CHAPTER FIVE

REALISTIC FAMILY PLAYS

Shepard himself in an interview with Kenneth Chubb said:

I’d like to try a whole different way of writing now, which is very stark and not so flashy […] and try to scrape it down to the bone as much as possible […] it could be called realism, but not that kind of realism where husbands and wives squabble and that kind of stuff.

(208)

Because in his realism Shepard brings the transgressive elements, deviations do occur; these deviations and inconsistencies occur within the context of real life. What is generally unauthorized becomes authorized in his plays, and uncovered for all to see through patterns of ritual actions.

After his early plays in which Shepard has presented the male bonding relationship, he wrote *Buried Child* and *Fool for Love* in order to explore the male-female personality. In *Fool for Love*, very specifically Shepard intended “to sustain a female character and azhave her remain absolutely, not only as a social being, but also as an emotional being” (qtd. in Nightingale 30). *Buried Child* and *Fool for Love* like Shepard’s other family plays are realistic ones. Their characters are searching for an identity that like the family secrets in both the plays is gradually revealed through dialogue and action.

Distinctive deviances from the realistic pattern happen in both the plays. *Buried Child* starts as a realistic play, but it turns out to be totally different. Step by step the play moves toward a ritualistic play. In a brilliant way, Shepard combines the reality (actual) with the ritual (fictional). The play moves from one mode to the other, in essence announcing that it is slipping out of its naturalistic format and moving into the mythic actions.
Traditionally, playwrights attempt to create an illusion of reality on stage, providing their characters with conventional needs and desires in a world, governed by logic and causality. Shepard abandoned such a technique, instead preferred to see his plays as complex pieces of improvised music. In Buried Child for example, characters enter carrying armful of carrots, cover their father’s body with husks of corn, or bury him under the clothes, or cut his hair viciously. Frequently their actions cannot be explained simply as product of the characters but rather as belonging to greater mythic and ritualistic patterns of behaviour.

In Fool for Love the father is present outside the stage, a device that can not be seen in Shepard’s earlier realistic plays. Although gender conflict and male-female relationship appear to be the play’s main concerns, paternal control and manipulation frames the play and determines its action. Unlike the other realistic family plays, in which the father was either centrestage as in Buried Child and Curse of the Starving Class, or absent as in True West, the father in Fool for Love has a surrealistic presence, because he “exists only in the minds” of the characters.

In Buried Child and Fool for Love Sam Shepard uses the old myth of incest. He depicts the incestuous relationships between the members of the family. The gradual discovery of the secrets blasts any hope in both the families. As if incest shatters the American dream of the happy family in both the plays. In these plays we will see characters that are not from within the families. These outsiders facilitate exposition and are good listeners and judges through whom we can recognize the nature of other characters and understand them better.

Shepard believes that the world explored by his plays is an “emotional territory” rather than a mundane physical reality. He told New York Times Magazine in 1980 that he believed theatre’s greatest power to be its ability to make visible a hidden, visceral energy. “You can be watching this thing happening” he said, “with actors and costumes and light and set and language, and even plot, and something emerges from beyond that […] the image part, the added dimension” (Coe “The Saga”, 56). Shepard’s work is further complicated by the radical approach he takes to characterization in many of his plays, most notably in Buried Child and Fool for Love.
Buried Child was first performed at San Francisco Magic Theatre on June 27, 1978 under the direction of Robert Woodruff. A year later, it was performed in New York at the Theatre de Lys on Christopher Street. In the same year, Sam Shepard won the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama for it, an honour “which undoubtedly gave him much pride and satisfaction” (Oumano 124). The prize brought about more attention to him as a playwright, established his standing in the mainstream of American culture, and provided greater opportunities for wider exposure of his works.

In Buried Child Sam Shepard brings three generations of a family together. The play is the story of a family secret that is gradually revealed through the characters’ dialogues and their actions. The peace and normality of the life of the family members is threatened due to the revelation of the secret, which causes a conflict in the family.

Each character in the play is part of the total picture, a picture that reveals to be fragmentary and fractured. The unholy secrets of a father, mother and two sons are forced into consciousness against the wishes of the other characters. It is said that the play has similarities with Harold Pinter’s The Homecoming (Simon, “Theatre” 77), but its ending is more conventional than Pinter’s. At the end of Buried Child, it is the grandson who inherits the house while his girlfriend leaves him.

Critics believe that the play uses myth; the ritual return of a son to his heritage, the image of shared identity between grandfather and son, the image of continuity or deeply felt psychological connections. It also shows an organic bond between man and nature, the mythical state of ones, the myth on the pattern of death-rebirth, the myth of the “Corn King,” whose health guarantees fertility of the land, and when he grows old, all the crops die and the land becomes barren and infertile. So the “King” must be ritually put to death so that his spirit may be transmitted to a younger one.

When the play begins, it shows a middle-class American living room: “Old wooden staircase [...] a large, old fashioned brown T.V.” (BC 11). Dodge the father of the family is in his seventies. He spends all his time on a sofa, covering himself with a blanket, smoking, coughing and “awaiting death as a release from the boredom of a hollow life” (Nash 204). Later in the play, we will see that despite his physical limitations, his mind seems sharp, but as his name implies, he “dodges” responsibility.
Throughout the play, Dodge reveals himself as the embodiment of nihilism. He never leaves his sofa and says: “I don’t enjoy anything” (BC 16).

Halie, Dodge’s wife has her room upstairs. It is filled with family pictures of the past, and this shows her private world in which she lives and very significantly, demonstrates her alienated character from other family members. At the beginning of the play, and at the end, very characteristically Shepard presents her as a voice. He also presents other elements that indicate the separation and alienation of both Dodge and Halie. She tries to forget her life’s problems, either by expressing idealized images of her sons, or having an affair with the local minister.

She talks to Dodge about the rain from her upstairs room (a sign of separation of the two characters). The rain is very significant, because it prepares the land and the fields for a miraculous rebirth and washes the earth from the buried child’s bones. While talking to each other, they shout because of the distance between them. Actually, there is no real communication between these characters, because, Dodge either “doesn’t answer,” “makes no reply,” or “mimics” her mockingly:

HALIE’S VOICE. Dodge! You want a pill, Dodge?

He doesn’t answer

HALIE’S VOICE. I went once, With a man.

DODGE. (mimicking her) Oh, a “man”.

HALIE’S VOICE. What?

DODGE. Nothing! (BC 12-13)

The very first image Shepard gives us about his characters through their speeches, is one of incommunicability, separation and alienation. The fragmentation and isolation of these characters is intensified by the appearance of Tilden, the couple’s eldest son. Tilden who has been a former college football star, is physically complete but “something about him is profoundly burned out and displaced” (BC 16), as if reduced to a child. Tilden in opposition to his younger brother, Bradley, is a very calm character. Although Bradley has lost a leg in an incident, but finds means of violence and threat.

The third son of the family is problematic. Ansel, the basketball star and the war hero, was Halie’s special pride and joy. He was the one who could achieve greatness.
She says that Ansel was the most intelligent of all her sons. Though in her words, he was not as handsome as Tilden or Bradley. Ansel died in a motel bedroom on his honeymoon rather than as a “war hero”. Halie cries out for her lost child: “He was a hero! A man! A whole man!” (BC 20), and thinks that his Italian wife and her family killed him. Otherwise he would have been alive, “if he hadn’t married into the Catholics. The Mobs” (BC 21). Ansel was the only one who would have taken care of them, because he was: “Brave. Strong. And very intelligent” (BC 20). But Ansel died young, and all the hopes of his mother and the family died with his death.

As Halie indicates, Ansel died before he could have become a soldier, and as Bradley says; Ansel “never played basketball” (BC 59), though Halie insists he did. So it brings a suggestion to the mind that, his death was anything but heroic. The contradictions in the languages of Halie and Bradley suggest that Ansel is no more than her mother’s prediction of an ideal son.

The other character of the play, is Father Dewis, the local minister whom Halie first tries to seduce “about putting up a plaque for Ansel” (BC 20) and later when she spends a night with him, he promises to erect a statue in the memory of Ansel; “a full bronze. Tip to toe. A basketball in one hand and a rifle in the other” (BC 58).

Tilden who has been in New Mexico for twenty years, has returned home now. Perhaps to be taken care of, because he did not know where to go. Halie says: “He is still a child” and Dodge confirms: “I’ll watch him” (BC 24). Coming home, he has been walking in the mud and picking the corn. Although Dodge says nothing has been planted in the fields “since nineteen thirty five!” (BC 17) Corn is a sign and a symbol. It is a “mystery” to Tilden, but Halie cannot see the corn from her window. Sometimes it is there, sometimes it is not, or, it depends on the person who is looking, perhaps Halie intentionally refuses to see it. However, Tilden could see “this stand of corn.” In fact, he has been “standing in it” (BC 23).

Perhaps by “standing in it,” Tilden is rooting himself and his past in the corn, and identifying his relationship to the past. He wants what the corn represents. The suddenly grown corn, suggests the continuity of a myth and rebirth of the land, which has been barren for a long time. It also offers the rebirth of the buried child he might
have fathered, the buried child in the missing person, a character that lives in the past and has all his relationships to the past.

Later in the play, Halie asks Tilden (with whom the incest may have been committed): “What is this in my house! [...] What’s the meaning of this corn Tilden!” (BC 21-22) and he responds: “It’s a mystery to me. I was out in back there. And the rain was coming down [...] I was just walking. It was muddy but I didn’t mind the mud so much. And I looked up. And I saw this stand of corn” (BC 23).

Tilden’s answer, is not fully relevant to the question her mother asks, instead it creates an image. In this scene, Shepard shows that Tilden cannot provide logical responses in his dialogues with other characters. And when later both Dodge and Halie accuse him of stealing the corn, Tilden “starts crying softly to himself ” (BC 23), because he is nothing more than “an infantilised man” (Bigsby Vol:3, 242). He must be watched constantly, he is dull and confused. Perhaps, too much sun and alcohol has transformed him while living in New Mexico.

The real corn Tilden brings, takes a surreal quality in the play. The mysterious corn seems Shepard’s grounding of the surreal in realism. When he enters with “his arms loaded with fresh ears of corn” (BC 16), this function is fulfilled. Later towards the end of Act One, in a ritualistic ceremony, Tilden “gently spread the corn husks over the whole length of DODGE’S body (BC 28). His action suggests Dodge’s symbolic role as the “Corn King,” but an old king who is in the winter of his life.

Tilden’s ritual action follows by Bradley’s entrance. He is mutilated, and has lost a leg in a chain-saw accident. He is vicious towards his father. Like Tilden, Halie and Dodge must also take care of him – both sons are invalids, one without a leg, and the other with a child’s mind.

Before Bradley’s entrance, Halie tells Dodge that, he is coming to cut Dodge’s hair. Dodge becomes so upset and says: “You tell Bradley if he shows up here with those clippers, I’ll kill him!” (BC 15). In this scene Shepard shows, how logically Dodge thinks, and how a sharp minded character he is. Later in his conversation with Halie, he becomes more and more angry and adds: “Bradley doesn’t even live here!”

HALIE. It’s his home as much as ours. He was born in this house!
DODGE. He was born in a hog wallow.

HALIE. Don’t you say that!

DODGE. He doesn’t belong in this house. (BC 23)

Comparing Dodge’s language in this scene with another scene in which he fails to recognize his grandson Vince, we understand that he is playing a cruel joke on him.

The conversation between Halie and Dodge about Bradley brings the first clue to the family secret:

HALIE. You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body! [...] Thinking up mean, evil, stupid things to say about your own flesh and blood!

DODGE. He’s not my flesh and blood! My flesh and blood’s buried in the back yard. (BC 24)

In this scene, Dodge claims that he is the father of the buried child, at another situation, Tilden refers to the child as his. What is clear is that, the father’s identity is less clear and remains a problematic issue in the play.

Halie’s speech throughout Act One shows that she tries to create the dream of a happy and successful family, but as the play continues, we will see that all her efforts are fruitless and she cannot create this situation. Tilden and Bradley are not what their mother expected and Ansel died before he could be a real hero as Halie expected and could never win a medal. According to Nash: “In folklore, it is a recognized rule of narrative that the third son is the heroic one” (204). He also sees a “heroic vacuum” in the family, a vacuum that Vince, the grandson of the family, will soon fill it in Act Two. Later, when Halie comes down from her upstairs room and first appears on the stage, is “dressed in black,” as much in mourning for herself as for her dead son(s).

Bradley finally arrives. Shepard’s explanation of him in the stage directions, provides a monster-like picture of this character:

He is a big man […] His left leg is wooden, having been amputated above the knee. He moves with an exaggerated, almost mechanical limp. The squeaking sounds of leather and metal accompany his walk coming from the harness and hinges of the false leg. His arms and shoulders are extremely powerful and muscular due to a lifetime
dependency on the upper torso doing all the work for the legs […] He moves laboriously. (BC 28)

His appearance and movement, as Shepard explains, raises his entrance to the level of a nightmare. In this scene, as we will see, the play moves from its realism into a terrifying fantasy. Bradley first gives his father a vicious haircut and later in Act Two, violently and forcefully puts his fingers in the mouth of Vince’s girlfriend, Shelly, in a significant image of rape. These actions show the violence and the inhuman performances of this monster.

Bradley’s act of haircut as Nash sees it “emphasize[s] the importance of the dying patriarch” (206). He is a brilliant example of an alienated and a fragmented character. He never communicates with anybody, in the sense of having a conversation, at least, like what Tilden has.

In such a situation and at the beginning of Act Two, Vince, the grandson of the family, arrives with his girlfriend Shelly. He has been driving to New Mexico to see his father. On his way, he decides to visit his grandfather’s house. Shelly, the outsider, thinks she is about to enter a world like “a Norman Rockwell cover” (BC 30) of “turkey dinners and apple pie and all that kinda’ stuff” (BC 36); but Shepard subverts the myth of the happy American family as it appears in popular culture by showing the gap between the real and the imagined. This is actually a fragmented family with its alienated characters living in a stinking atmosphere.

While describing the character of Vince, Shepard gives us some self-referential elements. This character that is wearing “a plaid shirt, jeans, cowboy boots, and carry[ing] a saxophone case” (BC 29), puts the image of the cowboy and the musician together. Vince who has returned to his house after six years, is on his way to find his past and his roots. He returns home to find what he calls his “heritage,” he is in fact searching for his identity. His arrival to the family will finally lead to the revelation of the family secret.

Dodge’s family actually suffers from the action of its members and what they have done in the past, an action, which threatens the unity of the family, its stability and its integration. The speech and the behaviour of Vince and Shelly moves the family toward the unintentional discovery of its secret. Shelly is an outsider who does not have
any relationship with the members of the family; but her speech and her conversations with family members give us a view about the reality of Dodge’s family. The arrival of this young couple and their presence in the family worsens the gloomy relations of the characters, especially between Tilden and his father. It also forces Tilden and Dodge to give clues about the family secret.

Vince and Shelly find Dodge on the sofa with his head shaved and bleeding. Later when he awakens, cannot remember anything about Vince: “Who are you” (BC 34) he says, going so far as to deny that he is anybody’s grandfather. His speech does not imply his forgetfulness; instead, it depicts Dodge’s conscious denial of familial relationships. Dodge’s language in an earlier scene provides an example of his conscious speaking. He addresses Tilden: “You’re a grown man. You shouldn’t be needing your parent’s at your age. It’s unnatural […] You expect us to feed you forever? […] I never went back to my parents. Never. Never even had the urge. I was always independent” (BC 25).

In another scene, he tells Shelly: “You think just because people propagate they have to love their offsprings? You never seen a bitch eat her puppies?” (BC 54) Vince who has returned home to find a sense of himself, finds out that no one can recognize him. Being shocked by his grandfather’s rejection later in Act Three, we will see that he repeats the same action and rejects to recognize anybody in the house.

After Vince cannot gain recognition from his grandfather, Tilden enters. Like Dodge, Tilden cannot remember Vince either. He says: “I had a son once but we buried him” (BC 37). Such a language is ambiguous and carries different meanings. First it refers to Tilden’s relationship with his mother and the child who was later killed, and second, to Vince’s position in his family; in the way that nobody can remember him.

Later, Tilden gives us a hint to Vince’s identity, “I thought I recognized him. I thought I recognized something about him. I thought I saw a face inside his face” (BC 41). Of course, the face is his son’s. But no one recognizes him because he is the reincarnation of the buried child of the family and has returned to claim his heritage. He is also the spirit of the murdered Ansel, and the suddenly grown vegetables, is also the sign of his return. Latter in Act Three, we will see how Vince finds his history and his identity in front of him.
Vince tries to convince Shelly that his grandfather “is just sick or something” but she realizes that something is wrong and reacts with anxiety: “This is terrible Vince!” Later, in their conversation, we realize that her language turns into the language of a frightened person: “I don’t want to stay here, I am […] terrified! I wanna go!” (BC 36)

One can infer different explanations from Dodge’s and Tilden’s speeches when they fail to recognize Vince. In one scene when Vince cannot remember how long Dodge has not seen him, Dodge responds: “You don’t remember. How am I supposed to remember if you don’t remember?” (BC 35) In another scene when talking to Shelly he says: “Recognize who?” or “What to recognize?” (BC 44), and she considers this as “cruel” and “unfair.” Tilden also just “stares at Vince” or simply asks “Vince?” (BC 37)

Consciously, Vince is searching for his father and his youth. He is surely in pursuit of his past by verifying his childhood memories. However his surprise visit to his home and his homecoming reverses his anticipation, because he cannot gain recognition from his father and his grandfather, and they both reject any relationship with Vince. When Dodge and Tilden fail to recognize Vince, he is puzzled, then frustrated, and finally angry. When he protests: “How in the hell could they not recognize me! I’m their son!” Dodge brutally responds: “You’re no son of mine” (BC 42). Vince realizes that his roots are cut from under him. Alienated from his own family and amazed, Vince asks himself: “Have I committed an unpardonable offence?” (BC 41)

In spite of the behaviour of Dodge and Tilden, Vince is determined to gain their recognition. Although he cannot accept that during his six-year absence his physical appearance has changed so that nobody can recognize him, but in desperation he admits the possibility of such a change. In search of his past, his roots and his identity, Vince begins to perform the tricks he used to do in his childhood, hoping to be recognized by his father and his grandfather. Dodge and Tilden do not respond to his tricks.

At this moment, Vince thinks that perhaps he has committed some moral offense such as “plunge(ing) into sinful infatuation with the Alto Saxophone” (BC 42) that may have caused his family to reject him. But all these attempts cannot help him.
When he finally fails, Shelly who has been watching all her boyfriend’s behaviour, reprimands him: “Jesus Christ. They’re not gonna play. Can’t you see that?” (BC 41). Her speech brings a suggestion to the mind that because Dodge and Tilden share an understanding about the secret of the buried child so they are in collusion, and Vince is an innocent victim of some sinister intent.

From this moment, Vince’s initiation into the real world of his family begins. The family has rejected him. To understand what his family expects, we have to apprehend the characters’ essential natures. Of all the Vince’s forebears, Dodge makes the strongest impression, because he is on stage throughout the play. Shepard depicts the character of Dodge as a sarcastic, possessed of the kind of repressed violence that makes him kill the child and bury him in the backyard. During these years Dodge has become a cruel, unfeeling, embittered old man.

In the same way, Halie is no more human than Dodge. As we saw in the first act, she first appeared as a loving mother; then as we will see in the third act she will appear as an “amorous mistress” who loses her “control and moral leadership” (Mustazza 40). Later in the play, Halie’s behaviour shows that she possesses many of the characteristics of Erich Neumann’s concept of the “Terrible Mother.” According to Neumann, the “Terrible Mother” is she, who dismembers, devours and destroys. He writes:

> The symbolism of the Terrible Mother draws its images predominantly from the ‘inside’: that is to say, the negative elementary character of the Feminine expresses itself in fantastic and chimerical images that do not originate in the outside world. The reason for this is that the Terrible Female is a symbol for the unconscious. And the dark side of the Terrible Mother takes the form of monster. (148-49)

Shepard presents the character of Halie as an over bearing and exploiter of all the other characters in the play. Bigsby believes that she continually abuses Dodge. While he is sick and helpless on the sofa, she dominates him and he is trapped by her voice from her superior position upstairs. Even Bradley’s vicious haircut of his father at the end of Act One can be considered as Halie’s wish and desire to control Dodge. In
another scene in Act One, when Tilden cannot explain how the corn appeared, she easily condemns him; although she knows that Tilden is still a child.

While the real motivation behind Dodge’s and Tilden’s intention remains unclear, the conversation of the characters makes us aware of the other story in the play, the secret of the buried child, which will actually make the mystery clear for us. When Vince leaves the house to get some bottles of drink for his grandfather, Shelly – the outsider – who is a good and the only source of an objective view, begins to accept the confusing rejection of her boyfriend, and to overcome her fear of these mystifying strangers. Later, when Tilden comes to her, he reveals the family secret of the buried child. This scene is one of the crucial moments of the play and Shepard creates a colloquial poetry of exposure, rhythms rising in an endless loudness.

This gradual loudness is also quite clear both in Dodge’s language and his movements.

TILDEN. We had a baby. (motioning to DODGE) He did. Dodge did […] Dodge killed it […] Dodge drowned it.
DODGE. Tilden? You leave that girl alone!
DODGE. (shuts off t.v.) Tilden!
DODGE struggles to get up from sofa
DODGE. Tilden what are you telling her! Tilden!
DODGE keeps struggling until he is standing
TILDEN. Finally every body just gave up. Just stopped looking.
DODGE struggles to walk towards TILDEN and falls
DODGE. Tilden you shut up! You shut up about it!
TILDEN. Little tiny body just disappeared. It’s no hard. (BC 47-48)

The identity of the buried child or Dodge’s real motivation for killing him would seem to explain the bizarre behaviour of the family. Although we will discover the secret buried child, but its secret remains problematic and we can never discover it.
Shelly, who according to Robert Woodruff is a “nice door for audience” (Coe, “Interview” 155) says of Vince: “I guess it’s a new thing with him. I kind of find it hard to relate to. But he feels it’s important. You know. I mean he feels he wants to get to know you all again. After all this time” (BC 32). The reason she finds it hard to relate to, the family, the past, the sense of continuity, is that she comes from Los Angeles; “stupid country,” says Dodge. But Shelly begins to feel it: “I don’t know what it is,” she says, “it is the house or something. Something familiar. Like I know my way around here. Did you ever get that feeling?” (BC 53) Dodge “stares at her in silence,” then says he never did, refusing both past and future.

Later in the play, Shelly, not as laid-back as before, wants some answers about the family that she couldn’t find as a “Norman Rockwell Cover,” about the past and about the pictures upstairs hanging on the wall, and when she says that one of them is like Dodge, he responds: “That isn’t me! That never was me! This is me. Right here. This is it. The whole shootin’ match, sittin’ right in front of you” (BC 54). So far as he is concerned, if there was a past at all, it is not anything Shelly would understand. But as we will see later she will be more and more curious and says: “There’s a picture of a farm. A big farm. A bull. Wheat. Corn” (BC 54).

Towards the end of Act Two when Tilden enters, he is carrying an armful of carrots just as he had previously cradled corn. His idiocy is followed by the cruelty and violence of Bradley. The crippled Bradley with over-muscular torso, limbs in the house. His presence makes Tilden run away from the house, and Shelly who is alone, is shocked. Bradley forces Shelly to open her mouth, and in a very significant image of sexual domination puts his fingers in her mouth. It is an assault, and an act of symbolic rape. Bradley then goes to the sleeping Dodge and covers his father’s face with his coat, as though to emphasize the death of the King.

While Vince is away, the unconventional and bizarre behaviour of the men intensifies. All of them want Shelly’s attention; they want her to mirror their desires. Tilden wants her to remain silent and listen to his story about the buried child. Dodge wants her to wait on him, and Bradley tells her to “stay put.” Although she first has to bear humiliations, but she will later achieve dignity.
Florence Falk has argued this as a survival strategy in which Shelly acts the obedient child to protect herself from male abuse, nothing comparable to the childish behaviour of the men. Shelly’s original passivity, Falk maintains, hides “inner resource fullness and resilience of more positive merit […] Shelly submits to molestation by Tilden (who symbolically strokes her rabbit coat) and rape by Bradley […] but she retaliates by hiding Bradley’s dismantled wooden leg (obviously a symbolic castration)” (“The Role”, 186). Later in the play, she also stands up against Halie, and smashes a cup and saucer in protest against being ignored.

Through her character, we see the dysfunctional nature of this home. It would appear that Shelly gains status as a spectator. As an outsider like Martin in Fool for Love, she watches, observes and objectifies the action of other characters. Shepard expects the audience to identify with a female character here. Shelly sees more clearly than the other characters that are caught up in the operations of a dead, fractured and alienated system. She uses conventional female domestic activities to defend herself from her odd surroundings.

When Vince turns to her for the existential reassurance his family cannot provide, Shelly deflects his objectifying desire by telling him: “You’re the one who wants to stay. So I’ll stay. I’ll stay and I’ll cut carrots. And I’ll cook the carrots. And I’ll do whatever I have to do to survive. Just to make it through this” (BC 39). These “feminine” activities provide sustenance to Shelly and unlike May in Fool for Love who is trapped in her conflicting desires, she is a decisive character. She shows more courage than Vince; at least she stands firm whereas Vince flees from the house.

In Act Three, when Halie returns with Father Dewis, she has undergone a miraculous transformation. She is lively, out of mourning and dressed in yellow. Her change of clothes provides a case in point. On the one hand, it expresses her extroversion as well as her hypocrisy and manipulation. On the other, in accordance with the fertility symbols (the corn, the carrots, the rain), the change also marks the shift from winter to spring.

Halie’s behaviour throughout the play reveals her as a witch character. In Act One, when she first appears, we see her dressed in black, and wearing a veil. She even drinks, liquor in the morning. Also in Act One, Dodge clearly implies Halie’s past
sexual misdeed. In this act, after being away for a night, when she returns with Father Dewis, she is carrying roses in her arms, which is a symbol of passion and we understand a sexual encounter.

In addition to all this, when she was talking about Ansel in the first act, we could realize her incestuous desire for him. She clearly remembers her reaction before Ansel leaves for his honeymoon. Her language and speech while narrating the event can be analyzed as a projection of her witchery onto Ansel’s bride:

I kissed him and he felt like a corpse. All white. Cold. Icy blue lips. He never used to kiss like that. Never before. I knew then that she’d cursed him. Taken his soul. I saw it in her eyes […] He was going with her. Thinking it was love. What could I do? I couldn’t tell him she was a witch. I couldn’t tell him that. (BC 21)

In this scene, Shepard clearly depicts Halie’s oedipal possessiveness of Ansel, but Ansel died and she could not fulfill her desire. That is why Tilden is suffering its damaging effects. Halie could not take Ansel’s soul, so she takes Tilden’s. When Halie talks about Ansel as a basketball hero, Bradley immediately silences her and says: “Ansel never played basketball.” Yet, at this moment Father Dewis supports Halie and says that he had seen Ansel play basketball on several occasions.

Later in this act, while Bradley is sleeping Shelly has a good chance and a moment of successful revenge. She steals Bradley’s wooden leg and makes him powerless. At this moment we clearly witness Halie’s vindictive treatment of Shelly, who as Bigsby remarks, “is no match for the oppressive cruelty of those around her” (Vol: 3, 243).

Halie’s behaviour actually begins when she describes modern basketball as “more vicious” than it used to be, and then she adds: “Much, much more vicious. They smash into each other. They knock each other’s teeth out. There’s blood all over the court. Savages […] Our youth becoming monsters” (BC 59). Although Halie never becomes a violent character like those modern athletes that she earlier explained; but we can understand it through her language and her behaviour toward other characters. In an earlier scene when Shelly refuses a drink of whiskey, Shepard describes Halie as turning “toward Shelly viciously” to hiss; “You sit back down!” (BC 58)
Occasions like this support Robert Woodruff’s opinion that Halie has an “almost demonic side of herself” (Coe, “Interview” 153). In all these scenes Halie is surely showing her own vicious nature. The qualities which surely gives Halie her terrible and witch-like characteristics.

Little by little, Shelly reveals that she knows the family has a secret. She goes to Dodge and says: “There’s a baby. A baby in a woman’s arms. The same woman with the red hair. She looks lost standing out there. Like she doesn’t know how she got there” (BC 54). Later, Dodge decides to reveal the story. The story of a baby that was born in the family and came in their life after the couple hadn’t been sleeping together for six years: “Then Halie got pregnant again. Outa’ the middle a nowhere[…] We weren’t planning on having anymore boys. We had enough already.” Then he adds:

Halie had this kid. This baby boy[…] It lived, see. It lived. It wanted to grow up in this family. It wanted to be just like us. It wanted to be a part of us. It wanted to pretend that I was its father. She wanted me to believe in it. Even when everyone around us knew. Everyone. All our boys knew. Tilden knew. (BC 64-65)

At one point in the play, Tilden refers to the buried child as his. At another point he calls the child his father’s child, and here in this scene, Dodge calls the child, Tilden’s. As a result, we cannot easily decide that who is the father of the buried child. Now, we understand the reason, why Dodge and Tilden refused to recognize Vince. Dodge, then reveals other aspects of the family secret, when he says:

Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He’d walk for miles with that kid in his arms. Halie let him take it. All night sometimes. He’d walk all night out there in the pasture with it. Talkin’ to it. Sigin’ to it. Used to hear him singing to it […] He’d tell that kid all kind’s a’ stories.

He finally concludes: “We couldn’t allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives. It made every thing we’d accomplished look like it was nothin’. Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness” (BC 65).

In his monologue, Dodge gives us the implication about the nature of the child and the reason why he killed it. This was the child that threatened his patriarchal power,
and that is why he was killed. The existence of this child would have destroyed the violent world of the father. Incest is the family’s dark, hurtful secret, but it also stands for something deeper; the curse of its mutilating habit of isolation and alienation. As Dodge said earlier in the play, long before the incest, they haven’t been sleeping together. He also hints about the possibility of Halie’s adultery: “There’s life in the old girl yet” (BC 33). This comment is also a significant reference to Halie’s love affair with Father Dewis.

The incestuous feelings Halie had for Ansel was already mentioned. In this way, the child can probably be Halie and Ansel’s or as we witness in the play that how Halie supports Bradely and he protects her, and is vicious toward his father the buried child can be Halie and Bradely’s. But when we return to the problematic issue of Vince and his identity in the family, and examine Tilden’s first encounter with him, we see that in spite of his denial of being Vince’s father, he later admits and says: “I had a son but we buried him” (BC 37).

So, Tilden accepts being the father of the buried child. It is clear from language of Tilden that both the story of Vince and buried child are dependent upon each other and link into an explicit structure. Now, we understand that Dodge’s and Tilden’s rejection to identify Vince, is because, these two characters have buried him in their memories. They did not expect his arrival, and their denial is the only expected reaction.

Critics are of the view that Tilden and his mother have engendered the buried child, which was killed and buried by Dodge. It is this relationship that destroys Tilden. Halie herself accurately assesses the problem: “He’s still a child” (BC 24). In psychoanalytic terms, Tilden’s incest reveals the longing for a reunion with the mother figure, for a comfort of a prenatal condition. It betrays his primary narcissism and love for his mother, which coincide during early childhood. This stage in a child’s development is characterized by a sense of identification with the environment, including the mother. Significantly, it is only Halie and Tilden who are most sensitive to their surroundings, to the crops and to the rain.

Throughout the play, Tilden neither recognizes his son nor mentions anything about his wife. He has repressed any memory of them and is forced to return to his
parents. He mentioned the reasons why he has come back: “I was alone. I thought I was dead […] I didn’t know where to go […] I didn’t know what to do. In couldn’t figure anything out” (BC 25). Bigsby believes that, Tilden was dead, because he had lost his language. Again as we will see his last action in the play, is to return to his mother. Like Vince, Tilden is also one of the repressed memories who finally returns home. On the other hand, Vince does not possess Tilden’s characteristics and his complexes. He has returned home to fill the “heroic vacuum,” because he is the actual rebirth of the family’s buried child.

As Vince tries to escape from the stress of his family’s rejection, confronts himself and his family history in his car’s windshield. His unconscious confrontation with himself is actually a testing ground of his commencement into the individuation process. In his journey, after Vince meets the demons in his unconscious ends the mystery of his identity and his rejection. In accordance with Joseph Campbell’s description of the hero’s journey, Vince must enter one of “the regions of the unknown […] [which are] free fields for the projection of unconscious content” (The Hero 79), areas that Shepard has called “territories within us that are totally unknown. Huge, mysterious and dangerous territories” (Lippman 12).

In his poetic monologue, Vince describes a moment of epiphanic insight: “I could see myself in the windshield. My face. My eyes. 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 […] I saw him dead and alive at the same time. In the same breath. In the wind shield” (BC 70). He has recognized his inescapable identification with all the ancestors who have preceded him:

I watched him breathe as though he was frozen in time. And every breath marked him. Marked him forever without him knowing. And then his face changed. His face became his father’s face. Same bones. Same eyes. Same nose. Same breath. And his father’s face changed in his Grandfather’s face. And it went on like that. Changing. Clear on back to faces I’d never seen before but still recognized […] I followed my family clear into Iowa. Every last one. Straight into the Corn Belt and further. Straight back as far as they’d take me. Then it all dissolved. Everything dissolved. (BC 70-71)
In his explanation of the journey, Vince reveals his connectedness with the past; and the journey is his vision of continuity that comes to him. He also can find his identity within himself and in his family history.

Vince’s monologue is the soliloquy of a character not aware of what is going inside himself but he is aware that he is explaining and commenting on his own identity. He is actually studying his “face” in his car windshield. Vince is reporting totally subjective sensations that can have meaning only through a consciousness, a mind aware of itself experiencing. Vince’s concentrated and rhythmic language charged with images, establishes him as a poet and a creative person. Vince’s soliloquy is his identity portrait. Toby Silverman Zinman also remarks that Vince’s reflection in the windshield shows “his link to what is behind him, beneath him, before him, his link to the American past” (22), and his identity is intricately bound to the bones of his family.

Certainly Vince could escape from the house of his ancestors, but he cannot escape from himself. Clearly Vince’s dream is a journey into his unconscious. In his journey, he sees himself as “dead and alive.” For his family he is as dead as the buried child is alive. As we will see later, Vince’s journey into his past and his personal heritage comes full circle at the play’s conclusion. Although he tries to run away from his family and his heritage, but he is finally drawn back into it by the vision of his own destiny. He finds his family and his personal heritage within himself. All these have inhibited him, although he did not know.

Vince who is not a stranger anymore, returns to the home of his forefathers, a home where everybody had already rejected him. His return to his heritage is the key event that causes a dramatic transformation, an appearance of a spirit. Vince comes back to his home in a spirit of revenge and rejects everybody in the family. He drunkenly enters the living room and asserts his blood claim. Now he is recognized by all members of the family. Clearly in the scene, Shepard has used this dramatic moment as a symbolic rebirth. Vince who undergone a complete transformation is now a wholly different character. He is an aggressive character now and is determined to claim his inheritance.
When Vince enters the house, shouts: “What is this! Who are you people?” He is now rejecting all those who refused to identify him before. In his way the cycle of rejection comes full circle. Feeling the power in himself he adds: “May be I should come in there and usurp your territory!” (BC 67) His drunkenness brings him in contact with his repressed self. He smashes bottles one after another against the wall. His behaviour in the scene shows that he cannot control his vicious, violent and alienated self. His language has also changed into a violent and vulgar language. In the earlier scenes we saw these characteristics in Dodge, and now Vince after his transformation, has clearly become Dodge’s double by gaining the same characteristics.

Shelly who feels that cannot tolerate this fragmented family with its alienated characters, leaves the house. She also realizes that cannot stay with Vince anymore. She is then freed and liberated from a family, which is not hers, a fractured family where she has felt that no one has any love for anyone else, a family where everyone is living in a state of spiritual impoverishment, and a family, which is actually dead. All this, Shepard suggests are the characteristic of America. Shelly leaves not like Vince in the hope of finding an identity, but in order to escape the deathly familial relationship.

Little by little Dodge realizes that Vince is now one of the member of his family, and has filled the “heroic vacuum” in the family. At this moment he refuses to recognize others, and does not consider them. He declares Vince to be his grandson and names him as his heir: “The house goes to my Grandson, Vincent. All the furnishings, accoutrements and paraphernalia there in. Everything tracked to the walls or otherwise resting under this roof […] My harnesses, my halters, my braces, my rough rasp, my forge, my welding equipment […] My levels and bevels” (BC 69). He announces his death and asks Vince for a burial ceremony suitable for the dying King. In his will, Dodge finally adds:

All related materials are to be pushed into a gigantic heap and set ablaze in the very centre of my fields. When the blaze is at its highest, preferably on a cold, windless night, my body is to be pitched into the middle of it and burned till nothing remains but ash.

(BC 69-70)
Vince accepts the responsibility to carry on the family name and tradition. He buries his grandfather’s corpse with an old blanket, puts Halie’s roses on Dodge’s body and takes his grandfather’s position on the couch. While sitting on the couch, his body mirrors that of Dodge’s dead body. The play ends where it began. It has now come a full circle. Halie’s voice is heard again from her upstairs room who says: “Dodge? Is that you Dodge?” (BC 72) Now, she can see the vegetables growing: “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” (BC 72).

The final moment of the play is one of Shepard’s most extraordinary poetic-visual effects. Tilden in his final armload from the backyard, carries the skeleton of an infant wrapped in a muddy rotten cloth. He walks up the stairs to his mother’s bedroom, as she continues to speak about the corns growing, the miracle and the paradise beneath her window: “Good hard rain. Takes everything straight down deep to the roots […] you just gotta wait till it pops up out of the ground. Tiny little shoot […] Strong enough to break the earth even” (BC 72).

Now she agrees with her son that the garden, which has been barren for thirty-five years, is blooming. Halie’s “tiny little shoot” has found a chance to grow and emerges strong. The buried child has come to life to claim his inheritance. The buried child has actually emerged in the person of Vince. The miracle as Halie says, has in fact taken place: “It’s a miracle, Dodge. I’ve never seen a crop like this in my whole life. May be it’s the sun. May be that’s it. May be it’s the sun” (BC 72).

In this scene Shepard uses a pun that explains the appearance of the mysterious crops. Indeed, it is the son (sun) that has motivated all these events. The pun “sun/son” reminds the audience not only of a source for the modern realistic family drama structured around a secret that is only gradually revealed, but also of the playwright’s earlier delineation of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children. This last issue, is the one in which Shepard uses in Fool for Love.

In the next play of the chapter, we will see how Shepard has examined male-female relationships by revealing the family secret, which worsens the problematic relationships of the characters and shatters the hopes of a young couple.
Fool for Love was first performed at Magic Theatre in San Francisco, on February 8, 1983, under the direction of Sam Shepard. The play moved to New York in May 1983 and had a long and popular run at the Circle Repertory Company, afterward the play was performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre. It was also made into a movie in which Shepard wrote the screenplay. The movie was directed by Robert Altman, and Shepard played the role of Eddie himself.

While Shepard was working on the film Frances in 1982, he met the actress Jessica Lange and began a relationship with his co-star. His meeting with this actress brought many changes in his career and life. Shepard in an interview with Jack Kroll said:

It’s just this suddenly being connected with someone in a play you never knew was possible. It’s like revelation; it’s like discovering a whole new life that you did not know was in you. And in this case for me. It has to do with love and the possibility of a real family.

At this time his marriage was failing and finally in 1984 his divorce from O-Lan Johnson was finalized. In this way Shepard ended his marriage of fourteen years. In 1983, as Oumano says: “Shepard was about to play his finest, most definitive role to date” (144). As a result of his role in The Right Stuff as Chuck Yeager, he became a major film star and received an Oscar award nomination as Best Supporting Actor.

Critics believe that after Shepard’s trip to England, Fool for Love is his second success. According to Oumano, this play was Shepard’s: “First play to explore that mystery of American life which he had considered secondary, the contest between men and women.” He then continues:

Perhaps Shepard had come to realization that a divided nature is not two male selves in one, but the male and female aspects of one’s self. Or perhaps he was also working out some of the pain regarding his feelings for his wife and for Jessica Lange. Whatever the motivation, Fool for Love is an excruciation ‘Can’t live with you/Can’t live without you’ melee, full of heads banging on walls and slamming doors. (146)
Shepard wrote the play during this time of crisis in his life. The piece also reveals his preoccupation with the male ego and exhibits his interest in the woman’s perspective. Shepard has said that he had a desire to “take this leap into a female character” (Shewey 150). He self-consciously tried to examine the male-female relation in a more balanced manner.

In a letter to his friend and collaborator, Joseph Chaikin, Shepard described *Fool for Love* as: “The outcome of all this tumultuous feeling I’ve been going through this past year […] It’s a very emotional play and in some way embarrassing for me to witness but somehow necessary at the same time” (qtd. in Watt 213). Shepard’s allegory for his own loss and love provides us with an intensely powerful personal drama that draws us in with its depiction of ill-fated love.

Shepard’s exploration of the writer’s attempt to negotiate what he has come to define more and more clearly as the male and female principles – the cowboy and the lady, the Old Man and mom, the desert of the West and domesticated culture – reaches its full development in this play. In 1993, in an interview with Carol Rosen, Shepard said that his work in the mid-eighties was influenced by feminism:

There was a period of time when there was a kind of awareness happening about the female side of things. Not necessarily women but just the female force in nature becoming interesting to people. And it became more and more interesting to me because of how that female thing relates to being a man […] as a man what is it like to embrace the female part of yourself that you historically damaged for one reason or another. (38-39)

In 1997, Shepard gave his opinion on *Fool for Love*. He said:

The play came out of falling in love. It is such a dumb-founding experience. In one way you wouldn’t trade it for the world. In another way its absolute hell. More than anything, falling in love causes a certain female thing in a man to manifest. (qtd. in Simpson 221)

*Fool for Love* was the first of Shepard’s plays that addressed the question of “love” as a central theme. Bonnie Marranca in 1981 wrote that Shepard does not show
any interest in relationships between men and women: “He writes as if he is unaware of what has been happening between men and women in the last decade [...] His female characters are much less independent and intelligent than many of those created by [his] literary forefathers a hundred years ago” (30-31). In an interview, Shepard said that, he believes there is “more mystery to relationships between men,” just before he wrote Fool for Love, he decided that he could find “the same mystery between men and women” (qtd. in Kakutani 26).

Fool for Love, then, became Shepard’s first conscious effort to create an independent female character, one who could “remain absolutely true to herself” (qtd. in Kakutani 26). In this play, Shepard has also described the “true relationship” between men and women, but a year later he calls it as “terrible and impossible” (qtd. in Fay 216).

It is believed that this play is Shepard’s psychological realism with complex characterization. The play also depicts Shepard’s exploration of the American family and in a broad sense, American society. Like Shepard’s earlier works, this play also shows a dream-like stage imagery and the playwright’s innovative use of sound effects. Themes of reality and fantasy, love and hate, the Old West and New West, and the loss and betrayal of the American dream both in the family and in the country, all can be found in this play which uses tense dialogue and intense action.

The play is noted for its dynamic, sometimes violent, staging, and is considered as another of Shepard plays of “magic realism” (Asahina 104). Shepard’s realistic plays start with real characters and real situations, but slip into dream and fantasy. This is why critics believe that his realism is “unfixed.” Shepard’s characters in this play are searching for their identity, and he impacts his audience on mythical levels. In this play, Shepard also asks questions about the nature of love, the power of family and the disintegration of the American dream.

The play is set in a low rent motel room on the “outskirts of Mojave Desert.” It begins after Eddie unexpectedly arrives at the motel room, where May now lives. In his stage directions, Shepard introduces Eddie as a cowboy who drives “two thousands four hundred eighty miles” through the empty Texas ranches in a pick up truck and a horse trailer behind the truck. May is Eddie’s half sister/lover who is now living alone...
in a motel room. They have not met each other since they were teenagers and the play is the narrative of these two lovers. May has started working as a waitress and is supposedly on the way to start a new life without Eddie.

Standing in the shadows of the motel room is Eddie’s and May’s father, the Old Man who is separated physically from the other two characters on a different platform. In his stage directions, Shepard says that the Old Man “exists only in the minds of May and Eddie even though they might talk to him directly and acknowledge his physical presence” (*FFL* 15). In this way, he moves in and out of the narrative; physically he crosses the boundary and psychologically he invades his children’s memories. He is thus both present and absent. The Old Man in the play is then like the character of the father in May’s and Eddie’s stories that we will hear later. As they remember in their stories, his omnipresent and controlling influence in their lives was characterized by a series of appearances and disappearances.

The fourth character of the play that does not hear or see the Old Man, is Martin, May’s new boyfriend. As Martin cannot see the Old Man, and he “exist only in the minds” of the protagonists, he thus adds to the dream-like qualities of the play. He simply waits and watches the characters from his rocking chair. He sometimes speaks with his children and often participates in the actions of the play. His presence actually gives a sense of surrealism to the piece, and the play represents a psychological and emotional landscape of Eddie’s and May’s minds, symbolized in the presence of the Old Man whose past is intertwined with Eddie’s and May’s present consciousness. His surreal contributions to the play add an outsider’s commentary with the perspective of an insider.

The Old Man fathered May and Eddie with different mothers in different towns. He lived a double life that was revealed when Eddie and May were teenagers. His presence in the play highlights the recurring themes of dual relationships, reality versus illusion, lies versus truth and the way stories and memories near the end of the play, mutate and change as different characters remember the same event. Thus incest is May’s and Eddie’s fearful secret, the bond that holds them together and the shame that tears them apart. Eddie has “inherited” his father’s inclination for disappearance. For
fifteen years he has left May many times and returned to her. His most recent disappearance was taken, to have an affair with a “Countess”.

In his stage directions, Shepard points out that the play “is to be performed relentlessly without a break” (FFL 13). He also suggests that the set should emphasize the extreme physicality of the movements of the characters. In a very innovative way, he amplifies the walls and the doors of the set. Shepard writes: “The door is amplified with microphones and a base drum hidden in the frame so that each time an actor slams it, the door booms loud and long” (FFL 26). This kind of live music is one of the most original uses of percussion ever made in a dramatic play.

All through the play, May and Eddie “throw their bodies into the walls of the set,” “crash to the floor,” crawl along the floor, “slam doors” and crawl or slide across it. These kinds of movements show the sense of entrapment of the characters. A critic like Frank Rich has seen the motel room as a jail. He says: “The motel room is May’s most recent home. With its solid green walls and a window facing black nothingness, it looks like a jail cell; its doors slam shut with a fierce metallic clang” (“Fool”, 18). In this way, as it seems, the characters are sometimes trapped in a cage and sometimes are prisoners in a jail.

Amplification of the entrances and exits, escapes and returns, adds emotional significance to the play. Perhaps Shepard is going to reflect the violence of his characters’ movements and their sense of entrapment. In his stage directions, Shepard clearly mentions the exact movements of May and Eddie. He writes: May “erupts furiously, leaping off bed and lashing out at him with her fists” (FFL 17) or, “she grabs pillow, clutching it to her chest then throws herself face down on bed, moaning and moving from one end of bed to the other on her elbows and knees” (FFL 19) or, Eddie “bangs his head into wall” (FFL 22), or “he laughs, crosses to table, takes a deep drink from bottle, cocks his head back, gargles, swallows, then does a back flip across stage and crashes into stage right wall” (FFL 39). All these characters’ movements and their behaviours as Shepard intended, externalize the inner states of the characters.

With this genuine use of live music, which acts as an accompaniment to the performance of the characters, Shepard involves the audience physically in the play. So the spectator feels as a participant in the play and gets closer to the characters. As
Jacques Levy points out: “Sam [Shepard] is more interested in doing something to audiences than in saying something to them” (98). So, with his staging technique, and the characters’ way of performance, Shepard externalizes the play’s psychology.

The conflict between May and Eddie is quickly established. Eddie has just returned to May, after having an affair with the mysterious Countess whose black Mercedes Benz appears repeatedly outside the motel during the play. Eddie tries to get May to speak to him, but she is sitting in a crumpled position with her hair over her face, as if she is protecting herself from seeing, hearing or acknowledging Eddie’s arrival and his presence in the room. In this scene, Shepard does not show May’s initial reaction to Eddie’s entrance, instead, he shows us her reaction to the realization of what his appearance means to her.

Eddie reassures May that he is staying with her and will not leave her again, but she rejects his advances verbally and physically. At the same time, her conflicting desires make her keeps the line of contact between them:

EDDIE. I came to see if you were all right.
MAY. I don’t need you.
EDDIE. Okay. (turns to go, collects his glove and bucking strap) Fine.
MAY. Don’t go!
EDDIE. I am goin’.
MAY. (agonized scream) don’t go !!! (FFL 18)

From the very beginning of the play, Shepard shows us that the characters use short sentences and a poetic rhythm, and what they say is brief and to the point.

May and Eddie are two characters whose hurts are so deep, and their angers are so real, but that does not stop them from talking. We can put together their stories, using what they have said in the play, and especially what they have not said. Eddie is the most finely drawn and in many ways most typical of all Shepard’s male protagonists. He is a fantasist, a dreamer of his own life and a cowboy out of time. May is the opposite; she is free of fantasies, a realist capable of lasting human commitment and the only fully developed and significant female character in all of Shepard’s works. Together they represent an interest in character that was largely absent in the earlier plays like Cowboy Mouth, and Cowboys #2 for instance.
May is torn between wanting Eddie to leave and wanting him to stay. Although she accuses him of having an affair with the Countess, but Eddie denies and asks for sympathy from her. She is slightly moved by his feelings, but when remembers Eddie’s affair with the Countess, cannot control herself, and her language changes into a language of violence:

No [...] You’re just guilty. Gutless and guilty [...] I’m gonna kill her and then I’m gonna kill you. Systematically. With sharp knives. Two separate knives. One for her and one for you. (She slams wall with her elbow. Wall resonates.) So the blood does not mix. I am gonna torture her first though. Not you [...] Probably in the midst of a kiss. Right when you think every thing’s been healed up. (FFL 20)

Eddie says that how far he has driven to see her, and that he missed her desperately, but May does not accept it and says: “I will believe the truth! It is less confusing” (FFL 22). May’s and Eddie’s interpretations of the truth contradicts. They fight each other with conflicting interpretations of the truth, which each wants the other to accept. For May and Eddie, love and betrayal – the former being addicted to the latter – is a movable feast. Eddie habitually entangles himself in volatile romances. His passionate, competitive nature magnifies itself when he drinks and when he relates to his lovers May and the Countess. He has trouble distinguishing between lies and truth, though he would not admit this. He has a strange but complicit relationship with his father; he shares his love of liquor and the same sense of humour with the Old Man.

Eddie struggles with different tragedies simultaneously. He is a character who has a complicated identity as a result of his complicated relationships with May and the Countess. He is a rodeo cowboy and the son of a distant, unaffectionate and an alcoholic father (the autobiographical elements of Sam Shepard’s life) who led a double life. Like his father’s life, Eddie’s confusing and painful relationships contribute to his need to have ultimate control of every situation. His return to May is the repetition of his cycle of abandonment and dependence with his half sister/lover.

May considers Eddie’s arrival as an unfair, badly timed and surprising return to her new life. He has returned to her when she thought she has nothing to do with him. Leaving her, betraying her and promising to come back soon, Eddie, never fulfilled his
promise. Eddie’s return brings up all the pain he has caused her, and more importantly her love for him; something which according to Jack Kroll, May “has found nothing to replace” (“Badlands”, 90).

May is madly in love with Eddie but it has been a painful, confusing and consuming love. Her love for him does not fit into her new life and the realistic issues that she must address to survive. She is actually torn between the fantasy and memory of their love and the reality and pain of the day-to-day struggle they encounter being together. Her love for Eddie takes May over so completely that it is like a sickness or madness. “[Like] all the great unlawful romances, this live is marked by jealousy, romance, anger, finality, and danger” (Brustein, “Love” 24). Her feelings are exactly similar to her mother’s feelings for the Old Man. Like her mother who became extremely depressed whenever the Old Man left, she also felt sad whenever Eddie left.

Eddie tries to present May a dream, and suggests that they move back into his trailer together and live a pleasant country life. But the dream does not seduce May anymore; she says:

I hate chickens! I hate horses! I hate all that shit! You know that.
You got me confused with somebody else. You keep comin’ up here with this lame country dream life with chikens and vegetables and I can’t stand any of it. It makes me puke to even think about it. (FFL 23)

May no longer believes Eddie and his repetitive stories, but her feelings like her language are contradictory. She says Eddie is a dreamer, and does not need him any more; at the same time does not let him to leave. She is in a state of denial; her emotions are so contradictory and deeply felt that she stays idle, perhaps to protect herself from opening up to the pain and the desire she feels toward Eddie.

May and Eddie seem fated to repeat endlessly their pattern of reunion and explosive separation, their pathological version of the *fort! da!* game of disappearance and return that Freud observed in his little grandson, a version of the early peek-a-boo game enjoyed by mothers and their infants. Here, however rather than a game lovingly and voluntarily engaged in, we witness a violent and compulsive repetition. These two
lovers “can never live with or without” one another. Their relationship represents the need/fear dilemma or approach avoidance conflict.

Eddie is going to construct the reality of their relationship even in the face of May’s denial of his claims.

MAY. You never had a hold of me to begin with […] How many times have you done this to me.

EDDIE. What.

MAY. Suckered me into some dumb fantasy and then dropped me like a hot rock. How many times has that happened?

EDDIE. It is no fantasy.

MAY. It is all a fantasy. (FFL 24)

May can clearly see the harsh reality of her life within the fantasy of Eddie’s dreams. She would rather work hard, make an honest living, and prove her independence. She would rather have someone by her side whom she can trust. On the other hand, Eddie believes in the fantasy that he can have both of his lovers at the same time.

Eddie wants May to believe that if she just follows his dream they can have a good life together. But it is only a dream and May can see it very well when she expresses her fear: “You are either gonna erase me or have me erased.” She says that she is “smarter” than Eddie and “can smell [Eddie’s] thoughts before [he] even think ‘em’ ” (FFL 19).

Critics believe that May is the first female character in Shepard’s plays that displays a complexity of characterization and subtlety of mind. She shows both a willfulness and resourcefulness in her dealings and behaviour with Eddie, and proves a worthy combatant in the play’s battle of the sexes. In his stage directions, Shepard says that May allows Eddie to “embrace” her, a long and passionate embrace, “then [she] suddenly kneels him in the groin with tremendous force […] EDDIE remains on the floor holding stomach in pain” (FFL 26). Thus May fulfils her earlier promise: “Right in the moment when you are sure you have get me buffaled. That is when you will die” (FFL 20).

When May goes out, Eddie who is baffled by the kneed groin and the rejection of his “country dream life,” is left alone with the Old Man. As he lies on the floor, the
Old Man “speaks directly” to Eddie: “I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist, right? Is not that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Is not that true?” (FFL 26) Eddie’s primary relationship is not with May but with the past, his image of the past and its representative – the Old Man. He shares a desire with his father that constructs his real personality.

The Old Man then points to an imaginary picture on an empty wall and provides a lesson to his son. He says to Eddie: “Take a look at that picture on the wall over there […] Ya’ see that?” Eddie who is confused, stares at the wall and pretends that he can see the picture. The old man continues: “Ya’ know who that is?”

EDDIE. I am not sure.

THE OLD MAN. Barbara Mandrell. That is who that is. You heard a’ her?

EDDIE. Sure.

THE OLD MAN. Well, would you believe me if I told Ya’ I married to her?

EDDIE. (pause) No.

THE OLD MAN. Well, see, now that’s the difference right there. That’s realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that?

EDDIE. Sure.

THE OLD MAN. Good. I am glad we have an understanding.

(FFL26-27)

This image is one of the play’s most memorable images, and the primal relation of truth to stories, or lying is raised in this image. Eddie and the Old Man share an understanding on this point, for Eddie, like his father is a “fantasist”, and May is as absent as the image of Barbara Mandrell. Because the Old Man considers his own subjective experience to be the only reality, it is easy for him to claim that his love for Eddie’s and May’s mothers was “the same love. Just got split in two, that’s all” (FFL 63). In his view, his love remains unchanged even though he has deserted both the women: “I was not disconnected. There was nothing cut off in me. Everything went on just the same as though I’d never left” (FFL 74).
The Old Man sees the imaginary picture of Barbara Mandrel in his mind and it seems real to him. In his imagination, the Old Man is married to this movie star. According to Megan Williams: “Postmodern man reaches out a hand to ground himself in time, to connect himself to other people, and finds nothing but an image that has no authenticity of or existence outside of his mental present” (59). When the Old Man calls Barbara Mandrel “the woman of [his] dreams”, we can understand the double meaning of his speech. The first meaning, which comes to the mind, is because she is a movie star, she is larger in life and naturally is an unattainable romantic figure, and secondly, she is unattainable by the senses, because she is existing in the Old Man’s mind and his imagination.

May enters while putting on new clothes. She then says to Eddie: “I got somebody coming to get me” (FFL 29). When Eddie hears the news, gets angry and feels the need to prove his manhood to May. He chooses to adopt the macho attitude of the rodeo hothead:

EDDIE. First off, it cannot be very serious.
MAY. Oh. Really? And why is that?
EDDIE. Because you call him a “man”.
MAY. What am I supposed to call him?
EDDIE. A “guy” or something. If you called him a “guy”, I’d be worried about it but since you call him a “man” you give yourself away […] This guy’s gotta be a twerp. He is gotta be a punk chump in a two dollar suit or somethin’. (FFL 31-32)
Thus Martin will become the perfect victim of Eddie’s sarcastic cowboy wit. May who knows Eddie very well says: “Anybody who does not half kill themselves falling off horses or jumping on steers is a twerp in [Eddie’s] book” (FFL 32). As we will see later, even when Eddie sees that Martin is harmless, he continues to threaten and intimidate him.

Eddie actually shares many traits with the stereotypical Western Man or cowboy, though his personality and past make him a more complicated character whose depth and strivings go beyond the archetype he puts up on a pedestal and emulates. He also seems to be jealous. When he sees May is preparing to go on her date, he says his feelings “get easily damaged” if she does so and May remarks: “I get sick every time
you come around. Then I get sick when you leave. You are like a disease to me. Besides, you get no right being jealous of me after all the bullshit I have been through with you.” *(FFL 33)*

Her speech represents the vicious cycle she and Eddie find themselves in. The sickness and disease, similes and metaphors she uses, reflect her feelings of self-disgust for herself and hatred for Eddie that is caused by his lack of commitment fractured and the incestuous nature of their relationship. The back and forth power struggle that the play’s structure of exits and entrances suggests, and Eddie’s and May’s conversations express, are also summarized here in her paradoxical explanation of her feelings for Eddie. That’s why a critic like Catharine Hughes believes: “Shepard’s characters are idiosyncratic” and their “dialogue explosive and crackling” (274).

Eddie has realized that he still loves May but feels compelled to pursue his new passion for the Countess. He is actually confronting his “male” heritage from the Old Man. In his relationships with May and the Countess Eddie faces three alternatives: he can win May back and remain with her; he can leave her and continue his relationship with the Countess; or he can do what the Old Man did. Eddie’s personality and his characteristics shows he has actually chosen to repeat the sins of his father in his attempt at juggling relationships with his lovers. Throughout Eddie’s and May’s childhoods, the Old Man alternately abandoned both Eddie’s and May’s mothers. He left both women distraught and tortured by their passionate love for the same man. Bigsby believes that, the Old Man was “himself a victim of love and the cause of suffering to those who gave their love to him” (Vol:3, 248).

The Old Man never fully gave himself to one woman, and always abandoned them to return at an unannounced date. May feels a similar pain for her mother and has decided not to let her love for a wandering man like Eddie, rule her life and her emotions. May who seems sure about her decision goes to Eddie and says: “ I want you to leave.”

**EDDIE.** You didn’t want me to leave before.

**MAY.** I want you to leave now. And it is not because of this

man. It is just ___

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DDIE. I did not come here because you were seein’ somebody else! I don’t give a damn who you’re seeing! You will never replace me and you know it!

MAY. Get out a’ here. (FFL 34-35)

The moment Eddie leaves May starts crying and challenges her emotions. Her conflicting emotions which is reflected in her language throughout the play shows that she does not want Eddie to leave; because as Eddie says May knows she can “never replace” Eddie. In his stage directions, Shepard very well shows Mays feelings: “She throws herself against [the] door. Her arms reach out and hug the walls. She weeps [and] embraces the wall” (FFL 35-36).

While Eddie is out, the Old Man tells May a story about a time, when she was a baby and crying. The story reveals some insights into May that she could not know herself. Nothing could stop her, but a loud noise in the field, the mooing of cows silenced her. The Old Man’s comment foreshadows abrupt change in her disposition to Eddie. After crying all the time during the Old Man’s story, When May sees that Eddie is returning to the room she suddenly stops crying. The story reveals the Old Man’s feelings that he has and once had for his daughter.

Before Martin arrives, the Countess comes. As May describe the scene, the Countess has “a big, huge, extra-long, black Mercedes-benz” (FFL 44). She seems to exaggerate and emphasize the size of the car. The car is never actually seen on stage but imagined through the description of May, who sees it from the door. Like the car, the Countess is also never seen on the stage. Dan Sullivan is right when he says: “Shepard does not believe in turning up all his cards” (9) (In an earlier play, The Mad Dog Blues a character is also named but like the Countess in this play, we never see him on the stage), and Bigsby says of the car that: “Shepard is careful to specify that [the headlights] should not appear to be realistic” (Vol:3, 248).

May also says of the car that it exactly looks like “the kind of a car a Countess drives. That is the kind of car I always pictured in” (FFL 47). A suggestion comes to the mind that May has created the picture of the car and its arrival in her mind, and not in reality. The car represents power, money and status, the same things which May lacks. The “big huge extra-long” car arrives to the environment of the small motel; an

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environment in the middle “of no-man’s land between the social world and natural world indifferent to human concerns” (Bigsby Vol: 3, 247), where May lives. It is also an evidence of Eddie’s relationship with the Countess and the world in which May is not a part of that.

Although May knows that the car is out there and the Countess is also there, but she does not have any proof. She only uses her imagination and her intuition as her proof. Clearly what Shepard presents in this scene is a dream, and this dream lends a surreal quality to the play.

Like the Old Man, May is also concerned with pictures, specifically her mind’s inverted pictures of the Countess. The Old Man is settled with his picture, but May is unsettled with hers:

I don’t understand my feelings […] I don’t understand how I could hate you so much after so much time. How, no matter how much I’d like to not hate you, I hate you even more. I can’t even see you now.

All I see is a picture of you. You and her. I don’t even know if the picture’s real anymore. It’s a made-up picture. It invades my head.

For May, the fantasy is more painful than the actual events. She continues: “And this picture stings even more than if I’d actually seen you with her. It cuts me. It cuts me so deep I’ll never get over it. And I can’t get rid of this picture either. It just comes. Uninvited” (FFL 28).

This lyrical speech, which is more like a dream, shows that May is aware of what is going inside herself. Her short sentences and her carefully chosen words, make her language felt and then understood. It is what Shepard says: “Like she’s writing [Eddie] a letter” (FFL 28).

May’s rival, the Countess makes her anger known by shooting Eddie’s truck. Later she will make it more known as she sets fire to his truck. She is surely offering Eddie, the opposite of what May offers him. On the other hand when Martin arrives, we see that he is the opposite of the Countess. Although Martin is Eddie’s rival but he is a simple and a kind man who lives in a town near May’s motel. Martin represents a character that is living in a world different from Eddie’s world. He is an uncompetitive character, even in a situation offers to leave Eddie and May alone.

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Later, when Eddie proposes him to “tell stories” (*FFL* 58), we see that he is an audience to the stories. These stories as we will see later are May’s and Eddie’s conflicting life stories and Martin is an involuntary sufferer of their verbal abuse and power struggle. May likes a quality in Martin, which Eddie lacks completely. This quality, which actually May yearns for, is Martin’s commitment, a commitment to a person and an engagement in life. When we compare Martin and the Countess we see Martin as a passive, kind and decent character, but the Countess is impulsive and temperamental. These two characters are completely different. The Countess is out of the room and Martin is an outsider. Unlike Martin she shoots any thing in sight to get her man and her goal.

Martin is supposed to take May to the movies but unlike Shelly – the outsider – in *Buried Child*, who was very sharp and decisive, he can not decide and pick the movie. In the conversation between him and Eddie, Shepard presents the scene as a confrontation between the two rival characters:

> EDDIE. What’re you gonna’ go see, Martin?
> MARTIN. I can’t decide.
> EDDIE. What d’ya’ mean you can’t decide?
> MARTIN. But I’m not sure what she likes.
> EDDIE. The guy picks the movie. The guy’s always supposed to pick the movie.
> MARTIN. Yeah, but I don’t want to take her to see something she doesn’t want to see.
> EDDIE. How do you know what she wants to see?
> MARTIN. I don’t. That’s the reason I can’t decide.
> EDDIE. You miss the whole point, Martin. The reason you’re taking her out to the movies isn’t to see something she hasn’t seen before.
> MARTIN. Oh.
> EDDIE. The reason is because you just want to be with her. Right? You just wanna’ be close to her. I mean you could take her just about any where. (*FFL* 56-57)
In this conversation, Shepard deliberately contrasts the two characters; Eddie’s aspect of macho with the dreadfully dull and monochromatic Martin, who “can’t decide.”

Perhaps Shepard in this contrast establishes his point of view on desirable male life style; that is why Eddie’s attractions become more obvious. Fantasy and lying are major aspects of macho and of love in this play. Eddie manifests macho in his competition with Martin; his maneuvering of the discourse concerning what manliness is and in his attempts to impress May. As we will see later in the play, May also does the same in her jealousy of the Countess.

During the Countess’s attack, Eddie asks May: “Get your stuff! We’re gettin’ outa’ here” (FFL 48), but her answer is no. Then “in a suspended moment of recognition” (FFL 49), May and Martin stare at each other. At this moment the Old Man comments:

Amazing thing is, neither one a’ you look a bit familiar to me. Can’t figure that one out. I don’t recognize myself in either one a’ you. Never did. Course your mothers both put their stamp on ya’. That’s plain to see. But my whole side a’ the issue is absent, in my opinion. Totally unrecognizable. (FFL 49)

The Old Man thus reveals a family secret, Eddie and May are half brother and half sister.

The rest of the play is given over May’s and Eddie’s stories. Both Eddie and May narrate their story of the Old Man and his wives. Martin remains as a listener and a judge of the stories of the past, of what is real and most believable. Each character’s story “gives us a different version of who Eddie, May and the Old Man are […] Yet they do cohere as an expression of the author’s consciousness” (Rich “Fool” 18). Their stories are actually two different versions of one story. When May and Eddie are narrating their stories, we will see that the old man is traditionally macho in his insistence on hearing “the male side a this thing” (FFL 73).

Before Eddie starts his story May goes to the bathroom. At this moment Eddie tells Martin that she is his half sister, and gives a detailed account of his father’s two separate lives and families. He says that the Old Man “fell in love twice […] Once with my mother and once with her mother […] He’d live with me and my mother for a while
and then he’d disappear and go live with her and her mother for a while” (FFL 63). Eddie says how the Old Man has been an absolute fool for the love of his two women. He was possessed with an overpowering and irreconcilable need for both of them. While Eddie is narrating, the Old Man confirms: “It was the same love. Just got split in two, that’s all” (FFL 63). Living with their separate mothers, Eddie and May never suspected each other’s existence.

Eddie also tells Martin about the night he went out with his Father. He continues:

And then this women comes to the door. This real pretty women with red hair. And she throws herself into his arms […] An then through the door way behind them both, I see the girl […] she just appears. She’s just standing there staring at me and I’m staring back at her like we know each other. The second we saw each other, that every second, we know we’d never stop being in love. (FFL 66-67)

Eddie’s story is a “male” story of inarticulate father– of son becoming the father. At this moment, May comes out of the bathroom and interrupts Eddie’s story. She tells Martin: “None of it’s true […] He’s had this weird, sick idea for year now and it’s totally made up. He’s nuts. I don’t know where he got it from. He’s completely nuts (FFL 67).

The spectator’s response to the story is signalled by Martin’s. Although he is going to leave, but is forced to sit in unwilling judgment over Eddie’s and May’s stories. Then Eddie asks Martin, if he thinks he made the whole thing up, Martin replies: “No. I mean, at the time you were telling, it seemed real” (FFL 68), Eddie continues: “But now you’re doubting it because she says it’s a lie? […] She suggests it’s a lie to you and all of a sudden you change your mind? Is that it? You go from true to false like that, in a second? (FFL 68). The issue which is raised here is the relation of reality and of truth. Susanne Willadt considers the story telling as a “story – telling – duel” in which “the character, telling the most convincing story is the one supposedly telling the truth (156).

May’s story is different from Eddie’s. She proposes to tell: “The whole reset of the story […] just exactly the way it happened. Without any little tricks added onto it”
May’s story, is the female side of the story, she says her mother was: “Obsessed” with the Old Man “to the point where she couldn’t stand being without him for even a second.” She then continues:

She kept hunting for him from town to town. Following little clues that he left behind […] just by process of elimination she dogged him down. I remember […] She was on fire. ‘This is it!’ she kept saying […] Her whole body was trembling as we walked through the streets […] she was terrified she’d come across him by accident on the street because she knew she was trespassing. She knew she was crossing this forbidden zone but she couldn’t help herself […] as soon as we’d found him – he disappeared. (FFL 71-72)

Like her mother May has become “obsessed” with Eddie. She then adds: “I was feeling the exact opposite feeling. I was in love, see. I’d come home after school, after being with Eddie, and I was filled with this joy and there she’d be – standing in the middle of the kitchen […] her eyes looked like a funeral […] all I could think of was him” (FFL 72).

In her daughter’s passionate relationship to Eddie, May’s mother has recognized her own dangerous “obsession.” She wants May and Eddie not to see each other again. Later when she understands that cannot stop them, she decides to confront Eddie’s mother and tell her the truth. When Eddie’s mother hears the story of May’s mother, she takes a gun and “blew her brains out” (FFL 73). At this moment, May’s story is finished.

In this play Shepard shows that psychological inheritance from father to son and from mother to daughter is very important. Like his father, Eddie is unable to remain faithful to one woman and yearns for the excitement of a life elevated above everyday, mundane reality. Like the Old Man, Eddie cannot commit or settle. His affair with the Countess indicates a predatory nature of Eddie’s character, which urges conquest and adventure. May’s behaviour and her feelings clearly shows that she resembles her mother in her dependence upon a man whom she cannot trust and who does not treats her well, but the characters attempt to escape from the psychological patterns imposed upon them by their parents.
When May ends her story, the Old Man “moves from the platform onto the stage between EDDIE and MAY” (FFL 73) and complaints to Eddie. He says: “Boy, is she ever off the wall with this one, You gotta’ do somethin’ about this […] she’s gettin’ way outa’ line, her” (FFL 72).

The moment the Old Man comes onto the stage, he breaks the surreal and imaginary boundary, which had already separated him from his children May and Eddie. The Old Man strongly reacts to May’s story and continues:

This story doesn’t hold water. (To Eddie who stays seated.) You are not gonna let her off the hook with that one are ya’? That’s the dumbest version I ever heard in my whole life. She never blew her brains out […] (To EDDIE who remains seated) Stand up! Get on yer feet now goddamn it! I wanna hear the male side a’ this thing. You gotta’ represent me now. Speak on my behalf. There’s no one to speak for me now! Stand up! (FFL 73)

What the Old Man asks is an explicit challenge to Eddie to join in solidarity with the “male side,” refraining from the female point of view as his father has, and living completely within his own solipsistic reality. Eddie refuses what the Old Man wants and affirms May’s story instead. He then adds: “It was your shotgun. Same one we used to duck hunt with” (FFL 73).

May’s and Eddie’s stories are as true and false as the Old Man himself, for May have existed in the lives of one or both of the couples. As Eddie’s and May’s eyes meet, and they begin to draw together, the Old Man tells Eddie: “Keep away from her! You two can’t come together! You gotta’ hold up my end a’ this deal. I got nobody now! Nobody! You can’t betray me! You gotta’ represent me now! You’re my son!” (FFL 73).

Although Eddie and May do not listen to the Old Man and come together momentarily, signifying their union with an embrace and kiss, this fusion of male and female is quite unstable in Sam Shepard’s world. But as we see in this play, there is a shift of emphasis from father/son relationship to the man/woman relationship, and this is a new concern in Shepard’s writing. He himself describes the change:
It always seemed to me that there was more mystery to relationship between men, and just now, it’s coming to a territory where I’m finding the same mystery between men and women”. For expressing such a mystery, Shepard had to “sustain a female character and have her remain absolutely true to herself, not only as a social being, but also as an emotional being. (qtd. in Kakutani 26)

Although Eddie ignored his father’s demands in the previous scene, but the Old Man’s authority is recuperated by Eddie’s final action. When the Countess sets off an explosion and a consuming fire, Eddie tells May that he want to go out to “take a look” at his car. He leaves with the promise that he will return in a moment, but May knows that “he’s gone” (FFL 77).

Eddie disappears again into the desert. After May leaves with her suitcase, it is the Old Man who has the last words in the play. Pointing again to the empty space on the wall, he says: “Ya’ see that picture over there? Ya’ see that: Ya’ Know who that: is? That’s the woman of my dreams. That’s who that is. And she’s mine. She’s all mine. Forever” (FFL 77). The Old Man’s speech in the last moments of the play reinforces the relativity of the “real” and reminds us of the determination of the masculine. This time, Barbara Mandrell is all his, “forever.” It seems that she is no more a fantasy, and by marrying her, the Old Man escapes from a tragic truth. Barbara Mandrell now exists completely within the Old Man’s consciousness.

Martin stares out at the scene of Eddie’s car, which is burning. He seems like a lost traveler swept up briefly in the storm of Eddie’s and May’s life. Love has gone, and the storyless Martin is left behind. Although Eddie consciously rejects the Old Man’s demand for the “male side” of things, he cannot escape his influence. On the other hand, it is not clear where May is going but unlike her mother she accepts the fact that her lover is “gone.”

In Sam Shepard’s plays the past – which might be expected to supply the audience with the origins and meaning of the conflicts they view—is itself problematic. Both Buried Child and Fool for Love are about the characters’ conflicting and contradictory memories and the gradual discovery and disclosure of closely kept family secrets. But in Buried Child as Shepard clearly depicted, control of the past and of
language becomes a matter of power, and the character or characters who dominate the past have the control of the present.

In Fool for Love we hear conflicting stories of the characters, and past becomes shifting and multiple. This undecidable past not only disturbs conventions of realism, but also reminds the spectator of the functioning of language in the play. Though the present can be represented in part by objectives, which the audience perceives—décor, actors, gestures and so forth— the past must be represented through language and exclusively through the character’s dialogues. In this play the characters physical opposition according to Paul Berman “makes a vivid image of hatred and bonding” which is Shepard’s “favoured theme” (216).

Shepard’s method in Buried Child and Fool for Love is direct. He allows his characters to talk around what they are really thinking. His characters in these plays use short sentences, and occasionally the talk escalates into brief, inclusive bursts of action and even violence. Sam Shepard uses a poetically simplistic dialogue and a rhythmic language that, when the rhythm is going it is rather hard to stop.

In his earlier plays Shepard presented the question of self-recognition and explored the nature of identity of the characters from the point of social roles and the private self. In these two plays he is working with the themes of home, family, heredity and environment. As he adopts the naturalistic frame, he moves into the exploration of the self in relationship to others, and the family represents the first encounter between the ego and the world.