical bond, the flesh and blood that bound the family together.

After his rebirth, Weston attended to the lamb that his son had kept penned in the kitchen. Weston was reminded of an incident that had occurred one day as he went about the unpleasant task of castrating the lambs. He shared his true story with the lamb, which according to him, was taken real care of more than any other lamb. He claimed that a giant eagle had cast its shadow over his work, driving close to the ground in pursuit of "those fresh little remnants of manlihood" (CSC 184). Weston identified himself with the eagle which triggered the memories of his war time experience when he was a flyer and was used to aeronautics. He had never had such a cheerful feeling as a flyer than when seeing the eagle's "suicidal antics" (CSC 184). The story expresses Weston's quest for freedom, his flight from routine and a dry life. The eagle becomes the symbol of authoritativeness. Weston dreamt of possessing a similar authority which he felt was necessary to bring the family to order. He came to realize that the family's "bodies were connected and could never escape that. But didn't feel like escaping. Felt like it was a good thing … to be connected by blood like that" (CSC 187).

Weston's realization brought a new life in him as he started to reshape the condition of the house. He told Wesley that he had decided to renovate the whole place and make it a good place to live in. He had devised a new prospect, done everyone's laundry and prepared a sumptuous breakfast for himself and Wesley. Ella was surprised
by his activities. Weston advised Ella to relax at the table so that she could get rid of the
tension about Emma. He believed "that table will deliver you" (CSC 190). The table at
the Tate house was put to different uses.

The table was used to eat food from, to prepare charts, to keep clothes and also to
sleep on. It stood as a member, like the refrigerator, which witnessed the family's
rootlessness. While Weston was going through the phase of rebirth, Wesley was being
transformed from the role of the protector to the role of an exploiter. Wesley, after a hot
bath just like Weston walked out of the home naked, carrying the lamb with him. Such an
action is suggestive of Wesley coming fully under the control of the curse. Now he would
act like his father, disintegrating everything.

Wesley's use of his father's clothes symbolically destroys Weston's identity.
Weston's attempt to reassume leadership and rebirth proved futile. It left him rootless
with nothing to hold on to. He pondered on how completely the game was rigged against
him, "I kept trying to piece it together. I couldn't figure out the jumps … it all turned on
me somehow" (CSC 195). Wesley became the true inheritor. His transformation was so
complete that his identity and character were lost in his father's identity and character.
Even Ella did not recognize him. She mistook Wesley for Weston and asked him to deal
with Slater and Emerson who had stomped the house with a lamb's carcass. This brought
home the condition of the family, which was dead and rotting because of such exploiters.
Emma was killed by Slater and Emerson while running away in her father's car which she
had taken without his knowledge. They blew up her car with gelatins, the ingredient she
had identified as the curse in the blood. The car was blown up as a warning to Weston.
Towards the end of the play the sight of the dead lamb in the kitchen awakened Ella's memory of the story she had heard from her husband. The story was the continuation of the castration of the lamb episode narrated by Weston. The play concludes with the story of the cat and eagle, where each tries to destroy the other are in turn destroyed by each other. The story is symbolic of the situation in the Tate's family where each destroys the other and thus become easy prey to outsiders as well.

The central problem in the Tate family was loneliness and isolation, and in *Curse of the Starving Class* there is no release. The characters attempt to liberate themselves, to find their individuality, their identity, their search for roots, only results in a loss of their individuality and identity. And their increasing trials only highlight their rootlessness, thus clearly emphasizing the disintegration of the American dream.

The family members in Curse suffer because of this primal 'curse' resulting from their exploitation by the Eastern culture. The conflict in the family has both an inside and outside story. Inside the family the father-mom confrontation which is a confrontation between the Western male Weston and the Eastern female Ella, lead to the family's disunity and the children suffer as the carriers of the 'curse'. Outside the family, both Weston and Ella are victims of the Eastern gangsters like Taylor and Ellis who are confident men as land agents.

The 'curse' in the play has thus a genetic implication. The son inherits the father's 'terrible temp' and the daughter inherits the 'periodic cycle and the gums' of the mother. Each character in the family is aware of this hereditary transmission of the past into the present. In an attempt to scare Taylor the land agent, Emma speaks about the terrible
consequences of the deal and exposes the curse in the family. Emma's recognition of this
curse is further confirmed by Ella. Ella in her plan to sell the land needs a signature from
Weston and meets Wesley. Wesley says that she would have a terrible time in her effort.
Ella, while speaking about Weston, actually comments generally on the Western male:

Do you know what this is? It's a curse. I can feel it. It's invisible but its
there. It comes onto us like night time. Everyday I can feel it. Everyday I
can see it coming and it always comes. Repeats itself. It comes even when
you do everything to stop it from coming. Even when you try to change it
And it goes back. Deep. It goes back and back to tiny little cells and genes.
To atoms. In tiny little swimming things making up their minds without it.
It's bigger than Government even. It goes forward too. We inherit it and
pass it down. It goes on and on like that without us (CSC 174-175).

The subject implied by the title *Curse of the Starving Class* is a gnawing hunger,
but not for food; Shepard repeatedly jokes with that image by bringing abundant
quantities of food on stage. His characters are starved for some modest level of
fulfillment, for just the chance at happiness, self-definition or self-esteem. Everyone in
the family suffers from a sense of incompleteness, which Wesley blames on the faceless
'they' who run the world. Weston identifies them more explicitly with the institutions of
American capitalism:

I figures that's why everyone wants you to buy things … They all want
you to borrow anyhow Banks, car lots, investors …. so I figures if that's
the case, why not take advantage of it? Why not go in debt…? (CSC 195).
So on one level *Curse of the Starving Class* is a variant of *Death of a Salesman*, an indictment of the American system for awakening a hunger it does not fill and then punishing the hungry.

The play on the whole is a similar metaphor of America's decay and self-destructive doom as well. The family is unable to support itself on the family ranch, instead reaching out for the unessential and ignoring the perhaps less tangible but nonetheless very real necessities for personal fulfillment. The members search for physical fulfillment in a materialist wasteland while being unaware that it is hunger for spiritual nourishment that is killing them. To dramatise this point in the play, Shepard presents it in an extended metaphor. The family is starving, literally. The refrigerator is continually ‘open and shut’ throughout the play in vain hope that it has been miraculously stocked. What they receive, to survive on, is a supply of artichokes, hardly sustaining nourishment and far from being considered a staple diet. Complementing this starving household is a cast of gangsters and cowmen, characters Shepard gleaned from late-night re-runs. They are caricatures of romantic notions of a golden American past … that perhaps never was … and they threaten the present with the misleading dreams and hopes they have instilled in this poverty-ridden setting. They enter without the least bit of realistic credibility … being stereotyped caricatures … but are nevertheless lives – endangering realities to those family characters given more than two dimensional forms. Trying to thrive on the dreams haunted by the two dimensional characters, the family has become spiritually malnourished in a manner parallel to the physical malnutrition.

Ella and Weston are lost in an echoing grandiosity. They are addicted to large, hysterical gestures and plans: “Weston totals cars, makes speculative car purchases like
an investment baron, smashes his own front door to pieces just to spite his wife.
Born again after a week – long drunken spree, on an impulse he grandly does all the
laundry in the house. The same impulse sponsors his offer to cook breakfast for Wesley.
Ella is similarly an artist of impulse. Though she knows that it's her husband trying to get
into the house, she calls the police anyway; only that dramatic gesture will do. She
aspires to the High art Paintings, Castles, Buildings, Fancy food" of Europe (CSC 144).
The wish to go to Europe separates her from her husband, who prefers the desert and
Mexico.

Rather, it seems that Ella and Weston have found what might be their satisfying
roles, romantic ones, but cannot enact them in equanimity because they are not plausible
roles for parents to play. Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, they have held out to
their children the exciting psychological promise of these same roles: the high
adventurer, the wanderer, the artist, what Weston calls the "escape artist". He sees
himself as one of these, an individual of abnormally larger size, perceptions and desires.
"I flew giant machines in the air. Giants! Bombers. What a sight over Italy, The Pacific

Weston’s story of the giant eagle and the lamb testicles embodies this same notion
of largeness in size and aggression. Weston yearns to be one with that eagle.
Consequently, in the story he cheers the bird on, for he would like to be as powerful and
impulsive as that eagle; he is in fact, an eagle to Wesley. Yet because of his and Ella's
inner desires the children have developed an inchoate hunger. Emma had seen herself
going off and playing one of the roles before she fell off the horse in Act I. "I had the
whole trip planned out in my head" (CSC 149). She would work her way along the coast
of Baja California, stopping at little towns, howling in big fish, learning to fix transmissions, and finally writing a novel before she would "disappear into the heart of Mexico. Just like that guy" (CSC 149) the 'guy' is B.Traven, who wrote the Treasures of the Sierra Madre. The role is not so much different from the one her father proposes for himself at the end of Act I and finally adopts in Act III: "like B.Traven he goes to Mexico: That's where everyone escapes to, right? It's full of escape artists down there. I could go down there and get lost. I could disappear" (CSC 195).

But neither Ella nor Weston can fit into ordinary parental roles. That they are the same in this respect is embodied in parallel theatrical action: Ella's entrance in Act 3 resembles two entrances of Weston's; though she does not tear a door to pieces, she makes a terrific ruckus and winds up, as he did, sleeping atop a pile of laundry on the kitchen table. They are linked together like the eagle and the cat that come crashing to earth in their linked accounts at the curtain of Ella's Act. Indeed, Ella has little to pass on to her daughter that Emma can use. On the first day the young woman starts to menstruate, Ella advises Emma to avoid swimming. "It can cause you to bleed to death. Water draws it out of you" (CSC 139). Emma must also be beware of buying sanitary napkins in gas station bathrooms on the grounds that they are unsanitary. But Ella cannot bring herself to attend to her daughter. It is always Wesley who is being asked to look after her – to see that she doesn't fall off the dangerous horse, for example – or to be highly sensitive to her needs: Ella: "Keep an eye for Emma, Wes. She's got the curse. You know what that's like for a girl, the first time around” (CSC 156).

Perhaps because little that Ella says is useful to her daughter; Emma, unconsciously choosing to avoid her mother, identifies strongly with her father: she
imagines herself a magician with care – as he is, she rides a horse violently through the Alibi Club, wreaking havoc there as Weston had done. But neither can Weston stand to be the father of the family. In Act III, when Wesley tells his father that he has really left Ella and not just gone off for a little while, Weston explains that, “I couldn't stand it here. I couldn't stand the idea that everything would stay the same, that every morning it would be the same” (CSC 195).

With *Buried Child* "Shepard creates a contemporary American home coming and another long day's journey into night" (Hall 97). The play is set on an unproductive farm in Illinois among people whose alienated lives are controlled by a terrible secret from the past. The play also portrays the distorted relationship between father and sons, quest for identity, lack of belongingness, search for roots and association with the past. As Harriot (12) states, *Buried Child* continues Shepard's obsession with identity*. Shepard's identity as an artist and his search for the past, the old West, is brought out through the characters in the play where the question of identity becomes prominent.

Halie's conversation frequently referred back to a happy time, one of sunshine and bougainvillea and she ruminated upon her former liaison with a horse breeder. Her mention of this involvement attributes potency to the past, which contrasts sharply with the diseased state of the present. *Buried Child* presents an emasculated image of the American heartland" (Wade 100).

Dodge and Halie had three sons. Tilden, the eldest was an All American football player. Something about him was profoundly burned out and displaced. He was a half-wit reduced to a childish nature. It was Tilden's responsibility to look after Dodge. Halie was
concerned about her husband's health and told Tilden that they were the only two who could take real care of Dodge. She said, "He can't look after himself anymore, so we have to do it. Nobody else will do it" (BC 72). Bradley the second son was reduced to a grotesque sight. He had lost his leg in a chain-saw accident. His left leg was wooden and had been amputated above the knee. He moved with an exaggerated, almost mechanical limp. The youngest son Ansel was killed in his motel room on the night of his honeymoon. He married into a family connected to a catholic mob and Halie persisted in thinking that Ansel was murdered by his Italian wife and her family.

Of course, he'd still be alive today if he hadn't married himself into the catholics. The mob. How in the world he never opened his eyes to this is beyond me …. Catholic women are Devil incarnate … The wedding was more like a funeral … She smiled at me with that Catholic sneer of hers. She told me with her eyes that she'd murder him (BC 73).

Ansel was, according to Halie, a hero and the projection of an ideal son. At the beginning of the play, Halie's tales of Ansel seemed almost like a fantasy she had formulated and she trots out from time to time as a substitute for the disappointment of her real sons. This kind of fantasy that Halie develops is similar to that of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, in which George and Martha create a fantasy child in order to compensate their sterility. Ansel was a projection of everything that Halie expected from Dodge. She saw Ansel as an ideal son who if alive would take real care of her and she would rely upon him.
He would've took care of us, too … He was a hero. A genuine hero. Brave. Strong. And very intelligent. Ansel could've been a great man. One of the greatest … It's not fitting for a man like that to die in a motel room (BC 73).

Halie intended to build a monument for Ansel, "a big, tall statue with the basketball in one hand and a rifle in the other" (BC 73). Halie's two living sons, Tilden and Bradley failed in their potential as breed owners of the family and destroyed her expectation of depending on them in their old age. The parents, bereft of the respect and love of their children, had grown aloof and intolerable. Bradley was worse than Tilden. He could hardly look after himself and was a terror to his father. Tilden returned to live with his parents after subsisting in Mexico for 20 years. In *Buried Child* men are presented as stunned, gutted bodies. Tilden returned home because he found no place to go to and hunted by the recollections of a vague crisis, he fled Mexico. Dodge was aware of this, "I know you had a little trouble back in New Mexico. That's why you came out here" (BC 70).

Like Wesley, Tilden identified himself with the barren land and his roots to the past. He was the only character who provided food for the family. Tilden actually brought corn to the house even though the land was infertile. There are many such inconsistencies in the play. Tilden's act of bringing corn, Dodge's inability or rejection to identify his son, Vince tracing his past to his grandparents house and his search for identity, the mystery of *Buried Child* are all interlinked. Tilden's homecoming and Dodge's rejection of fatherly duties, love and affection brings about a breach and disintegration of father-son relationship. He portrays himself as a cruel strict patriarch. His character is clearly portrayed when he tells Tilden, "there is nothing we can do for you now anyway …
support yourself … you expect us to feed you forever?" (BC 78). Dodge was clearly devoid of a protective nature. He was not interested in family relationships.

To Dodge the appearance of the corn meant association with the past, a past which did not exist for him. It was Tilden who created a bond with the barren land. Like Weston's artichokes, the corn grown from the barren land signified Tilden's relationship to the past. "Shepard's most realistic play portrays souls sick with the battle fatigue. In *Buried Child*, parents and children are locked in a death struggle" (Marranca 101). For Halie it is Tilden who can protect Dodge from Bradley. Dodge was aware of his son's inability to protect himself. Dodge, though an authoritative patriarch is not able to protect himself from his own sons. Shepard reveals the struggle of the father to keep his sons from gaining power.

Tilden's mental condition is paralleled by the physical disability of his younger brother Bradley. When Halie informed Dodge that Bradley was coming to give him a hair-cut, Dodge got upset because "Last time, he left me almost bald" (BC 91) Bradley creates an overpowering feeling of foreboding. "His arms and shoulders are extremely powerful muscular due to a life time dependency … He moves laboriously …" (BC 82). Sigmund Freud noted that:

> The ability of such beings to induce terror and psychic discomfort arises from an uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or automation. While Bradley is undoubtedly human, his mechanical movement and general menacing appearance raise his entrance to the level of a Freudian nightmare (as quoted in De Rose :103).
Bradley's slightly inhuman appearance was enhanced by the specific act of menace he subsequently performed, the act of shaving Dodge's head. Dodge saw Bradley as a terrible spoilt child. He did not want him in his house; there was no proper mutual understanding or a fatherly bond between their relationships. The father-son relationship was cruelly severed by Dodge's statement that Bradley was not his son, 'He's not my flesh and blood! My flesh and blood's buried in the backyard … He was born in a god dam hog wallow! That’s where he was born and that's where he belongs! He doesn't belong in this house!' (BC 76). Dodge's words led to a confusion about the identity of Bradley. It was either Bradley's behaviour which made Dodge utter those words or it was that Bradley was not really Dodge's son. Another ambiguity that Shepard focuses in the play is the existence of a *Buried Child* in the consciousness of the characters. It is the mysterious *Buried Child* that haunts the characters memory, the reality they want to efface. Dodge identifies the *Buried Child* as his own flesh and blood. His mention of the child presents the secret of the mystery.

After six years Vince arrived with his girl friend Shelly in search of his identity. He was going to meet his father Tilden, in Mexico, not realizing that he would find him in Illinois. Vince wore jeans, boots and a plaid shirt and carried a saxophone case. Vince combines the image of the cowboy and the magician and is suggestive of Shepard himself. He was on a journey to reestablish his roots, to find his past and his place in the family. He wished to show his girl friend his heritage and ancestral home site.

*Buried Child* goes far beyond *Curse of the Starving Class* in arguing Shepard's point that the twentieth century malaise in America is a spiritual one requiring treatment far beyond that which can be traditionally offered.
The depth reaches down into essence itself, necessitating a sort of mythic reclamation of an American identity that had so long ago blanched of any significance (Demastes 108).

Dodge's refusal to accept Vince as his grandson is not only representative of, the old man's forgetfulness but is also a conscious rejection of family ties. His rejection of relationships is evident in his speech to Shelly, "You think just because people propagate they have to love their puppies?" (BC 48). Dodge's comparison of human nature to animal nature is absurd. He was devoid of the basic emotions of human nature. He seemed to have acquired a nature baser to, than an animal. Animals at least have a little sense of oneness and belonging. Dodge admonished Tilden saying, "You shouldn't be needing your parents at your age. It's unnatural … I never went back to my parents. Never had the urge" (BC 78). Vince shocked by Dodge's rejection attempted to reassure. Shelly said that Vince's grandfather must be ill and senile. Shelly perceived that something was chaotic in the family situation and revealed her anxiety to leave the house, "Vince, may be we oughta' go, I don't like this. I mean this isn't my idea of a good time" (BC 88). According to her, Vince had arrived at the wrong house and had mistaken the inhabitants to be his grandfather and father and such interpretation heightened her apprehension, "Vince, this is really making me nervous. I mean he doesn't even want us here. He doesn't even like us" (BC 89). In such a crisis, Vince's ability to prove himself was ultimately crushed especially since Tilden also did not acknowledge the presence of a visitor. He entered the house with an armful of carrots and did not recognize his son. He came in and confronted Vince and Shelly. He cradled the carrots in his arms just as he had previously cradled corn. Tilden could only recognize and recollect the *Buried Child*.  

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Vince did not ever exist in his memory, "I had a son once but we buried him" (BC 92) Time and character once again raise the question of Vince's identity.

Vince and Shelly strove to find a reason for Dodge and Tilden not recognizing them. It could be they felt that Dodge was old and Tilden mentally impaired. It could also have been a joke that Dodge and Tilden were playing on Vince and Shelly felt that if they had really recognized Vince, then the game they were playing was unfair. There was no possibility of playing such a joke for Vince's arrival was unexpected. Shepard repeatedly poses the question of self recognition and explores the nature of identity from the vantage point of social role and the private self. Despite the virtually incomprehensible behaviour of Dodge and Tilden, Vince, frantic to be recognized performed a repertoire of infantile tricks from his childhood. Vince's attempts were all in vain,

Look at this. Do you remember this? I used to bend my thumb behind my knuckles. You remember? I used to do it at the dinner table … Here's one you'll remember. You used to kick me out of the house for this one … Both Dodge and Tilden take short uninterested glances then ignore him (BC 95).

He had hoped that his childhood games would jar their memories. As nobody responded, Vince sarcastically suggested that he had committed some moral offense such as "Plunge into sinful infatuation with the alto saxophone" (BC 94) that might have caused his family to reject him. Shelly, embarrassed by Vince's pathetic condition, exclaimed, "Jesus Christ. They're not gonna play. Can't you see that?" (BC 96).

Shelly was the only one who stood her ground inspite of the confusions. She resorted to conventional female domestic activities like cutting carrots brought by Tilden,
in order to defend herself from her odd surroundings. When Vince turned towards Shelly with a broken heart pleading with her stay at the house, she said, "You're the one who wants to stay. So I'll stay. I'll stay and I'll cut carrots. And I'll do whatever I have to do to survive. Just to make it through" (BC 94).

In order to bring about a sense of logic in the broken story of the past, Shelly actively participated in the family story but at the same time she had to face the strange behaviour of the men towards her in Vince's absence. All of them, Dodge, Bradley and Tilden wanted Shelly's attention. Tilden wanted her to remain silent and listen to his story about the *Buried Child*. Dodge wanted Shelly to wait on him and Bradley symbolically raped her trying to prove his potency. But his impotency was confirmed and Shelly tormented him by seizing his artificial leg. Shelly strove to keep these men in control and hold the ground till Vince's return.

The metaphor of the *Buried Child* takes a different connotation. The symbol of the *Buried Child* is not just a representation of all that is sullen, dark and mysterious but it also takes on the significance of hope, the hope which Halie expected from Dodge, Tilden, Bradley and Ansel but was disappointed. After them, she turned towards Vince, considering him as "the guardian angel of the family" (BC 128) but then all her hopes were shattered as Vince did not identify them and inherited the personality of his grandfather, confined to one place, abjuring all relationships and duties towards the family. He not only refused to recognize others, but also turned his back to the very qualities of love and sympathy that would hold the family together.
Shepard puns on the situation which explains the appearance of the mysterious crops, "I've never seen a crop like this in my whole life (says Halie). May be it's the sun … Indeed; it is the son that motivates the events, that tiny little shoot … strong enough to break the earth even" (BC 132). Tilden's Buried Child was now under the care of Halie, the keeper of corpses. The image of regeneration that surrounds the house heightens the decay within the family. Shepard puns on the word sun. Sun is the symbol of the fruitful growth of the crop induced by the nourishing rays of the sun and it is also the refreshed and regenerated growth of the son of the family to keep it surviving generation after generation. The Buried Child can also be the symbolic representation of Vince's burial in the sofa, a kind of living death. Mel Gussaw sees "Buried Child as a play demonstrating that love and friendship are ties that can be thicker than blood and that parents and children have to prove themselves to earn their relationships" (Hart 180).

The corn sequence in Act I, with a completely mystifying occurrence is simultaneously questioned by Dodge, by Tilden and Halie. Strange, but it is treated in such an understated manner that it elicits only a shrug not a shock or a shudder. Yet when the question of Vince's identity is raised in the next act, both Dodge and Tilden treat the event of this prodigal son's return with less consequence than the appearance of the corn. Their strangeness brings darkness. The progression of the earth’s produce that Tilden carries in his arms reflects the downward movement of the search for the child's identity. "It is a play about death and resurrection of the past; about the making of character and the forces which cannot be discounted, about the nature of reality which resists definition" (Jain 157).

Audience fascination derives from the layers of mystery that shroud the history of Dodge's household. Much of the power of the play issues from Shepard's strategic
withholding of information, and thus it is often regarded the most unusual and disturbing enactments – as when Bradley forces his fingers into Shelly's mouth – without contextual understanding. The arrival of Vince and Shelly function as the play's dramatic catalyst. Their presence aggravates the sullen relations of the household mainly Tilden and Dodge, and triggers the disclosure of the horrible secret that lies at the root of the family's plagued condition. Though never stated without ambiguity, one becomes aware that Tilden – Vince's father – has had an incestuous relationship with his mother, Halie, producing an off spring that Dodge later killed and buried. This narrative element gives the play a strange depth and resonance, intimating in an almost Attic fashion that the famine and blight have been brought upon the kingdom.

In *Buried Child*, the turning point of the drama actually occurs offstage. Vince has left the farm house under the pretext of getting liquor for Dodge, yet he determines to flee the family and thus drives Westward long into the night. In a mesmerizing monologue Vince, recounts a moment of epiphanic insight when he recognizes his inescapable identification with all the progenitors who have preceded him:

_I could see myself in the windshield My face, My eyes. I studied my face, studied everything about it. As though I was looking at another man. As though I could see his whole race behind him. Like a mummy's face. I saw him alive and dead at the same time … And then his face changed. His face became my father's face. Same eyes, same bones … And his father's face changed to his Grand father's face. And it went on like that … I followed my family clear into Iowa … straight into the Corn Belt and further straight back as far as they'd take me (BC 130)._
Throughout the play, the characters seem to have a preference to cling to this male wasteland, its forms and its 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, but rather than attempting to change her relationship to men in general, she transfers her affections to other men, first to her son Ansel and then to a father of the Church after Ansel's death. While she may not fully participate in the specific workings of her domestic patriarchy; she is still male – identified, leaving the home to erect monuments in their honour and to search for more suitable male companionship. Despite all the evidence the play presents regarding the patriarchy's impotence, Halie continues to search for a man who will satisfy her.

With Vince absent, the eccentric behaviour of the men intensifies. All of them want Shelly's attention; all of them want Shelly to remain silent and listen to his story about the dead baby. Dodge wants her to wait on him. And when Bradley tells her to 'stay put', he symbolically rapes her by putting his hand in her mouth. This gesture is trying to prove his potency. Later his impotence is confirmed. Shelly manipulates and torments him by taking away his artificial leg.

When Halie returns in the Act III, she not only finds Shelly in control, but she herself has undergone a miraculous transformation. She is lively and out of mourning. Her change however, is only superficial. She is still male – identified, and her male companion, Father Dewis, is impotent, too. As he tells her, he cannot accommodate experiences that fall beyond his parish.
As a mother within the phallic economy, Halie had an obligation to fulfill – to insure the patriarchal lineage and retain its purity. Halie, the mother must have a man, either a husband or son, in order to exist within the phallic economy. While upholding the prescribed desires for women in patriarchy, Halie has also violated them by taking the patriarchal admonitions too far. She must be punished. Dodge mentions that he forced Halie to give birth at home in order to make delivery painful, because the child's conception was so ‘unnatural’, Dodge did not expect the child to live. When it does, Dodge "drowned it. Just like rung of the ladder" (BC 124). Halie may be the keeper of the family tree, but she cannot add new branches without the law of the father.

In *True West*, of the two brothers, Lee represents the vanishing 'old' West and Austin the plasticized, over developed 'new' West of Hollywood and its adjacent suburbs. It has been further stated that American myth such as the legendary American West or the tradition of the stable family not only fail to sustain contemporary Americans but often in their elusiveness, delude and frustrate them. The investigation of such themes also suggest that *True West* is Shepard's most personal and autobiographically revealing play – that Austin and Lee's desert-dwelling father is inspired by Shepard's own absent parent and that Austin and Lee represent divided aspects of Shepard himself. Henry Schvey, writing in Modern Drama, suggested that

Austin the successful Hollywood screenwriter, clearly represents the side of Shepard that has accommodated itself to material success, the aspects that have moved him from his counter culture roots in the Off-Off-Broadway theatre movement of the sixties to a commercially successful career as a film star. Lee, although presented as Austin's brother in the
play, is in fact his alter-ego, the part of Shepard's divided self that is rough and crude, lives outside the law, and is drawn toward the elusive image of his father. The play, then, is not so much about between two brothers as it is an externalized metaphor of the dialectic between the dual aspects of Shepard's psyche" (Schvey 12).

Revealing of the relationship between the brothers is a descriptive paragraph from Lee's outline that ends Act I:

So they take off after each other straight into an endless black prairie. The sun is just comin' down and they can feel the night on their backs. What they don't know is that each one of 'em is afraid, See. Each one separately thinks that he's the only one that's afraid. And they keep riding like that ... And the one who's chasin' doesn't know where the other one is taking him. And the one who's being chased doesn't know where he's going" (TW 27).

As the brothers struggle with each other verbally, and finally physically, they enter a territory where anything is possible. Their conflict is as old as that of Cain and Abel, and the feeling of death on their backs is as strong as the fears that drive them. the question, Which is the pursue and which the pursued? in relation to Austin and Lee, loses its meaning, for it belongs more to the simplified realms of myth and the movies. In the West of contemporary reality, which may be the only true West, it is not so easy to tell the pursuer from the pursued, to decide between the bad guys and the good guys, to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable or the socialized from the primitive.
As the deserts into which one can flee give way to suburban development, the old frontier, Turner's hither edge of free land, is more and more transformed into a myth of freedom that can no longer be realized, with the result that ‘the meeting point between savagery and civilization’ is internalized and defines the contours of a purely inner True West.

A turning point occurs in the play when Austin accepts a challenge from Lee to steal something without getting caught. The next morning, Austin has a line of toasters on the kitchen counter, the loot of his night's work in going from house to house in the neighbourhood. Although Lee thinks that stealing so many toasters is the ‘dumbest thing’, he has ever seen, the act represents for Austin a threshold of experience that opens up a new world of possibilities. When Lee, asks him for the time, Austin gives an answer that functions as a metaphor for the potential dangers that he faces now that he has taken a step away from his safe round of respectable daily routines:

This is the time of morning when the Coyotes kill people's cocker spaniels. Did you hear them? That's what they were doing out there.

Luring innocent pets away from their homes (TW 45).

Like the Cocker Spaniels, Austin is being lured into the more open-ended and violent world of his brother. Both characters in their search for life's fulfillment meet at a common ground what once was the West but have now changed by the Eastern influence.

In Genesis, Saul is the king of the Hebrews who proves himself incapable of controlling the Philistines (1 Samuel 31). The allusion works well within True West. With the rejection of Austin's script, Saul abandons all efforts to control the Philistines in
American culture, whose indifference to refinement and art is well illustrated by their
taste in movies. While Austin had been initially pleased to hear Lee refer to his romantic
screen play as 'art' (TW 6), Lee desires no aesthetic qualities in his Western. He
approvingly quotes Saul as saying, "In this business we make movies. American movies.
Leave the films to the French" (TW 30). Further when Saul promises to produce a movie
based on Lee's story, Lee arranges to have "a big slice" (TW 33) of his profits turned over
to the father.

In contrast, Lee offers Saul a Westerner about a man's confrontation with his
wife's lover and involving a bizarre chase in which two horses are taken by trailer to the
Texas pan handle and then ridden into the desert at night. Lee seeks Austin's creative
assistance in writing an outline of the plot, but he angrily rejects the notion that Austin's
contribution is important or inspired: "Favour! Big Favour Handin' down favours from
the mountain top" (TW 23). The implication is that Austin is not like God handing down
the tablets to Moses; what Austin hands down, Lee is quite prepared to reject. Clichéd as
Lee's story is, it holds out the promise of a bloody duel at the end, the blood offering that
Abel presented to Yahweh. As one might predict, the God of Hollywood eventually
rejects Austin's comparatively wholesome love story and smiles on Lee's Western, just as
the Old Testament deity accepted Abel's blood sacrifice and threw down the altar of Cain.

By discrediting women and those who serve women or worship women, the
ancient patriarchs may have sought to combat the patriarchal worship of the Triple
Goddess in her many manifestations as Astarte, Ishtar, Iris, Artemis, Aphrodite, Demeter
and Diana and others. Before the invasion of the Hebrews, the Cananites worshipped a
variety of Gods, but fertility rites were central to their religion and the triple Goddesses
Asherah, Anath and Astarte were worshipped with special fervour as life – bringers and harvest givers. Cain's ritual offerings of grain and libations were characteristic of the early Hebraic devotion. The symbolic conflict between matriarchal and patriarchal worship in Genesis is complemented by the more directly historical account in the book of Joshwa of the efforts to destroy the worship of the Goddess. Here one witnesses a force due to culture/custom.

The action of Shepard's quartet of domestic dramas may be purely imaginative, but the father figure is clearly modeled on Shepard's own. Biographical speculations aside, *Fool For Love* moves towards a resolution of the conflict that has been a large part of Shepard's drama since 1976, the play also indicates a return to earlier dramatic techniques. Pete Hamill, points out that in the later plays "the symbol of the circle recurs. The characters are imprisoned within the circle of their lives, or seem to be making a wide circle home, as does Shepard himself"(Hamill 80). Shepard remembers the line from Albee's *Zoo Story*: “Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of the way in order to come back a short distance correctly”(80). Jerry in Albee's play makes this statement when he realizes that the love/hate relationship he once had was preferable to the indifference he now must live with. Shepard's characters find a similar truth in the wide circle home of *Fool For Love*, but first they must confront the father who controls their lives and manipulates Shepard's play.

The relationship between Eddie and May, their psychological confusion, and the ensuing violent arguments seem to be the result of the past action of the father. May and Eddie's brutal dispute reveals that their father led two different lives with two wives in separate towns and had one child with each of them. He would disappear for months at a
time and each wife would gratefully receive him upon his return without questioning his absence. Finally, however, May's mother decided to trace her wandering husband and found him in the small town where he lived with Eddie's mother, who committed suicide when she learned the truth. At least, this is the way May tells the story. In Eddie's version, his father silently led him on a long walk to the door of the house where May lived with her mother. Eddie saw her half-sister May peering from behind the dress of the red-haired woman who opened the door and threw herself sobbing into the arms of her long absent husband. Instantly they fell in love, still unaware of the truth of their heritage.

The father further confuses the facts by denying both stories and insinuating that he might not have fathered both children. But incest is not the real issue in *Fool For Love*. It is alluded to in Eddie's references to a mysterious bond between himself and May which he mentions when on the verge of losing control of her altogether. Her reaction of horror and vicious reminder that this bond must remain unspoken hints at its forbidden nature. But much more important is the psychological inheritance from father to son and mother to daughter. Eddie, like his father is unable to remain faithful to one woman and yearns for the excitement of a life elevated above every day, mundane reality. His attachment to the Countess, who is never seen and perhaps does not really exist, is evidence of this desire. Further likenesses are reinforced by the camaraderie they share over the bottle of whiskey that is passed from father to son and is significantly the only action that demands a physical crossing of the boundary between the play and the frame. May obviously resembles her mother in her dependence upon a man whom she cannot trust and who treats her badly. The action of the play consists in the young couple's
attempt to escape from the psychological patterns imposed upon them by their parents and their effort to solve the dilemma of the relationship created by their father's hypocrisy.

The second part of the uninterrupted action brings together the strands in Shepard's drama of love, for it intensifies and gives depth and mystery to the full range of what Shepard means by love. First there is sexual attraction, what Ross Wetzsteon calls "freely chosen" (Wetzsteon 27) and at the same time, paradoxically, "ruthlessly fated" (27). The Old Man's tale is also one of divided love for the two mothers: "It was the same love. Just got Split in two, that's all" (FFL 48). Eddie's love is also divided; the Countess and May are cut from the same cloth, active, violent, intense and May responds to the division like her mother.

The Old Man: (To May) she (May's Mother) drew me to her. She went out of her way to draw me in. She was a force. I told her I'd come across for her. I told her that right from the very start. But she opened up to me. She wouldn't listen. She kept opening up her heart to me. How could I turn her down when she loved me like that? How could I turn away from her? We were completely whole (FFL 55).

In *Fool For Love*, the absent father appears not only in the stories of his offspring but as a ghost-like character on stage as well. Like some eccentric visiting dignitary who has been offered the best seat in the house, or a ghostly witness to a ceremonial family rite, the old man's unintegrated onstage presence takes the play out of the realm of realism, placing the reunion of Eddie and May, two incestuous half siblings within a metatheatrical framework.
May allows Eddie to gull her into a long and passionate embrace only to knee him sharply in the groin, thus fulfilling her earlier promise that "right is the moment when you're sure you've got me buffaloed. That's when you'll die" (FFL 23). As Eddie lies writhing on the floor, gasping for breath, the old man laughs at his embarrassing and clearly uncomfortable predicament. I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist. "Isn't that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Isn't that true? (FFL 27). The old man seems to indicate that Eddie is somehow performing for him, creating a romantic masculine fantasy for his approval. But Eddie's painful condition suggests that if this is a fantasy, he has momentarily lost control of it.

The Old Man as if to set an example, points to the empty wall of the motel room.

The Old Man : I wanna show you somethin'. somethin' real, okay? Somethin' actual.
Eddie : Sure
The Old Man : Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. (He points at wall stage right. There is no picture but EDDIE stores at the wall).
Ya; see that? Take a good look at that.
Ya See it?
EDDIE : (Starting at wall) Yeah.
The Old Man : Ya' know who that is?
EDDIE : I'm not sure
The Old Man : Barbara Mandrell. That's who that is. Barbara Mandrell. You heard a' her?
EDDIE : Sure.
The Old Man : Well, would you believe me if I told ya' I was married to her.
EDDIE : (Pause) No (FFL 27).
Eddie conjures up a romantic memory in which his father takes him for a long walk one
evening, traveling across freshly plowed fields, stopping at a liquor store to buy a bottle,
and finally approaching a house on the far side of town:

Then finally, we reached this little white house with a red awning, on the
far side of town. I'll never forget the red awning because it flapped in the
night breeze and the porch light made it glow … And then this woman
comes to the door. This real pretty woman with red hair. And she throws
herself into his arms. And he starts crying. He just breaks down right there
in front of me … And then through the doorway, behind them both, I see
this girl … She just appears. She's just standing there, staring at me and
I'm staring back at her and we can't take our eyes off each other. It was
like we knew each other from somewhere but we couldn't place where.
But the second we saw each other, that very second, we knew we'd never
stop being in love (FFL 66-67).

From the bathroom May screams to Martin not to believe a word. Martin is forced to sit
in unwilling judgement over May and Eddie's tales of the past as they compete for his
credulity and sympathy. The sole earthly witness to their battle, he possesses the power to
verify the past, to decide which of them is living a lie and which the truth – if any truth
exists at all.

Barbara Mandrell is no longer a fantasy that the old man controls. She represents
a life lie, an escape from a tragic truth too painful for him to endure. He does not control
the lie, as he claimed earlier – the lie controls him. Lacking the strength to face his past,
he is a slave to his self-imposed blindness. May is angry at the beginning of the play, having thought that she might finally be free from a complicated past, she is unhappy that Eddie has again shown up at her door. Their love-hate relationship has continued for fifteen years in spite of their being half brother and sister. Eddie suffers from the same affliction that had haunted his father; he is repeatedly unfaithful, and yet something makes him return to May time after time. Sharing the same father, neither Eddie nor May has a healthy perspective on what constitutes a loving relationship, and yet neither can fight the attraction that is between them. Eddie's denial of the truth of their past shows his loose grasp on reality, while May fights desperately for something to hold on to, even if it is harmful.

*Fool For Love* is a Shepard love story, which means confrontation, one which reveals that May and Eddie, however often they try to go their separate ways, are inextricably bound together. It is a binding which suggests that of Lee and Austin and indicates that the play, whatever its surface melodramatic plot, is about the nature – the ‘double nature’, which one I should say – of love. Since May and Eddie are (or may be: evidence is always hard to verify in a Shepard play) half brother and sister, it is possible that the playwright intends the kind of split he presented in *True West*, a common personality that is at once feminine and masculine, gentle and violent, holding and escaping.

Shepard's persistent effort is to regain the landscape of the *True West* to reconcile the disintegrating forces in the family and to create a new world order by releasing the land and the people from the curse of man's antagonistic, possibility of regeneration through love. In *A Lie of the Mind*, he succeeds to some extent in his attempt, succeeds in his search
to bind what he calls the incredible schism between a man and a women, in which something is broken in a way that almost kills the thing that was causing them to be together.

In a realistic mode, Shepard talks the story of how Jake gets from where he is to where he ends up. It is not about the travel of a man between two geographical or even psychological points. By the end of the play, one's vision widens beyond the brothers, Jake and Frankie, their phantom father and Beth to take in a larger landscape. These archetypal genetic fates finally transcend to find that urge for salvation that hunger for love that allows every human to go on like Jake.

Jake's father was an alcoholic Air Force Pilot, who had deserted his family. After having ruthlessly beaten Beth, she is literally a highway away back at her home of the childhood in Montana. Jake when he takes the small leather box of ash of his father, one is made to understand that Jake is caught in the blackness between these two primordial magnetic poles – the father he cannot escape and the woman he cannot stop loving.

These ties, as immutable as a tribal code, also seem to be the lies of the title. It is the roles the characters play in their eternal family scenarios, the mythic stories that are re-enacted ritualistically in generation after generation, that dog Shepard's people. Even Jake's runaway father, in his final years alone in Mexico, cannot stop himself from sustaining an illusion of family by posting snapshots of his children among pinups of his favoured pop culture heroes. Jake's mother is fueled only by her desires to seek revenge on her husband; however, long he is been dead, Beth cannot resist being drawn to her own abusive husband, either: not even the brain injury she suffered from Jake's beating can wipe out the thought of him.
Jake's mother keeps hoping in vain that she will be released from her tie to the past by "winds that wipe everything clean". Each one of the family members, burn down the homes, run away, lose their memories, try out their new roles and yet fail to escape the family pull. But if, as Jake's mother Lorraine says, “love is a disease’’ (LOM 68), it still "makes you feel good while it lasts" (LOM 68). Shepard seems to believe in the saving possibilities of love between men and women, if not between parents and children. Love is the play's only plain truth.

The rest of the cast includes Jake's sister Sally and mother Lorraine; and Beth's father, Baylor and mother Meg. Shepard uses the simple convention of alternating scenes from family to family juxtaposing one with the other with only the music of a country and western band, the Red clay Ramblers to provide transitions. His point is as clear as it was in the quartet of family plays that precedes A Lie of the Mind: the curse of psychological disease passes from parents to children: the family's buried secrets eventually surface to demand confrontation; the truth of our experience collides with the lies of our minds.

The action of A Lie of the Mind has as its axis the turbulent marital relations of Jake and Beth. The play's preface cites a passage from the writing of poet Cesar Vallejo, which highlights the ‘Slavery’ of separation. Like other family plays of Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, in one sense functions as a personal exorcism. Jake's biography approximates that of the playwright, and when Lorraine tells of the father's transient military career and the family's many moves, it parallel's with Shepard's own vagrant youth.
Between this love-torn couple, physically and emotionally separated from each other, Frankie plays a connecting link. Frankie leaves for Montana to find out the truth. There he is shot by Beth's father, Baylor by mistake and becomes invalid. Beth takes care of him and in the process begins to fall in love with him. Jake in the meantime suspects Frankie's long absence and leaves for Montana. When he comes to know about everything he confesses his folly.

These things – in my head – lie to me
Everything lies. Tells me a story
Everything in me lies. But you, you stay.
You are true. I know you now. You are true
I love you more than this life. You stay
You stay with him. He is my brother (LOM 128-129).

Through Beth he defines a kind of love that could be everlasting. When this kind of reciprocity is achieved, the curse on the land and the family will be lifted and regeneration can take place.

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's script takes the audience to the nerve center of the play, for Henry must raise, as he says, "the question of my being! My aliveness! My actuality in this world! Whether or not I'm dead or not! … You can argue my case for me. I've got no one else" (LHM 41). Not surprisingly, Taxi finds himself accompanying Henry and Conchalla on their suddenly announced trout-fishing excursion. Shepard, however, is not merely dramatizing Henry's quest to discover if he is ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’. For the play, quickly deepens as Shepard interrogates the highly contested site between the real and the imaginary.

For Henry, ‘identity’ seems buried in a maze of denials and the rationalizations. After all, he reasons, "What did I ever do to deserve this? I've led an honorable life for the most part! Few slip-ups now and then but – for the most part – I've served my country. I've dropped bombs on total strangers! Paid my taxes. Worked my ass off for idiots. There's never once been any question of my – existence. It's humiliating!" (LHM 50) Defining his identity, however, remains as problematic as it is disturbing. Henry lives for years in his adobe; remaining drunk enough to blot out a past that forever emotionally paralyzes him. Only outsiders – Esteban, the kindly Mexican neighbour who long ago befriended and still feeds Henry, and Conchalla, Henry's enigmatic girl-friend he met while both were in the local jail's drunk tank – know much about Henry's recent existence.

Henry Moss protests that he is wrong and screams that they are bound up as ‘flesh and blood’. These brothers, Ray and Earl are the beneficiaries of their family's history. So
for Ray, the skittish younger son, ‘identity’ has been under pressure from the 
(de)formative experience of watching the family disintegrate and his own subsequent 
withdrawal. Too young to defend his mother and traumatized by the beating and 
subsequent abandonment of family by his elder male figures, he also ran from home. 
He used to work on cars with his father's tools; now he makes ends meet by playing the 
clarinet at a Ramada Inn. Although, he wears a Hawaiian shirt, black leather jacket, and 
blue leather tipped shoes, Ray appears withdrawn and paranoid. Ray seems consumed by 
a desire to stand up for a mother he could not protect as a boy, as if now he might make 
amends for the sins of the past. At best, however, he can only mop the kitchen floor in the 
third act with his older brother, just as the father mopped the bloody floor with their 
mother before. Within Ray's world of attenuated options, retribution comes too late. Expiation 
remains a distant force. These family members emerge as damaged figures whose only 
remarkable feature, Shepard suggests, is their own insignificance in the universe.

For Shepard, a mere survival in inertia is 'living death' and he seems to propose a 
hot pursuit, however drifting and meaningless it may be. Instead of bearing with the 
'dent' in i-dent-ity and 'divid(e)' and 'duality' in in-divid-uality / indivi-duality, 
Shepard's character choose to have a 'transformation' which seem to ascertain a 'form' in 
the disintegrating scheme. The 'quest' and the fight for the quest becomes an all 
consuming pre-occupation. Shepard's men and women reconstruct themselves on their 
way through the untrodden paths and the 'struggle' signifies a purposeful and meaningful 
life. It also creates a bonding with the bywalkers of the family. For Shepard, the restructuring 
of the family is synonymous with the reconstruction of the society.