Chapter IV
SAM SHEPARD

Sam Shepard is the preeminent playwright, actor, and television and film director of the post-war American theatre. Shepard, a major force in contemporary American theatre, has proved himself to be one of the most prolific, original, and important playwright of his generation. He has written more than forty-five plays, eleven of them have own Obie Awards, two Tony Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979 for his play Buried child. Some of his well-known plays from 1964 to 2009 are Cowboys, Mad Dog Blues, Action, Angel City, Buried Child, Curse of the Starving Class, True West, Fool for Love, A Lie of the Mind, and Ages of the Moon. Here is a brief survey about Shepard’s themes, characters, and family and the rest of the chapter is a study of three of his plays Buried Child, True West, and A Lie of the Mind.

Shepard attributes part of his father’s downfall to postwar trauma. He says in an interview:

My dad came from an extremely rural farm community . . . and the next thing he knows he’s flying B-24s over the South Pacific, over Romania, dropping bombs and killing people he couldn’t even see, . . . These men returned from this heroic victory . . . and were devastated in some basic way . . . that’s mysterious still. . . . The medicine was booze. (1)

Shepard's youth was shadowed by his father's descent into alcoholism and the deterioration of the family. His father was the source of violence and a model of disabling familial relationships and had also introduced him to the work of a playwright. His father was an example provided a warning of the disintegrative power of alcohol and violence of an alienation so strong that drove him to the margin of social life and the psychological disintegration. His father was a divided man and the inheritance passed to him was a double one.

Shepard’s Plays blend images of the Old West, fascination with pop culture-rock and roll, drugs and television- and bizarre family problems. The
distinguishing marks of his dramas lie in his unique use of languages, myth, music, and predatory characters. In his plays, he shows a rich variety of cultural concerns, and his central subject is the American family. His plays express a sense of loss, nostalgia for the original rural world and the national myths, destroyed by pragmatism, money and power. In the modern world, the connection between myth, land, community, and a feeling of purpose in life had been broken. The various themes which Shepered uses are broken family ties, alienations, inability to communicate, violence, the surreal wife-mistress relationship, and quest for identity and define how they impede the fulfilment of the dream. The chaotic used by Shepard serves in presenting the plays as instances of the Dream of a harmonious family turning to nightmare. Taking into account political and social issues, one cannot ignore the role of the theatre reflecting the changing nature of concerns, in America and beyond, regarding the integrity of the American Dream.

The plays express what Shepard called the despair and hope of the sixties; they act out both the spiritual dislocation and the survival instinct of traumatic times. In an interview Shepard says that the sixties, to him, felt extremely chaotic. It did not feel like some heroic effort toward a new world. Vietnam shaped everything. There couldn’t have been a more serious, a more deadly serious anger. So it was merely to him to be against the war. About the family in the sixties, he says,

...the family was no longer viable, no longer valid somehow in everybody’s mind. The ‘nuclear family’ and all these coined phrases suddenly became meaningless. We were all independent, we were all free of that, we were somehow spinning out there in the world without any connection whatsoever, you know. Which is ridiculous. (2)

The contemporary times are confronted with an ambiguity of the notion of reality, as, by the development of the media and information technology the human being pays the price of an almost unlimited access to knowledge. Sam Shepard reminds his audience about the dangerous situation of the ambiguous reality, he also brings about the favourite theme of the individualism and self-
isolation of the present times. The telephone, television and the entertainment industry and later on, the virtual reality of the internet have given the individual the illusion of social life within the secluded home. The contemporary person’s identity seems to be more that of passive spectator than of performer.

His themes are the bitter dependencies of people on each other or on their landscape. On the causes of moral decline in the United States, James Wilson Says:

*The American people believe that this nation is on the wrong track, not because it is constitutionally ill-founded or economically backward, but because its family life is deteriorating.*

Though political and economic opinions affect a person’s attitude toward government, the roof of national stability is found in the individual families comprising the nation. Sam Shapard’s plays are examples of how the decline of the nuclear family is represented in twentieth century American drama and consider some of possible causes for this decline. Years of living with invasive family aggression had taught Shepard to play things close to his chest: to look and to listen.

Shepard’s primary focus throughout his work is on questions of male identity. His male protagonists struggle to prove themselves to be men, but are limited, even entrapped, by the images of masculine identity passed on to them by their actual or cultural fathers. This issue of patriarchal legacy perhaps explains why Shepard has turned to exploration of the son in the American family as the chief way to explore issues of male identity and individuation that have obsessed him since early plays such as *Cowboys #2* and *Rock Garden*. The Cowboy is a recurrent image which he connects mythologically to such twentieth-century images of masculinity as the gangster and the rock star. Based primarily on this western hero myth, his men have as a key to their identity a view of maleness as violence. This view of masculinity has also been voiced by Shepard himself. He has said, in regard to American violence, which he genders as male:
there's something about American violence that to me is very touching. In full force, it's very ugly, but there's also something moving about it, because it has to do with humiliation. There's some hidden, deeply-rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always, continually, having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent.\(^{(4)}\) The violence perceived to stem from a need to prove one's self a man. Shepard himself recalls how his own father projected upon him the image of masculinity: "I know what this thing is about because I was a victim of it; it was part of my life, my old man tried to force on me a notion of what it was to be a man."\(^{(5)}\) Male identity is set up as a precarious thing which must be violently enacted and violently protected if it is to exist at all. The sons in True West, Buried Child, and A Lie of the Mind inherit a violent image of male identity from their fathers, who are usually drunkards wallowing in their self-destruction.

The plays bear a witness to Shepard's violent memories such as a wife brain-damaged by her husband's jealous violence in A Lie of the Mind, the corpse of a murdered child exhumed in Buried Child, a mother's home trashed by her sons in True West, and warring parents trying to sell the family home out from under each other in Starving Class. The plays resound with bewilderment at the absence of familial normality.

The heroic cowboy of American popular culture bears little resemblance to the historical cowboy. The cowboy hero is a mythic figure, an archetype in American culture, representing the values of common, middle-class citizens and the idealized stature which only mythic heroes can attain. Shepard’s drama has at its centre the idea that the traditional values embodied in the cowboy are no longer adequate, and that one must move through or beyond them to find new ones; employing the figure of the cowboy as an American everyman. Shepard examines the failure of Americans to find comfortable roles, self-images, and modes of action in a traumatic, contemporary world.
Most of the critics concentrated mainly on Shapard’s form of writing, themes, simplicity of language, his passion for rock music, his handling of magic and myth, his how he brought out about America’s cultural milieu, social behaviour, and political and cultural disintegration. He concentrates on human beings emotions. Marranca says: “in fact, it would be difficult to find a contemporary playwright with as much emotional texture in his plays as Shepard. That quality links him with another poetic realistic who deals with the emotional”. (6)

Shepard's characters are deprived of their dreams and sense of continuity. They seem less concerned with social change and more fixed on discovering some genuine force in a world filled with shattered families and the iconography of popular culture. They are preoccupied with merely surviving. They enact their repressed anxieties and depressed lives in a post modernist setting. His plays explore the American psyche at a time of failed dreams and lost vision. Shepard’s most plays are crowded with clashes of the pairings formed either by a man and a woman or by two men, and his plays seem to exist in a male dominated society in which the women characters are victims of male violence.

His plays trace the bankruptcy of American culture, in which characters are no longer integrated into their world by adherence to traditional values and norms. Shepard raises the idols of this tradition, examines possible strategies for adapting our old culture to our new circumstances. Although his language to achieve that is simple, it is not that he chose to abandon language but that it played another role than that of communicating character, forwarding plot, articulating mood or value. His was what Peter Brook had called: “a language of actions, a language of sound- a language of word- as part of movement, of word as lie, of word as parody, of word as rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word cry”. (7)

The example of a postmodern drama, Buried Child, won Shepard the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979. It embodies ambiguity, discontinuity,
disintegration, and difference. It shows that in his depiction of American family in decline, Shepard brings into account a consideration of postmodernity according to Lyotard’s theory of the fall of grand narratives. According to Lyotard, the metanarratives that traditionally used to give cultural paradigms have lost their credibility since the Second World War. That’s a clear sign of the cultural mutation happened in postwar and postmodern America.

The story is built around a classical topic, seeking roots and a sense of identity. The play in general is a mystery, as the audiences with Shelly, Vince’s girlfriend, try to unravel the secret. Abboston says: “The play is also a mythic exploration of family guilt and betrayal, conveyed by a complex web of symbols.”(8) Sam Shepard’s Buried Child tells the story of a spiritually and physically depressed Illinois farm family. The lives of its members are stagnated by the mystery and the contradictory emotions they share concerning an unspeakable family secret involving incest and infanticide. However, the farm of Shepard’s Buried Child is marked by misunderstanding, fear, and violence among family members. That is caused by intense sense of personal and cultural loss, and by a need to establish individual and family identity.

The plays structure is traditional three-act structure where Shepard depicts three generations in the lives of a grotesque family. The characters and conflicts are established in the first act, the conflict gets worse and the antagonist gets stronger in the second act, and the whole conflict seems to resolve in the third act. The characters bizarre behaviour and exaggerated defects symbolize inner psychological defects and generational conflicts that have shaped characters’ lives. “The play tells a family story of guilt and betrayal, in which the older generations have abdicated their responsibility, and handed down an inheritance of emotional sterility that the younger generation needs to recognize, understand, and transcend”.(9) In Shepard’s Buried Child, he continues to focus on father and son relationships, this time examining three generations in a single family. This
compelling play of family relationships and strife has become one of Shepard’s best known.

In *True West*, Shepard examines and explores the entertainment industry, family relationships, and the life of the modern cowboy. The title of this play suggests the existence of two Wests, one is true and the other is false. Lee comes from the desert West that is synonymous with the myth of the frontier American West. Austin’s life, on the other hand, is centered in the twentieth-century West of Southern California. There is no clear answer for which one is the true West. Symbolically, these two different western locals represent the conflicting ideals of masculinity that the family myth expects American men to consolidate. However, under its realistic surface there exists Shepards’ traditional abstract theme of the impossibility of the American family to successfully attain its goal of the perfect life as established by the modern American family myth. *True West* is characterized as a civil war of family life, a showdown between brothers. It means in the clash between these two opposites and the futile effort to integrate the two, *True West* approaches tragedy. The geographical meeting place between savagery and civilization is extended by Shepard into a psychological boundary. In Lee and Austin’s struggle against a cultural determinism they represent allegorical figures in the clash between East and West. Lee and Austin strive to overcome the character traits and values inherited from their parents, for their division and conflict are equally due to Lee’s close association with his father and Austin’s with his mother. The conflict in the play occurs both between the two brothers—the geographical or cultural frontiers and within each of the individual characters—the psychological boundary. Here the cultural change affecting the society resulted in a clash between the savagery and civilization.

*A Lie of the Mind* is, as well, a story of two families with rejecting and brutal fathers, ineffectual mothers, and their dysfunctional offspring. These two families represent all families that are caught up in the lies of the great myth of the traditional modern American family. *A Lie of the Mind* concerns the relationship
among the members of two families whose lives are loosely connected by the marriage of one’s daughter, who is an actress, to the other’s son. The two families are suffering of psychological dysfunctions and a lack of understanding. The opening stage direction of *A Lie of the Mind* might be a description of the psychological and spiritual situation of many of his characters: “Impression of huge space and distance between the two characters with each one isolated in his own pool of light”.(11) The play opens with a character further isolated, having apparently lost the power of coherent speech.

The idea of identity is explored widely within *Buried Child*. The play is about the struggle between creativity and destruction. Shepard is working with the themes of home, family, heredity, and environment; as he moves into the exploration of the self in relationship to others. This idea is embodied by the character of Vince. Vince has left the family home, moved to New York and has created a new identity for himself. When he returns to his family he is not recognized. Instead of gaining a sense of self when he returns home, he loses the identity that he has established for himself in the outside world. Vince is clearly on a quest to recover his past by verifying his memories. To fulfil his search for identity, Vince needs to justify his origins but his father and grandfather refuse to acknowledge the bond of flesh and blood that unites them. Vince inherits the patriarchal tendency toward power, domination, and violence best represented through his grandfather Dodge and Uncle Bradley. Vince returns with a new identity but quickly becomes both confused and corrupted by the environment of home, he cries in frustration: “How could they not recognize me?[......] I’m their son”.(12) He returns in the Third act a completely different person. Vince cannot fully believe that his physical appearance has changed so drastically in six years as to make him unrecognizable, but in desperation he admits the possibility and begins performing tricks that he entertained them with as a child, hoping that will help regaining their memories.
Shelly begins to accept the puzzling rejection of Vince and to overcome her fear of these mystifying strangers, Tilden reveals to her the family secret, the baby they had once, drowned by Dodge and buried in the garden. The identity of the buried child would seem to explain the bizarre behaviour of the family. In Act III, Dodge decides to reveal the whole story to Shelly. He tells her that the child was borne by Halie, a baby that came late in life after the couple had not been sleeping together for six years. He insinuates that Tilden fathered the child but

....it (the baby) wanted to pretend that I was its father. She (Halie) wanted me to believe it. Even when everyone around us knew. Everyone. All our boys knew. Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us.\(^{(13)}\)

Everyone in the play has different identities at different times; Dodge has a very fixed identity, but Halie suggests that he used to be different. Tilden says that he used to have a sensation of himself but that has been eroded. Shelly, who is an outsider to the family with an intact identity, is affected by the family and the house and completely loses her sense of identity to the point that she becomes totally unlike herself symbolized by her grabbing Bradley’s false leg. By the end of the play she no longer recognizes herself and says: “I don’t even know what I’m doing here.”\(^{(14)}\) Tilden, at the end, finds the body of the buried child. The last thing is Tilden taking the baby upstairs to Halie. The incestuous nature of this child’s birth results in confused identity and blurred morality; Halie is Tilden’s mother but also becomes his lover, so the child born is both her son and her grandson; it is Dodge’s grandson and stepson; and it is Tilden’s son and brother.\(^{(15)}\)

Sam Shepard’s play, *Buried Child*, set in rural America portrays to us the breakdown of familial relationships in their structure and value. This play contrasts the American dream in that it is the polarity of what the American dream represents. In the American dream, the male is usually presented as the breadwinner, the caretaker of the family, the family’s main source of income. It is the wife that is domesticated and is responsible for the maintenance of the family’s structure; the wife represents the backbone of the family. As the play begins one
can almost tell by description of the setting and scene design that the house depicts chaos. “Frayed carpet, stuffing coming out of the sofa, old brown blanket, old wooden staircase”; these descriptions, are used as a direct representation of the characters. The males in the family are seen as disappointed, since they have not fulfilled the dream of being successful. They have not fulfilled their roles in life, therefore opposing the American dream.

Ansel is idolized as an American Hero; the other boys are being constantly compared to him. Shepard utilizes Ansel as the ideal character but also uses his death as the end of all hope for the American dream in the family. Halie says:

*Course then when Ansel passed that left us all alone. Same as being alone. No different. Same as if they’d all died. He could’ve earned lots of money.*

Ansel is portrayed as the ideal character that would have achieved the American dream that both Dodge and Halie longed for. Ansel were set high, but the only disappointment was that he married into a Catholic which is said to be the cause of his death. The central image of American at war comes through discussion of Ansell who became a soldier, not to die on a battlefield but in a hotel room instead. He fell victim of the Mafia after marrying that Catholic.

Tilden, Dodge, Bradley and Halie are representations of the polarity of the American Dream. Tilden being the oldest son would naturally be seen as the wisest. Halie says that instead of taking responsibility, he cannot look after himself. She says:

*I always thought he’d be the one to take responsibility. I had no idea in the world that Tilden would be so much trouble. Who would’ve dreamed.*

The expectations of Tilden were set high; therefore indicating that he had the capacity to fulfil the American dream. What is inadvertently addressed is also the affair between Halie and Tilden. After the child was born, Tilden took great pride in raising the child but it tore the family apart. Dodge no longer knew his family; he was emasculated by his son.
Dodge is the father of the family, he should be the leader naturally but in contrast, he acts as the dysfunctional patriarch in the family. He is always drunk and hiding beneath his blanket and hiding downstairs. He is ashamed of his family and failure as a farmer and a father. This all started when Tilden impregnated Halie. Dodge portrays the character that is most affected because his character reflects those that have failed in creating environments of the American dream. He is most ashamed of his family and that he killed the baby and buried it in the field. The power he once owned as the breadwinner is now lost and is translated to Halie who is the bully in the family. He hides in his own insecurities and failures. He drowns himself in alcohol because he does not want to face the reality of being a failure to his family.

Bradley is an amputee. The accident which leaves him amputated portrays his helplessness and emasculates his character from achieving the American Dream. He is aggressive and bullies the other boys because of his fatal accident. He is considered to be another failure in the family, not because of his mental capabilities but because he is physically not capable of fulfilling the dreams of his parents. When Shelly hides his false leg from him, he becomes both emotionally and physically unstable. The symbol of the blanket is directly applied to Bradley too, since he also uses it as security from the reality of all his problems, where he just hides.

Halie serves as the main female character in the play but she does not fulfil the American dream, in that the wife serves as the glue to keep the family together. She is the reason why the family is unstable. She sets high expectations for her family but does not reflect it on herself. The affair with Tilden was a clear example that her moral standing was very blurred. After Dodge kills the baby, we would expect that she would try to mend the family but instead she begins an affair with the town Reverend. She abandons the family when they need her most which is why the family becomes the polarity of the typical American dream. She
revels in the past where she dreamed of the perfect family, and she believes that Rev. Dewis will relive it with her.

American dream is a nightmare that reaches its climax in the works of Shepared. Thus, in *Buried Child* Tilden’s sense of being in the family and at the same time not being, his sense of presence and not presence at home indicates that his existence and non-existence would make no difference in the family in which the American Dreams are all shattered. It shows the break of Grand narratives and the fall of enlightenment. In *Buried Child*, Shepard desires to show the inability of America to deliver on its promises. He also desires to highlight the fact that the so-called American Dream proves nothing but a fantasy of confused minds. Shepard says in an interview about the American dream:

*I don’t know what the American dream is. I do know it doesn’t work Not only doesn’t it work, the myth of the American dream has created extraordinary havoc, and it’s going to be our demise... The move west-ward was promoted by advertising, with words like ‘Free Land’,... we always prefer the fantasy over the reality.*

Vince and Shelly come to visit a house which is completely American. But what they face is completely the opposite of what they had in their minds: a shattered family, a drunkard grandfather, a bewildered father who does not recognize his son and a child which is buried in backyard.

The men in the family, showed the characteristics of the failed American dream. Halie portrayed the opposite of what the wife in the American dream is supposed to be. She tears the family apart. The incestuous relationship of Tilden and Halie does not match the standards of the traditional, moral, American family. Also, none of the family’s sons could be the true model of what American Dream supposes them to be, as all are impotent and irresponsible figures of a corrupted family. This play suggests to us that the moral standards of this family had majorly affected them from reaching the goal of their American dream. In this way, Shepard portrays a life which is completely the antithesis of American Dream and the ideal American kind of life is completely damaged in this play.
The curse of the family is well represented in *True West*. Each person takes on the burdens of the generations preceding him or her. Although Austin has tried very hard to escape the influence of his family, all of his attempts have failed. He has tried to get a sense of identity from his work and his accomplishments, but in the end they are all meaningless in relation to the identity formed for him in the family. Austin tries to deny that he is part of the family, but in the end cannot. In the end he is exactly like his brother and both of them are like his father—incapable of dealing with life in the regular world.

*True West* is a play about the quest for identity, and at the same time, a play about exchanging identities. The lack of a solid sense of self becomes evident, as one recognizes a sudden transformation in the behavioural pattern of the main protagonists. On the writing of *True West*, Shepard notes: “I wanted to write a play about double nature, one that wouldn’t be symbolic or metaphorical or any of that stuff. I just wanted to give a taste of what it feels like to be two-sided. It’s a real thing, double nature. 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.”(20) The clear distinctions between the brothers as represented by Shepard in the opening of the play eventually become blurred, and one may thus question the stability of each brother’s identity. After the failure of his movie deal, Austin reveals a new aspect of his personality by becoming increasingly reminiscent of his brother. He turns to alcohol, petty crimes, and adopts his brother’s aggressive attitude; more importantly, he becomes obsessed with life in the desert. He eventually decides to abandon his civilized life and instead embrace whatever the desert has to offer. Similarly, Lee all of a sudden emphasizes that he hates his rootless life and that he longs for the stability presumably embedded in civilized society. He situates himself in front of the typewriter and performs the role of Austin. As Lee attempts to concentrate on his writing, Austin drunkenly disturbs him.

LEE: I’m a screenwriter now! I’m legitimate. [......]
AUSTIN: Now I’m the intruder. I’m the one who is invading your precious privacy."(21)

Scene Seven may thus be argued to be a total inversion of the opening scene; by now, the brothers have obviously exchanged identities, or, as William Kleb puts it: “the spirit of each brother actually seems to possess the other.”(22)

One of Shepard's major ideas in True West is that what most Americans have taught to want and value is all wrong. He offers a contrary vision to the traditional American Dream that infuses so much of life and literature. Austin realizes that his entire identity—which, since his youth, has focused solely on achieving this dream—is completely wrong. What is right, instead, is to paint outside the lines and form an identity on one's own terms. For Austin that means giving up everything he has worked for and retreating to the desert. It shows the failure of the American dream.

Shepard's mothers absent themselves from the conflicts that so consume the men, they are embracing a different set of values that conflict with the male crisis at the centre of Shepard's plays. The mother's withdrawal is a refusal to collude in the male stories and their concomitant destruction. She chooses to leave because life on stage in Shepard's plays is usually a scene of destruction, violence, and death. Furthermore, unlike most of the men in the family plays, the women are often the only ones able to leave the destruction that engulfs Shepard's stage. In A Lie of the Mind, Shepard encouraged his women to approach their roles with a different attitude from that of the men. This difference in the actor's relationship to the character highlights a general difference in attitude toward the self between Shepard's men and women in his family plays. The women come to an awareness of the problems that surround them, and in a twist of traditional positioning, tend to take action to avoid or escape the destruction that is overwhelming the men. Ironically, although the male characters and their stories dominate the stage space of Shepard's theatre, it is their stories that fracture, fail, and fragment, even as the men cling to them for meaning and identity. A Lie of the Mind explores how
women are used and abused in the protagonist's quest for male identity, and offers us a look at the precariousness of that male identity in relation to women.

The scenes of violence have contributed to a prevalent belief that, in Shepaled’s world, women are more often acted upon than active, with men assigned central place and function. Bonnie Marranca writes that in Shepard’s plays “Women are the background…always treated as subservient to men, their potential for growth and change restricted”.(23) There is an essential masculinity to Shepaled’s dramatic world by projecting the crises of his own artistic sexual and psychic life on stage. The world may be masculine, but it’s the women who are able to see what that world lacks, to understand its inadequacy and poverty, to expose its soullessness.

Halie of Buried Child may not be the loving and loyal wife. The focus of “Buried Child”, which allows Dodge to tell the story of Halie's betrayal of him, does not allow for her version of events. Halie remains a disembodied voice during much of the first act of the play, and Dodge remains constant throughout the play in trying to discredit or ignore her, or to distract the audience from everything that she says. Dodge's version of events clearly sets up Halie to take the guilt for the family's curse, for the child that is perhaps the result of her incestuous liaison with her son Tilden. The half-stories we are told of the family's past are made to blame Halie for the current decline.

Dodge maintains centre stage not because of his strength as a character, but because of his physical weakness, which renders him unable to leave the house and its curses. It is weakness or failure, such as Bradley's loss of a leg and Tilden's loss of his wits that traps characters in the house throughout the play. The house also claims Shelley until she asserts her independence by exclaiming to the returned Halie, "I don't like being ignored. I don't like being treated like I'm not here".(24) Like Halie, she is able to leave the house after taking a stand to assert her independence, but Vince's stand ineffectually returns him to the place he was trying to escape. Vince is as unable as Dodge to leave this house and is helplessly
drawn back to it to take on Dodge's role. In taking centre stage to claim ownership of the house, Vince also claims his own destruction.

In *True West*, the characters of these plays are no longer able to sustain original thought or to imagine new roles or performances for themselves; their identity or existence is threatened or confused. Shepard's men are also limited in understanding the implications of their actions or of the actions of others around them. Only in the stories of the women is there any hope for survival or enlightenment. Enlightenment is hardly shared by all of Shepard's women in the family plays. The mother of *True West* certainly does not fall into this category, but neither does she fall into the traditional role of the mother who cleans up after her sons' messes in order to ease their way, as Lorraine seeks to do at the beginning of *A Lie of the Mind*. Certainly his women are no better parents than his men are.

The mother's story in *True West* is written off the stage even more completely. She appears only briefly as something of a cartoon version of the mother who tells her two grown sons, who are killing each other before her eyes, not to play rough in the house. Distant, unemotional, and out of touch, she serves mainly as background for the battle of identity in which Lee and Austin are engaged, leaving them to fight it out as she goes looking for a place she can recognize as home. However, in refusing to take the brothers' fight seriously, her reaction offers a different, less self-important view of the play's central conflict. The mother of *True West*, in leaving the stage space, simply ignores the seeming importance of the male crisis of identity, choosing instead to pursue a better life, a better love, and a better home. In contrast to these women, their husbands and sons cannot envision new lives for themselves once their current ones have failed. Instead of creating new stories, new adventures, new tactics, the men cling to the past methods of behaviour, repeating themselves in an endless cycle of self-destruction.
Shepard’s women adapt to hostile, unforgiving climates more readily than his men. Shelly in *Buried child* takes refuge in tasks, and then eases into a commanding role in household, eventually commandeering the absent mother’s bedroom. The mother, meanwhile, forsakes a rotten household. The women in Shepard’s late plays escape the past and the confining present which the men want to do but rarely can. Lorraine, in *A Lie of the Mind*, burns away all the remnants of her former life, eradicating the memory of her late husband and eagerly planning a future; her son remains trapped with the false icons and romantic memories of past glory. In *Buried Child*, Dodge lies prone on his couch waiting for Shelly to bring him soup; and Baylor, in *A Lie of the Mind*, can’t get his boots off, and his frostbitten fingers ache, until Meg helps him into his slippers and rubs balm on his skin. Women master the space in *A Lie of the Mind*, and in *Buried Child*. Men are victims of it, forever uncomfortable.\(^{(25)}\)

*Buried Child*, *True West*, and *A Lie of the Mind* have come to be known as Shepard’s family plays and have received much critical attention. In exploring family problems, Shepard continues an American tradition which started with Eugene O’Neill as Tom Scanlan observes “*From O’Neill on, our [serious] playwrights have been obsessed with the failure of family harmony and with family disintegration.*”\(^{(26)}\) *Buried Child* is about a family of misfits and outcasts who have tried unsuccessfully for years to cope with the emotional destruction inflicted upon them by the act of incest committed between mother and son, and the murder of the new born child by a family member. So an overwhelming sense of shame felt by all members. It is this shame that cripples the family. The family relational disintegration is fed by both distrustfulness and loneliness and the mood of detached, brutal and emotionless interaction between the characters is maintained from the beginning towards the end of the play.

Sam Shepard demonstrates the horrific consequences that result from a distortion of family roles, especially pertaining to fatherhood, through the family of characters in his play *Buried Child*. Vince and his girlfriend, Shelly, return
home after six years since he left the family. His grandfather, Dodge, and his father, Tilden, refuse to acknowledge his relationship to them. Vince calls attention as he tells Shelly:

*I gotta find out what's going on here. Something has fallen apart. This isn’t how it used to be. Believe me. This is nothing like how it used to be.*

Their conversations reveal a disgraceful secret that has altered the familial function of Vince’s relatives. Not only the family does not remember him, but also, the pictures that Shelly observes lining the walls of Halie’s room, are denied by the rest of the family. It is important to note that Shepard does not merely depict the family denying the past, they actually seem unable to remember aspects of it and that is a kind of denying reality.

Dodge, is the principle father in the story. His thin and unhealthy form reflects his deteriorated status in the family. Throughout the play, Dodge calls himself “an invisible man” and a “corpse” dependent on the rest of his family to care for him. He feels his position of authority has passed to others such as his wife, Halie, and younger son, Bradley. Dodge no longer fulfils the roles of masculine stability or even companion; Halie continually reminds him of her past – and present – love affairs. Dodge was once a successful dairy farmer but the events between his wife and son have changed him forever as they break the Grand narratives of familial relations. He has been deeply hurt over his betrayal. He spends his time trying to forget his past. But Halie tells him:

*You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body! Hacking your head off.*

Her words unknowingly describe the physical destruction that her marital infidelity has wrought upon Dodge. Toward the end of the play and in the presence of company, she takes a rose given to her by her present lover, Father Dewis, and throws it onto Dodge, causing it to land lifeless between his knees. This action symbolizes Dodge’s impotence and emasculation. In the same manner
she denies him his manhood. The disrespect for Dodge’s position as father does not have to do entirely with his own attitude, but also with the actions of other family members. Dodge receives the news of Bradley to cut his hair as a threat, even connecting it with his identity as a man:

\[
\text{You tell Bradley that if he shows up here with those clippers, } \\
\text{I’ll kill him!}^{(39)}
\]

This incident is one of the first symbols of emasculation and subversion present in the play. By the end of the play, even this simple claim of ownership is stripped from him as he loses all traces of authority in his home. Also, Bradley again plays a role in erasing his father’s position in the household. He takes the couch to sleep on, displacing Dodge onto the floor. Moreover, he also takes Dodge’s blanket, in a sense exposing his father to the trauma present in his family situation. By taking these last items that Dodge claims as his own, Bradley succeeds in again stripping his father of the last vestiges of leadership and masculinity within the family. So what a kind of fatherhood grand narrative this family keeps! Dodge is afraid to fall asleep, for example, thinking that some harm will befall him if he does:

\[
\text{I don’t Wanna lay down for a while! Every time I lay down} \\
\text{something happens! (Whips off his cap, points at his head)} \\
\text{Look what happens! That’s what happens! (Pulls his cap back} \\
\text{on) You go lie down and see what happens to you! See how} \\
\text{you like it. They’ll steal your bottle! They’ll cut your hair!} \\
\text{They’ll murder your children! That’s what’ll happen.}^{(31)}
\]

Dodge is vocal about his family role as he reminds his son that he is still his father. Though his efforts do not seem to change his position in the family, they are evidence of the inner frustration he feels toward his family’s mocking and demeaning attitude with which they now treat him.

The two sons of the family struggle for self-determination in the face of familial ties that restrict their independence and movement outside the system:

DODGE: You’re a grown man. You shouldn’t beneeding your parents at your age. It’s unnatural. There’s nothing we can do for you now anyway. Couldn’t you make a living down there? Couldn’t you find some way to
make a living? Support yourself? What’d’ya come back here for? Your expect us to feed you forever?

TILDEN: I didn’t know where else to go.
DODGE: I never went back to my parents.
    Never. Never even had the urge. I was independent. Always independent. Always found away.\(^{(32)}\)

Tilden’s response that he didn’t know what to do shows his inability to function independently outside the system’s boundaries. The act of incest is the most severe type of boundary blurring. In Shepard family, physical boundaries are broken on a regular basis, contributing to the high level of mistrust and paranoia among its members. Such boundary ambiguity creates additional anxiety. So their inability to connect with the outside society is itself a big break of grand narratives of social relations.

Tilden does not even seem to be aware that he is a father. When Vince comes back to his family’s home and calls Tilden:

\[\text{VINCE: Dad,}\]
\[\text{TILDEN: Me?}\]
\[\text{VINCE: Yeah, you. Dad. That’s you,}^{(33)}\]

Tilden seems to struggle with his identity not only as a father but also as an older brother. When harassed by Bradley, he does exactly what his younger brother predicts to run like a dog. Both fathers in the play have difficulty either accepting their positions or maintaining them, and the results create the confusion and chaos. However, the key to this lost identity reveals itself throughout the evasive dialogue between the play’s characters. Dodge offers his chronicle of the family’s destruction as he tells Shelly part of the story:

\[\text{See, we were a well-established family once... Everything was settled with us... Then Halie got pregnant again. Out the middle of nowhere, she got pregnant. We weren’t planning on havin’ any more boys... In fact, we hadn’t been sleeping in the same bed for about six years.}^{(34)}\]

While the entire story is never offered in detail, Dodge does admit:
Eventually, the audience learns that the murdered child was actually the consequence of sexual relations between Halie and Tilden.

The family disorder does not end with one generation, but passes on to the next. Apparently the only member of his family that refuses to live in a delusion, at least in the initial scenes of the play, is Vince. Demanding to be recognized, demanding truth. Vince’s arrival hastens the family’s destruction as the secret is revealed, and he joins in the power struggle. When Vince assumes the identical position of his grandfather on the couch, it reflects that the play will end exactly as it begins, only with a new man, Vince. Nothing has changed in the family, reinforcing the play’s circular causality. All the sons of this corrupted and dysfunctional family are dramatically impaired and disfigured and antithetical to the modern American family myth. Tilden is mentally devastated and unable to connect with the members around him. Bradley is mean and sadistic and suffers from the amputation of a leg, which represents his emotional amputation from the family. The buried child is evidence of the family’s ultimate failure. It is symbolically opposed to the modern American Family myth in that it is a result of an incestuous relationship within the family.

In *Buried Child*, Dodge’s death at the end of the play doesn’t bring about salvation. The pattern is continued by Vince who takes Dodge’s place on the sofa which signifies death. Shelly can no longer remain with Vince in his house, the dead house, so she leaves. She leaves Vince not in the hope of finding an identity on the frontier, but in order to escape the disgusting family relationships of the dead house.

In *True West*, Shepard continues to explore struggles within the family and to search for the meaning of home. The father and the mother have separated, so the men and women are more polarized than in *Buried Child*. Her urban alienation from the land parallels his alienation from people. The two sons, Austin and Lee,
participate in an intense, territorial battle that replicates the division between the two parents. The image of competition and hostility between family members is unrelenting and murderous.

LEE: you go down to the L. A. Police Department and ask them what kinda’ people kill each other the most,..... Family people. Brothers.... Real American-type people.

AUSTIN: We’re not insane. We’re not driven to acts of violence like that.”,(36)

But Austin ends up trying to strangle Lee with a telephone cord near the end of the play. His self-control and reasonableness are as illusory as the neat set of the suburban kitchen. This mother is another example of Shepard’s ineffectual women who are unable to stop the violence that, according to Shepard, characterizes the American male and discredits the idealism of the modern American family.

By the end of True West, the brothers appear locked in an endless showdown, just like the characters of the script that they developed together: “Each one separately thinks that he’s the only one who’s afraid (...) 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.”(37) In other words, even though Lee and Austin harbor aspects of each other’s psyche within themselves, the contradictory versions of masculinity tear them apart, and it seems that they never will be able to reconcile their differences. True West depicts an example of betrayal and revenge, which are two emotions inherent in all of Shepard’s family plays and also inherent in the American family. It shows a break of family peace and harmony.

A Lie of the Mind is the most disturbing of the family plays in its treatment of women. The fracturing of the female body in this play is set up as reflections of the fractured psyche of its male characters. Beth’s injured body and brain are the direct result of her husband’s interior fears and insecurities projected upon her. Jack epitomizes male’s rooted feelings of inferiority. The play’s initial focus is on Jake’s struggles rather than on those of his wife. As far as Jake and Beth’s
relationship is concerned in the play, Jake seems to be the acting subject, the play’s protagonist. Beth’s attachment to Jake’s brother, Frankie, offers different version of subject-object relations. She imposes on Frankie a fantasy version of him as her new and better husband; so Frankie, the soft like a women-man, becomes the victim of Beth’s fantasies who is not pure female.

Shepard’s *A lie of the Mind* is most complex examination of male identity within male-female relations. The relationship with Baylor and Meg developed. When they first appear in Beth’s hospital room, Meg’s vagueness is accompanied by Baylor’s ordinariness. Baylor’s dependence on his wife becomes as clear as is his resentment of her, making their relationship reminiscent of that between Dodge and Halie in *Buried Child*. The following lines of Meg sum up male and female differences, she tells Baylor:

> The female one needs... the male one... But the male one doesn’t really need the other. Not the same way... The male one goes off by himself. Leaves. He needs something else. But he doesn’t know what it is. He does not really know what he needs. So he ends up dead. By himself.(38)

Her declaration of self sufficiency is further underscored by Baylor’s helplessness. The man cannot even pick up his own socks or take off his own shoes.

Shepaed came to feel that if family was the source of a disintegrative pressure, of contradictory needs and defining tensions, it was also where he could eventually look for those connections, that sense of unity, whose lack he constantly laments. Besides, the family is itself a connection with the world beyond its parameters:

> What does not have to do with family? There isn’t anything... Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other- everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It’s an endless cycle.(39)

Due to the loss of reality, all family members in *Buried Child* have lost the true connection with life, the fact Vince and Shelly discover at the early moments
of their entrance. Required to keep the secret for so many years, the family, in fact, has come to believe that there has never been a secret to keep it untold. And this is exactly the family's fabricated illusion and the case of their being far away from reality. Tilden also seems so bewildered and out of touch with life's reality, but he is reconnecting to the land in which rain has created new growth. Perhaps, for these characters consistency lies in a sense of loss, of threat, of anxiety, and of tension. Tensions of Dodge's family are the direct result of losing reality which is buried in the backyard and they try to ignore.

The family in *Buried Child* constantly argues over minor things to avoid having to face the big issues, including their own failures and complicities in relation to a murder and its effects on a pain-filled dysfunctional family in the American mid-west. The number of times characters cover themselves or each other with blankets or coats symbolizes the extent to which all are complicit in hiding from the truth and each other. This is a family so buried in guilt and so corrupted that the members have lost the power to communicate, even on a daily basis. Halie's infidelity, past and present, and Dodge's drinking have greatly contributed to the breakdown of this family, and they bear the brunt of the guilt. Dodge, all denying reality, is a picture of ill health, showing how the effects of guilt wear a person down until there is hardly anything left. Dodge, in fact, denies any affective bond with his family, claiming that:

"...just because people propagate [does not mean] they have to love their offspring. You never seen a bitch eat her puppies?"(40)

In the course of the play, the problems of the past are always in progress with the present. The past in *Buried Child* is in some way the present. The present generation has to pay back the sins of the past generation. Dodge tries to deny the possibility of new growth, even as Tilden covers him with the corn he has picked. Dodge's drinking is a classic reaction to guilt. Halie's emotional estrangement from her family is shown both by what she says and by the fact that she frequently speaks from offstage, creating as great a distance from her family as she can.
Halie lives in a private world in her upstairs bedroom with pictures from the past. From her window she claims to see the whole world passing by. Ansel, her son who is dead, is an obsessive memory for Halie. Halie attempts to preserve the illusion of a happy and successful family, but her hopes are all in memory and even her remembrance is distorted.

The family in *Buried Child* suffers from the tyranny of the past, turning their day-to-day existence into a nightmare. Only the young girl escapes, according to Dodge on a search for some way to fill the void that brings men and women together, that sends people wandering in search of meaning:

> You’re all alike your hopers. If it’s not God then it’s a man. If it’s not a man then it’s a women. If it’s not a women then it’s the land or the future of some kind. Some kind of future.\(^{(41)}\)

Losing the reality is one of the main characteristics of Shepard’s characters leads to alienation, illusion, and psychological disorder.

*True West* is a metaphorical representation of the divided self, a familiar condition in modern drama. Shepard’s literary and film successes link him with Austin; and his self-dramatization as a cowboy links him to Lee. Kelp sees Austin and Lee as two halves of Shepard’s character. So the play dramatizes a “*confrontation between the conscious ego (Austin) and the hidden psychic forces (Lee)*”\(^{(42)}\) Shepard depicts Austin and Lee as cultural archetypes, that they represent two halves of his own personality as it is in the attempt to bring the two opposites into concert. So Shepard’s concept of the “true west” is explored.

In *True West*, the west is both a geographical reality and a psychological frontier; and it is on this psychic frontier that the battle between Austin and Lee takes place. In the play, the confessional nature of Austin’s story draws these brothers back into the past, which, resembling the home they trash, has been transformed into something unrecognizable. Recalling the 1950s Austin admits, “*When we were kids here it was different... that don’t even exist anymore.*”\(^{(43)}\) Considering the circumstances of Shepard’s life noted in numerous interviews before and after the death of his father, a World War II flyer and an alcohol-
addicted intellectual who frequently fought with his son and periodically vanished into the desert. Shepard says:

*I grew up in a condition where the male influences around me were primarily alcoholics and extremely violent, and at the same time like lost children... These wars had something to do with the psychological state that my father’s generation (coming out of World War II) came back in. This happened across the country, but my dad came from an extremely rural farm community- and next thing he knows he’s dropping bombs and killing people. It’s extraordinary.*

So Shepard’s plays are haunted by fathers plagued by alcoholism. A child raised in these circumstances survives by coping behaviour. Such an individual may become a renegade like Lee or a control freak like Austin, whose neurotic behaviour imposes order on a disordered world.

In *A Lie of the Mind* the past casts a long shadow over present events. Jake’s beating of his wife Beth establishes a bond with his brother Frankie and his physically and psychologically abusive father, who drank too much and too often. *A Lie of the Mind* introduces a history of Jake’s trouble-making, refusal to accept responsibility for his actions, and his abusive behaviour. His rejection of responsibility is a violation of the norm of manhood leads to his trouble. His mother Loraine says, “*Name a day he wasn’t in trouble? He was trouble from day one,* ”. Jake has difficulty in connecting the present time to that time- before he beats Beth, before his father died, and before he lived in this childhood home. Beth’s mother, Meg, as is confused in her recollection of Jake as Lorraine is of Beth. Mike informs that Jake inflicted the brain damage of Beth, his name seems to mean nothing to her:

MEG: *Who’s Jake?*
MIKE: *Her husband, Mom. Jake... you remember Jake, don’t ya?*

Meg’s recall of her own family is shaky. Finding refuge in a romanticized version of love, Beth’s emotional memory of Jake is disconnected from him. He is a name, a voice, an elusive past. In fact, when Jake appears on her doorstep she does not
recognize him, believing him to be a stranger. And when she remembers his face in a slow-motion, time has turned back to the first time Beth saw him- not the last. On the contrary, she introduces herself as she is now:

This is me. This is me now. They way I am. Now. This. All different. I-I live inside. Remember. Remembering. You. You.-were one. I know you. I know-love. I know what love is. I can never forget. That. Never.\(^{(47)}\)

Shepard has characterized *A Lie of the Mind* as a legend about love. It is a reflection on the past, on the elusiveness of memory, and on the forgetfulness that has broad implications for the audience personally and culturally.

Shepard’s characters all live in a state of shock. It is World War II, from which men returned no longer able to relate the women they had left behind. Shepard described the women of the forties as suffered a psychological assault by men who were disappointed in a way they didn’t understated. Also he says; “While growing up I saw that assault over and over again, and not only in my own family. These were men who came back from the war, had to settle down, raise a family and send the kids to school and they just couldn’t handle it.”\(^{(48)}\)

Shepard’s male characters are marked with their using abundant violence on the female characters. The response to this violence is interesting and strange. Neither the oppressor shows any sign of remorse, nor does the victim give the impression of suffering. Shepard criticizes the violence and the irresponsibility of men and also he is angry with the weak females who are treated as a material for man to abuse and enjoy and then to dispose. There is an absurdist facet in Shepard’s drama. The general picture of women portrayed by absurdist playwrights is a minor one in the society. Shepard’s plays are exposes to what extent material violence is experienced in an average American middle class family. Not only are women victim of violence, but also underestimated by the male characters, notably the husbands or fathers. Domestic violence is seen as means of control over the physically weak households, particularly women. This is
a typical patriarchal attitude at home. But since the 1960s, the feminist movement has helped marital violence to be exposed.

Shepard has created a new kind of violence in his plays by saying frankly about the worst social background and family life in America. This kind of violence, seen in *Buried Child*, Halie, who has sexual relation with her son Tilden, because of that she has one child, that was also buried, due to this cause violence arises, though having sex with son is considered as a universal taboo. Shepard brought out this kind of universal taboo frankly. Barnes pointed out about this play, “Shepard makes a searing indictment of the American family, seeing it as a destructive unit rather than a supportive one.”(49) Increasing awareness occurs when an unacceptable behaviour, held secret for a while, is uncovered after some time. This dark site of a family is at last unraveled causing stormy consequences, which epitomizes the deadly secret of the killed and buried baby in *Buried Child*.

In *Buried Child* each member gets crazy, performing their turn by victimizing the other. Thus each character plays a cruel and a victim role. While certain members afflict other members in the family, they are oppressed by the strangers outside the house. In his plays, notably in *Buried Child*, Shepard searches for the nature of paternity. The father is cruel, aggressive, dysfunctional and oppressive at the same time. This odd creature is created by the society itself. The men are problematic and do not present a reliable attitude. Although Dodge, the father in the play is weak, old, and cannot move, he tries to control his family from his sofa where he is stuck. He stands as a semi-dead body, a corpse, as his wife, Halie refers to him:

*You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body! Hacking your head off till all hours of the morning! Thinking up mean, evil, stupid things to say about your own flesh and blood!* (50)

The brothers, like their father, do not function properly, either. In the family, in which dialogue is impossible, behaviours tell many things: the father is half-live; of the sons, Tilden is halfwit, and Bradley is an amputee, a half-man. Every aspect
gives a picture of a dead family. This kind of violent masculine attitude is the main cause of destruction in Shepard’s families.

Shepard’s first naturalistic dramatization of the conflict between the claims of the past and the realities of the present occurs in *True West* when Lee, the natural man, the wanderer, arrives to challenge his brother Austin. The play seems to be the overworked tradition of the American psychological family drama. Austin practices his art in his mother’s house in a solitude and absence from his wife and children. His concentration is broken by the unexpected and unwelcome arrival of his older brother Lee, who returns hostile from the desert. Lee’s words and gestures emanate violence and chaos. Lee belongs to a lost frontier and the wild perils of the old West.

The two brothers have mutual hostility. Austin secretly longs for Lee’s freedom and independence; Lee openly desires Austin’s comfort and security. Lee is bent on releasing the hidden truths that lie behind social behaviour. His verbal and physical assaults results in exposing the limits of Austin’s psychological endurance. Then Austin changes the subject to the old man, their father whose life has been ruined by heavy drinking and who lives on the desert estranged from his family. This conversation proves to be even more explosive because of the affinity between Lee’s behaviour and his father’s.

Lee’s primitive force is thus pitted against Austin’s refined manners and acquired with a conflict that transcends the psychic rivalry of the two characters. The battle between force and wit or primitive power and acquired learning develops further into an exploration of the nature of human creativity when Lee attempts Austin’s role as a screenwriter. In a hilarious comment on the state of commercialism in the art, Kimmer accepts Lee’s project based on its verisimilitude, rejects Austin’s simple romance. Although Austin is the writer in the family, it is Lee, who really is in touch with the harsher realities of human behavior.
The brothers are equally incapable of communicating their hidden fears and desires in life; but in the fictions they create the truth of their inner experiences. Lee confesses that he needs Austin’s help in delineating the fictional characters in his play, and Austin will soon plead for Lee’s assistance in helping him escape from his artificial world. When scene 8 opens, Austin appears to have successfully carried out the demands of Lee’s trade, but Lee has clearly failed to adjust to his new profession. Lee’s frustrated attempt to assimilate into Austin’s culture has led him to recognize his own unsuitability for urban life. He confesses that his way of life is not a kind of philosophical decision but a result of his inability to make his living in the city. That is due to the social and cultural change.

As the play continues to depict the war between the brothers, Austin and Lee, contemporary man is shown to be hopelessly divided. To Lee the desert is a refuge. He tells Austin, “Out there it’s clean. Cools off at night. There’s a nice little breeze.” Austin, tired of the polluted heat associated with the life of a Hollywood screenwriter, longs for the solace of the desert.

The battle for dominance together with conflicting inner primitive fears are common themes in Shepard’s most plays. These fears bring about insanity-like behaviours in his characters. The households in his plays seem to be obsessive individuals and mentally ill. A Lie of the Mind deals with the tense situations in the American families in which the households are ready to burst out. Shepard suggests that the source of violence is not woman as the males claim, but instead, it is the man himself. A Lie of the Mind is Shepard’s other play in which he handles gender conflict. In a telephone conversation with his brother Frankie, Jake has said that he has beaten his wife, Beth, to death and he thinks that she is dead. The reason for Jake’s anger is his jealousy, he thinks that Beth is not loyal to him; she dresses in an immoral way, and becomes a destructive female, who is unfaithful to her husband. In A Lie of the Mind, Jake and Beth, in fact, are very similar characters. Both characters experience a bitter physical violence: Beth is beaten by Jake at the beginning of the play, and Jake is beaten by Beth’s brother,
Mike at the end of the play. They give trouble to a mutual relative, Frankie, Jake’s brother. Their mothers each ignore the other spouse: Beth’s mother ignores Jake, and Jake’s mother ignores Beth, as Jake’s mother, Lorraine says that she ever hears about Beth.

Shepard searches for the reasons why men tend to escape from home, and this inquiry is also for his father’s escape from his family and responsibilities. As a result, Shepard concludes that both sexes are in need of each, as Meg, Beth’s mother, points out, in *A Lie of the Mind*:

> The female—the female one needs—the other...But the male one—doesn’t really need the other. Not the same way...The male one goes off by himself. Leaves. He needs something else. But he doesn’t know what it is. He really doesn’t know what he needs. So he ends up dead. By himself.

Shepard shows us how degrading men act in treating women. Jake supposedly loves Beth but beats her to death. Beth’s father, Baylor considers Beth’s injuries less important than caring his mules. In the case of Jake, woman is turned into an object, one of the belongings, but in the second example, in the case of the father, the female is degraded more, to a much lower state. Beth’s father is a marginal immoral type and a selfish male. His selfishness and hunger are above the tolerable levels. Abstract terms such as love, affection, or emotions have disappeared from his world:

> This is my father. He’s given up love. Love is dead for him. My mother is dead for him. Things live for him to be killed. Only death counts for him. Nothing else.

Women are nothing but servants to him. The male characters in the play have a goal while the females are aimless. Hence the extensive violence practiced upon women in Shepard’s plays is a sign of breaking the grand narratives in American society.

The most pervasive irony depicting the capitalist American society in *A Lie of the Mind* is what the American family should be like and its reality as depicted through Lorraine, Jake’s mother, and Baylor, Beth’s father. Mike and Beth arrive
home. Baylor becomes impatient because Beth is sleeping and Mike does not want to awaken her. Baylor is also upset because he has brought some mules to sell while he is in the area, and he must leave shortly to meet the buyer. He acts as if his sale is more important than his daughter’s health. He does not think of his daughter’s well-being. It is clear that he is more concerned about his business deal and personal comfort than he is about his daughter. It is ironic that Mike expects him to be comforting, but instead he shows little concern at all. It is the new ideology in a capitalist society that values material gains over the family members. Baylor is not sympathetic. The idea of home being a place to receive loving care is shattered by Beth’s experience because her father, Baylor, criticizes the way she dresses and her inability to follow his orders promptly. Like Beth, Jake finds no mature parent to help him find his way back to mental health at home. Instead, he encounters a mother, Lorraine, who is self-absorbed and has no ability to help him deal with his problems. In both Bayler and Lorraine, Shepard shows how selfish and self-centered people have become even with respect to their own families.

Till the end of True West, the brothers are still fighting. Because of Austin’s civilized behaviour and Lee’s attempt to become more like his brother, it is ironic that at the end of the play, both of them are behaving in an uncivilized manner. The play brings out Shepard’s views on progress and its effects on wilderness. It is easy to picture the civilized Austin at Mom’s table and the uncivilized Lee in the desert with his father. Yet Mom’s house is at the edge of the desert. That makes aware of the fine line between civilization and lack of it. An ironic comparison can be made between Lee, who has begun preying on the residents, stealing their television sets and house objects. Lee brings uncivilized behaviour to the civilized area, and that is shown by the brother’s confrontational behaviour at the end of the play. Their fighting provides an ironic contrast to the civilized atmosphere of their mother’s house. The land development in Southern California is an issue Shepard was concerned about. The intrusion of civilization is later underscored when Austin says he would like to go live in the desert with Lee:
There’s nothin’ down here for me. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a life here then...
Fields that don’t even exist anymore.\(^{(54)}\)

From this interchange, it would seem that both men long for the wide open spaces. Although earlier, both brothers have expressed admiration for their suburban surroundings, calling them a paradise.

The consumerist society is described by Lee as a paradise. After he has broken into one home, he describes it to Austin as:

\[\text{Like a paradise kinda’ place that sorta’ kills ya’ inside. Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots havgin’ over the stove. Ya’ know like. They got in magazines... Kinda’ place you wish you sorta’ grew up in, ya’ know.}\(^{(55)}\)

He is surprised how people achieved happiness and make their homes a paradise by the new products which he can see only in magazines. He mentions that the media is the tool used for advertisement of new products in a consumerist society. Here Austin agrees that they are living in a paradise in their suburban area. Their vacillation between wanting both the freedom and openness of the desert and the luxury and structure of the suburbs undercross the irony in their own personalities. It is further ironic that because of their physical struggle with each other, they turn the paradise of mother’s house into a wasteland. It means they are rejecting civilization as well as their mother’s values.

The difference in appearance mirrors the men’s contrasting lifestyles, as *True West* soon reveals that the two brothers have chosen completely different paths in life. While Austin is a member of the social elite, Lee is an outcast of society. “*Austin represents objectivity, self-control and self-discipline, form and order, the intellect, reason. Lee stands for subjectivity, anarchy, adventure, excess and exaggeration, intuition and imagination*.\(^{(56)}\) Austin strives for the ideal of masculine success, to achieve financial prosperity in his role as the modern businessman. Lee, on the other hand, strives for the frontier ideal of masculinity. His fascination with the archetypical hero of the American past prompts him to
avoid the industrialized city. Lee and Austin represent a classic masculine split: the natural man versus the social man. The American male is in conflict, uniquely in conflict in the cultures of the West.

Realizing that Kimmer expects him to focus his attention on Lee’s movie idea instead of his own, Austin becomes enraged, and the conflict between the brothers escalates. The competitiveness within the business world eventually tears the brothers further apart, as Lee confirms: “Competition’s getting’ kinda’ close to home, isn’t it?”(57) Kimmer represents the stereotypical unscrupulous businessman. Manipulative, narcissistic and unsympathetic, he is willing to do whatever it takes to get his way. Lee reports: “[Kimmer] said it was the best story he’s come across in a long, long time”.(58) Loyalty and trust are obviously foreign concepts in the business world to which Kimmer belongs. Phrases such as “commercial potential”, “a great deal of merit”, and “big studio money”(59) are Kimmer’s main priorities. He attempts to buy Austin into participating in the writing of the script mentioning that the first draft offer is three hundred thousand.

In True West, both brothers want to destroy or steal a part of the other that each alternately idealizes and disparages. Needing each other, they remain frozen in irreconcilable difference. True West arrives at no resolution between the extremes the brothers connote: contemporary, civilized West and Old, frontier West, the family man and the renegade, social acceptability and marginality, the order and discipline required of art-making and the flexibility and chaos needed for creative thought. Lee thinks his stories of men dying for love of horses and his stereotyped yarns about cowboys forever chasing each other on the desert are the real West. Austin thinks the true West is freeways, smog, and shopping centres, and proclaims that the heritage of the old West is a dead issue. But the fight between the two brothers shows that the most destructive aspects of old West myths have been incorporated into contemporary culture. Lee’s story of the endless chase by one frightened man after another one is exactly what the two brothers reproduced at the end to the play. Neither has managed to learn to live

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with the contradictions produced by the American society within him and neither can help the other repair his one-sidedness.

In *Buried Child*, Shepard portrays characters to show both the emptiness of their lives and the void of their contemporary culture. Characters of the play, as Bottoms notes, "seek to create and recreate their personal appearances. Many of them manipulate an ever-shifting series of roles and masks, thereby, suggesting the absence of any underlying sense of the self." Characters of the play inhabit a world in which parents deny any kind of kinship with their children. Becoming disintegrated, they cannot show any kind of affection to one another; they become disloyal, they get involved in incest, and life is unbearable. This is in fact, another outcome of postmodern culture, due to that everybody feels a great contempt to one another, but at the same time, no one is able to make a complete break because there is nowhere to go to. There is a great gap among the family that nothing can fill it in, neither the return of sons home, nor the exhumation of the buried child from the barren backyard, because in the presence of all of them there is an absence and a lack. Hence, the uncertainty is regarded as the best way to live life in a culture addicted to nostalgia, violence, and secrecy.

Shepard’s family members in *Buried Child* all know the secret, but it is an unspoken rule that it will remain hidden. As a result, communication becomes so rigid that the family keeps secrets from each other that have nothing in common with the original secret. They are so accustomed to hiding one secret that hiding other pieces of information becomes second nature, and as a result the family is devoid of trust as members hide information from each other. Communication is vague and ambiguous so that little definitive meaning is ever established in conversion.

When Dodge complains that Tilden cannot be counted on, he introduces the idea of mistrust:

*Now, between the two of us, who do you think is more trustworthy? Him or me? Can you trust a man who keeps bringing in vegetables from out of nowhere?*
Even when Halie asks him what he is watching on television, Dodge’s response is evasive and noncommittal:

**HALIE’S VOICE:** Dodge, are you watching baseball?
**DODGE:** No.
**HALIE’S VOICE:** What’re you watching? You shouldn’t be watching anything that’ll get you excited!
**DODGE:** No horse racing.
**HALIE’S VOICE:** They don’t race on Sundays. (62)

Dodge doesn’t answer her questions, but will only tell what he is not watching.

Even Halie contributes to this dysfunctional pattern. Dodge asks Halie if the man who took her to California ever laid a finger on her. His answer is met with a long silence. Her response has nothing to do with his question. Halie changes the subjects to avoid giving Dodge a truthful answer. These ambiguous and elusive responses continue when Tilden enters. His answers to Dodge’s questions are meaningless:

**DODGE:** Where’d do you get that?
**TILDEN:** Picked it.
**DODGE:** Where’d you pick it from?
**TILDEN:** Right out back.
**DODGE:** Out back where?
**TILDEN:** Right out in back. (63)

Tilden is similarly shifty when Dodge asks him about the trouble he had in Mexico. Vague responses like these negatively affect the relationships within the family because members come to know each other only on a superficial level and quickly learn not to trust other family members. Each one distances as if living among strangers.

The play’s communication patterns reveal that most conversations have never a logical ending because questions are never answered. This breakdown in dialogue contributes to the members’ inability to sustain interpersonal relationships. The conversation in the play supports alliance, maintain secrets and silence by subverting answers. It reinforces a deep sense of distrust among all the
members because they have been conditioned to accept dishonesty as a normal part of conversation.

_Buried Child_ begins with Tilden bringing on stage an armload of corn. The corn originates from a field where there hasn’t been corn since a long time. The corn and later the carrots were last grown before the family began to experience their troubles. It represents the possibility of renewed life. Shepard closes the play with Halie viewing a rich harvest from the window of the room where symbolically the family’s troubles began, her bedroom. She says:

_Dodge? Is that Dodge? Tilden was right about the corn you know. I’ve never seen such corn.... Carrots too. Potatoes. Peas. It’s like a paradise out there, Dodge... Maybe the rain did something. Maybe it was the rain._

By the end of the play, Dodge has quietly expired and Tilden enters with the decaying remains of the child who was buried in the garden. It is a remarkable moment, contrasting fertility and drought, invoking the lost innocence and failed expectations not just of a family but of an entire nation. They succeed closing the system until the end of the play, when the system collapses once the secret is revealed. The family secret has an oddly cohesive outcome. It unifies the family, whose members recognize that they are part of a shared endeavour. But the closing of the system has a negative effect, making them even more reclusive as they become suspicious of outsiders.

_Buried Child_ is a play about coming back to what one left behind- even though it is hypocritical, violent, and shameful- and getting sucked into it. It is about giving up everything in the present in order to make contact with the past. This familial disintegration suggests the deterioration of the American family in general. Shepard’s assertion here is that community and belonging must be linked to family and biological roots no matter how destructive, since what’s outside is worse.

In the representation of a life and characters in which coherence, unity and centre seems to be fading away, the characters suffer from a lack of sustained
unity to keep them together. Shepard seems to portray his characters as voids, perhaps to show both the emptiness of their lives and the void of their contemporary culture. In *Buried Child* the members of Dodge's family, not satisfied with their roles, constantly change their functions, however, no satisfaction is fulfilled and, the fact that all members of this family have been forgotten is that they are all trapped in the hands of postmodern condition- the fall of grand narratives and the loss of reality.

In *Buried Child*, alienation and dissociation are experienced by all the family members, all denying reality, and therefore their true identity. All the characters are crippled in one way or another. They are incapable of recognizing Vince, one of their own, who has arrived seeking his own truth, his own identity. Shepard represents that the problems of the past are always in the present, and the new generation pay for the sins of their fathers forever. It would appear that Vince, lying on the sofa at the end of the play, will be like Dodge. The play’s ending, a return to the beginning of the play, suggests that the past will always be with this family. Shepard in *Buried Child* directly challenges the fall of religion in the family life and puts their social values under erasure. Although none of the characters in the play seem to have any moral scruples at all. Whatever the characters’ action and decision are, Shepard expresses no hint of his personal feeling toward them. The attitude of these characters towards life reflects that the old Grand narratives of Christianity and morality have no longer any place.

Shepard is criticized by some feminist critics for humiliating female characters, and they make it clear that Shepard’s plays ignore women, their capabilities, and achievements in general. Mothers are torn between fathers and sons as a result of a sort of oedipal impact. Halie, in *Buried Child*, who bears an incestuous child from her son Tilden, is a typical example of this ongoing rivalry. His plays are criticised for including several elements of misogyny or gynophobia. Shepard’s male characters always seek to run away from women who try to survive depending upon males. The female character in his plays is weak,
dependent, problematic, discredited, and missing in every way. Shepard is regarded as a playwright who likes to convey his private life in his plays. Shepard’s two opposite attitudes towards woman in his plays coincides with his living with different women in different times, so it is quite possible that this situation reflects his real family life.

In the early plays, fragmentation is an aesthetic principle no less than a fact of character or social relations. Characters are fractured, divided, and doubled. It becomes an aspect of a deeper alienation, a division within the self. In 1988 interview, Shepard explained that he had arrived at a point:

*I need something that has more of a definite wholeness to it. That has a sense of being a story that’s already been told... What’s most frightening to me right now is this estrangement from life. People and things are becoming more and more removed from the actual. We are becoming more and more removed from the Earth to the point that people just don’t know themselves or each other or anything... People are being amputated from each other and from themselves. (65)*

The desire for connection remains an echo of lost harmonies resulted in violence, and a personal and cultural anarchy. Shepard’s characters are driven less by a sense of genuine destiny: “*People who have a profound hunger for anything- the hunger for drugs, the hunger for sex- this hunger is a direct response to a profound sense of emptiness and aloneness, maybe or disconnectedness*” (66)

The family in *Buried Child, True West, and A Lie of the Mind* becomes the location of passion, an imminent violence, and a sense of things in near terminal decay. Shepard’s plays are about male violence, a fragmented social world, the decay of relationships, the loss of an organic connection between man and his environment, the attenuation of the link with a past, disrupted and dislocated harmony in the modern world. In general, the West is a dead issue to Shepard. Tilden, the burned out and displaced son in *Buried Child*, who returns to his family after a twenty-year exile Mexico, Lee, the thief, who wanders out of the desert in *True West*, and Jake the confused liar, violent husband in *A Lie of the
Mind, these unmoored souls are trying to escape a sense of shame that they only vaguely understand. They recede from family, from society, and through drink from themselves. All these figures are fragments of Shepard’s father, a Second World War bomber pilot, who spent his last years alone in the desert because he didn’t fit with people.

From Cowboys to True West Shepard’s dissenting voice has rebelled against the restrictions of urban life and asserted the claims of freedom and adventure embodied in the myth of the American West. His attempts to attack contemporary civilization through magic and incantation seem bizarre and satirical, but it is important to recognize that Shepard is not just analyzing the society or suggesting reforms, but exorcizing the spiritual demons. With his deeply ingrained Western sense of psychological rootlessness and space, Shepard’s work is prodded by a conflicting urge to make a home in the contemporary wilderness. His playas are most advantageously considered by grouping works concerning the bankruptcy of American culture, the disintegration of Americans from their world, the revelation of false cultural heroes, the dead culture, and failed but necessary attempts at reintegration by means of relations with other and the returns home. In his plays, Shepard depicts the search for home within contemporary American culture. Characters build structures for the home in Fourteen Hundred Thousand, long to return home in Mad Dog Blues, try to live in a new home in Action, and return to the original home in Buried Child or to the current domain of a parent in True West.

To sum up, in Shepard’s plays, breaking the grand narratives is clear in the familial relations, the connection to the outside world, the Parenthood roles, the incest and murdered child as in Buried Child, the effects of capitalism, and the loss of identity. Each of these facts is a clear mark of the cultural mutation.
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