Chapter Four

Emasculation, Male Effeminacy and None-male Masculinity

Emasculation is constantly put forward as a threat to all men in U.S. society. As many gender theorists have argued, it is exactly this constant fear of emasculation that indexes the instability of masculinity as a social construct.

GARDINER

The plays coming after the early phase of Shepard’s writing particularly his family plays: *Buried Child* (1978) and *Fool for Love* (1983) focus on the problematics of masculinity. These plays depict emasculation, male effeminacy and female masculinity as social constructs and cultural phenomena. These plays investigate problematics of male and female identity delineating the male characters that are effeminate or threatened to be emasculated and female characters that are masculine.

Masculinity is a changing phenomenon, it is fluid, and it is something ever changing and in movement. Constructs of masculinity vary across historical and cultural contexts. Moving across cultures and societies looking at examples different from our own leads us to the conclusion that there are wide variety of cultural variations in masculinity and it is very difficult to determine the concept of it as natural. Emasculation, effeminacy and none-male masculinity are some configurations of masculinity.

The denotative meaning of emasculation is the removal of the genitalia (castration) of a male, notably the penis and/or the testicles. “Commonly used as a synonym for emasculation in both academic and vernacular discourses, castration has come to operate metaphorically as the mere psychic threat of a sexual wounding that signifies the universal jeopardy of being fully masculine” (Gardiner 313). Figuratively the word emasculation means to render a male less of a
man, or to make a male feel weaker or less of a man by humiliation. Emasculation signifies to
deprive male of his strength, virility, force, sexuality or vigor literally by castration or
figuratively. The metaphorical usage of the word is much more common than the application of
its literal meaning.

Emasculation is more precisely related to castration in that etymologically it also means
to ‘out’—that is, to cut out—the male member: ‘to castrate, to remove the testicles of.’
As is the habit of words, emasculation becomes a metaphor for itself, as it comes to
signify any practice that diminishes the potency of men in the family or in society more
generally: ‘to deprive of masculine strength or vigor; to weaken; to make effeminate’.
(Gardiner 311)

Emasculated man is a man who has lost his power and fallen from his status as a dominant one.
Within the realm of masculinity, emasculated form of masculinity is often associated with
powerlessness, helplessness, and inability to control, dominate, or rule over the others.

Comparing and contrasting the effeminate man with the emasculated man, Reeser in his book
Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction states that these two terms are not synonymous or
identical because the effeminate man signifies a man who has become like a woman but the
emasculated man designates a man who has fallen from his status as masculine or male (148).
Reeser further explains:

The emasculated man resembles a woman only if woman and man are considered
opposites (not a man = woman). Or, he may also be considered like a castrated man, even
if he is not really castrated or even if he has no connection with castration. An Asian or
Native-American man considered emasculated might resemble a woman, then, but he
may also be imagined to resemble a man with no penis or testicles. The association might
result from a perceived lack of masculine traits or of a true or full male body, meaning
that the mechanism behind the perception of emasculation might be either gender or sex.
(148)
As Gardiner discusses in *Masculinity studies and feminist theory* emasculation is always as a threat to all men in U.S. society. It is exactly this fear of emasculation that causes masculinity to be unstable as a social construct (311).

Effeminacy is supposed to be a threat for men since when they become feminized they look like women. “But effeminacy is not necessarily the opposite of masculinity. A man’s fear of becoming effeminate does not have to mean that he is not masculine, and a man can lack masculinity and still fear effeminacy” (Reeser 120). Effeminate masculinity means that male individuals appropriate traits attributed to women. Their identity is constructed based upon the traits which are non-hegemonic and seem opposing to masculinity.

Non-male or female masculinity exhibits that women can also appropriate defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity such as independence, power, toughness, bravery, aggression, and violence. Female masculinity provides women with power and strength to fight against men and occupy the territory which was always occupied by men.

Divided into two parts, this chapter would deal with family plays which involve a shift in the focus: *Buried Child* (1978), and *Fool for Love* (1983). This chapter reveals how emasculated and effeminate males and masculine females are social constructs and cultural phenomena. This chapter will critically assess these two plays investigating problematics of male and female identity delineating the male characters that are effeminate or threatened to be emasculated and female characters that are masculine during the plays’ processes of action. These plays deal with men who desire to behave according to the principles of traditional hegemonic masculinity, that is, to be tough, stable, solid, reliable, aggressive, violent and dominant in position but they cannot adhere to these principles since they become emasculated by the people around them male or female. Moreover, influenced by the modern society, men become feminized and display feminine characteristics such as being gentle, tender, and sympathetic. In these plays women are given both feminine and masculine characteristics. They have their own voice and find chance to express their thoughts and feelings. They acquire power both feminine and masculine and through this deprive men of their authority.
Shepard’s Pulitzer-prize winning three-act play *Buried Child* premiered at the Magic Theatre in June 1978. In writing *Buried Child* “Shepard borrows from the classical Greek family myths, incorporating such archetypal narratives as the Orestean homecoming, Oedipus incest, the battles of father and son, as well as patricide and infanticide” (DeRose 99). It depicts a Midwestern farm dilapidated family home in Illinois. “The play is both similar to and different from his earlier (and later) work in its content, but its singular distinction is its mix of archetypical American Gothic horror and humor with a poetic density of imagery and textual statement” (Tucker 130). Carol Rosen in her book *Sam Shepard: ‘A Poetic Rodeo’* discusses that audiences find *Buried Child* as Shepard’s most satisfying play for the play’s use of devices and echoing the structure and stage effects found in the works of other modern playwrights:

First, its imagery, characters, and family secrets all resound in an Ibsenesque way. . . . Second, its action and dialogue are suggestive and theatrical in an opaque Pinteresque way. . . . Third, the play’s surreal comedy is familiar: Tilden’s entrances in each act, his arms piled high with mounds of vegetables, burying old Dodge under corn husks and littering the house with carrot peel, seem like something out of an Ionesco’s absurdist play. . . . Finally, the secret of the play, the revelation upon which the plot hinges, recalls in its placement in the play and in its dramatic rhythm both Mary’s anguished revelation at the close of O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. . . . The nature of the secret of *Buried Child*, however, is more of a device akin to secret shared by George and Martha in Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (129-30)

Although *Buried Child* shares some common characteristics with the works of other modern playwrights it is unquestionably an original one. “*Buried Child* is paradoxically both more conventional and more original” (Shewey 119).

*Buried Child* explores the disintegration of the American family. The decay of the American family is a recurring theme in Shepard’s works “which can readily be seen as a synonym for the nonviability of today’s American society. . . . The atmosphere in the family is stifling, repressive, sterile, and noncaring, for the essential element of love is missing. The action is played against a background of archaic, primeval power struggle. It portrays a savage world expressing exclusive
patriarchal values of violence and dominance” (Auerbach, *Buried Child* 381-82). The play “has linear plot and realistic dialogue. The characters do not switch identities or metamorphose or vanish. . . . Shepard’s surreal sensibility still pervades the drama and gives it its atmosphere of ambiguity and dream. . . . The surface realism furnishes the center that many of the other plays lack, and the intersection of this realism with his poetic imagery creates a rich texture” (Harriott 12-3) Name-symbolism is used very artistically in the play. The word *dodge* is used both to call the father figure and show something more about his character, to emphasize on the fact that he avoids being hit or he avoids something unpleasant. The play portrays the struggle of the Dodge to keep his sons from gaining power. “The family patriarch’s failings as a ‘man’ are reflected in the dissolution of his family and the failings of his sons” (McDonough 53).

The play begins with the lights rising to show Dodge, the owner, farmer of the land, the husband, the father of the family and grandfather, who wrapped in a blanket, spends most of his time on the dingy old sofa watching a television with no sound. Stripped of his power, his body is usually covered with the blanket that seems to give him security. When he is trying to avoid what is going on, he covers his head with it. Dodge is in his seventies. From time to time, he rises by the sound of rain and drinks from a bottle of whiskey he has hidden under the sofa cushions. Always lying on his sofa, Dodge isolates himself from the outside world. He tries to hide from and forget his family and his past. Halie is lively and energetic. She is deliberately oblivious to the decay around her. Halie surrounds herself with pictures of the past and of her family in its prime. Dodge stops coughing as his wife, Halie, calls down from upstairs. Her voice is heard from the upper floor where she spends most of her time. She expresses concern for Dodge and on the surface seems to be a caretaker urging her husband to take his medicine when he coughs. She asks if he needs a pill. She remains offstage as they talk and shout to each other about the rain, television, and horse racing. She remembers a trip she took with a man before she and Dodge met, when she won money on the horse races. Halie is shut up when Dodge inquires whether she slept with him. The family’s essential lack of communication is symbolized by the wife/mother occupying the upstairs, as Dodge, the husband/father lives on the ground floor.

Halie tells her husband that Tilden, their eldest son, is in the kitchen if he needs anything. Then she adds that their second son, Bradley, is coming to cut Dodge’s hair. She has an appointment
for lunch with Father Dewis, a local lecherous and cynical preacher. In Shepard’s family plays “deconstructive or constructive turns of behavior occur only after the mother has gone offstage” (Tucker 135). In Buried Child, violence takes place in the house just after Halie goes with the preacher. “In all the family plays, the mothers accept the world that the men--husbands and sons--make” (Tucker 136). Dodge is extremely worried about Bradley’s way of haircut because last time he cut his hair while he was asleep leaving him with bald patches and cutting on his scalp. Halie insists Tilden will protect him, but Dodge does not rely on either son. In his forties, Tilden has come home because of some trouble in New Mexico. Halie warns Dodge not to let Tilden drink and mentions he has been in jail. We learn Tilden used to be an All-American but has fallen down since then. He is presented as a retard that walks around in a defective manner. Something is wrong with him but it is never revealed by the playwright. Dodge calls for Tilden. Mentally deranged Tilden who is living in the past enters with arms full of corn and stares at his father while Dodge coughs. Tilden says he harvested the corn outside, but Dodge tells him that this is impossible because he has not planted corn in over 30 years, and asks Tilden to put it back from wherever he has taken it. Tilden dumps the corn in Dodge’s lap. Bradley is an amputee, having accidentally cut off one of his own legs with a chain saw. Crippled Bradley has a wooden leg and is a threatening figure until his leg is taken away and he is rendered helpless. “Both their sons are invalids, one without a leg, one without a full mind” (Tucker 132). Halie dwells on the thoughts of her dead son and talks about him. She views him as the real hero. Dressed in black, Halie finally enters and talks disjointedly about Ansel--playing basketball, being a soldier, and dying on his honeymoon with his Catholic wife. Halie seems to have deeply loved Ansel. She notices the mess, gets worried by Dodge’s crazy-sounding speech, and is bewildered by Tilden’s assertion that there is corn outside since she has seen none from her window. They ask Tilden where he has got it from. Halie gets upset as Dodge speaks unsympathetically about Bradley and swiftly leaves.

Tilden tells Dodge he should not have said what he did, and Dodge refuses to talk further. Tilden warns him if he does not talk, he will cease to exist, so Dodge criticizes him for coming back home. Tilden goes back outside, but Dodge begins a coughing fit for which he needs medication. Once Dodge is subsided, Tilden suggests him to sleep and promises to stay with him. As Dodge falls asleep, Tilden steals his whiskey, covers his father with the corn husks, and then leaves.
Bradley, on a wooden leg, awkwardly enters. He takes off Dodge’s baseball cap and begins to cut his hair. The sound of the electric clippers merges with that of the rain.

Act II begins later that night. It is still raining. Dodge still sleeps, and Tilden’s son, Vince, arrives on the porch with his girlfriend, Shelly. Vince has come to visit his family after a six years absence. Vince is nervous and annoyed for Shelly makes fun of his family home. Shelly expected Vince’s family to receive them kindly, give them warmth of the family life and provide them with good meal but what she encounters is a totally different vision. Vince calls but gets no response and enters. He does not notice Dodge. Shelly puts on Dodge’s cap and Vince goes to look upstairs. Dodge wakes up and takes his cap back from Shelly. She explains how she and Vince have stopped by on their way to New Mexico to see Tilden. Vince joins them, and Dodge initially acts as if his grandson is Tilden, and then seems not to know who Vince is. When Vince asks where Halie is, Dodge grows increasingly threatening and looks for his whiskey. He insults Shelly, who wonders if they have the wrong house, and tries to leave, but is stopped by Vince. Tilden enters his arms full of carrots.

Dodge shouts at Tilden for taking his whiskey but Tilden is indifferent. When Shelly asks Tilden if he recognizes Vince, he replies: “I had a son once but we buried him” (92). Dodge tells him to shut up, saying this happened before he was born. Shelly offers to take the carrots, and handing them over, Tilden suggests they cook them. Dodge asks Vince to buy him more whiskey, and Vince tries to get him to lie down. Dodge refuses, pointing out that bad things happen when you lie down—including his hair, and murdering of children. Shelly suggests Vince get the whiskey. Tilden brings a knife and a stool, and in defiance of Vince, Shelly sits and prepares the carrots while Dodge and Tilden watch. Dodge and Tilden do not recognize Vince. Both seem oblivious.

Vince decides to get Dodge his whiskey, taking the two dollars he offers. Shelly is nervous, but stays when he leaves. She talks to Tilden, who seems to want to tell her something. He asks to touch her rabbit-fur coat, and she gives it to him. He puts it on and recalls when he was young and felt more liberated, and then he tells Shelly about Dodge drowning a baby. Dodge tries to quiet him and falls helplessly on the floor. Tilden ignores him, adding that no one knows why Dodge killed the baby or where he buried it, then offers Shelly her coat back. She is too stunned
to take it. Bradley enters, takes the coat, aggressively asks who Shelly is, and wonders if she is with Tilden. He belittles his brother, who runs away. Fearful of Bradley, Shelly suggests they help Dodge, but Bradley suggests killing or drowning him instead. Shelly complains asking Bradley to shut up. Seeing himself in charge, he orders Shelly to open her mouth and puts his fingers inside. Then he drops her coat over Dodge’s head.

Act III begins in the morning. It is not raining anymore. Bradley is asleep on Dodge’s sofa under his blanket, his wooden leg removed, while Dodge sits weakly on the floor. Shelly brings him a cup of broth, which he refuses. He thinks Vince is not coming back, though she insists he will. Feeling like this is her house, she questions Dodge about the family pictures she saw in Halie’s room, where she slept the night, after escaping from Bradley. Dodge refuses to answer and talks only of corpses and graves. She asks about the baby, but he changes the subject. He begs Shelly to stay as he hears Halie returning.

Halie is now dressed in yellow, even carrying yellow roses, and Father Dewis is with her. Both are slightly drunk and joke on the porch before coming in, while Dodge hides under Shelly’s coat. Halie enters, moves the coat to cover Bradley’s wooden leg, and when Dodge complains, takes the blanket off Bradley for him. Bradley wakes and tries to get the blanket back, but obeys Halie when she stops him. She asks Shelly, who sits quietly drinking Dodge’s broth, what she is doing, and threatens her. Halie flirts with Dewis, who feels increasingly uncomfortable here, drinks from his flask, and talks about a commemorative statue being made of Ansel, while scolding the nation’s current youth. Speaking of the importance of belief, she throws a rose at Dodge. Shelly rises to explain why she is there, but Halie appears uninterested and is more worried where Tilden might be.

Bradley grabs the blanket and returns to the sofa as Dodge and Halie shout at him. Annoyed no one is paying her any attention, Shelly smashes her cup. Bradley suggests she is a prostitute, so she retrieves her coat and takes his leg. As Bradley weakly whimpers, Halie angrily asks Dewis to intervene. He tries to calm Shelly, but she threatens them, saying she knows they have a secret. Dodge offers to confess, despite Bradley and Halie wanting him to stop and Shelly’s reluctance to listen. He tells how their farm used to be prosperous and that they had enough boys
when Halie got pregnant again, six years after he had stopped sleeping with her. She gave birth, and unsettled at the way Tilden was spending time with the boy, Dodge drowned the child and buried it in the back yard. Dodge says that the child was not fit to be a member of the family. In his monologue he tells that it was unwanted.

Vince does not return until the next day. As Halie complains to Bradley for not stopping Dodge from telling, finally Vince returns, drunk and angry, crashes onto the porch, and begins smashing Whiskey bottles all over the house at the wall while singing the Marine Battle Hymn. He imagines he is in a battle. Dodge and Halie both acknowledge their grandson, Dodge demands his money back, and Vince pretends he does not know them. Halie asks Dewis again for help, but he feels to be powerless. Bradley tries to grab Vince, but misses. Shelly declares her need to leave, but Vince will not let anyone out. He pulls a knife and starts to cut the porch screen. Dewis drops the roses next to the wooden leg and takes Halie upstairs, as she happily reminisces about Vince as a baby.

Vince climbs inside onto the sofa, through the hole he has cut, and pushes Bradley to the floor. Shelly has gone outside and looks in, watching Bradley crawl after his leg as Vince knocks it away and smells the roses. Dodge declares his last will and testament, leaving the house with all its treasures and contents to Vince, his carpentry tools to Tilden, and asking that his body be burned on a fire made from his farming equipment. Shelly insists they leave but Vince wants to stay. He had driven all night, not intending to come back, but had a vision of his family connection and returned. Shelly leaves. Vince tosses Bradley’s leg offstage to send him after, and he takes the blanket as he passes. Dewis comes to ask Vince to help Halie, but Vince tells him that no one is in the house.

Dodge has died unnoticed, so Vince covers him with the blanket and roses, and then lays himself on the sofa, ignoring all that next takes place as the lights fade. Vince assumes Dodge’s old position on the couch. He has come into his inheritance appropriating his father’s role by taking over as patriarch. From offstage, Halie’s concluding monologue refers to the corn growing in the back yard, even though it has not been planted for years. Halie speaks to Dodge about the vegetables she now sees growing outside, suggesting the rain has brought them on. “Final
moment in the third act is one of Shepard’s most extraordinary poetic-visual, metaphorically-dramatized effects” (Tucker 133). Tilden, covered with mud, enters the house and carries a decomposed corpse of a child, buried for over 30 years in the backyard, up the stairs to Halie as she wonders about the relationship of the bloom to rain and the sun outside, and the stage turns dark. “The images that end the three acts of Buried Child--the haircut, the fingers in the mouth, and the infant corpse--do not so much disrupt the action of the play as they intensify the sense of foreboding that has been realistically introduced through the action” (DeRose 105).

Reading through Buried child it reveals that the notions of incest, infanticide and emasculation as a subtype of masculinity have been beautifully and aesthetically staged in this play. Dodge stands for a patriarch who has lost his power and awaits his death. He confesses that he hardly has the strength to breathe. What Halie tells him approves this fact: “You sit here day and night. Festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body!” (76). Dodge’s baseball cap, sofa and blanket have metonymic meaning of crown, throne, and mantle respectively. His children fight over these properties to possess the only remainder of the lost patriarchy. Having lost their masculinity, they repeatedly take his cap, occupy his place on the sofa and try to possess his blanket which gives them security like a baby blanket. Everything is finished for Dodge. He is either at the verge of death or better to say already dead. When a man loses his authority and dominance at home, when he loses whatever he is acknowledged with, and whatever his masculinity is defined with, then he becomes a walking dead. In Dodge’s case even the ability to walk is also eliminated.

In Act I, Halie informs Dodge that Bradley will be there soon to cut Dodge’s hair. But he is worried about Bradley’s way of haircut. Whenever he cuts his hair he wounds his scalp. Dodge tells Halie that “He cut my hair while I was sleeping! . . . My appearance is out of his domain! It’s even out of mine! In fact, it’s disappeared! I’m an invisible man!” (68). The terms disappeared and invisible imply that Dodge considers himself as a dead person. Not enjoying the life, he is anesthetized and numb as dead. When Dodge complains to Bradley’s haircut, Halie complains “Why do you enjoy stirring things up?” and Dodge replies “I don’t enjoy anything” (68).
Dodge attempts to obliterate his guilt and the memory of his past with alcohol. Near the close of the play we learn that he has drowned his wife’s illegitimate child. “Dodge commits infanticide for his patriarchal power was threatened. . . . The existence of the child promised a new world order which would have ended patriarchy’s violent hegemony” (Auerbach, *Buried Child* 384). Murdering the illegitimate child designates that once Dodge enjoyed dominant hegemonic male position as family patriarch. Dodge does not have that ideal position required of a real man anymore. In spite of Halie and Bradley’s complain, Dodge tells Shelly their family secret and confesses he has murdered a child:

DODGE. We were a well established family once. Well established. All the boys were grown. The farm was producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over. Me and Halie here were pointed toward what looked like the middle part of our life. Everything was settled with us. All we had to do was ride it out. Then Halie got pregnant again. Out’a the middle a’ nowhere, she got pregnant. We weren’t planning on havin’ any more boys. We had enough boys already. In fact, we hadn’t been sleepin’ in the same bed about six years. . . .

Halie had this kid. This baby boy. She had it. I let her have it on her own. All the other boys I had had the best doctors, best nurses, everything. This one I let her have by herself. This one hurt real bad. Almost killed her, but she had it anyway. 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. . . .

We couldn’t let a thing like that continue. We couldn’t allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives. It made everything we’d accomplished look like it was nothin’. Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness. . . .

I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter. Just drowned it. (123-24)

The mistake Dodge is talking about and its consequences have anesthetized every member of the family. Dodge’s sons have also lost their power and seem almost weak and debilitated as their father. This becomes clear through Halie’s words. She desires their dead son, Ansel, was alive since she thinks Ansel was a real man. While Dodge reveals their secret to Shelly she tells
Bradley “Ansel would’ve stopped him! Ansel would’ve stopped him from telling these lies! He was a hero! A man! A whole man! What’s happened to the men in this family! Where are the men!” (124). “It is clear that a kind of ‘heroic vacuum’ paralyzes the family, a void that will soon be filled, however” (Nash 385). In spite of their weakness, men compete to get dominance in the family. Each of them is trying to emasculate another one and acquire authority.

In the first Act it said that Tilden, Dodge’s oldest son, displays no affection for his parents or for his own son, Vince. He only cares for the land and the dead son, the buried child. Dodge tells Shelly that “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. Singin’ to it. Used to hear him singing to it. He’d make up stories. He’d tell that kid all kinds a’ stories. Even when he knew it couldn’t understand him” (124).

Tilden had moved to New Mexico to escape the family but he would end up lonely and in trouble and come home to find security or warmth of home life, just as Vince now does. Although Dodge and Halie mention that Tilden is useless and needs constant watching, when Dodge leaves Tilden his carpentry tools in his will in the final Act, it implies a possibility that he recognizes Tilden as a potential male figure at least sexually if not mentally or morally. Moreover, it is implied that more likely the father of the buried child is Tilden, who was so considerate of the child while it lived, and talks of having lost a son. He tells Shelly “I had a son once but we buried him” (92), “We had a baby. (motioning to DODGE) He did. Dodge did. Could pick it up with one hand. Put it in the other. Little baby. Dodge killed it. . . . Dodge drowned it. . . . Nobody could find it. Never told Halie. Never told anybody. Just drowned it. . . . Nobody could find it. Just disappeared. Cops looked for it. Neighbors. Nobody could find it” (103-104).

Having an incestuous relation with Halie, his mother and fulfilling his Oedipal complex, Tilden is always afraid of castration. It is said that after murdering the child by Dodge he has left the house for about twenty years and now that he has come back exhausted he is always threatened by his younger brother, Bradley. When Bradley arrives he leaves the house in terror. Moreover, Tilden is also afraid to be castrated by his father. This is suggested by his action of covering Dodge’s body with corn husks which symbolizes burying his father and getting rid of his danger of castration. In the first Act, Tilden suggests Dodge to sleep and promises to stay with him and
take care of him against Bradley’s brutal haircut. As Dodge falls asleep, Tilden steals his whiskey, covers his father with the corn husks, and then leaves. Tilden steals Dodge’s whiskey what he is so dependent on and covers his body with corn husks which may imply Tilden’s desire of his father’s imminent death.

DODGE falls into deep sleep. TILDEN just sits staring at him for a while. Slowly he leans toward the sofa, checking to see if DODGE is well asleep. He reaches slowly under the cushion and pulls out the bottle of booze. DODGE sleeps soundly. TILDEN stands quietly, staring at DODGE as he uncaps the bottle and takes a long drink. He caps the bottle and sticks it in his hip pocket. He looks around at the husks on the floor and then back to DODGE. He moves center stage and gathers an armload of corn husks then crosses back to the sofa. He stands holding the husks over DODGE and looking down at him he gently spreads the corn husks over the whole length of DODGE’s body. He stands back and looks at DODGE. Pulls out bottle, takes another drink, returns bottle to his hip pocket. He gathers more husks and repeats the procedure until the floor is clean of corn husks and DODGE is completely covered in them except for his head. (81)

When Dodge sees corns he does not accept the fertility of the earth on backyard. After the incestuous act of Halie and Tilden he has lost his masculine power and fecundity. Since then he has not cultivated any seed in the backyard. Apparently he distastes any kind of fecundity either human or non-human. Unwilling to move on, Dodge denies the possibility of new growth, even when Tilden covers him with the corn he has picked. “There hasn’t been corn out there since nineteen thirty-five! That’s the last time I planted corn out there!” (69).

Having lost his patriarchy Dodge has also lost his feeling toward his offspring. Even though Dodge reminds Tilden that he is still his father if he is having trouble, he feels no paternal affection for Tilden:

TILDEN. You’re not worried about me, are you?
DODGE. I’m not worried about you.
TILDEN. You weren’t worried about me when I wasn’t here. When I was in New
Mexico.

DODGE. No, I wasn’t worried about you then either.
TILDEN. You shoulda worried about me then.
DODGE. Why’s that? You didn’t do anything down there, did you?
TILDEN. I didn’t do anything.
DODGE. Then why should I have worried about you?
TILDEN. Because I was lonely.
DODGE. Because you were lonely?
TILDEN. Yeah. I was more lonely that I’ve ever been before.
DODGE. Why was that?
TILDEN. (pause) Could I have some of that whiskey you’ve got?
DODGE. What whiskey? I haven’t got any whiskey.
TILDEN. You’ve got some under the sofa.
DODGE. I haven’t got anything under the sofa! Now mind your own damn business!

Jesus God, you come into the house outa the middle of nowhere, haven’t heard
or seen you in twenty years and suddenly you’re making accusations. (71)

Talking with his father Tilden emphasizes that silence brings death for men. Dodge tells Tilden
that he does not want to talk about anything! He does not want to talk about troubles or what
happened fifty years ago or thirty years ago or the race track or Florida or the last time he seeded
the corn! Tilden emphasizes “Well, you gotta talk or you’ll die... That’s what I know. I found
that out in New Mexico. I thought I was dying but I just lost my voice... I was alone. I thought
I was dead” (78). Tilden’s words refer to the fact that men must dare to speak and confess their
guilt otherwise it is the end of their manly life.

There is a little suggestion that Tilden also attempts to emasculate Dodge. He tries to take
Dodge’s baseball cap off. Dodge complains “What’re you doing! Leave that on me! Don’t take
toffa me! That’s my cap!” (80). As though, he will lose his crown and be deprived of his
manhood.
In the end of Act I, Bradley, Dodge’s second son, appears as his mother had told to Dodge. He looks like a monster and creates an intense ominous and threatening atmosphere:

_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._ (81-82)

When Vince questions Dodge as to why he does not lie down and rest for a while. He answers “I don’t wanna lay down for a while! Every time I lay down something happens! (whips off his cap, points at his head) Look what happens! That’s what happens! (pulls his cap back on) You go lie down and see what happens to you! See how you like it! They’ll steal your bottle! They’ll cut your hair! They’ll murder your children! That’s what’ll happen” (93). Dodge’s words give the impression that Bradley and all the people residing in the house attempt to dispossess him of his power and he is terrified of losing power or macho potency. The ominous act of shaving Dodge’s head by Bradley emphasizes the impotence and helplessness of the dying patriarch:

_He looks at DODGE’s sleeping face and shakes his head in disgust. He pulls out a pair of black electric hair clippers from his pocket. Unwinds the cord and crosses to the lamp. He jabs his wooden leg behind the knee, causing it to bend at the joint and awkwardly kneels to plug the cord into a floor outlet. He pulls himself to his feet again by using the sofa as leverage. He moves to DODGE’s head and again jabs his false leg. Goes down on one knee. He violently knocks away some of the corn husks then jerks off DODGE’s baseball cap and throws it down center stage. DODGE stays asleep. BRADLEY switches on the clippers. Lights start dimming. BRADLEY cuts DODGE’s hair while he sleeps._ (82)

Cutting his father’s hair Bradley tries to emasculate and dominate him, but is displaced in turn by Vince, who in the final act throws away Bradley’s false leg (indicative of Bradley’s own impotence). “When Bradley finally crawls off stage, Vince pulls the blanket away from him and
throws it around his own shoulders, just as Bradley had taken the same blanket from Dodge. It shows an endless progression from one violent man to another” (Auerbach, *Buried Child* 383). Then Vince takes Dodge’s place on the sofa, which Bradley had tried to occupy.

Bradley, the second son, is the personification of the ultimate male castration fear. He has a wooden leg that is taken from him by Shelly and Vince, making his helplessness a symbol of impotence. In his hands he carries the instrument of his castration, the scissors with which he threatens and terrorizes Dodge. The impotent son is unable to replace his father; able only to make the father as impotent as he is by cutting off his hair. Dodge, like a modern-day Samson, has lost his power and potency to the now castrating figure of the son. (Auerbach, *Buried Child* 382)

Each of Bradley’s efforts to dominate ends in failure. He intimidates his father and Tilden. Then symbolically rapes Shelly by sticking his fingers in her mouth. During the second Act, Tilden again enters with an armful of vegetables. This time, he brings carrots, which he gives to Shelly to clean and cut. Bradley’s second entrance is signaled by the terrifying mechanical squeak of his harness offstage. His presence makes Tilden run away from the house and freezes Shelly in her track. “Bradley performs a vaguely sexual rite of domination upon her” (DeRose 104).

BRADLEY. Open your mouth.

SHELLY. What?

BRADLEY. (motioning for her to open her mouth) Open up.

(She opens her mouth slightly)

BRADLEY. Wider.

(She opens her mouth wider.)

BRADLEY. Keep it like that.

(She does. Stares at BRADLEY. With his free hands he puts his fingers into her mouth. She tries to pull away.)

BRADLEY. Just stay up!

(She freezes. He keeps his fingers in her mouth. Stares at her. Pause. He pulls his hand out. She closes her mouth, keeps her eyes on him. BRADLEY smiles. He looks at
DODGE on the floor and crosses over to him. SHELLY watches him closely. BRADLEY stands over DODGE and smiles at SHELLY. He holds her coat up in both hands over DODGE, keeps smiling at SHELLY. He looks down at DODGE then drops the coat so that it lands on DODGE and covers his head. (. . .). (106-07)

Like his father and his uncle, Dodge’s grandson, Vince, tries to deprive Dodge of his manhood and manliness. In Act II, Dodge does not recognize his grandson, Vince. Vince reminds him that he is his grandson but Dodge tells that he does not remember him and asks him to stay where he is, keeping his distance. Vince insists on their relation but Dodge gets angry with him: “Stop calling me Grandpa will ya’! It’s sickening. ‘Grandpa.’ I’m nobody’s Grandpa!” (90). Dodge tells Vince: “You’re no son of mine. I’ve had sons in my time and you’re not one of ‘em” (97).

Formerly, Dodge has experienced enough of emasculation. Tilden took his masculine place having incestuous relation with his wife, Bradley shaved his hair leaving his scalp bleeding and Father Dewis made a friendship with his wife. Now Tilden’s son, Vince, has come back apparently to deprive him of the remainder of his manliness. Vince, in Act III, announces that “Maybe I should come in there and usurp your territory” (126). Dodge asks Vince to keep his distance since he wants to protect his territory of manhood.

The turning point of the play occurs offstage. Vince leaves the house to get liquor for Dodge. He gets drunk and does not come back home until the next day. Not recognized by his father and grandfather, Vince is very disappointed and annoyed. It was his greatest fear that his family would not accept him. When he is out for getting whiskey for Dodge, Vince decides to flee his family and thus drives westward long into the night but he is drawn back into it by the vision of connection he has in the windshield and decides to stay as he explains to Shelly:

VINCE. I was gonna run last night. I was gonna run and keep right on running. I drove all night. . . . It never stopped raining the whole time. Never stopped once. I could see myself in the windshield. My face. My eyes. I studied my face. Studied everything about it. As though I was looking at another man. As though I could see his whole race behind him. Like a mummy’s face. I saw him dead and alive at the same time. In the same breath. In the windshield, 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 to his Grandfather’s face. And it went on like that. Changing. Clear on back to faces I’d never seen before but still recognized. Still recognized the bones underneath. The eyes. The breath. The mouth. (130)

"Vince finds his father, his family, and his personal heritage within himself. Against his will and without his knowing it, they have inhabited his body" (DeRose 107). He returns home to get his inheritance. He has to behave manly to show that he is eligible for acquiring the leadership of the house. As a result he becomes violently aggressive:

(Suddenly VINCE comes crashing through the screen porch up left, tearing it off its hinges. Everyone but DODGE and BRADLEY back away from the porch and stare at VINCE who has landed on his stomach on the porch in a drunken stupor. He is singing loudly to himself and hauls himself slowly to his feet. He has a paper shopping bag full of empty booze bottles. He takes them out one at a time as he sings and smashes them at the opposite end of the porch, behind the solid interior door, stage right. . . .

(He takes another bottle, makes high whistling sound of a bomb and throws it toward stage right porch. Sound of bottle smashing against wall. . . . He keeps yelling and heaving bottles one after another), (124-25)

The image of knife in Vince mouth is repeated in the play “VINCE holds the knife in his teeth once he gets the hole wide enough to climb through (128). While DODGE declares his last will and testament “Vince climbs into the room, knife in mouth, and strides slowly around the space, inspecting his inheritance” (128). Knife as a threatening device intensifies his masculine posture. Now that he stages defining traits of hegemonic masculinity and shows his dominance he is qualified to acquire the leadership of the house. “Dodge turns to the powerful presence of Vince, who enacts a violent, military-style masculinity upon his second return to the house, throwing beer bottles as if they are bombs and singing the Marine Hymn” (McDonough 55-6). Dodge recognizes him: “It’s me! Your Grandfather! Don’t play stupid with me!” (125). But now that everybody recognizes him Vince does not remember them or pretend not to. “Vincent who?
What is this? Who are you people? . . . I am a murderer! Don’t underestimate me for a minute! I’m the Midnight Strangler! I devour whole families in a single gulp!” (126). Halie attributes Vince most of what she earlier ascribed to Ansel: “He was the sweetest little boy! . . . There wasn’t a mean bone in his body. Everyone loved Vincent. Everyone. He was the perfect baby . . . I used to lie awake thinking it was all right if I died. Because Vincent was an angel. A guardian angel! He’d watch over us. He’d watch over all of us” (128). Later, Dodge dictates his will and testament, naming Vince as his heir: “The house goes to my Grandson, Vincent. All the furnishing, Accoutrements and paraphernalia therein. Everything tacked to the walls or otherwise resting under this roof” (129). When Dodge’s will finishes “VINCE takes the knife out of his mouth and smells the roses. He folds up the knife and pockets it” (129). He tells Shelly “I just inherited a house” (129). The fight is over. He has emasculated his grandfather taking his house with all furnishing and all people residing in it. At the end of the Act II, Dodge dies unnoticed. Vince covers his head with the blanket and sits on his sofa. Taking Dodge’s place on the throne after his death, Vince undoubtedly takes on the role of the dominant one in the household. Then unseen by Vince, Tilden enters with the infant corpse in his arms, he begins to climb the stairs toward his mother. Now he is free from two people who were going to castrate him. Dodge has died and Bradley has left the house because of Vince’s torture. Mentally disturbed and released of the superego’s control, Tilden behaves according to what Oedipal complex orders him. Father figure has been removed and now he can win the mother. So he approaches Halie once more. “Although Buried Child presents a realistic surface, its veneer of normalcy is frequently perforated by surrealist eruptions and mythic innuendo” (Wade 103).

At the end of Act I, Tilden covered Dodge’s body with corn husks except for his head. At the end of Act II, Bradley covered his head with Shelly’s coat. These actions foreshadow Dodge’s forthcoming complete loss of dominance and death which happens at the end of Act III.

In this play women also try to emasculate men in their own way. First Halie dispossess Dodge from his hegemonic position having incestuous relation with their son, Tilden and later having intimate relation with Father Dewis. Dodge’s loss of patriarch power is also indicated through Halie’s emotional estrangement from him and her family. Halie frequently speaks from offstage, creating as great a distance from Dodge and her family as possible. “Halie is a disembodied
voice for most of her scenes, and Dodge remains constant throughout the play in trying to discredit or ignore her, or to distract the audience from everything that she says” (McDonough 54). Halie’s black dress at the start suggests mourning for her dead son, Ansel. But in the final act she is slightly drunk, wears yellow clothing and carries armful of yellow roses she has possibly received from Father Dewis with whom she has apparently an affair. Dodge and Halie “exhibit the typical Shepardian marriage: they are estranged and contemptuous of each other. Dodge drinks and Halie philanders. . . . The dialogue highlights the question of Dodge’s manhood. He is clearly no longer able to control his wife’s actions” (McDonough 53). In the second Act Vince inquires Dodge that where Halie is. Dodge replies: “Don’t worry about her. She won’t be back for days. She says she'll be back but she won’t be. (he starts laughing) There’s life in the old girl yet! (stops laughing)” (87-88). Halie is the perpetual absent mother whose voice conveys neither love nor affection toward her family members.

The second female character is Shelly. When Vince inconsiderately leaves her without any protection, Shelly is manipulated by Dodge, Tilden, and Bradley who show hostility and aggression toward her and each other. But Shelly survives. She is an excellent listener since she listens to the male characters’ confessions and little by little draws out the truth about family secret. Shelly’s wearing of Dodge’s cap; taking Bradley’s Wooden leg away from him, leaving him impotent; and the feeling that she somehow belongs in this house suggest a strong female potential for emasculation but like Halie she remains on the margin for this is a male territory. She is omitted from the family picture leaving the house at the end.

_Fool for Love_ (1983), one-act piece, has been produced for the stage and has also been made into a feature film in which Shepard starred. _Fool for Love_ alternates submission and rejection between two lovers, Eddie and May, who may also be half-brother and half-sister. “Buried Child and _Fool for Love_ make use of the Oedipus myth. Incest shatters the American dream of a well-ordered happy family” (Bala 165). Eddie and May cannot live apart or together. “Though it is a stormy affair, the two feel a mysterious bond which nothing can break” (Bala 165). They “spar with each other in a ‘can’t-live-with, can’t-live-without’ relationship” (Baechler & Litz 448). In this play tenderness is blended with violence and love with hate. “To be human, it seems for Shepard both here and in all his works, is to be in the eye of the storm: a fragile structure in and
through which powers both material and magical circulate, caught in a turbulence that has no measurable beginning or end” (Gray 717).

*Fool for Love* takes place in a dumpy motel room where May has been living. The motel is on the edge of the Mojave Desert somewhere in the American West. When the lights begin to rise slowly, three characters May, Eddie, and the Old Man are revealed on the stage. Physically the Old Man is separated from May and Eddie. The Old Man sits in the rocket. “A bottle of whiskey in a brown paper bag sits on the floor beside him. . . . He has a scraggly red beard, wears a straw Mexican gardener’s hat with a flat brim. . . . He exists only in the mind of May and Eddie, even though they might talk to him directly and acknowledge his physical presence. The old man treats them as though they all existed in the same time and place” (7-8).

Eddie and May sit without speaking to each other. May sits with her head hanging forward between her knees over the side of the bed and stares at the floor. Eddie “sits in the Upstage chair by the table. Down left, facing May. He wears muddy broken down cowboy boots with silver gaffer’s tape wrapped around them at the toe and in-step, well-worn faded dirty jeans that smell like horse sweat. Brown western shirt with snaps” (8). The only sound which is heard is that of Eddie fidgeting with his glove and bucking strap. Eddie tries to get May to speak to him. He talks soothingly to her, touches her head, and offers to get her something relaxing to drink. He reassures May that he is staying with her and will not leave her again. May suddenly grabs Eddie’s “closest leg with both arms and hold tight” (8). He continues talking to her and saying that he would not leave her anymore “I’m not gonna’ leave. I’m stayin’ right here” (8). But she clutches tighter to his leg and buries her head in his knee. He tries to gently push May off of him. “She erupts furiously, hitting him to Upstage of Stage Left door, Eddie backs off” (9). May has run away from him and now works as a cook and supposedly on the way to starting a new life without Eddie.

May wants Eddie both to leave and to stay. “I don’t need you! . . . Don’t go!” She screams. She accuses him of erasing her “You’re either gonna erase me or have me erased” (9). Then she accuses him of having an affair with the Countess, a rich woman. She threatens Eddie saying that she will kill both of them. Eddie denies his relationship with Countess and asks for sympathy
from May by telling her that he has traveled more than two thousand miles to see her and that he missed her very much. May tells him indifferently “Nobody asked you to come” (9). Then Eddie admits that he has taken the Countess out to dinner once or twice. May accuses Eddie that he has slept with the Countess. Eddie denies this too but May is not deceived. Eddie imitates his father in his infidelity.

Eddie tells May that they will move back into the trailer together to Wyoming where he has moved it and live a pleasant country life with chickens, a vegetable garden, and horses. Eddie’s words do not seduce May since she has heard this story before. Eddie promises to take care of her but when he sees that all his attempt is in vein suggests that he will leave. May stands and asks him to wait. They embrace and kiss lovingly. Just as they seem to be very soft with each other, May knees Eddie in the groin. He doubles over and holds his stomach in pain. May exits into bathroom and slams the door.

The Old Man who has watched their conflict talks to Eddie. He tells that he thought Eddie was supposed to be a fantasist or someone who makes things up. Then he asks Eddie to look at an imaginary picture on the wall. “There is no picture but Eddie stares at the wall” (13). The Old Man claims that it is the picture of Barbara Mandrell and that he is married to her. He asks Eddie if he would believe that. Eddie says no. The Old Man says that he is married to her in his mind.

May returns and starts to take off her clothes and wear the clothes she has brought. “She gradually transforms from her former tough drabness into a very sexy woman” and tells Eddie that she does not understand her own feelings (14). She tells Eddie that she hates him and that she gets sick every time he comes around. Then she gets sick when he leaves. That he is like a disease to her. Eddie offers to leave again and this time May who has transformed from her plain clothes into a sexy red dress and black heels tells Eddie that it is better to leave because she has a date. Another power struggle begins. Eddie gets angry and goes outside. He comes back with a bottle of tequila and a shotgun in his hands. He offers May some tequila but she refuses saying that she’s on the wagon. Eddie’s resentment increases. May asks him to be kind with the man she has date describing him as a gentle person. Eddie feels jealous when May calls her date a man. He stages a power game with her and says that if the person was important, May would have
called him "a ‘guy’ or something" (15). Eddie boasts that this man will never replace him. May asks Eddie to get out of her life. Eddie lifts his glass and toasts and leaves and slams the door. Thinking that Eddie has gone, May mourns. “Her entire body is involved in the loss” (17).

As May clings to the walls of the motel room and weeps, The Old Man speaks to her. He tells her a story about a time when he, May’s mother and baby May were driving in southern Utah and May would not stop crying. The Old Man took her outside into a dark field to stop her from crying but he became frightened at the sight of a group of cows that he could not see in the dark. For the rest of the trip baby May shuts up seeing the cows’ mooing. May cries and does not recognize the Old Man.

May hears Eddie’s footsteps. She leaps up and in a very calm manner takes a drink. Eddie comes back in and begins to throw his lasso around the bedposts. He tells May that she can have the date. May tries to leave but Eddie runs after her and carries her back onstage kicking and screaming. Eddie proposes May to introduce Eddie as her cousin. As they fight, a car’s headlight beams flash across the stage through the window. May goes to the door to see if her boyfriend has arrived but she reports to Eddie that she sees “a big, huge, extra-long, black Mercedes Benz. . . somebody’s sitting out there in that car looking straight at me” (22). Unexpectedly the white headlights beam is seen through the open door. Eddie slams the door and pushes May to the side. “Just he slams the door the sound of a large caliber magnum pistol explodes Off Let, followed immediately by the sound of shattering glass then a car horn blares and continues on one relentless note” (23). May accuses Eddie of bringing the Countess with him or telling her where he was going. Eddie does not admit that he knows the woman in the Mercedes Benz but later it becomes clear that he knows her.

The Mercedes drives away. The windshield of Eddie’s truck has been blown by the unseen, furiously jealous Countess. Eddie does not allow May to turn on the lights. Eddie decides that they have to leave the place or keep the lights out since the Countess would certainly come back. As May and Eddie face each other, the Old Man talks to the audience about how neither May nor Eddie look like him “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 mother 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” (24-25). Eddie tells May she will never get rid of him. He will track down no matter where she goes (25). May says she doesn’t trust Eddie and does not love him anymore. “Why should I believe it this time? . . . You have been jerking me off like this for fifteen years. Fifteen years I’ve been a yo-yo for you. . . . And now I just plain don’t love you. Understand? Do you understand that? I don’t love you. I don’t need you. I don’t want you. Do you get that?” (25). Headlights come slashing across the stage again. Eddie tries to push May into the bathroom but she pulls away. She tells that she is not going to hide in her own house. She threatens to murder both the Countess and Eddie. It turns out that the driver of the car is not the Countess but he is Martin with whom May has a date. Martin arrives expecting to go to the movies with May. He hears May’s screams and thinks that May has been attacked by Eddie and after a short fight with Eddie throws him to the ground. May stops the fight and introduces Eddie to Martin as her cousin.

Even though Martin does not challenge Eddie, Eddie frightens him verbally. Martin does not even know that Eddie is his competitor. Eddie confuses Martin negating to be May’s cousins. Eddie does not allow Martin to leave. He tells Martin that May is his half-sister and that they had relation and spent time together in high school before they knew of their blood relationship. Eddie recounts to Martin what happened the day he found about his father’s secret life with May’s mother. Every now and then The Old Man interferes, but Martin cannot hear him.

As Eddie describes the story, May opens the bathroom door and comes out. She slams the bathroom door and screams at Eddie for involving Martin in the story and getting the story “all turned around” (36). Then tells Martin not to believe a word he has heard. “An innocent bystander, Martin is forced to sit in unwilling judgment over May and Eddie’s tales of the past as they compete for his credulity and sympathy” (DeRose 119). May tells the story from her point of view and the way it affected her mother and her youth with her mother who was always desperately waiting for the Old Man to return. May’s story does not contradict Eddie’s. She only narrates the woman side of the story. May’s story is about obsessive love of her mother for the Old Man who always deserted her and how her mother finally decided to track down the Old Man in his other life and found him at Eddie’s house eating dinner. “While Eddie and May fall
more deeply in love, May’s mother endures torment each moment she is forced to live without her husband. In her daughter’s passionate attachment to Eddie, May’s mother begins to recognize her own dangerous obsession. She begs May and Eddie to stop seeing each other. Unsuccessful, she is determined to confront Eddie’s mother with the truth” (DeRose 119). But Eddie’s mother violently blows her brain out. Then May’s story ends.

Hearing about Eddie’s mother’s suicide due to his infidelity, the Old Man becomes anxious and astonished. He claims that “She never blew her brains out. Nobody ever told me that. Where the hell that come from? (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!” (38). Eddie takes the side of May adding that his mother shot herself with the Old Man’s shotgun. The same one they used to duck hunt with.

The Old Man tries to justify his actions in the past and defend himself before Eddie and May but they ignore him. They move toward each other and embrace. Headlights flash across the stage again and a loud explosion is heard. Glass shatters, an explosion goes off, horses scream and hooves gallop outside the motel room. Martin looks out of the window and tells them that Eddie’s horse trailer is in flames. Eddie says he’s going out to see the damage and promises to come back soon. May packs her suitcase and tells Martin Eddie’s gone. She leaves with her packed suitcase. The Old Man talks about the imaginary picture of Barbara Mandrell on the wall. He describes her as the woman of his dreams. Martin stares out of the window as the fire continues to blaze outside.

Leslie A. Wade in his book *Sam Shepard and the American Theatre* notes that it is “curious that female characters should be given greater dramatic focus in *Fool for Love* and *A Lie of the Mind*, Shepard’s last two plays of the eighties”. Further he discusses that *Fool for Love* displays Shepard’s preoccupation with the male ego and its compulsions as well as interest in the woman’s perspective. He believes that in *Fool for Love* Shepard has attempted “to explore the male-female relation in a balanced manner” (120-21). *Fool for Love* concentrates on the analysis and appraisal of the female psyche as well as male psyche and the tendency of both genders to violence and role reversal.
To bring out the masculine side of women and the feminine side of men, *Fool for Love* penetrates more deeply into male/female relationship than male/male one. It portrays the stormy reunion of lovers, who are also half-brother, Eddie and half-sister, May. Outside the realistic frame, their father is observer of them having romantic relation together and at the same time accusing each other. Shepard inserts “a ghost-like observer just beyond the proscenium who quietly comments on the play and occasionally interjects himself into the action” (Demastes, *Beyond Naturalism* 115). Shepard focuses noticeably not on the father/son tension but on the tension existing in male/female relationship. Just like other family plays, as no responsibility is taken or recognized by the family members, there is no closeness, communication, or companionship in the family.

The focus of the *Fool for Love* is both on the male masculinity and non-male masculinity. All the characters somehow show a combination of masculine and feminine features. There are four female characters in the play three of which are either absent or not on the stage. In spite of showing feminine traits, all these female characters to some extent reveal masculine traits. On the other side, three male characters become de-traditionalized, effeminate and/or emasculated even though they try to preserve their masculinity.

Commenting on Shepard’s family plays, McDonough declares: “More recent discussions of gender dynamics in the later family plays begin to examine the possibility of a feminine presence that disrupts the traditional power of the patriarchy” (57). In *Fool for Love* May and Eddie are involved in a power struggle against each other, “two lovers alternately violently repelled by and passionately attracted to each other in a classic love-hate relationship” (Demastes, *Beyond Naturalism* 115). May, the major female character, is a very sexy woman and at the same time she displays masculine features adopting violent behavior, shouting, complaining, threatening others characters, and deciding for herself.

May displays both womanly and manly behavior. What are said about her appearance approves her to be very feminine. Moreover, she shows temperamental behavior typical of a woman in asking Eddie desperately not to leave her to the point that she clutches to his leg to make him
stay with her. But some seconds later she tells him that she does not need him! May has the fear of being erased by Eddie. “You’re gonna erase me. . . . You’re either gonna’ erase me or have me erased” (9). She continues to talk and her words denote her feminine intuition: “I’m smarter than you are and you know it. I can smell your thoughts before you even think ‘em” (10). May’s behavior changes when she accuses Eddie to be in relationship with the Countess. She speaks to Eddie like a macho man:

EDDIE. I’m trying to take care of you. All right?
MAY. No you’re not. You’re just guilty. Gutless and guilty.
EDDIE. Great. (Pause)
MAY. (Quietly) I’m gonna kill her ya’ know.
EDDIE. Who?
MAY. Who.
EDDIE. Don’t talk like that.
MAY. (Stays calm) I am. 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. So the blood doesn’t mix. I’m gonna’ torture her first though. Not you. I’m just gonna’ let you have it. Probably in the midst of a kiss. Right when you think everything’s been healed up. Right in the moment when you’re sure you’ve got me buffalored. That’s when you’ll die. (Pause) (10)

Eddie tells her that he’s taking May back. But May is not going to act submissively. She rejects his advances verbally and physically. May decides for herself. “I’m not going back to that idiot trailer if that’s what you think. . . . I got a job. I’m a regular citizen here now. . . . What’d you think, I was helpless? ” (11). Eddie insists on his proposition saying that he has got everything worked out. He tells May that he has been thinking about this for weeks. He’s going to “move the trailer. Build a little pipe corral to keep the horses. Have a big vegetable garden. Some chickens maybe” But May has made her mind not to act obediently (11). She is going to fight with Eddie’s dream: “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 with this lame country dream life with
chickens and vegetables and I can’t stand any of it. It makes me puke to even think about it. . . . How many times have you done this to me? ” (11-12).

Eddie maintains telling her that he is going to take care of May. After exchanging some words May stands. They face each other for a while. They look at each other. Then they embrace. They kiss passionately. They look to be very soft with each other. May “suddenly kneels him in the groin with tremendous force. Eddie doubles over and drops like a rock. She stands over him. . . .” (13). Then she tells him: “You can take it, right? You’re stuntman” (13). Symbolically May emasculates Eddie. She is determined to deprive him of his sexual and masculine power. “May does not wish once again to become the victim of Eddie’s macho, romantic delusions, nor of his hopeless infidelity and restless need for flight” (DeRose 115). She exits into bathroom and slams the door behind her violently. “Eddie remains on the floor holding his stomach in pain” (13). While the Old Man talks to Eddie, May comes out from bathroom and slams the door. The door booms. She has changed her clothes and has transformed from “her former tough drabness into a very sexy woman” (14). May expresses her feeling. She says to Eddie that she does not understand her feelings. That she hates Eddie. And she is obsessed since the picture of Eddie and the Countess is in her mind all the time. Then she tells Eddie that she is dating a man. Selecting someone as a partner is somehow a masculine treat. Eddie gets angry since he thinks May is giving Martin too much power labeling him as a man and makes fun of him:

EDDIE. This guy’s gotta’ be a twerp. He’s gotta’ be a punk chump in a two dollar suit or somethin’.

MAY. Anybody who doesn’t half kill themselves falling off horses or jumping on steers is a twerp in your book. (16)

May is ready to compete with Eddie verbally and physically. She is tough, firm, and violent. “She exhibits both willfulness and resourcefulness in her dealings with Eddie and proves a worthy combatant in the play’s battle of sexes” (Wade 122). In this play “the female characters, unlike those of the earlier family plays, do not simply abandon the stage space to their men” (McDonough 58). She mocks Eddi’s machismo posture and reprimands. After kicking in the groin of Eddie now replies Eddie giving her definition of manhood. According to her taking risks
97
or horse riding are not defining features for manhood. Manhood has a different definition for her. She may have in mind a more balanced one like Martin with whom she has an appointment. After some verbal conflict with May and calling her traitor, Eddie leaves and slams the door. Unable to tolerate Eddie’s absence, May mourns. “She weeps silently as her face contorts into total grief... Her body weeps” (18). To calm May, the Old Man tells her the story of a night he, May and May’s mother travelled together. Unexpectedly Eddie returns and May drops her grief.

Later on when they think that they are under the threat of the Countess, Eddie suggests they leave the place or keep the lights off. May again refuses to accept Eddie’s decision and displays feminine masculinity. She fights against him turning the lights back again and threatening him: “This is my place! ... I’m not gonna’ hide in my house! I’m gonna’ go out there. I’m gonna’ go out there and tear her damn head off! I’m gonna wipe her out! ... Come on in here! Come on in here and bring your dumb gun! You hear me? Bring all your weapons and you silly skinny self? I’ll eat you alive!” (26-27).

Announcing her ownership to the place, May attributes authority and power to herself. In another scene she acts aggressively. Eddie narrates their relationship and how they met each other “May comes bursting out of bathroom door, slams it behind her. Door booms” (34). As though, the door speaks for the person who is dominant each time it booms. May tells: “Boy, you really are incredible! You’re unbelievable! Martin comes over here. He doesn’t know you from Adam and you start telling him a story like that. Are you crazy? None of it’s true, Martin. He’d had this weird, sick idea for years now and it’s totally made up. He’s nuts. I don’t know where he got it from. He’s completely nuts” (34).

At the end of the play May decides to leave alone acknowledged that Eddie has gone with the Countess. She is not dependent as traditional societies expect women to be. She tells Martin “He’s gone” and then she “closes suitcase and exits with it out Stage Left door. She leaves the door open behind her” (40).

The Countess is not seen on the stage and her presence is only announced by May and through the consequences of her violent actions. She demonstrates the extreme of both feminine and
masculine traits. The description given for her denotes her feminine personality but her doings show that she is tough and violent as a macho man.

Once, Eddie had bought some fashion magazines for May. One of these magazines has the picture of the Countess on its cover. Besides, the Countess rides “a big, huge, extra-long, black Mercedes Benz” (22). Her picture on the fashion magazine and the luxurious car she has indicate she is a very rich and appealing woman.

While Eddie and May are waiting for Martin to arrive suddenly headlights come across the stage through the window. Then “suddenly the white headlight beams slash across through the open door. Eddie rushes to door, slams it shut and pushes May aside. Just as he slams the door the sound of a large caliber magnum pistol explodes Off Left, followed immediately by the sound of shattering glass then a car horn blares and continues on one relentless note” (22-23). If the door boom speaks for Eddie and May, the sound of car horn and explosion speak for the furious and violent Countess. At the end of the play “headlights suddenly are across the stage again and then sound of loud collision, shattering glass, an explosion. Bright orange and blue light of a gasoline fire illuminates Upstage window. Then sounds of horses screaming wildly, hooves galloping on pavement, fading, then total silence. Light of gas fire continues now to end of play” (39). She has shot and burned Eddie’s truck and horse trailer. What she does is completely contrary to the given description of her sexy and attractive appearance. The Countess is determined to achieve her sex object. She is so tough, commanding, and in control that Eddie at once follows her like a woman who follows her husband.

Like May and the Countess, May’s mother demonstrates both feminine and masculine traits. May describes her mother as:

MAY. My mother—the pretty red-haired woman in the little white house with the red awning, was desperately in love with the Old Man. . . . She was obsessed with him to the point where she couldn’t stand being without him for even a second. She kept hunting for him from town to town. Following little clues he left behind, like a postcard maybe, or a motel on the back of a matchbook. (To Martin) He never left her a phone number or an
address or anything as simple as that because my mother was his secret, see. She hounded him for years and he kept trying to keep her at a distance because closer these two separate lives drew together, these two separate women, these two separate kids, the more nervous he got. . . . But finally she caught up with him. Just by a process of elimination she dogged him down. I remember the day we discovered the town. She was on fire. “This is it!” she kept saying; “This is the place!” Her whole body was trembling as we walked through the streets, looking for the house where he lived. She kept squeezing my hand to the point where I thought she’d crush the bones in my fingers. 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. We walked all day through that stupid hick town. All day long. We went through every neighborhood, peering through every open window, looking in at every dumb family, until finally we found him. It was just exactly supper time and they were all sitting down at the table. . . .

The funny thing was, that almost as soon as we’d found him—he disappeared. She was only with him about two weeks before he just vanished. Nobody saw him after that. Ever. And my mother—just turned herself inside out. I never could understand that. I kept watching her grieve, as though somebody’d died. . . . Her eyes looked like a funeral. (36-37)

As May portrays her mother she was a pretty red-haired woman. She was so emotional that she couldn’t tolerate to be without the Old Man even for a second; she pursued him for years; she went on fire if she saw him with another woman; and when the Old Man disappeared she was so sad as if someone had died. But the Old Man tells May that she was as a force “She drew me to her. She went out of her way to draw me in. She was a force. I told her I’d never come across for her. I told her I’d never come across for her. I told her that right from the very start. But she opened up to me. She wouldn’t listen. She kept opening up her heart to me. How could I turn her down when she loved me like that?” (38). What the Old Man says is exactly the opposite of what is expected from a coy mistress as Andrew Marvell has described in his poem “To His Coy Mistress”. Here we observe a reversal of gender role. She goes after the Old Man to obtain her object of desire. She is determined to find the Old Man and never stops her quest for him. Another clue to the masculinity of May’s
mother is when looking for the man in the streets she nervously squeezes May’s hand to the point that she feels she would crush her fingers’ bones.

Eddie portrays his mother as a house woman who cared for her family members and never complained when his husband left her and her son for a long time:

EDDIE. Our daddy fell in love twice. That’s basically how it happened. Once with my mother and once with her mother. . . . He had two separate lives. That’s how come. Two completely separate lives. 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. . . . He’d disappear for months at a time and she never once asked him where he went. She was always glad to see him when he came back. The two of us used to go running out of the house to meet him as soon as we saw the Studebaker coming across the field. . . . He kept disappearing and re­appearing. (32-33)

The picture Eddie gives from his mother denotes that she has been very submissive and obedient. She never said a word when her husband left her and her little son. She only waited for him to come back and when he came back she received him kindly. This passive picture of Eddie’s mother is completely distinct from the picture May gives from her. Hers is a masculine woman acting like a hero. When May’s mother couldn’t stop May and Eddie seeing each other goes to meet Eddie’s mother and begs her. But “Eddi’s mother blew her brains out” (38). Suicidal act is traditionally attributed to manhood as a last chance to get rid of difficulty. So Eddie’s mother stages feminine masculinity in its extreme.

Eddie, the main male character, stages features of both masculine and feminine genders. Eddie, the cowboy character, has a passionate and competitive nature and wants to prove his masculinity. He is doomed to repeat his father’s behavior because his masculine identity “is largely determined by the actions of and relationship with the father figure” (Wilson, Forging 9). He tries to be like his father, the Old Man. Like the Old Man he has to dominate and abandon his partner. He is supposed to be the exact copy of his father and show infidelity. Eddie does not break up his relationship with May since she is his link to the Old Man biologically and also the
object of his desire. Eddie states of his relationship with May, “You know we’re connected, May. We’ll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago” (17). To emulate his father’s behavior, Eddie has relation with May and the Countess. Eddie repeats his father’s masculine behavior to be a real man. He has to assert his masculinity. Eddie desires to be like the Old Man. He follows his father’s way of living and becomes an adulterous person. Fool for Love explores “how a son’s relationship with women is profoundly affected by his relationship with his father, from whom the son has derived a precarious and violent concept of identity” (McDonough 57).

Eddie attempts to present himself as a dominant person. He claims that he is going to take care of May. May informs him that she has an appointment with another man. Then Eddie “moves violently toward her” and asks May how long she has been seeing him (14). He “(stares at her then turns suddenly and exits out the Stage Left door and slams it behind him. Door booms. . . . Eddie enters Stage Left, slams door behind him, door booms. He stands there holding a ten gauge shotgun in one hand and a bottle of Herradura tequila in the other)” (14). Eddie does not want to accept it as a serious matter and starts to make fun of the man. He insists that the person May is going to meet cannot be a man. May reacts saying “Why is everything a big contest with you. He’s not competing with you. He doesn’t even know you exist” (16). Then she wants Eddie to leave. Eddie accuses May to be a traitor and exits. “(Slams door. Door booms)” (17). While he is out the Old Man tries to calm May who is very unhappy and depressed thinking that Eddie has left. Eddie feels the need to prove his manhood to May. He attempts to win May back. “Eddie chooses to adopt the macho attitude of the rodeo hothead. Like so many of Shepard’s western men--especially Lee in True West--Eddie possesses the undaunted desire and uncanny ability to make everyone else in the room uncomfortable in his presence” (DeRose 121). Eddie shows off his rodeo skills to May by lassoing his rope around the bedposts.

Eddie enters fast from Stage Left door carrying a round burlap rope bag. He slams door. Door booms. He completely ignores May. . . . He builds a loop in the rope, feeding it with his left hand so that it makes a snake-like zipping sound as it passes through the Honda. Now he begins to pay attention to May as he continues fooling with the rope. . . .
He spins the rope above his head in a flat horn-loop then ropes one of the bedposts, taking up the slack with a sharp snap of the right hand. He takes the loop off the bedpost, re-builds it, swings and ropes another bedpost. He continues this right around the bed, roping every post and never missing. (19)

Eddie ropes bedposts and makes his way around the bed in a circle. “This act of masculine talent is presented by Shepard as a means for Eddie to prove himself superior to other men that May is dating” (Wilson, Forging 10). As he continues roping bedposts they talk together. Eddie threatens May saying that he is going to nail his ass to the floor. But then relinquishes. Eddie declares to be a very balanced man. He proposes May to introduce him to the man as her cousin and promises not to hurt him. “I’m not gonna’ hurt him. I’m a nice guy. Very sensitive too. Very civilized” (21). May asserts that he is just a date, an ordinary date. Eddie continues his threatening words “Well I’m gonna’ turn him into a fig. . . . (He goes on laughing hysterically)” (21-22). When May’s date, Martin, arrives he tells Eddie that he is adopted. First Eddie begins to scorn him “You orphans are supposed to steal a lot aren’t you? Shoplifting and stuff. You’re also supposed to be the main group responsible for bumping off our presidents” (27). After that like a father he teaches Martin how to be a man. Martin wanted to take May out to the movie. Eddie asks Martin if he has picked the movie. Martin is not sure what May likes. He tells Eddie that he does not want to take her to something she does not like to see. Eddie advises him “So you pick the movie, right? The guy picks the movie. The guy’s always supposed to pick the movie” (29). Eddie thinks that it is a sign of weakness if they allow women to make a choice. Through “the dialogue about men’s control over women,” Eddie tries to bring Martin “into the world of maleness” (Wilson, Forging 12). Then the Play reaches its climax. Eddie reveals that he is not May’s cousin but her half-brother who has had relation with her since they were teenagers not knowing their blood relationship and that the Old Man is their father.

In spite of the elements which show Eddie’s hegemonic masculinity, in some scenes he turns out to be an example of de-traditionalized masculinity. In the beginning of the play, we observe that he behaves May very gently and kindly. He is not cruel to her at all. “May, look. May? I’m not goin’ anywhere. See? I’m right here. I’m not gone. . . . You want some water or somethin’? Huh? (He gets up slowly, goes to her, strokes her head softly, she stays still.) May? Come on.
You can’t just sit around here like this. How long you been sittin’ here anyway? You want me to go outside and get you something? Some potato chips or something?” (8). Even when May erupts furiously and hits him, Eddie behaves her emotionally. May accuses him to have an affair with the Countess but Eddie denies it and expresses his feelings:

EDDIE. You know how miles I went outa’ my way just to come here and see you?
MAY. Nobody asked you to come.
EDDIE. Two thousand, four hundred and eighty. . . . I missed you. I did. I missed you more than anything I ever missed in my whole life. I kept thinkin’ about you the whole time I was driving. Kept seeing you. Sometimes just a part of you.
MAY. Which part?
EDDIE. Your neck.
MAY. My neck?
EDDIE. Yeah.
MAY. You missed my neck?
EDDIE. I missed all of you but your neck coming up for some reason. I kept crying about your neck.
MAY. Crying?
EDDIE. Yeah. Weeping. Like a little baby. Uncontrollable. It would just start up and stop and start all over again. For miles. I couldn’t stop it. Cars would pass me on the road. People would stare at me. My face was all twisted up. I couldn’t stop my face.

(10-11)

Crying is a feature which has always been attributed to women. Men are not supposed to cry even in the worst moment of their lives. It seems not irrelevant to allude “Crying Poem” of Jimmy Santiago Baca (1952– ) a Chicano/Mexican American poet. In his poem Baca beautifully demonstrates how social and cultural inscriptions define masculinity. In patriarchal societies masculinity is defined as active, rational and brave so they ought not to cry. Baca’s poem portrays how society prohibits men from crying and how this prohibition is challenged:
For the longest time,
I haven’t been able to cry.
Tears start to come while I’m watching a movie tears
starts to come,
swelling my whole body a tulip starting to open under moon,
then the petals of my eyelids
stiffen
and something in me braces
and I don’t cry.
When we crashed into a telephone pole
my dad yelled me not to cry,
I was terrified, almost killed –
but don’t cry,
he said.
I couldn’t cry because men don’t cry.
When the dog bit me on the leg I couldn’t cry,
when Joey died I couldn’t cry –
how cool it would feel
to have a tear slide down the corner of my eye
on my cheek,
to the curve of my lip,
where I could taste it –
but I don’t cry.
Something blocks the paths, channels
under my skin.
Tear ducts are red cracked clay,
for thirty years,
drought famine’d,
since I was eight when I got a beating for crying.
but I been taught not to cry –
big people don’t cry, people say,
ain’t those alligator tears boy,
can’t fool me with those tears –
bullshit!
Fooling no one but myself not crying
step aside –
I’m going to cry,
until my shirt is drenched,
and my hands shimmery wet
with tears,
running down my face on my arms.
my legs and breast,
and you have to look at me,
because I’m drowning your manly ways in my tears,
to get back my tears.
I’m crying until there isn’t a single tear left
crying,
for what we been through not crying.
how we fooled ourselves thinking men don’t cry.
................................................................
Goodbyes were crying events –
Goodbye to grandma, to my brother,
friends, my neighborhood,
teachers and other boys,
and I never shed a tear,
though I felt them coming up in me.
I bit my teeth down hard to hold the tears back,
lowered my face and thought about something else.
I kept hearing voices in me,
telling me not to cry, don’t cry, don’t cry!
Boys don’t cry,  
leave yourself open,  
become liable to get an ax in your heart by some non-crying fool,  
be a sissy,  
puto, you be hurting  
yourself if you cry.  
I hurt when I didn’t cry,  
al those times when I didn’t cry ashamed  
to in front of people,  
fearful others would think I’m not a man,  
fearful I’d be made fun of,  
whole groups of us heard tragic news  
and no one cries,  
because it ain’t right –  
we need to weep – . . . . (1-29, 62-80, 101-125)

As the speaker of Baca’ poem, Eddie has decided to cry. Though Eddie’s crying is not as tragic as Baca’s speaker, but it shows that he has transcended the borders of traditional society and has been triumphant challenging the long-held opinion that men do not cry. His crying demonstrates his effeminacy, being like a woman. Choosing to weep, Eddie exhibits de-traditionalized or feminized masculinity.

One more thing approving his feminine characteristics is that he is pursued by the Countess as a sexual object. At the end of the play when the Countess puts Eddie’s truck and horse trailer into blaze, he surrenders and follows her in a passive and submissive way. “Eddie’s initially powerful version of masculinity becomes, by the end of the play, much more fractured and insecure as his complex entanglements with May, the Old Man, and the past are revealed” (McDonough 62).

The Old Man is “a typical Sam Shepard archetype: the absent, yet important, father figure” (Wilson, Forging 9). He lives only in the mind of May and Eddie and stages both masculinity
and effeminacy. The Old Man has had relationships with two women, Eddie and May’s mothers. He describes it as, “the same love. Just split in two, that’s all” (32).

As a surreal and witty person the Old Man only exists in May and Eddie’s minds, even though he is heard onstage offering a contrary point of view. His presence gives dream-like quality to the play. Mostly he talks to Eddie and May when he finds one of them alone. He plays his role as a father when May kisses Eddie and then kneels him in the groin. He also talks to May when she is crying alone thinking that Eddie has left her. To make them feel being physically or mentally free from pain and suffering the Old Man as a real powerful father figure joins Eddie or May comforting them whenever he thinks they are in need of his company. May and Eddie repeat his aggressive drinking of whiskey. Eddie repeats him in having relation with two women. The “power of the father figure is strongest when the actual father is absent and the law he represents is internalized” (McDonough 61). The Old Man believes that Barbara Mandrell, the unattainable woman of his dreams, is his wife. Now that he is old and unable to have any relation with women as he likes, he imagines having relation with Mandrell. When still young, the Old Man could handle two lives as a dominant masculine man but now to be content he has to imagine being in relation with a woman. Moreover, his appearance, his excessive drinking of whiskey and providing his son with whiskey when he was only a teenager portray the extent Old Man insists on masculine side of his personality. Eddie narrates the night they went to the house of May’s mother:

EDDIE. One night I asked him if I could go with him. And he took me. We walked straight out across the field together. . . . We were completely silent the whole time. Never said a word to each other. . . . Then we stopped at a liquor store and he made me wait outside in the parking lot while he bought a bottle. . . . And he opened the bottle up and offered it to me. Before he even took a drink, he offered it to me first. And I took it and drank it and handed it back to him. And we just kept passing it back and forth like that as we walked until we drank the whole thing dry. And we never said a word the whole time. (34-35)

The Old Man gives liquor to his son to make him a man like himself. But what Eddie adds is
showing the different face of his father: sensitive, tender, and weak as a woman:

EDDIE. We walked right up to the front porch and he rang the bell and I remember getting real nervous because I wasn’t expecting to visit anybody. I thought we were just out for a walk. And then this woman comes to the door. This real pretty woman with red hair. And she throws herself into his arms. And he starts crying. He just breaks down right there in front of me. And she’s kissing him all over the face and holding him real tight and he’s just crying like a baby. (34)

Selecting to cry, like Eddie the Old Man shows the feminine side of men. Moreover, his effeminacy is emphasized in the play when he is pursued as a sex object by May’s mother. In addition to this, when Eddie’s mother and May’s mother end up in the same town “he simply surrenders his attempts to control events and disappears. In leaving, he abandons his credibility as a witness to the events that lead to the sexual relationship between Eddie and May and to the suicide of Eddie’s mother” (McDonough 60). His final disappearance does not come to an end, except for his ghost-like presence, but gives an end to his dominant masculine position.

Martin is a simple, innocent, and kind man who works on landscaping maintenance for places around town like the high school stadium. He witnesses May and Eddie’s conflict, their verbal abuse and power struggle. Martin must be a competitor to Eddie but by nature he is uncompetitive. In his first entrance, he quarrels with Eddie thinking that Eddie has made problem for May:

(Suddenly the Stage Left door bursts open and Martin crashes onstage in the darkness. He’s in his mid-thirties, solidly built, wears a green plaid shirt, baggy work pants with suspenders, heavy work boots. May and Eddie pull apart. Martin tackles Eddie around the waist and the two of them go crashing into the Stage Right bathroom door. The door booms. May rushes to light switch, flips it on. Lights come back up on stage. Martin stands over Eddie who’s crumpled up against the wall on the floor. Martin is about to smash Eddie in the face with his fist. May stops him). (26)
Fighting with Eddie, Martin displays his masculine nature but hearing Eddie and May’s stories he offers to leave them alone. In fact, he demonstrates a moderate type of masculinity. His feminized nature is concentrated on when he allows May to select which movie they see. Eddie inquires what they are going to see. Martin replies that he cannot decide since he is not sure what May likes and that he does not want to take her to something she does not want to see. As a balanced person he permits May to select. In a patriarchal society giving right for women to decide is not customary. The play ends with Martin left alone by May. (May closes suitcase and exits with it out Stage Left door. She leaves the door open behind her. . . . Martin just stands there staring at open door for a while then moves slowly Upstage to window and looks out at fire with his back to audience) (40).

To sum it up, in his family plays: Buried Child (1978) and Fool for Love (1983), Shepard continues to focus on the problematics of masculinity. They represent the dangers of relying exclusively on violence as a definition of self. In these plays, Shepard puts an emphasis on de-traditionalized masculinity, male effeminacy, emasculation, and non-male masculinity as social constructs and cultural phenomena. These family plays explore problematics of both genders: male and female. They depict male characters who are threatened to be emasculated or show the feminine side of masculinity and female characters who depict masculine side of femininity.