Chapter One

Introduction

If the identity is not fixed and if gender roles are variable, fluid, and multiple, they are open to oppositional strategies.

SHEPARD

Sam Shepard Rogers ranks as one of America’s celebrated dramatists. He has written nearly 50 plays. Outside of his stage work, he has achieved fame as an actor, writer, and director in the film industry. With a career that now spans nearly 50 years, Sam Shepard has gained critical regard, media attention, and an iconic status enjoyed by only a rare few in American theatre. Throughout his career Shepard has amassed numerous grants, prizes, fellowships, and awards, including eleven Obie Awards, the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, and a Pulitzer Prize.

In the 1960s Shepard emerged from the off-off-Broadway theater community. He is highly praised as the leading American dramatist of his generation mainly for his explorations of myths, archetypes, and American manhood through forceful language and visual imagery. His works commonly have enigmatic structures and convey a surreal vision of contemporary American society in which myth frequently collides with reality. Thematically, his work often deals with the cultural identity of the United States, utilizing cowboy trappings and Western locales to dramatize the influence and corruption of the American frontier. Shepard has also been concerned with the dynamics of the American family, portraying the irresistible yet sometimes destructive force that relatives exert over one another. Shepard’s plays explore various topics especially the quest for identity, male subjectivity, the spiritual dissolution of the family, the corruption of the artist by commercialism, the disintegration of the American dream, the vanishing Western frontier and its culture, the legends and myths of the American West and references to jazz, song lyrics, drugs, Hollywood films, and other components of American popular culture. His settings in place are often a kind of nowhere grounded in the heart of the
vast American Plains; his characters are typically loners caught between a mythical past and the mechanized present; and his work often concerns deeply troubled males and troubled families.

Samuel Shepard Rogers was born on November 5, 1943, to Samuel Shepard and Elaine Rogers in Fort Sheridan, Illinois. His father was in the Army Air Corps and, after World War II, the family shuttled between various military bases before settling in Duarte, California. Shepard has described his family life as chaotic. In the early 1960s Shepard left home, eventually migrating to New York City in 1963. Shepard began his acting career in California, but in 1963, he became involved with several off-off-Broadway theater groups. His first one-act dramas, *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden*, were part of the first Theatre Genesis show at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery in 1964. Between 1965 and 1970, Shepard continued to write prolifically, completing more than fourteen plays.

In addition to writing plays, he was a member of the rock band The Holy Modal Rounders in the late 1960s. His interest in music partially motivated his move to England in 1971, as he hoped to join a rock band in London. Although this plan never materialized, Shepard settled in the London area where he pursued his interest in music, directed several productions of his own plays, and wrote a number of new works, including *The Tooth of Crime* (1972). In the mid-1970s, Shepard resettled in California, becoming the playwright-in-residence at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for *Buried Child*, which also won an Obie Award. Eleven of Shepard’s plays have won Obie Awards, including *Chicago* (1965), *Icarus’s Mother* (1965), *La Turista* (1967), *The Tooth of Crime*, and *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976). *A Lie of the Mind* (1985) won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, the New York Drama Desk Award, and the Outer Critics’ Circle Award for outstanding new play. Shepard was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1986, and in 1992, he received the Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy. In 1994 Shepard was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame. A revised version of *Buried Child* opened on Broadway in April 1996 and was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play. Shepard has also worked as an actor, screenwriter, and director in several motion pictures. His screen acting career began in 1970 with the film *Brand X*. 
Shepard attracted much media interest, attention that increased in the early 1980s when he divorced his wife to begin a relationship with film star Jessica Lang. He continued to produce plays on a regular basis through the mid-1980s, often serving as the stage director for the initial presentations. His movie credits include the films *Days of Heaven*, *Frances*, *The Right stuff*, and the film adaptation of his own play *Fool for Love*. Shepard was nominated for a best supporting actor award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1983 for his performance in *The Right Stuff*, and later appeared in several films, including the screen adaptation of his play *Fool for Love* (1983), *Country* (1984), *Thunderheart* (1992), and *Black Hawk Down* (2001).

Shepard has written and directed two films—*Far North* (1988) and *Silent Tongue* (1993)—and has written a number of screenplays, most notably *Paris, Texas* (1984; with L. M. Kit Carson), which won the Grand Jury Prize at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival.


Overall, as a writer Shepard pays more attention to his male characters than his female characters. Thus, his plays are appropriate for an analysis of masculine psyche and identity. The present study will concentrate on the construction of male identity and gender in Sam Shepard’s selected plays and will also show how these issues are uncertain and indeterminate. First, generally speaking, identity or selfhood is not something natural, essential, or innate, but is something that is socially and culturally constructed. What is constructed can be changed, put into play, destabilized, altered, and reworked. Second, Gender operates within Western constructs of binary opposites, so that gender signifiers always point to either a male or female body, and to masculine or feminine traits. Since gender is constructed through cultural and social inscriptions and through arbitrary links between signifiers and signifieds, the connection between the two can be weakened, changed, or broken. And finally, the subfield of Masculinity Studies offers a particular range of ideas and debates. The focus of the field of gender/sexuality
and its subfields, including Masculinity Studies, is upon critical analysis of gender and sexuality in social life. By examining this thematic concern with masculinity, I hope to further considerations as to how masculinity is staged by Sam Shepard.

The early works of Shepard, covering the period from 1963 to the mid-seventies, include abstract and absurdist explorations that are powerful extended images of dominant hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed within social and cultural settings and is defined as having such characteristics as dominance, chauvinism, violence, aggression, virility, mental toughness, rationality, and physical power and strength. Thus, during this early career, the basis of identity was often a violent struggle to gain dominant hegemonic masculinity. “Masculine ideals are summed up in the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’, but even that cultural ideal seems to change and pluralize as the culture itself changes and fragments with the march of history. Recently, for example, perhaps to protect itself from onslaughts from feminism, hegemonic masculinity has incorporated the feminine” (MacKinnon 14). Inherent in Shepard’s portrayal of masculine identity is the representation of male violence and chauvinism. This is the reason many of Shepard’s plays feature men as cowboys and rodeo riders. Men are often characters that are tied to the land and to their fathers. Women are the background of these early plays: they hang out and do unpleasant and boring tasks regularly “while the men make decisions, take risks, face challenges, experience existential crises. Women are frequently abused, and always treated as subservient to men, their potential for growth and change restricted” (Baechler and Litz 435). These early works portray women as tender, emotional, passive and eventually as the recipients of male violence and aggression. They are victims of uncontrolled passion. Women are archetypal sex objects. They facilitate it for men to stage their maleness. They are objects, which are needed to give macho male characters dominant status. Therefore, these early plays associate males with human characteristics defined as superior and dominant and females with those defined as inferior and auxiliary.

Shepard’s early one-act plays—such as Cowboys, The Rock Garden, and Chicago—are abstract and absurdist explorations that have been compared to the works of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. The plays are marked by their disjointed structure, visual imagery, and long monologues typically loaded with obscenity. For example, The Rock Garden culminates in a verbal outburst
by a teenager who details his sexual techniques to his father. These works combine humor, satire, myth, and a poignant language to create a subversive pop art vision of America. Shepard continued to explore various combinations of sight and sound in his early full-length dramas as well. His first full-length play, *La Turista*, is a comedy about a couple who fall prey to intestinal illness while vacationing in Mexico. *Operation Sidewinder* (1970)--which satirizes the social and political upheavals of the 1960s--features a giant rattlesnake-shaped computer as the central figure and ends with a prolonged burst of machine gun fire.

After Shepard moved to London in 1971 he authored his most notable work *The Tooth of Crime*, which he later revised it as *The Tooth of Crime (Second Dance)* in 1996. The play tells the story of two rock musicians, Hoss and Crow, whose battle for prominence in the music industry resembles the actions of gunfighters in the Old West. Language plays a crucial part in the play, as Shepard employs urban slang, rock lyrics, and other pop idioms in place of the conventional weapons of gunfighters. At the conclusion, Hoss, realizing that the language and style he uses for dueling is dated, commits suicide, leaving Crow in command until the next challenger comes along. Shepard’s residency at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco began a new stage in his career--the plays from this period typically focus on an artist’s pursuit of identity and creative freedom, as well as the struggles that result from this search. *Suicide in B-Flat* (1976) suggests the stifling of creativity in the life of a jazz musician, while *Angel City* (1976) satirizes the film industry and the corruption of young writers.

The plays coming after the early phase of Shepard’s writing also focus on the problematics of masculinity. Family plays: *Curse of the Stowing Class* (1977), *Buried Child* (1978), *True West* (1980), *Fool for Love* (1983), and *A Lie of the Mind* (1985) are prominent examples which show Shepard’s interest to portray male psyche and male subjectivity. In this later phase, Shepard becomes more interested in modernized, de-traditionalized male subjects which demonstrate qualities of effeminacy and/or are under the threat of emasculation. In these works, one can clearly see Shepard’s inclination to turn and distance from machismo postures in favor of a modern masculinity, thus moving from the realm of the physical to the social and emotional. Through processes of modernization, men become detached from their traditional image which was guided by habit, tradition, and long established social customs. These works recognize the
dangers of relying solely on violence and chauvinism as a definition of self. Adhering on some level to traditional masculinity while at the same time avoiding violence, aggression and abuse of women leads to the embarrassment and anxiety of the male characters. These plays show that male identity is more dependent on women than is female identity dependent on men. In doing so, the plays ultimately present these would-be domineering men as the weaker party in the negotiation for individualization and selfhood within gender roles. The tension between the ideological positioning of women and the reality of women’s lives in these works reflects that women clearly mean more than patriarchy insists they should mean. They are not fully captured or contained by the male-defined roles of sexual object or of mother. In sum, these works present male characters as a medium between a violent figure and a modern male which is less violent but in trouble.

Shepard’s major plays of the late 1970s and 1980s are domestic dramas in which working-class families become victims of violence, guilt, and abnormal fantasy. These works reject the cartoonish imagery in Shepard’s earlier works in favor of more realistic plot lines and characterizations. Shepard uses the dissolution of a southern California family in Curse of the Starving Class to symbolize the demise of the Western frontier and American society in general. The action in Buried Child unfolds when a man named Vince returns to his Midwestern home after a long absence. He is confronted with dangerously unbalanced relatives who conceal secrets of incest and murder. Eventually, these secrets are discovered along with an unwanted infant buried in the backyard years earlier. True West (1980) highlights the struggle between the dual natures of two brothers, Austin and Lee. Austin, a reserved screenwriter, has returned to their mother’s house to finish a long overdue script for his Hollywood contact. Saul. Lee is a charismatic and violent criminal who lives in the desert and surprises Austin by arriving unannounced. Lee attempts to persuade Saul to buy his idea for a movie telling stories from his sordid past. Saul immediately buys the idea and breaks his agreement with Austin. Fool for Love examines obsession, betrayal, myth, truth, de-traditional masculinity, and masculine violence inherent in both male and female genders. The plot develops through alternating submission and rejection between two lovers who may be half-brother and half-sister. A Lie of the Mind continues Shepard’s exploration of American families in emotional distress. The work centers on a married couple, Beth and Jake, whose violent relationship both destroys and redeems their
families. Beaten to the point of brain damage by Jake, Beth is slowly recovering under the care of her loveless parents and her vengeful brother. Jake, thinking that he has killed Beth, hides in his boyhood home and his over-protective mother takes care of him. Although the two characters become separated, they remain emotionally bonded by their obsessive love for each other. Throughout the course of the play the true nature of both families is probed and revealed.

Shepard’s major works written from 1990 onward such as *States of Shock* (1991), *Simpatico* (1994), *Eyes for Consuela* (1998), *The Late Henry Moss* (2000) and *God of Hell* (2004) delineate male characters that have been put in crisis in more advanced societies. They experience crisis since the society they live in is generally different from traditional society. Male characters have internalized the traditional ideals of patriarchal society or whatever their fathers inculcated in their minds as typical masculine ideals but at this time they are of no use for them. They are expected to behave in a way which is definitely distinct from the traditional one. So male subjects have to conform to the changed situation and recognize that the social and cultural attitudes toward the ideals of masculinity has changed entirely otherwise they will be subject to face crisis.

In *States of Shock* (1991) a nameless American colonel and an amputee soldier named Stubbs arrive at a restaurant to celebrate the anniversary of the death of the colonel’s son. *Simpatico* (1994) follows the tensions between two ex-partners, Vinnie and Carter, who once made a fortune by fixing a horse race. Years later, Vinnie threatens to blackmail Carter, now a successful horse breeder, with evidence of their past crime. In *Eyes for Consuela* (1998), a two-act play, a vacationing American is assaulted by a knife-wielding Mexican named Amado, who wishes to present his lover Consuela with a bouquet of blue eyeballs. In *The Late Henry Moss* (2000), two brothers return home to confront each other and their violent past after the unexpected death of their father. Shepard’s latest play, *The God of Hell* (2004), is an uproarious, brilliantly provocative farce that brings the gifts of a quintessentially American playwright to bear on the current American dilemma. Frank and Emma are a quiet, respectable couple who raise cows on their Wisconsin farm. Soon after they agree to put up Frank’s old friend Haynes, who is on the lam from a secret government project involving plutonium, they’re visited by Welch, an unctuous government bureaucrat from hell. His aggressive patriotism puts Frank, Emma, and
Haynes on the defensive, transforming a heartland American household into a scene of torture and promoting a radioactive brand of conformity with a dangerously long half life. *The God of Hell* was written in part as a response to the events of September 11th, 2001. It is essentially Shepard’s reaction to the political situation he found the Western world mired in at the turn of the twenty-first century. However, this reaction and the political situation itself are nothing new to Shepard: *States of Shock* was written as a response to the first Gulf War, and *When the World Was Green* finds its subject in the Bosnian conflict.

Briefly speaking, Shepard’s focus on the macho male characters changes during his career. His male characters’ identity shifts from a macho self in traditional society to the emasculated, troubled and tortured one in modern society and then to characters who experience crisis in the family or society in more advanced society.

The importance of gender issues regarding masculinity and male experience has been demonstrated by some other contemporary playwrights. Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) as leading forefathers portray a common concern with male identity. For example, *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *Dutchman* (1964) represent male characters who struggle to assert their manhood or to find their identity as men. “Viewed together, these four representative plays serve to demonstrate the importance that gender issues regarding masculinity have traditionally had within American drama” (McDonough 21). Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* treats both class and gender relations outside of the family relationships. *The Hairy Ape* examines class structures that dehumanize the lower level group of society. However, the main character, Yank, represents physical power or brute strength as the key aspects of traditional masculinity. Yank’s concerns regarding his place in society is related to his manhood as well as his class. While Yank is capable of constructing a sense of manhood for himself in order to feel superior to the rich men who ride the steamship he works on, he loses his self-confidence when confronting a rich woman, Mildred. Proud of his power and strength, he considers himself alienated from humanity and seeks for refuge among the apes in the zoo. Even in the zoo he does not fit and so is at last killed by the hug of an ape. Yank’s story seems to indicate the dangers of an identity structured only on the physical strength in a society that values
economic power and influence. Yank's story indicates the mirage of power that the traditional concept of masculinity and manhood considers necessary to all men. Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* offers the best example of the complexity of male positions. Brute Stanly, Blanche's young husband Allan, and the inexperienced Mitch together exemplify the conflicting masculine identities. These three men in *Streetcar* are insecure about their identities. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* provides American drama with one of its most well-known portraits of troubled masculinity. Among the plays of modern American drama, perhaps no other captures the instability and dilemma of traditional American masculinity better than does Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* is about black masculine identity. The violence and rage of Baraka’s male characters, “while overtly motivated by racial injustice, are covertly reflecting a confusion regarding gender identity that is apparent in the rage and violence among the men in the plays of Shepard, Mamet, Rabe, and, to a lesser extent, Wilson. . . . Baraka’s theatre is an angry theatre, his men are bitter and defensive, threatened and imperiled, but fighting back” (McDonough 32).

The anxiety and the insecurity of male identity are present within plays of O’Neill, Williams, Miller, and Baraka, who influence the leading male playwrights of the next generation. Masculinity and manliness become fractured and insecure in the plays of O’Neill, Miller, Williams and Baraka. Even though O’Neill, Miller, Williams and Baraka are considered to be leading forefathers of playwrights who are interested in male identity and experience, Sam Shepard along with David Mamet (1947- ), David Rabe (1940- ) and African American August Wilson (1945- ) are four major male playwrights of the latter half of the twentieth century who have shown much interest in male subjects. Thus, it is not irrelevant to survey briefly how Mamet, Rabe and August approach and stage the notion of masculinity in their major works recalling that Shepard’s career has been discussed earlier and his selected works will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

It should also be mentioned that there are other playwrights who are stereotypically outside of the mainstream of traditional American masculinity and merit consideration. For instance, Chinese-American David Henry Hwang and the gay playwright Tony Kushner produced powerful dramas that explore the problems of traditional American concepts of masculinity and
challenge it. David Henry Hwang’s most famous play, M. Butterfly (1988), explores how the Western concept of the masculine West and the feminine East entraps the Western man and manipulates him because his illusions of masculinity makes him unable to see reality. Hwang also explores Eastern involvement in these Western images. Kushner’s Angels in America, Millennium Approaches (1990), represents a portrayal of a decaying American culture caused by the domination of heterosexuality and competitive masculinity.

David Mamet’s plays reflect his key themes concerning masculinity and manhood in America. If open spaces of the west are important for Shepard’s men, the realm of business has the same importance for Mamet’s male characters. “Mamet’s male characters are every bit as stubborn as those of shepard in being unwilling to abandon American myths of masculinity, even as those myths shatter around them” (McDonough 71). Mamet’s Lakeboat (1970) is a one-act play about life on board. Lakeboat dramatizes a masculine space among the blue-collar world of the great Lakes shipping industry. Lakeboat’s world is a world without women but its men are obsessed with women. Especially in the character of Fred sexual exploitation of woman is seen as a defining characteristic of manhood. In this play, there is a dialogue among its eight characters that are all male. Mamet’s next play, American Buffalo (1976), is about three low-life city men plotting to steal a coin collection. This play is recognized as an important commentary on American business and ethics. Three characters assert to affirm their self-worth. Each character in this play feels threatened by the other characters. Male characters attempt to establish or preserve masculine identity which is relied upon antagonism with women or the feminine. Another major play of Mamet is Edmond (1982). It is an allegorical tale of self-discovery and reflects issues of masculine identity. It represents one man’s quest for identity and his failure to find it through traditional means. Glengarry Glen Ross (1983), Mamet’s most successful play, was first produced in London in 1983 under the guidance of British playwright Harold Pinter and won the Olivier Award. It moved to Broadway in 1984 and won, among others, New York Drama Critics’ Circle, Dramatists Guild, and Pulitzer awards. Telling a story of dehumanizing, materialistic American business, it follows the exploits of a group of male characters who are real estate agents that tried to sell worthless lands to old people who could hardly afford it. The play is based on some of Mamet’s own experiences working in a real estate office. In 1988, Mamet wrote another longer play, Speed-the-Plow (1988), which satirizes the Hollywood film
industry and this led Mamet to win his first Tony Award. *Speed-the-Plow* deals with such issues as loyalty, betrayal, and the fear of emasculation. It makes a clear split between masculinity and femininity by the actual presence of a female character. His next play, *Olcanna* (1991) is about sexual harassment and power relationships between a student and her professor. “*Olcanna* is a simplistic reading of gender misunderstandings, fueling the fires of the war between the sexes with its assurances that the gulf between men and women is too wide to be bridged. *Olcanna* affirms the fears of Mamet’s male characters and helps to explain why they are so afraid of the feminine, why they are disgusted by women, why they long for their all-male worlds” (McDonough 98).

Mamet’s emphasis on male identity is clear within his male-cast plays (*Lakeboat, Duke Variations, A Life in the Theater, American Buffalo, Glengarry Glen Ross*) and plays that only superficially deal with female characters and their concerns (*Sexual Perversity in Chicago, Edmond, The Woods, Speed-the-plow*). His plays are about the quest for male identity, search for a masculine space, and a contest among men because they try to establish identities at the cost of other characters. The search for masculine identity and a fear and hatred of women are often communicated through obscene, degraded, and incoherent language which reveals characters’ insecurities and bewilderment. In Mamet’s plays, the mythology of frontier and open spaces of the West which is vital to male identity in Shepard’s works has been shifted to the idea of free enterprise. To exalt male independence and strength, the conception of masculine space in Mamet’s work is always dependent on the destruction or exclusion of female subjectivity. But the complete exclusion of female subjects is not actually possible. Since male characters are obsessed with a fear of femininity, even though they try to remove women to the margins they are not able to keep a separate male space exactly. Male characters of Mamet’s plays are similar to those of Shepard in that even though they see American myths of masculinity are destroyed and shattered they are still reluctant to get rid of them.

Regarded as one of the most important dramatists in American theater, David William Rabe obtained national attention for his *Vietnam Plays*, a series of three plays that delve into the violence and chaos of the Vietnam War and its effects on young soldiers. Critics praise his exploration of sensitive issues such as the exploitation of women, the deleterious impact of drug
use, the depravity of materialism, and the decline of the American value system. In his work, black humor, visible acts of violence, symbolism, and strong language provide the context for alienated characters who struggle to find meaning in the modern world. Although he originally established himself as a playwright of Vietnam plays, Rabe’s central concern does not end with war. His focus is more consistently upon myths of male identity. Although he explored some myths concerning women in *The Boom Boom Room* (1973), his other plays, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971), *Sticks and Bones* (1971), *Streamers* (1976), *Goose and Tomtom* (1986), *Hurlyburly* (1984), and *The Orphan* (1974) focus on male systems of identification. Rabe’s interest in masculinity has become more evident with each play he writes.

Rabe’s earliest Vietnam plays are structured around male protagonists. What these characters do is to keep track of cultural images of manhood and construct their own identities in terms of those images. Not only Rabe’s plays are to portray deep male and his power but also they reveal the anxieties and fracturing of male characters and the immaturity of their thinking about their own identities. The Vietnam plays are about men in war and the outcome that the survivors and their society confront. These plays depict men who on their search for manhood turn to the army. With regard to their conception of masculinity, soldiering is important for them. The first two were written and performed while America was still involved in Vietnam. Rabe’s focus on the military is to show the popular idea of it as an institution which makes man rather than being an institution for war. Even though war is the background of Vietnam plays, Rabe places his soldiers against a social context detached from war such as the home in *Sticks and Bones*, and personal backgrounds and pressures including home life in both *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* and *Streamers*. Combining life in the camp with life at home, Rabe implies that violence in home life is only the result of the life in barracks. Cultural images of manhood associated with violence and aggression are presented not only in the Vietnam trilogy but in all of Rabe’s plays. His characters seem chiefly to be searching for identity and selfhood according to whatever they have learnt about manhood and manliness in their culture’s myths.

Rabe’s work has been compared to that of Sam Shepard, particularly in its use of naturalistic and absurdist elements, its emphasis on male psyche and identity, deconstruction of the American masculine myth, and exploration of the deterioration of American culture and values. For
example, Rabe’s *Sticks and Bones* is very similar to Shepard’s *States of Shock* in depicting a homecoming veteran who is rejected by family members and de-mythologizing the myth of American war hero. David Rabe has been grouped with Sam Shepard and David Mamet as a white male playwriting triad.

August Wilson in his plays has devoted much attention to the issue of race and its close relation to the gender formation. “August Wilson’s theater offers excellent texts for reading how race as well as gender factor into male conflicts with and struggles for normative masculinity” (McDonough 137). August Wilson (Frederick August Kittell) took his mother’s maiden name of Wilson to show commitment to her and his African American heritage. It also revealed disapproval of his white birth father, a German baker who lived apart from the family and eventually abandoned them. Working as a cleaner, Wilson’s mother, Daisy, provided as best she could. Daisy had stern pride in her culture and ethnicity and encouraged her children to read. In the late 1950s she married David Bedford, an ex-convict with whom Wilson had a quarrelsome relationship, and who moved the family to Hazelwood, a mostly white suburb, where they regularly faced racist derision. Bedford died in 1969, and years later Wilson based the character of Troy Wilson of *Fences* (1985), on his stepfather.

From 1984 through 1987, Yale Repertory Theatre produced a new Wilson play each year, which transferred to Broadway to growing success. *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* opened on Broadway later that same year, ran for 275 performances, and won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award. *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* is primarily inspired by the blues women of the 1920s and 1930s. Even though Wilson first had in mind to write a play about blues women as they fought against racism and sexism, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* turned out to be a play about black men. *Fences*, Wilson’s Pulitzer-winning family story set in 1957, premiered at Yale in 1985, moved to Broadway in 1987. *Fences* explores the responsibilities, duties and limitations of fatherhood and the difficulties of marital obligations for African Americans inhabiting the industrial cities of the North after World War II. Troy Maxon is too certain that his sons are destined for failure. He turns to another woman to escape the sense of his own failure as a man. *Fences* “is the story of manhood as measured against that illusory American dream of material gain, only this time the struggles of the male protagonist are further heightened by questions of racism” (McDonough
Troy stands for the whole black masculinity. The complex relation between gender and racial identity is treated in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (1986). *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* is the most allegorical and mystical of Wilson’s plays. It is set in a rooming house in the 1910s as a male character, Herald Loomis, travels north to find his wife and child. He is on the quest to rebuild his personality and find his humanity. Wilson’s next play, *The Piano Lesson* (1987), stages masculinity within the black American family. The legacy of a dead father is a test for how the main male characters construct their own identity as a man and their role and responsibility within the family. *The Piano Lesson* won Wilson another Pulitzer before it even opened on Broadway in 1990, and secured Wilson’s national reputation. His next play, *Two Trains Running* (1990), took on urban black culture in the chaotic 1960s and won him his fifth New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award in 1992. In this play family is totally avoided and the focus is put on a group of men who spend a lot of time at Memphis Lee’s restaurant in Pittsburgh in 1969. *Two Trains Running* lacks central character. Two characters given more attention than the rest are Memphis and Sterling. Memphis is fighting to get city hall to pay him top price for his restaurant which the city intends to destroy and Sterling, released from prison, searches for some love interest and enthusiasm. The fundamental action of the play is the talk among sterling, Memphis, and the other men. A sense of aloofness, decay, and dissolution is felt in their talk. All through their talk it is clear that these men sense an endangered position in relation to the white society.

In his representation of black males, Wilson portrays masculinity both within the family and in conflict with white society. His male characters assume that manhood is often given or denied a man by women. However, they also believe that their manhood is in danger by white enmity. Consistently in all five major plays of Wilson: *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (1984), *Fences* (1987), *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (1988), *The Piano Lesson* (1990), and *Two Trains Running* (1992) the central protagonist is male. What makes Wilson’s works distinct from those of Shepard is that Wilson’s plays reflect how ideas associated with race are closely interconnected with those of acceptable masculinity.

Having examined how Shepard’s contemporary dramatists approach and stage masculinity in their works, the study will now attempt to focus on Shepard. This study includes in six chapters.
It is based on an analytical reading of Sam Shepard’s selected plays, along with critical books, articles, essays, and notes on his works. It offers an analysis of six plays of Sam Shepard from a gender perspective focusing on male identity and therefore takes into its ambit different theories of masculinity especially those posed by R.W. Connell, Todd W. Reeser, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Anthony Giddens. The plays under scrutiny are: *The Tooth of Crime* (1972), *Buried Child* (1978), *Fool for Love* (1983), *States of Shock* (1991), *Simpatico* (1994), and *The Late Henry Moss* (2000). In all six of these works, male subjectivity is explored.

Since this study applies various theories associated with masculinity to Shepard’s works in order to examine how male subjectivity is staged by him, the second chapter entitled as “Theories of Masculinities” is dedicated to the theoretical approach that will be followed. This chapter is devoted to the diverse theories of masculinities including: crisis of masculinity, traditional masculinity, de-traditionalization thesis and various types of masculinities such as hegemonic, subordinate, marginalized, complicit, protest, effeminate, emasculated, and female or non-male masculinity proposed by social theorists such as British sociologist Anthony Giddens, Australian sociologist R.W. Connell, and some other leading theorists of masculinity studies. In addition, this chapter contains the critical discourse analysis emphasizing Michel Foucault’s ideas concerning gender construction. In the end of the second chapter masculinity is treated as an ideology and the structural Marxist theorist Louis Althusser’s views of ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses) are discussed in relation to the formation of male subjects.

Shepard’s reputation remains connected to his earlier plays, those fueled by aggression and the attractive qualities of Western manhood. Chapter three under the title “(Challenging) Hegemonic Masculinities” is devoted to a major early rock play *The Tooth of Crime* (1972). It is the analysis of how hegemonic masculinity is staged in rock drama *The Tooth of Crime* and therefore takes into its ambit R.W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, Foucault’s ideas concerning social discourses and gender construction and finally Althusser’s views of ISAs (Ideological States Apparatuses). After giving introductory remarks on the play itself, the idea of hegemonic masculinity is discussed and how it is challenged in *The Tooth of Crime*. Afterward it is discussed that hegemonic masculinity is challenged in different ways. Dominative hegemonic masculinity is considered as a performance. Investigating male subjectivity, *The Tooth of
Crime seems to be related to American maleness. The notion of masculinity is performed in a way that defies any fixity. The Tooth of Crime describes the fact that male subjectivity has not an essential core and is just a performance. Then it is discussed that in The Tooth of Crime, male aggression and violence act as defining features of hegemonic masculinity. Violent and aggressive male behavior is accepted as a normal part of hegemonic masculinity. “It seems to be culturally believed that violence is a natural, practically genetic component of masculinity” (MacKinnon 12). In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard’s most impressive play, noticeable violence is successfully communicated through masculine actions as well as through language and music as defining features of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity emerges and develops from the social and cultural settings and has its own defining characteristics such as chauvinism, violence, aggression, and mental and physical strength or toughness. Next debate considers hegemonic masculinity as a kind of discourse and since discourses are subject to change so dominant hegemonic masculinity changes. In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard stages two different discourses of hegemonic masculinity, the traditional discourse and modern one, in dialogue with each other. Moreover, hegemonic masculinity acts as an ideology and therefore is shaped and constructed through ISAs, institutions such as arts, and media that produce ideologies and individuals internalize and act in accordance with. Since Shepard utilizes some allusions to Western and gangster film, rock and roll and jazz music, and the drug culture which influence and shape male subjectivity, the influences of popular culture and media as an organization which creates systems of ideas and values are very noteworthy in The Tooth of Crime.

Effeminacy, emasculation, and female masculinity are other configurations of masculinity. Effeminate masculinity means that male subjects construct their identity by appropriating traits which seem opposing to masculinity, especially those ascribed to women. A man can acquire woman-like traits or effeminacy to accomplish his objectives which are non-hegemonic. Effeminacy and emasculation are not used interchangeably. Emasculation means to deprive men of strength, vigor, power and force. Emasculation is also rendering male less of a man so that male feels weakened by humiliation. Non-male or female masculinity exhibits that defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity such as power, strength, toughness or violence are not possessed in or confined to the body of male individuals. Female masculinity gives power and
chance to women to move into realm of traditional masculinity which was always occupied by men. It may cause an anxiety in men who are worried not to lose their hold on masculinity. Divided into two parts, chapter four is entitled “Emasculation, Male Effeminacy, and Female Masculinity” and deals with family plays, namely, *Buried Child* (1978) and *Fool for Love* (1983). In this chapter there is a shift in the focus. These works portray effeminacy, emasculation of male characters, and none-male masculinity and recognize the dangers of relying solely on violence and chauvinism as a definition of self. Shepard’s long-held interest in male aggression, sexual conquest, and violent display continues to be depicted in these plays in a milder degree. What is novel is that women are also given voice and power in these plays to the extent that they go beyond female territory and acquire masculine traits. Dealing with emasculated, effeminate, and female masculinity this chapter depicts men who are often dependent on women. Although women are considered to be secondary in these plays but they are important having their own voice to express themselves.

According to Anthony Giddens, the way subjects construct their identities in contemporary societies has changed radically. His thesis of *Crisis of Masculinity* describes that in advanced industrial societies under the impact of globalization the way people construct their identities has changed. Social and ideological changes lead to changing social location of men which threatens qualities of manliness and finally results in crisis of masculinity. Crisis of masculinity implies that losing their traditional roles in the family and workplace, modern men become dazed and confused about their place in the family and society. They oscillate between traditional conditioning and contemporary demands and desires and never settle fully into either. Exposing that manhood is in crisis, Shepard’s plays from 1990 onwards demonstrate an outlook that distinguishes them from his more well-known works. Chapter five entitled “Crisis of Masculinity: Late Shepard (from 1990 Onwards)” offers a detailed analysis of the three plays Sam Shepard has written during and after 1990: *States of Shock* (1991), *Simpatico* (1994), and *The Late Henry Moss* (2000) which involves a shift in the focus in that most emphasis is put on male/male relationship and the idea of manhood in crisis. Shepard’s plays dating from 1990 onwards continue his examination of the American family; war between father and son; fatherhood in crisis; male/male relationship; male/male friendship; sibling rivalry; balanced male; female/male relationship; female masculinity; feminized masculinity; female
transcendence over men; the search for love and personal identity; and finally war both political and personal which results in de-mythologized image of war hero as the American manhood.

Chapter Six, the final chapter of my project, would consolidate the arguments of the previous chapters and sum up their main thrust. This chapter would also examine the unique place that Shepard holds among his contemporary playwrights. My study would thus conclude by locating Shepard in the context of the age and depicts his contribution to the dramatic genre. This chapter also delineates other inferences drawn during the course of the study.