

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN  
IN THE PLAYS OF SAM SHEPARD

THESIS

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

In the endeavour to abolish from society all forms of ideologies that prescribe the domination of one sex over another, it has become increasingly important to analyse the representation of women in dramatic literature because dramatic literature reflects the philosophies and codes of behaviour which enable individuals to dominate one another in society, and assists in either reinforcing old ideologies or shaping new ones.

Although Sam Shepard has been an influential force in the creation of modern drama, his plays reflect a patriarchal ideology that dictates that women are subordinate to men. Shepard's plays dramatise various male predicaments and his female characters are constructed and utilised to express men's experience, not women's.

One of the conflicts which besets the male characters is that they desire to return to the womb of the mother, but simultaneously fear that their identities will be engulfed by the mother. In The Rock Garden, Red Cross and Fourteen Hundred Thousand, these desires and fears are demonstrated through the female characters, who are manipulated to represent objects of male desire and/or objects onto which devouring images are projected. Women are therefore represented in a manner in which they are best able to express the male characters' identity related conflicts.

In Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child, characters suffer from receiving insufficient nurture, are spiritually and emotionally impoverished or cursed and appear unable to transform their lives. The female characters are presented as being partly responsible for causing these predicaments since their nurturing, generative and transformative abilities are presented in a negative light. Women are also represented as objects of blame in the male characters' attempts and failures to undergo rebirths and are once again created to express male predicaments.

In Fool for Love and A Lie of the Mind, Shepard focuses on the relationships between men and women, but is only able to present the male characters' perspectives and represent male desire. The female characters are regarded, and engaged with, as reflections of the male characters' selves and are frequently utilised to express male desire.

If Shepard's plays are persistently applauded and seen as examples to be emulated, we need to closely analyse these dramas that represent women in a manner which expresses male predicaments and which places them in roles that allow men to dominate them.

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## NOTES ON PRESENTATION

In the absence of very few book-length studies on Sam Shepard's work, I have had to refer, more than might appear usual, to articles, interviews and reviews in periodicals.

There is a distinct lack of available articles or books in South Africa on Sam Shepard's work and I have had to rely, where absolutely necessary, on the use of criticisms of critical works, where the original works were unattainable.

My system of documenting the reference details of my sources conforms to the requirements laid down in the Modern Language Association Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations. However, given the vagaries of periodical publication and the varying methods of inter-library photocopying services, I have where necessary sacrificed strict uniformity of citation for the sake of unambiguous information.

Once the documentation details of a source have been given in full, the details of further references to the work have been shortened. The full details of all quoted sources appear in the Bibliography. When I have used a variety of articles from books which are comprised of articles by different authors, I have documented the source of the book under the name of the editor of the book, as recommended by the M.L.A. handbook. When citing a reference to one of these articles in the thesis, I have therefore repeatedly documented the name of the editor of the book so that students who are making use of only one chapter of this study can find the reference in the bibliography with greater ease.

When quoting from articles in which the writer has used American spelling, I have not altered the spelling.

I have used two methods of presenting ellipses dots. The use of three ellipses dots which are not underlined denotes my own method of omitting material from a quote. In the quotes from Sam Shepard's plays, the ellipses dots which are underlined denote Shepard's own use of ellipses dots.

## INTRODUCTION

A significant and growing awareness of the representation of gender in dramatic literature has evolved in recent times. There has been an increasing attempt to analyse the manner in which gender is constructed within texts, and the extent to which such representations have exercised power over readers and audiences. In the creation of dramatic literature, playwrights make use of similar concepts that dominate social interactions, frequently reflecting and reinforcing them. Dramatic literature also leads to the creation of ideology, which makes it a moulding force in our society. Attentiveness to questions of gender in dramatic texts, therefore offers perceptions that encourage "a fuller understanding of both literature and culture."<sup>1</sup>

Our culture has been dominated by patriarchal ideology for centuries, and, if we are to progress towards eradicating from our society the domination of one sex over another, it is crucial to analyse the representation of women in dramatic literature, so that ideologies contained within texts that prescribe the subordination of women may be identified, deconstructed and rejected.<sup>2</sup> "We are a masculinist culture evolving into a masculine-feminist culture. Bringing attention to ways in which women are portrayed in literature may provide an important part of that evolution."<sup>3</sup>

Sam Shepard is one of the most prolific writers of his generation. Between 1960 and 1987 he chronicled various aspects of American Society and his innovative transformation of traditional realistic theatre has had a marked influence on modern dramatists. The ideology contained within Shepard's plays, however, upholds patriarchal values, and, in order to prevent this ideology from being reinforced, and to hinder Shepard's followers from attempting to imitate his construction of female characters, it is imperative to deconstruct his representation of women. The preservation of patriarchal values is a common feature of male-authored texts, making the analysis of them crucial.

While the gender, race, sexual orientation or class of authors do not guarantee the meaning of fictive representations in their texts, male authored texts are likely to have a greater investment in traditional gender norms. The social construction of masculine subjectivities tends to serve patriarchal interests which allot more power to men.... The task for feminist criticism is to demonstrate how texts constitute gender for the reader ... and how these modes of femininity and masculinity relate to the broader network of discourses on gender both in the past and in the

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<sup>1</sup> June Schleuter, ed., *Introd., Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama* (London and Toronto: Fairleigh Dickenson Univ. Press, 1989), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> See p.23.

<sup>3</sup> June Schleuter, ed., *Introd., Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama*, p.12.

present.<sup>1</sup>

By deconstructing the representation of women in Sam Shepard's plays, knowledge can be gained about the construction of gender stereotypes which both inhabit and inhibit our culture.

Although Sam Shepard has been considered one of the best practising American playwrights, many drama critics have deplored his representation of women.

One of the most problematic aspects of the plays is Shepard's consistent refusal or inability, whichever the case may be, to create female characters whose imaginative range matches that of the males.... Though he has opened up whole new areas of exploration in the form of dramatic realism developed by his literary forefathers, he has not radicalized the way women interact in dramatic form, neither has he given them a new language, and, in fact, his female characters are much less important and intelligent than many of those created by these forefathers a hundred years ago. It cannot be ignored that Shepard, who is in some ways an idol of his young audiences, is not simply traditional in his view of women, but downright oppressive.... The voice - of consciousness, of the emotions, of reason, of triumph, and of failure, too - and finally, of America - is a man's voice.<sup>2</sup>

The most extreme attack on Shepard's representation of women has come from critic Florence Falk who claimed, "In general, women are a straggling group of camp followers, and men treat these 'bitches,' 'broads,' and 'stupid fucking cunts' as recalcitrant and dangerous possessions."<sup>3</sup>

There are other critics who accept that Shepard's earlier presentations of female characters compromised or misrepresented women's experience, but are assured that with the emergence of plays like Fool for Love and A Lie of the Mind, Shepard has succeeded in representing women in an acceptable form.

It is certainly true ... that most of Shepard's theatre is centred on a male character, that five out of twenty-eight published works have no woman at all and that some of his plays offer extremely negative images of women.... [However] in Shepard's most recent period, 1977-85, we find his most memorable young women.... These five women, Cavale in Cowboy Mouth, 1971, Shelly in Buried Child, 1978, Emma in Curse of the Starving Class, 1977, May in Fool for Love, 1982, and Beth in A Lie of the Mind, 1985, form a group apart because they are far more enterprising than any of their predecessors. Every one of them makes a heroic effort to escape from an imprisoning and unacceptable situation.<sup>4</sup>

Shepard has also been attacked for not utilising his alteration of traditional notions of

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987), pp.167-168.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Marranca, ed., "Alphabetical Shepard: The Play of Words," in American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1981), p.28.

<sup>3</sup> Florence Falk, "Men without Women: the Shepard Landscape," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.102.

<sup>4</sup> Charles G. Whiting, "Images of Women in Shepard's Theatre," Modern Drama, 33 (Dec. 1990), 497.

characterisation to subvert attitudes towards the established roles that women in society play. Through his work with the Open Theatre, Shepard developed the concept of the transformative character, revising the concept of a psychologically associative, fixed character, to a multiple, changing one. He said he preferred the concept of a character who was "constantly unidentifiable, shifting through the actor, so that the actor could almost play anything, and the audience was never expected to identify with the character."<sup>1</sup> Various critics proposed that Shepard's rejection of certain components of traditional realistic theatre could have promoted novel representations of women.

The Open Theatre was dedicated to demystifying the process of artistic creation. In their movement away from verisimilitude and mimesis, they were attacking the realistic theater's suppression of the ideological processes at work in representational structures. By dismissing realism's aesthetic of unity of character, their transformational strategies could foreground shifting and plural cultural constructions of identity.... The Open Theatre's strategies seemed to hold out possibilities for redressing the relegation of the feminine to the repressed or suppressed terms in patriarchal ideologies. But like many postmodern performers who are flourishing in the ground broken by groups like the Open Theatre, they failed to utilize these strategies to disrupt sexual difference.<sup>2</sup>

Sam Shepard's concept of characterisation affects his representation of both men and women. "The typical realistic character has to play the line of the dramatic text whereas in Shepard's radical transformation of realism, the character plays fragments, gaps, transformations - the breaks in continuity.... The Shepard character has not simply a self, but several selves which are continually changing."<sup>3</sup> Since the self is always a multiple and shifting entity in Shepard's plays, the characters' identities are always fractured and incomplete. The characters in Shepard's plays are constantly engaged in the search to find their authentic selves, but they attempt to locate their identities through the medium of performance, and by taking on roles from myths, popular culture and most often the media, which only results in their acting out inauthentic identities.

Shepard's males and females act as they imagine men and women behave and have scant regard for what they are. That is they perform in compliance with commercial gender representations that 'teach' how 'Ideal' men and women behave. Hence the relationship between males and females are essentially stereotyped and regressive.<sup>4</sup>

Shepard's preference for dramatising characters who behave in ways which are heavily

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard quoted by Pete Hamill, "The New American Hero," New York Times, 5 Dec. 1983, p.98.

<sup>2</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Spectacle of Impossible Heterosexuality: Fool for Love," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.216.

<sup>3</sup> Bonnie Marranca, ed., "Alphabetical Shepard," in American Dreams, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> Florence Falk, "The Role of Performance in Sam Shepard's Plays," Theatre Journal, 33 (May 1981), 187.

influenced by the media, has led to his creation of a male hero whom Shepard has modelled on the myths of American cowboys. His plays are steeped in American culture and his work is crammed with media-influenced images of what it means to be an American, ranging from the 1950's obsession with road houses, juke boxes and 'junk-culture' to the faith-healing, trance-dances and altered states of consciousness of the 1960's. One of the myths that Shepard is devoted to representing is that of the Great Western frontier, where cowboys were supposedly able to roam free, unhampered by women and domesticity. He has said, "Cowboys are really interesting to me - these guys, most of them really young, about 16 or 17, who decided they didn't want to have anything to do with the East Coast, that way of life, and took on this immense country, and didn't have any real rules."<sup>1</sup> Shepard's attachment to this myth has resulted in the construction of a prototype of male character, and has dramatically affected his vision and focus in the creation of his female characters.

Indeed, a description of the cowboy bears a striking resemblance to many of Shepard's male characters.

His [the cowboy's] sensibility is usually anti-intellectual and anti-school and so physical prowess is counted upon to resolve any conflict or problem. His strongest emotional tie (other than to his horse) is to a group of buddies, playing poker, chasing horse thieves, riding in masculine company. He is contemptuous of farmers, has no interest in children and considers men who have lived among women as effete. Usually he left his own family at a tender age and rebelled against the restrictions of mothers and older sisters.<sup>2</sup>

Shepard idealises the cowboy's credo and creates male characters who long to be free from domesticity and committed relationships with women. He reinforces a view of male desire that was expressed in one of the first American novels, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.<sup>3</sup> Leslie Fiedler comments that, "The figure of Rip van Winkle presides over the birth of the American imagination; and it is fitting that our first successful homegrown legend should memorialise, however playfully, the flight of the dreamer from the shrew."<sup>4</sup> This particular story line has been so influential in the creation of American literature that it has become the norm for plays, novels and films to depict the struggle of the American male hero against the constricting forces of domesticity and society, which are embodied and represented by women. The typical American

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard quoted by Kenneth Chubb and the editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, "Metaphors, Mad Dogs and Old Time Cowboys: An Interview with Sam Shepard," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.190.

<sup>2</sup> David Brion Davis, "Ten Gallon Hero," in Myth and the American Experience, Vol.II, ed. Nicholas Gage and Patrick Gerster (New York: Glencoe Press, 1975), pp.94-95.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Washington, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (London: Harrap, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion, 1960), p.48.

hero has become "a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat - anywhere to avoid 'civilization'; which is to say, the confrontation which leads to the fall of sex, marriage and responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

Shepard's utilisation of the cowboy as a model, on which his male characters are based, allows these characters to subscribe to a violent code of behaviour. "No other figure so successfully sustains, recycles - and condones - the violence this country [America] is bred on.... In Shepard's plays, the 'frontier' symbolizes those open spaces where law, order, and social restrictions have never invaded.... The 'frontier' also represents conquest, the settling of territories by means of violence."<sup>2</sup> In Sam Shepard's plays, the most severe consequence of his creation of male characters, who employ violence to win their battles and assert themselves, is that they inflict it upon the female characters.

In Shepard's earliest plays, male violence towards women is apparent. In Chicago, Stu pushes Joy out of a bathtub and in Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Tom attacks Donna with a paintbrush. In Melodrama Play, Donna is clubbed by a policeman and in Icarus's Mother, Bill and Howard violently shake Pat. In plays like Operation Sidewinder and Forensic and the Navigators, the violence increases, anticipating the male violence which appears in the later family plays.

The abundance of violence in Shepard's plays raises the possibility that he is attempting to explore the roots and causes of stereotypical male behaviour in our society. As critic Lynda Hart notes in her essay, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," in interviews, Shepard has expressed an interest in the origins of machismo and male violence.<sup>3</sup> Shepard has said:

Just because machismo exists doesn't mean that it shouldn't exist.... There's this attitude today that certain antagonistic forces have to be ignored or completely shut out rather than entered into in order to explore and get to the heart of them.... So rather than avoid the issue, why not take a dive into it? I'm not saying whether it's good or bad - I think that the moralistic approach to these notions is stupid.... Machismo may be an evil force ... but what in fact is it? ... I know what this thing is about because I was a victim of it, it was part of my life, my old man tried to force on me a notion of what it is to be a 'man'. And it destroyed my dad. But you can't avoid facing it.<sup>4</sup>

In the above quotation, Shepard reveals his interest in the presence of stereotypical male behaviour in society. In his plays, however, he avoids confronting the causes or effects of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>2</sup> Florence Falk, "Men without Women," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.90.

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepherd's Pornographic Visions," in Studies in the Literary Imagination, 21 (Fall 1988), 72.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Jonathan Cott, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Sam Shepard," Rolling Stone, 18 Dec. 1986, p.172.

machismo, such as male violence. He presents his male characters' violent behaviour as a trait that is inherited, and as an inevitable consequence of being an American male. He fails to expose male violence as an oppressive force in society, and never fully explores the consequences of violence from the female characters' perspectives.

There is a significant violence in most of the plays, but it is a pretend, boyish violence without real consequences.... This pretend violence is evident in most of the 'family' plays.... Whose reality is this? Is there any relationship between these situations and the reality of male violence against women? ... Shepard reveals himself to be an essentially romantic playwright who rationalizes male violence and softens its consequences to appeal to the sentimentality of American audiences. He reinforces popular media images in the best Sylvester Stallone tradition.<sup>1</sup>

What is even more troubling about Shepard's presentation of the inevitability and inheritance of male violent behaviour is that he uses it to evoke sympathy for the male characters, who obviously are unable to help themselves. Shepard has said:

I think there's something about American violence that to me is very touching. In full force it's very ugly, but there's also something very moving about it, because it has to do with humiliation. There's some hidden, deeply rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always continually having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent.<sup>2</sup>

Shepard excuses male violent behaviour by implying that it is merely an expression of men's desperation to find a way of behaving like a man. Since Shepard's characters attempt to express their identities by playing out roles from myths and popular culture, it could be argued that the male characters' proclivity towards engaging in violent behaviour is merely a reflection of the way in which individuals are so heavily influenced by the images which surround them. Shepard, however, actually chooses to allow his characters to perform like characters from the American myths that specifically reinforce the notion that being a man means behaving in a violent manner. He refrains from utilising male violence in his plays to express male inferiority, and allows it to be a means that allows the male characters to express their feelings of entrapment in the structures of the family or society, which are usually represented by women.

There are many critics who have argued that Shepard's dramatisation of male violence is merely a reflection of society, and that it is patriarchal society which requires criticism, rather than his plays. It is my premise, however, that Shepard does little to explore the consequences of male violence in his plays, and is, therefore, not interested in enquiring into or reflecting this problem

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine A. Schuler, "Gender Perspective and Violence in the Plays of Maria Irene Fornes and Sam Shepard," in *Modern American Drama: the Female Canon*, ed. June Schleuter (London: Associated Univ. Press, 1990) p.223.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, Realities: Sam Shepard's America," *New York Times*, 29 January 1984, p.26. Quoted by John Dugdale, in *File on Shepard* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), p.62.

in society. If he reflects anything, it is the viewpoint that it is men's right to behave in any way they choose.

Shepard chooses the realistic structure which perpetuates and indeed reproduces the male dread of women rather than deconstructing it.... If indeed, he does present us with images that imitate the psychic/mythic geography of contemporary social relationships, then we must begin to ask whose desire is he fulfilling and to what purpose.... Generally literary representations condone violence against women as they hide behind the realistic imperative allowing the argument that they are simply 'showing' or exposing the features of contemporary society when they are in fact ratifying them.<sup>1</sup>

Some critics have excused Shepard's entire representation of women as an inevitable consequence of dramatising the social forces and constructs in American society. For example, commenting on Shaved Splits and Operation Sidewinder, Charles G. Whiting writes:

Miss Cherry ... in Shaved Splits, 1970, is an amazingly vulgar and empty headed rich American woman, and in Operation Sidewinder, also from 1970, Honey is her silly middle class counterpart. Both these plays, however, have to be seen as political and social satires of various aspects of American life.<sup>2</sup>

If Shepard is merely satirising various aspects of American political or social life, it is not inevitable or necessary that he utilise such a negative representation of women. In Shaved Splits, he specifically uses Miss Cherry, who lies in her pink and puffy bedroom in Castle Cherry gobbling chocolates, to represent the wealthy capitalist, while the rugged revolutionary is represented by one of Shepard's freedom-loving male heroes, Geez. Shepard's derogatory representations of women cannot be excused by the explanation that he is merely reflecting aspects of American social life, for, even though numerous critics claim that he represents realistic structures in society, he has stated that he is disinterested in that project. He has said:

I'm not interested in the American social scene at all. It totally bores me. I'm not interested in the social predicament. It's stupid.... People get off on tripping out on these social implications of the play and how that matches up to contemporary America. And that's O.K. But that's not why I'm writing plays.<sup>3</sup>

Sam Shepard very rarely focuses on recording women's experiences or on expressing a "female point of view" in any of his plays.<sup>4</sup> One exception to the rule is Little Ocean, which opened in 1974. In the play,

Three girls - one who has a child, one who is very pregnant, and one who never has been - look at pregnancy from an ironically humorous, often frustrated modern woman's point of view. The actresses ... act out fantasies and frustrations that have

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<sup>1</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," p.81.

<sup>2</sup> Charles G. Whiting, "Images of Women in Shepard's Theatre," p.494.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Shepard quoted by Amy Lippman, "Rhythm and Truths: An Interview with Playwright Sam Shepard," in American Theatre, 1 (April 1984), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Bonnie Marranca, ed., "Alphabetical Shepard," in American Dreams, p.30.

to do with pregnancy: sudden vacillations of emotion, an angry turn with a baby carriage and a squalling infant, a child making idiots of its parents.... The central image of the little ocean refers to the child's vast playground within the womb.<sup>1</sup>

However, "whether it was written for a specific occasion or because it doesn't fit in with his manly image as a playwright, Shepard refuses to publish it or allow further performances."<sup>2</sup>

Shepard's creation of a male hero who longs for the freedom of the frontier and rejects domestic life has affected his portrayal of the American family.

Fathers in Shepard's plays escape the ties of families and civilization into the desert and the Western wilderness with its promised dream of freedom. They leave wives and children in an elusive search for themselves.... Shepard portrays an external battle between the women gatherers who settle down, grow food and create civilization, and men, the nomadic hunters, who survive by violence and flee the ties of the family and commitment.... The family that Shepard portrays over and over again is one that cannot nurture its children, that has become as fruitless and sterile as the betrayed American dream of the west.<sup>3</sup>

Shepard's characters yearn to be nurtured in a stable environment, but he is persistent in dramatising mother figures who are incapable of nurturing their children. They are often presented as having ambivalent natures, as being concerned about their children, but also far more interested in fulfilling their own desires. The fact that many of the mother figures in Shepard's dramas do not engage in nurturing their families does not enable them to exist as non-stereotypical representations of women because, although many of them do not take on the stereotypical roles of nurturers and homemakers, these characters are stereotypical representations of "Bad Mothers". In this way, Shepard fails to destroy stereotypical representations of mothers, and allows his plays to create the impression that the mother figures are responsible for the stunted development and regressive behaviour of the male characters.

The prevalent lack of nurture in the plays, and the fact that the male characters appear to have unstable identities, is related to Shepard's dramatisation of the male characters' conflicting desires. In the majority of the plays discussed in this study, the male characters demonstrate that they desire to return to the womb of the mother, or to what Freud termed the pre-Oedipal stage of development, during which the infant begins to develop an awareness that she/he exists as a separate entity from the mother. The male characters, however, simultaneously fear returning to a state of existence which would involve the boundaries between their selves and their mothers being blurred, and they perceive that the mothers, or the female characters who are able to

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<sup>1</sup> Theatre Facts, No. 3 (1974), p.11. Quoted by John Dugdale in File on Shepard, p.31.

<sup>2</sup> Don Shewey, Sam Shepard: the Life, the Loves, Behind the Legend of a True American Original (New York: Dell Publishing, 1985), p.96.

<sup>3</sup> Doris Auerbach, "Who was Icarus's Mother? The Powerless Mother Figures in the Plays of Sam Shepard," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), p.54.

represent "reproductive women," will engulf them.<sup>1</sup> Adult fears of having one's identity engulfed by the mother can be related to the fact that during an infant's early development, the primary nurturer is usually the mother.

The earliest roots of antagonism to women lie in the period before the infant has any clear idea where the self ends and the outside world begins.... She embodies the original non-self, a part of the infant's world which is both "it" and "you" and which feels both vitally necessary and vitally threatening to the formation of the I.... The mother is the outstanding feature of the arresting, sometimes overwhelming, realm within which the self's boundaries must be defined.... This outside realm can threaten to swamp the nascent self's own needs and intentions, to blunt its perceptions of its own outlines.<sup>2</sup>

In adulthood, "When the active project of selfhood feels too strenuous or too dangerously lonely, the temptation is strong in all of us to melt back into that form from which we have carved ourselves out."<sup>3</sup> However, adult individuals who desire to return to a relationship with the mother do not usually acknowledge that this is their own desire, and perceive that it is the mother who is unable to let go of her children.

In Sam Shepard's plays, the male characters' desires to return to the mother are related to their inability to confront the various trials of adulthood and/or to create their own identities. The male characters, however, do not acknowledge that it is they who desire to return to the mother, and they view the mother figures in the plays as wanting to absorb the sons' identities back into themselves. Shepard not only dramatises the manner in which the male characters perceive the mother figures, but in some of the plays creates mother figures who do in fact behave in the manner in which the male characters perceive that they do. Many of the mother figures in Shepard's dramas display an inability to relinquish their children or allow them to develop their own identities.

In Freudian terms, Shepard's early plays dramatises the male characters' regression to the Oedipal stage of development, when identification with the father takes place, and the mother poses the threat of castration and of engulfing the developing male identity. In Shepard's plays, the threat of engulfment is dramatised through the male characters' projection of negative or devouring images onto the mother figures or the symbols which represent them. Lacan has developed Freud's theory and has proposed that the infant's identification with the father represents his entry into the paternal Symbolic Order, where the desire for the mother is replaced by the capacity to acquire language. To gain entry into the Symbolic Order, the infant's desire for

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, The Revolution of Poetic Language, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.453.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p.28.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.28.

the mother is sacrificed. In The Rock Garden, Red Cross, and Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Shepard dramatises the battle between the male subject's conflicting desires to return to the maternal world and to a state of being in harmony with the mother, while simultaneously wanting to remain in the Symbolic Order. He also dramatises what Julia Kristeva terms "rituals of defilement," which include the ways in which men view and behave towards women in order to ward off the fear of incest, of engulfment, and of sinking back into the mother's body.<sup>1</sup>

In Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child, Shepard suppresses the nurturing and transforming abilities of the female characters and presents their ability to procreate in a negative light. He contrasts them to the male characters whose regenerative, nurturing and transforming capacities are emphasised. In order to understand the severity of Shepard's suppression of women's abilities, it is important to observe his dramatisation of the manifestation of the feminine and mother archetypes in his characters. Jung theorised that all human beings share a collective unconscious, which is a "conglomerate of intuitive, primal categories and potentialities," that he called archetypes.<sup>2</sup>

These archetypes are the numinous, structural elements of the psyche and possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the conscious mind, those contents which are best suited to themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Jung conceived that archetypes are "the source of typical actions, reasons that characterise human life, and thus they structure behaviour, images, affects and thoughts as they emerge in the typical situations in human lives."<sup>4</sup> The archetype is known only through its "particular manifestations" as they appear in individuals' lives.<sup>5</sup>

Jung described the mother archetype as follows,

The qualities associated with it [the mother archetype] are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side, the archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark, the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), p.64.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Bedford Ulanov, The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and Christian Theology (Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1971), p.143.

<sup>3</sup> C.G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1931), p.232.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Brooke, Jung and Phenomenology (London: Routledge, 1991), p.141.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.141.

devours, seduces, poisons.<sup>1</sup>

In Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child, Sam Shepard creates mother figures who are unable to manifest the mother archetype positively and who are apt carriers of the projections of what Jung termed the "Terrible Mother," who "devours and destroys," which the male characters place on them.<sup>2</sup> "Jung defined projection as an unconscious, that is unperceived and unintentional transfer of subjective psychic elements onto an outer object."<sup>3</sup> The male characters' fear of being engulfed by the mother leads them to project negative images onto the mother and the symbols which represent the mother. Since the mother figures are created as being such suitable receivers of these projections, it can be seen that in these plays the mother figures are created to express the male characters' predicaments.

In Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard presents a family who are spiritually and emotionally impoverished, and cursed. The female characters are presented as being partly responsible for contributing to the characters' predicaments, since their nurturing and procreative qualities are presented in a negative light. Although the characters all express a desire to transform their lives in some way, Shepard is insistent on suppressing the possibilities of their doing so. He does, however, foreground the male characters' potential to transform their lives, and suppresses the female characters' abilities to escape from confining circumstances far more severely than he does the male characters. He also creates female characters in this play, who attempt to disrupt stereotypically feminine behaviour, but he suppress their ability to authentically accomplish this, or to benefit from behaving in ways which are not stereotypically feminine.

In Buried Child, Shepard presents a mother figure who is incapable of nurturing her children. He contrasts her to the Mother Earth, which is presented as producing an abundance of crops to nurture the family, and to the rain, which is a symbol of the mother, and which is also, at first, presented as nurturing. The male characters, at first, are all associated with death, destruction or immobility. As the play progresses, the mother figure, the Mother Earth, and the rain become utilised to express the male characters' predicaments. The male characters express a desire to return to the womb, and a simultaneous fear of being engulfed by the mother figure. As the male characters' fears of engulfment intensify, so too does their need to project negative images onto the mother figure and the symbols which represent the mother. The mother figure, and the symbols of earth and water, then come to represent a destructive force associated with death. At

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<sup>1</sup> C.G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, p.235.

<sup>2</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956), p.238.

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, Projection and Recollection in Jungian Psychology: Reflections of the Soul, trans. William H. Kennedy (London: Open Court, 1978), p.3.

this point in the play, the male characters' procreative capacities are emphasised.

In Fool for Love, Sam Shepard attempted to write a play "about a woman" that was presented "from her point of view."<sup>1</sup> This endeavour is, however, undermined by the fact that he constructs for the audience a way of viewing the events of the play which is from the male characters' perspective. The male characters create their own subjective sense of what is real or true, and use their version of reality to excuse their degradation of women, and to deny the female characters' version of reality. Although the female character does express her viewpoint, the audience have already been positioned to believe the male characters' version of reality. At the end of the play, the patriarchal notion that male authority and subjectivity should remain dominant is reinforced.

In Shepard's later plays, the characters' attempts to construct themselves become more complex. Not only do they engage in this process by performing like images from the media, but they also construct their selves in a manner which is related to the process that Jung termed individuation. Jung observed that the self is constructed out of "an endless process of reconciling out indwelling opposites."<sup>2</sup>

The psyche is structured in polarities of opposites whose interchange of energy is the life energy of the psyche for the human being. These polarities - conscious-unconscious, flesh-spirit, reason-instinct, active-passive - are most often characterised in masculine-feminine terms and are perceived by us, whether we are male or female as confrontation with 'other'... Understood symbolically, then, the psyche uses the biological differences between male and female to speak about psychic opposites.<sup>3</sup>

In A Lie of the Mind, the female characters are periodically employed to represent not only their own characters' desires to reconcile the opposites within themselves, but also the male characters' attempts and failures to engage in the same process. The male characters demonstrate an inability to reconcile the masculine and feminine components within themselves. This is reflected in their inability to engage in relationships with women where they do not dominate and control them, and/or to sustain even destructive relationships with women. Since the female characters strive to attain self-realisation by attempting to form relationships with men who will not dominate and control them, their desires to attain self-realisation remain unfulfilled.

In this study of Sam Shepard's plays, I have specifically dealt with three plays from Shepard's early period (1965-1966), and four from his later period (1978-1985), as the female characters who appear in the plays which fall between the two periods are generally not substantial enough to

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, as quoted by Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, Realities." Quoted by John Dugdale, in File on Shepard, p.46.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Bedford Ulanov, The Feminine Principle in Jungian Psychology and Christian Theology, p.143.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.143-144.

warrant close analysis. During this period, as Shepard's plays grew to be critically acclaimed, he began to explore the pressures which success inflicts upon the artist in various ways. This theme appears in Icarus's Mother, Seduced, Geography of a Horse Dreamer, Suicide in B<sup>b</sup> and is particularly prominent in Shepard's "rock dramas": Melodrama Play, The Tooth of Crime and Cowboy Mouth. Shepard's artist figures or visionaries are almost all male, and the female characters are usually marginalised in these plays.

In Icarus's Mother, the artist figure is represented by the male pilot who signals to the community below, and, although his actions inspire Pat to take a walk and expand her knowledge of the unknown area beyond the picnic site, she and Jill are reduced to pretending that they are the pilot's wives. In Shepard's group of plays which deal with more political themes, (1967-1971), the artist figures appear in the form of male characters who are usually revolutionaries who desire to bring changes to society. Female characters in these plays generally fall into two categories. First there is a group of female characters who are servile, silly sex symbols, whose roles often also include representing capitalist greed, and certain members of society's obsession with material wealth. Miss Cherry in Shaved Splits is a prime contender for this category. In Forensic and the Navigators, Oolan fills a bowl with rice crispies and holds them down with her hands, inviting Emmet to pour milk over them onto the cereal. She remains in service to the visionaries who try to change the world, and is also viewed as a male possession. This view of women as being male possessions reappears time and time again in Shepard's plays. For example, in The Unseen Hand, women are utilised to describe that one man's possessions are superior to another's. Kid says, "You think your girls are so tough-looking. They're fucking dogs! I wouldn't fuck an Arcadia girl if she bled out her asshole!"<sup>1</sup> In Operation Sidewinder, Honey's artistic aspirations only extend to her desire to become a sex symbol.

HONEY: My mama said that sometime ... someday I'd make a living from my hair.... That I should come to Hollywood and the very next day, just from walking around the streets and everything, that someone would see my hair and ask me to come and get a screen test. And that before long I'd be famous and rich and everything.<sup>2</sup>

The second group of women in this group of plays include characters who are much more substantial, but who are only associated with artistic concerns in that they demonstrate that they have supernatural qualities, and even then they are relatively marginalised. Spider Lady from Operation Sidewinder is a visionary and a very rare representation of a wise, powerful woman. However, she appears only in one very brief scene in which she seems to pour all her knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, The Unseen Hand, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, Operation Sidewinder, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.224.

into furthering Mickey Free's aspirations. In Back Bog Beast Bait, Gris Gris is an artist figure and a visionary, since she plays a fiddle and has a knowledge of supernatural power, but her creativity is portrayed as a destructive force. She says, "My fiddle plays a death song. I sing it through my ears. Frogs move in me. Crawdaddies play with my soul. Something moves my fingers over strings. Something strikes the bow like a torch."<sup>1</sup> She also utilises her power to spur Slim on to becoming a killer, and desires to transform herself into whatever he would like her to be, inspiring him to behave like an artist.

SLIM: If I could only have that power again! That incredible power to kill and not be afraid. If only I could get it back!

GRIS GRIS: It's here! Here it is! Here I am!

SLIM: To slaughter a lamb ain't the same.

GRIS GRIS: How 'bout a bird? An eagle or a crow! I can be what you make me. I can turn into a fawn. A white buffalo. An antelope! A wolf! Make me what you want!<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine)

The other female character in this play, Maria, is never taken seriously and is viewed by Slim as a sex object. Slim asks her, "How would ye' like a little roll in the sack, baby? How 'bout suckin' on my ding-dong or somethin'?"<sup>3</sup> In The Holy Ghostly, the witch is a relatively insubstantial character and is only utilised to provide a supernatural atmosphere. In The Mad Dog Blues, the Ghost girl, who rejects Wacko since she's saving herself for Elvis Presley, is little more than an object of male desire. In the same play, Mae West and Marlene Dietrich are less of their own characters than expressions of the inhabitants of Kosmo's mind, which is populated with images of music and film icons from the fifties. Mae West and Marlene Dietrich behave only like images of their real selves, and they appear on command exactly as Kosmo has envisaged them

In Seduced, Miami and Luna are Henry's possessions and he controls any artistic ability they might display. In Angel City, although Miss Scoons desperately desires to become a film star, the only transformation she undergoes is from being a secretary to a woman who scrubs floors. She also performs in Lanx's "film", but does not demonstrate her own creativity, and rather represents a character conceived in Lanx's imagination. In Suicide in B<sup>b</sup>, Paulette is Niles's sidekick and although she advises him, it is Niles who is the artist figure. Laureen is a cellist, but does not represent a creator, since she merely plays music in a new style of musical production which Niles has invented.

In Sam Shepard's "rock dramas", female characters take on the roles of groupies, glorified slaves and women who pour their entire beings into making the male artists successful. They are

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Back Bog Beast Bait, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.321.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.331.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.313-314.

characters on whom the male artist figures can lay blame for their predicaments, or release their frustration and anxiety. I have here included a very brief discussion of Shepard's "rock dramas", since some of the themes that appear in these plays are relevant to the discussion of the plays which are included in my study.

In Melodrama Play, Shepard focuses on the burdens which beset Duke Durgens, a rock musician with one hit record to his name, as he struggles to repeat his success in a ruthlessly commercial environment which he finds imprisoning. Duke's attempt at creating a new song reveals his desire to control women as sexual objects.

DUKE:            Won't you pretty please move a little to the left.  
                       Won't you pretty please move a little to the right.  
                       Won't you shake your ass.  
                       Won't you shake your tits.  
                       Won't you please shake, baby, before I have fits.<sup>1</sup>

This view of women as sexual objects reappears in Fool for Love and A Lie of the Mind.

Duke's girlfriend and slave, Dana, is presented as being utterly unaware of the pressures which plague the male characters in the play and as being more concerned with petty irrelevancies. The comedy in the play is created by mocking both Dana's stupidity and her lack of awareness. When the play opens, she is concerned that Duke reply to a letter from a sociologist engaged in a study concerning the changes that occur in a contemporary American singer when one of his songs is "received and acclaimed by the public at large" (p.134). Duke interrupts Dana's reading aloud of the letter with a song that he is trying to compose, and continues to mock her concern for irrelevancies.

DANA:            Could I continue, please.  
 DUKE:            Please do! Please continue on. There's more coming and if that's true I certainly would not want to be the one to block it from coming. Not me! Not I! After all, who am I to say stop! Stop coming, my dear? Not me.  
 DANA:            Thanks. (p.118)

It is painfully clear that Duke is more concerned with the integral, artistic aspects of his career than in replying to letters, and that Dana is unaware that she is being mocked. Floyd's return to observe Duke's progress signals repeated mocking of Dana's ignorance. There is a male code of understanding between Duke and Floyd as they mock Dana's petty concerns.

DANA:            Floyd, I'm glad you arrived but Duke is really getting entirely out of hand here recently. He made an airplane out of a letter and threw it away. Can you imagine that?  
 FLOYD:           How did you manage that, Dukie?

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Melodrama Play, in Fool for Love and Other Plays, p.118. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

DUKE: I made the wings and weighted it just right and gave it a little snap with my wrist and away she flew. (p.120)

In this way, Shepard constructs for the audience a way of viewing Dana as a stupid woman. This construction of a superior male viewpoint recurs in Fool for Love. Melodrama Play, while dramatising the pressures which beset the male artist, employs a derogatory representation of women to create humour. This representation of women reinforces male attitudes that women are steeped in stupidity and that their rightful roles should be those of loyal servants to our male artists and visionaries.

In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard explores the artist's struggle to maintain his success as younger visionaries attempt to topple his order. Hoss is a rock musician who represents the old order and tradition, and who must fight his opponent, Crow, who has no laws and is not imprisoned by either fame or a code. The play contains dialogue which records the battle between modernism and postmodernism, and between the needs of the self and those of society. Hoss's sidekick, Becky, plays a variety of roles ranging from slave to manipulative supervisor. In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard elevates the role of the female groupie to that of advisor. Becky, however, reveals that she is only interested in male power and achievement, and not in achieving her own success. She speaks in a male language, never expressing a female consciousness. Her elevated status is reduced at the end of the play when she is handed over to Crow like an object along with his other possessions.

In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard explores the postmodern notion that identity is constructed by means of language. "The play expresses ... the sense that the subject is constituted in language and discourse.... The self brings itself into being through words."<sup>1</sup>If language is the integral component in the construction of the self, Becky's self is constructed like that of a man, for she speaks like the male characters in the play and her speech is derogatory towards women.

HOSS: I'm too old fashioned. That's it. Gotta kick out the scruples. Go against the code. That's what they used to do. The big ones. Dylan, Jagger, Townsend. All them cats broke codes. Time don't change that.

BECKY: But they were playin' pussy Hoss. They weren't killers.... You're a killer man.<sup>2</sup>

Becky uses a derogatory term for female sex organs to imply the phrase "messing around". She also refers to women as sex objects when she says to Hoss, "You're really trying to self destruct aren't you? Whatsa matter, you can't take fame no more? You can't hold down the pressure circuits?"

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Modernism vs Postmodernism: Shepard's The Tooth of Crime and the Discourses of Popular Culture," Modern Drama, 30 (Dec. 1987), 566.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, The Tooth of Crime, in Seven Plays (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p.207. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

Maybe you need a good lay or two" (p.207). Like the male characters in the play, Becky demonstrates that women can be used by men to let off steam. Hoss says to her, "Ya' know you'd be okay, Becky, if you had a self. So would I. Something to fall back on in a moment of doubt or terror or even surprise" (p.225). Shepard, however, fails to create a female self for Becky as he constructs her identity with a male language.

With the move in dramatic criticism towards applauding a playwright's separation of characters' sex from their gender, there are many critics who would view Becky's character as a representation of the fact that women are perfectly capable of taking on what is traditionally thought of as a male gender, since she is both direct and domineering. The problem arises in that Becky's male gender is utilised to represent a derogatory representation of women, and the creation of her character, therefore, does not allow stereotypical or derogatory views of women to be challenged. Becky behaves like one of Shepard's male characters, but necessarily appears in a female form since Shepard utilises her to represent an object of male desire later in the play. This representation of women who are modelled on men, but necessarily appear as women in order that they might represent that which is desired, reappears in Fool for Love.

In The Tooth of Crime, Becky's ambitions are for Hoss's character rather than for herself. Many critics argue that she does fulfil her own ambitions by living vicariously through Hoss, yet she never describes her own satisfaction or pleasure from his achievements. She thus represents the aspect of Hoss's personality which desires success.

Becky's role also entails the enactment of a seduction scene between herself and Hoss in the 1950's. This scene is an excerpt from Hoss's memory, not Becky's, and "she is simply his vision."<sup>1</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that we witness the scene only through the character of Becky, with one of her hands playing the groping male and the other one playing the woman trying to fend him off. It is as if Hoss doesn't picture himself, since he remembers himself being in the moment, and the gaze of this scene is from his perspective, at the time when the moment actually occurred. In this scene, Becky is reminiscent of one of Freud's patients whom he called hysterics. "In an example he frequently returns to, Freud recalls a patient, Dora, who tore at her dress with one hand (identifying with a man) and pressed it to her body with the other (identifying with a woman)."<sup>2</sup> Becky's appearance as an hysteric is reinforced by the fact that she appears to have a mixed identity, as she is a female character who speaks in a male tongue.

Becky reinforces Shepard's representation of women as being utterly immersed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, A Lie of the Mind (New York: Plume, 1986), p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Fiedelberg, "A Denial of Difference: Theories of Cinematic Identification," in Psychoanalysis and Cinema, ed. E. Anne Kaplan (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.37.

promotion of male power and glory. Like Beth in A Lie of the Mind, her own character is undeveloped, as she is manipulated to express components of Hoss's psyche. She becomes a representation of the shared woman, a sexual object who can be passed from one male character to another with great ease. Women are represented as objects that can be passed between two or more men in Curse of the Starving Class, Buried Child, Fool for Love and A Lie of the Mind. Becky is imprisoned like one of Freud's hysterics, enacting a man's viewpoint from within a female body.

In Cowboy Mouth, it appears as if Shepard has promoted the female groupie to the role of creator, as Cavale kidnaps Slim off the streets and attempts to make him into a rock-and-roll saviour. Cavale, however, is only an artist in the sense that she attempts to make Slim into one. Like Dana and Becky, she pours her entire being into furthering his success. She tells him, "I was doing the streets looking for a man with nothing. So I could give him everything."<sup>1</sup> Cavale seeks in Slim the qualities which she most desires to possess within herself, and she attempts to integrate herself, by attempting to engage in a relationship with Slim. This desire to unify oneself, by means of having a relationship with someone who appears to possess those qualities which one desires to find within oneself, is thoroughly explored in A Lie of the Mind.

Cavale feels unable to fulfil the role of being the rock-and-roll saviour herself. She says, "Some say Jesse James was one ... and me ... I dream of being one. But I can't. I mean I can't be the saint people dream of now. People want a street angel. They want a saint, but with a cowboy mouth" (p.156). Throughout history women have been excluded from being the saviours of society, and Shepard reinforces this myth which is prominent within Christian theology.

Jesus came to be understood as the priest par excellence who offered the supreme sacrifice of himself on the cross.... Women universally have been excluded from this role on the basis of sex.... Women are not the 'innocent' victims offering the self in immolation for the sins of others, as Christian theology has imagined Jesus. Women ... remain essentially identified with Eve and evil. Salvation comes only through the male.<sup>2</sup>

In his later plays, Shepard uses the concept that men are able to represent saviours to foreground the fact that it is the male characters' behaviour that results in rebirth and regeneration, and not the female characters' actions or abilities. In Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard uses the lamb, who symbolises Jesus Christ and also Wesley, to represent the sacrificing of Wesley's personality in Weston's rebirth and transformation from sinner to saint. In Buried Child, the corpse of the dead infant operates as a symbol of sacrifice and resurrection, and serves

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Cowboy Mouth, in Fool for Love and Other Plays, p.208. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

<sup>2</sup> Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p.70.

to emphasise the fact that a male character has been sacrificed in order that a rebirth process take place in other characters. The sacrificing of the child also emphasises the fact that it is the death of male characters that is responsible for the abundance of crops which the farm is producing.

Cavale also believes that her existence was created solely from a man. She says of Nerval, one of her heroes, "He hung himself on my birthday. My birthday. And some lady told my mom I was made from a hanged man" (p.201). The emphasis of the male ability to generate life and the de-emphasis of the female ability to procreate is reminiscent of the reversal of the biological truth that women give birth, which appears in the Bible.

The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.... For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, for as much as he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.<sup>1</sup>(Emphasis mine)

Shepard's insinuation that the death of men is responsible for the regeneration of new life, and his de-emphasis of women's ability to generate life, reappears in both Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child.

Although Cavale is able to reject the stereotypically feminine roles of helpmate and homemaker, she behaves in a manner which involves stereotypically masculine behaviour and her femininity is suppressed. She reveals that she is unable to integrate the masculine and feminine sides of her personality, and the masculine component of her psyche dominates her personality. Cavale's character suffers from what Ann and Barry Ulanov term a "hag complex."<sup>2</sup>

The vying of male and female parts in this hag drama, and the dominance of animus over ego - results in her [a woman] sacrificing her own femininity entirely.... She ends up at best as an adult serving only as an anima link for the males in her life, living her femininity only in service to the male, perhaps aware of her own feminine ambitions and aspirations, but only dimly.<sup>3</sup>

Since the male aspect of Cavale's character dominates her ego, she is unable to make contact with her feelings and desires that relate to the feminine component of her personality.

A woman whose feeling life has fallen into the unconscious suffers a fate.... Her feelings are not alive, not connected with her real ego identity.... Images from the deeper collective layer of the unconscious are mobilised without benefit or modification by contact with reality.... A hag cannot get her own fantasies into life and derives no satisfaction from them. An impregnable barrier is erected between fantasy and reality.... Her symbols have failed to combine her personal fantasies with what actually exists in the world, so that though she retains her symbols, they

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, I: Corr. i., 11:3. (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804), p.922.

<sup>2</sup> Ann and Barry Ulanov, The Witch and the Clown: Two Archetypes of Human Sexuality (Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 1987), p.55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.55.

are too private, too fantastic, too cut off from others to be shared.<sup>1</sup>

Since Cavale's dreams and desires are disassociated from her real ego identity, and are not able to be adapted and modified by her contact with reality, her dreams are unrealistic and become so far-fetched she is unable to fulfil them. For example, her dream of making Slim into a rock-and-roll saviour is not a desire which can be fulfilled. In Curse of the Starving Class, Emma is also ruled by the masculine component of her personality and is unable to fulfil her desire to transform her life.

Near the end of the play, through her song, Cavale articulates her desire to make her fantasies more accessible so that she can make them become a reality.

CAVALE:           I was always dreaming too high  
                      Help me pull my star down from the sky  
                      Down on the ground  
                      Where I can feel it  
                      Where I can touch it  
                      Where I can be it. (p.164)

She also realises that she doesn't require a male saviour but that she can find the qualities which she desperately sought to find in Slim, in herself.

CAVALE:           Come right here you know you're not alone  
                      If you got no saviour you can do it on your own.  
                      (p.164)

The ending of Cowboy Mouth, however, contradicts the final words of Cavale's song. While she sings, the Lobster Man walks downstage and "begins to break open and crack revealing the rock-and-roll saviour inside the shell, dressed in black" (p.163). Cavale begins to groom him to become the new rock-and-roll saviour, telling him about a previous saviour, Nerval. Shepard has Cavale profess her desire to become self-realised, only to allow her actions to contradict her expressed desires. She begins to pour all her energy into making the Lobster Man the new rock-and-roll saviour. The conclusion of Cowboy Mouth highlights Sam Shepard's practice of creating endings for his plays that counteract the female characters' desires to become self-realised or integrated. In A Lie of the Mind, Beth expresses her desire to integrate the masculine and feminine components of her personality and to attain self realisation. At the end of the play, however, her actions ensure that her goals cannot be realised.

Shepard represents a view of women that is as confining for his female characters as the situations his male characters long to flee. Because of Shepard's marked influence on American theatre, and on the creation of ideology involved with representational structures, it is of vital importance that his representation of women be analysed.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.121.

There are a number of problems associated with analysing the representation of women in a male-authored text. The first relates to the fact that throughout my study, I have used the terms patriarchal and ideology. Numerous feminist literary critics have theorised that using the term 'patriarchy' is problematic. Elizabeth Wright notes that after Kate Millet "relaunched the concept for specifically feminist purposes and put forward a general theory which sketched out the dominance of men in all areas of social, cultural and political life," certain feminist literary critics argued that using the term patriarchy created the impression that it was "universal," and that "the inevitability of patriarchy seemed to put men's domination of women into the immutable and natural, rather than the socially variable and constructed."<sup>1</sup>

It is my contention that, even though using the term patriarchy creates the impression that it is "universal" and "inevitable", using it can only aid critics to demonstrate the importance of attempting to dismantle the beliefs and codes of behaviour which living in a patriarchal society has produced. Since writers like Sam Shepard have helped to reflect and reinforce patriarchal notions and the idea that the domination of women by men is "natural", using the term (which demonstrates the universality and inevitability of patriarchy) can only encourage more critics to deconstruct texts which reproduce patriarchal notions. In my study the term refers to "the organization of the relations between the sexes ... the domination of women by men."<sup>2</sup>

Many feminist literary theorists have also argued that using the term ideology denotes, "a representation of a prior reality," and that literary critics who use the term only reinforce the notion that there is "an already existing division between men and women," rather than focusing on the fact that "sexual differences are generated in various discursive and social practices."<sup>3</sup> Other feminist literary theorists argue that critics are unable to deconstruct the view that patriarchal ideology is viewed by authors and playwrights as a "prior reality" without utilising the term. While the debate over the term continues, and until an alternative term is produced and accepted by the majority of theorists, critics are continuing to utilise the term. Wright notes, "One may think that the notion of ideology, despite its attendant problems, will remain relevant as long as the discrepancy between the situation of being oppressed and taking action to remove that oppression continues to exist and perplex."<sup>4</sup> In this study, I have used the term ideology as Althusser theorised its meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wright, ed., Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), p.300.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.300.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.170.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.170.

Ideology is not primarily a matter of conscious belief: it is the name of the process by which actual individuals are transformed into subjects. They are inserted from, and even before, birth into certain institutions whose characteristic rituals and discourses furnish them with their identity, and teach them to act so as spontaneously to reproduce the dominant social relations.<sup>1</sup>

Another problem associated with critically evaluating the representation of women in a male-authored text is that many feminist critics feel that the utilization of predominately male psychoanalytical and sociological theories (many of which were founded after the rise of patriarchy and are, therefore, actually based on patriarchal notions) counteracts the deconstruction of patriarchal notions in the text.

In this study of the representation of women in Sam Shepard's plays, I have not adhered to any one approach to criticism and have employed a wide variety of techniques to deconstruct Shepard's work, since utilising one approach would limit the analysis of the multitude of ways in which Shepard suppresses women. In this sense my approach might be described as hermeneutic.

Indeed part of the attraction of feminist criticism is what might be called a kind of critical intertextuality, an interaction with other approaches that provide a point of entry and a critical paradigm, but in no way neutralize the feminine focus. Feminist criticism, in its plurality remains resistant to categorization, connecting, at will, with any number of formalist, structuralist, or poststructuralist methodologies.<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary to utilise a variety of approaches to analysing the representation of women in Shepard's plays since his plays reflect realistic structures in society and are also composed of fantasy. On the one hand, he claims that his plays do not reflect society or reality (which accounts for certain elements of fantasy in his work), and it is therefore necessary to analyse his construction of a universe and his construction of female characters, which might not necessarily reflect reality of life. On the other hand, aspects of Shepard's plays do, in fact, reflect reality and many of his dramas are able to fall under the genre of realism. This quality in Shepard's work requires an analysis of the manner in which Shepard reflects women's experiences. I have used certain techniques developed by the post-structuralist feminist literary school of thought in criticising Sam Shepard's construction of a universe in which women and their abilities are suppressed, as well as various techniques which might be associated by certain theorists with the "images of women" approach to literary criticism in arguing that Shepard fails to adequately represent women's experience. There are a number of problems associated with using aspects of the "images of women" approach to literary criticism, since one has to avoid taking an "ultra-realist" standpoint.

Such a view refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex ... process

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>2</sup> June Schleuter, ed., *Introd.*, Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, p.12.

with many different conflicting literary and non-literary determinants (historical, political, social, ideological, institutional, generic, psychological and so on).... Literary works can and should of course be criticized for having selected and shaped their fictional universe according to oppressive and objectionable ideological assumptions, but that should not be confused with failing to be 'true to life'.<sup>1</sup>

While it is obviously difficult to define what constitutes a perfect representation of women's experience, it is possible to identify that Shepard represents women as they are viewed through a patriarchal gaze, that his female characters are manipulated to express male concerns and male experience, and that his representation of women's experiences is limited to their interactions with men. It is obviously dangerous to criticise Shepard's plays for failing to be "true to life," but they can be criticised for representing a marginalised view of womanhood and woman's experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1985), pp.45-46.

CHAPTER 1: THE COMPETING MATERNAL AND PATERNAL WORLDS OF THE ROCK GARDEN, RED CROSS AND FOURTEEN HUNDRED THOUSAND

Sam Shepard began writing plays in the early sixties when the Off-Off Broadway movement was gaining momentum. The new theatre movement operated out of small cafés, store fronts and lofts and became the starting point for a new generation of playwrights. Shepard's early work was performed at places such as the Café La Mama and the Café Cino, and by the companies of the Judson Poets' Theatre, The Theatre Genesis, The Open Theatre, The American Place Theatre and the San Francisco Magic Theatre<sup>1</sup>. His involvement with these theatre groups dramatically influenced their subsequent development. Ralph Cook, the director of the Theatre Genesis said, "Beginning with Sam Shepard's Cowboys and The Rock Garden, Theatre Genesis has defined itself in terms of a deeply subjective kind of realism and, within the Off-Off Broadway circuit, an almost conspicuous heterosexuality."<sup>2</sup>

Many critics have suggested that Shepard specifically collaborated with theatre groups which would reflect his patriarchal ideology. For example, Don Shewey notes that Sam Shepard worked with the San Francisco Magic Theatre because it was a place where, "the masculine ethos was unquestionably championed."<sup>3</sup>

In Shepard's early plays, the foundations of themes which are fully realised in the later plays are laid. Cowboys, which premiered at the Theatre Genesis in 1964, was Shepard's first play. The manuscript has, however, been lost and only Shepard's rewrite of the play in the form of Cowboys #2 has survived. This play appears to be the forerunner to the later plays, The Unseen Hand, True West, and Geography of a Horse Dreamer.

Cowboys #2 focuses on the American myth of the Great Western frontier, and the deep bond which apparently grew between the rugged, independent, virile men who inhabited it. Chet and Stu pretend they are cowboys in the desert and they contrast their fantasy of the old west with modern, urban civilisation. Stu uses a derogatory image of women to denote this contrast. Stu remembers that there used to be a lot of orange orchards around where they lived. He says, "They were all over. Then they cut them all down, one at a time. Every one. Built schools for kids and

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Mottram, Inner Landscapes: The Theatre of Sam Shepard (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1989), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Cook, "Notes on Theatre Genesis," in Off-Off Broadway Plays, ed. Nick Orzel and Michael Smith (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1984), p.94.

<sup>3</sup> Don Shewey, Sam Shepard, p.3.

homes for flabby old ladies and halls for heroes and streets for cars and houses for people" (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

In Chicago, Shepard dramatises the existential anguish and alienation of members of society, and their search for a way of being.

Chicago ... confirmed Shepard's radically pessimistic vision of contemporary reality.... The intent once again was not to tell a story, but to project images that would provoke a visceral awareness of the dislocation and disorientation of contemporary existence.... The sheer quantity of his [Stu's] games and fantasies reflect on the emptiness, boredom and alienation of modern existence.<sup>2</sup>

While commenting on the alienation which characterises contemporary existence, Shepard presents existential crises solely through a male voice, thus diminishing the concerns and experiences of women. This tendency recurs in Shepard's later play, Action, where the two male characters theorise about the nature of being while the women tend to domestic duties.

It has been observed by many critics that, in his early plays, Shepard refrains from focusing on the psychology of his characters. Gerald Weales has said, "Where Shepard differs from the traditionalist in these early plays is that we are given no biographical or psychological information to explain the attachments and confrontations of the characters."<sup>3</sup> While it is true that Shepard refrains from presenting his characters' biographical details, the characters' responses to one another, the manner in which they create identities for themselves, and the imagery which Shepard utilises in their language reveal their psychological conflicts. In The Rock Garden, Red Cross and Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Shepard dramatises, through his characters' internal conflicts, a battle between the world of the mother and that of the father.

### The Rock Garden

In Sam Shepard's second play, The Rock Garden, the male protagonist, who is simply called Boy, tries to establish his own identity and escape the constraints that living with his family has imposed on him. Shepard has said, "Rock Garden was about leaving my Mom and Dad."<sup>4</sup> In the same interview, Shepard described the family as one of the entrapping forces in society which inhibit personality development.

But you have this personality, and somehow feel locked into it, jailed by all of your

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Cowboys #2, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.149.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bloom, "Visions of the End: The Early Plays," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.74.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Weales, "The Transformations of Sam Shepard," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.40.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Kenneth Chubb and the editors Theatre Quarterly, "Metaphors, Mad Dogs and Old Time Cowboys," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.193.

cultural influences and your psychological ones from your family, and all that. And somehow I feel that that isn't the whole of it, you know, that there's another possibility.... You can't escape, that's the whole thing, you can't. You finally find yourself in a situation where, like, that's the way it is - you can't get out of it. But there is always that impulse towards another kind of world, something that doesn't necessarily confine you in that way.<sup>1</sup>

In The Rock Garden, Shepard depicts the desire to escape the identity imposed on an individual by her/his family, through the character of the boy, who attempts to differentiate himself from his parents by speaking a monologue about his sexual life. The boy's sexually active existence contrasts with the sterile existence of his family. Shepard demonstrates that the boy has an impulse towards living an alternative existence to that of his family by using a derogatory representation of women, since the boy's speech describes women as sexual objects.

The boy's behaviour and speech reveal that although he desires to leave his parents and establish his own identity, he simultaneously wishes to regress to the state of being contained within the womb of the mother. The predominant themes in The Rock Garden - the manner in which the female characters are employed to present views which reflect the male characters' desires and fears, the prioritising of the male creative force, and the view that women can be viewed as sex objects - are developed further in Shepard's later works.

The Rock Garden dramatises the fact that sons and fathers have remarkably similar qualities and that one's identity is often inherited from one's parents. Although in The Rock Garden, it is only the boy's physicality which is described as being similar to that of his father and grandfather, the fact that sons inherit qualities from their fathers is an important theme in Shepard's later plays because the male characters' inheritance of their fathers' behaviour directly affects the way female characters are treated in these plays. In Curse of the Starving Class, Buried Child, Fool for Love, and A Lie of the Mind, the younger generation of male characters inherit the sins of their fathers, continuing to behave violently towards women and to abandon their families.

Boy is compared to the older generation in numerous ways. The character who is the boy's mother, and who is simply called Woman, tells him, "Your legs are a lot like Pop's. Pops had the same kind of legs."<sup>2</sup> Later she says, "Your feet are almost identical to Pop's. I mean the way the middle toe is. You see the way your middle toe sticks way out further than the other toes? That's the way Pop's toe was. His middle one. The way it sticks out" (p.37). She tells her son he has the same "torso" as his father, "The same build" (p.38). The woman's comparisons of the boy's physical attributes with those of his father and grandfather cause the boy to feel committed to an

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.193.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, The Rock Garden, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.37. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

inheritance of his father's stagnant and limited existence. He begins listening to his mother's speech wearing just his underwear, but gradually puts on pants, a shirt and an overcoat, which symbolises that he moves from being unrestricted to being confined. The similarities between the boy and the father are also emphasised at the end of scene two when the boy makes a hurried exit and is replaced by his father, who is dressed in his underwear. "With the juxtaposition of similar images - the boy and the Man dressed in underwear and seated identically - Shepard symbolises the Man's impotence, the boy's future, and the continuity of generations in a sterile, empty family."<sup>1</sup>

This stagnant existence which the boy wishes to escape from also includes a breakdown in communication between the mother and the father. At the end of scene two, they interact, but apparently have nothing to say to one another.

The man enters stage left. He walks across the stage and exits stage right. After a while the man comes back on dressed in underwear. He crosses to the rocking chair and sits. For a long while the man just sits rocking. The woman stares at the ceiling.

MAN: Kind of drafty.

WOMAN: Yes.

MAN: Must be the windows.

WOMAN: I guess so. (p.39)

The collapse in communication between the mother and the father prefigures the communication breakdown that occurs between the parents in the later full-length family dramas.

The woman's description of her father also announces the theme of absent or secluded fathers who desire no participation in family life in Shepard's plays. She says of her father, "Sometimes he just stayed in the attic. He'd stay up there for days and days and never come down" (p.39). The woman also remembers that her father would eat when no one else was around. The fact that food fails to unite characters is reinforced in scene one of The Rock Garden when the father sits with his children at the breakfast table, but says nothing to them.

The usual case in Shepard's theatre is ... food imagery with complete absence of communion.... From the very beginning of Shepard's career, from the spilled glass of milk in The Rock Garden and the biscuits thrown at the young man in the bathtub of Chicago, scattered food has been a recurring image in his theatre, signifying that things to eat and drink, which should nourish people and bring them together, simply fail to do so.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that food fails to unite the family members in The Rock Garden signifies the lack of nourishment and the insufficient nurture that characters have received from the family.

The boy's desire to be nurtured is related to the fact that he expresses a desire to return to the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Bloom, "Visions of the End," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.73.

<sup>2</sup> Charles G. Whiting, "Food and Drink in Shepard's Theatre," Modern Drama, 2 (June 1988), 183.

womb of the mother which can be interpreted as a desire to return to a stage of development where sufficient nurture was received. In scene three, he attempts to separate himself from his parents and after his father has tediously described his rock garden, the orchard and the irrigation system, the boy launches into a graphic description of his sexual preferences and practices. Although the boy's monologue is an attempt to shock his father into realising that the boy has reached adulthood, it expresses a desire to return to the mother's womb. He says, "I really like to come almost out, and then go all the way back into the womb. You know, very slowly. Just come down the end all the way back in and hold it. You know what I mean?" (p.44).

In Lacan's theory of development, a child becomes aware of itself as a separate entity from the mother when it acquires the capacity to learn language and gains entry into the Symbolic Order. Lacan theorised that the infant is "initially amorphous" and has no sense of boundaries.<sup>1</sup> "This shapeless mass of sense impressions crystallises into a sense of wholeness at the mirror stage," where the infant sees itself reflected in a mirror.<sup>2</sup> Self recognition in the mirror occurs in three successive stages.

At first the child who is together with an adult in front of a mirror confuses his own reflection with that of his adult companion. In the second phase the child acquires the notion of the image and understands that the reflection is not a real being. Finally in the third stage, he realises not only that the reflection is an image, but that the image is his own and different from the other.<sup>3</sup>

Lacan observed that during the first stage of the mirror stage of development, the infant perceives that she/he and the mother form a perfect whole. Through the belief which Lacan termed the "Desire for the mother," the infant perceives her/his desires and the mother's desires as being mutual.

The 'Desire for the mother' is a double genitive referring to both the mother's desire and the child's desire for the mother. First the child imagines itself to be the desire of the mother in the sense that it is all the mother desires.... The child becomes all that would satisfy the mother's lack, in psychoanalytic terms becoming the 'phallus' for the mother.... Second, the 'Desire for the mother' is the child's own desire for the mother, as that part of experience which has been prompt to satisfy its needs.<sup>4</sup>

In the second stage of the mirror stage, the father intervenes.

He deprives the child of the object of its desire and deprives the mother of the phallic object. The child encounters the Law of the Father. The third stage is that of identification with the father. The father reinstates the phallus as the object of

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wright, ed., Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p.315.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.315.

<sup>3</sup> Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism (Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1989), p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Wright, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p.315.

the mother's desire and no longer as the child-complement to what is lacking in her.... This is the debt which must be paid if one is to become completely one's self.<sup>1</sup>

According to Lacan, the child enters the Symbolic Order when he recognises certain things as being "the right of the father and sacrifices the desire for the mother."<sup>2</sup> The infant's illusion of there being unity between her/himself and the mother is destroyed and she/he gains an awareness of the self as a separate entity from that of the mother. On entering the Symbolic Order, the desire for the mother is replaced with the capacity to acquire language. "The structures of language are marked by the Father's rules, laws and definitions."<sup>3</sup>

After entry into this Symbolic Order has been completed, the mother may be perceived by the subject as a force which threatens to engulf the individual's differentiated identity within the Symbolic Order because she represents a time of primal unity and the possibility that the infant will regress back to a state of non-differentiation. "This all-powerful mother figure can become the basis of persecutory images."<sup>4</sup> For the male subject who has entered the Symbolic Order the fact that the mother, or the female body who represents reproductive woman, is able to represent the possibility that the boundaries between the subject's self and others might collapse, may result in the male subject attempting to control the female body.

In The Rock Garden, the stage of development where the infant perceives there to be a harmonious relationship between the mother and the child is expressed through the woman's early and fond memories of the rain, which because it is comprised of water, is a symbol of the mother. The mother's memories of the rain can be seen to reflect the boy's desire to return to the womb. She says, "I used to listen to the rain while I was sleeping," which is reminiscent of the infant who lies developing in the womb listening to the water and blood surrounding it. The boy's desire to return to the womb of the mother is also mirrored by the woman's desire for more blankets and more water which express the desire to return to the warmth and fluidity of the womb. "In the Vedas, water is referred to as Mâtrimâh (the most maternal)."<sup>5</sup> Jung also stated that, "The maternal significance of water is one of the clearest interpretations of symbols in the whole field of mythology."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Wilson, "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama, 30 (March 1987), 56.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wright, ed., Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p.315.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.315.

<sup>5</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (London: Routledge, 1988), p.364.

<sup>6</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1978), p.218.

In previous plays, Shepard has associated water with the mother and, more specifically with the mother's womb. His unpublished play, Little Ocean, expresses the idea that a mother turns into a little ocean when she is giving birth. In Red Cross, Shepard associates water with the amniotic fluid in the womb. In her swimming fantasy, the Maid says, "You move through the water like you were born in that very same place."<sup>1</sup> In Suicide in B<sup>b</sup>, Shepard also links blood and water to the amniotic fluid surrounding the baby in a mother's womb. Louis says, "A boy hears sound before he has a name - he hears gurgling, pounding underwater. He hears an ocean of blood around him. Through his veins. Through his mother."<sup>2</sup>

While the woman's memories of the rain and her desire for more water may be seen as her expressing her own desire to return to the womb of her own mother, in light of the fact that the boy expresses his desire to return to the womb of his mother in his monologue, and the fact that in Shepard's later plays the male characters' desires to return to the womb of the mother are indirectly expressed through the female characters, the woman's expressed desire for more water and blankets can be seen to foreground the boy's desire for the mother. In Shepard's dramas the female characters' desires are frequently constructed to specifically reflect or reinforce the male characters' desire, as will be discussed in the chapters which follow. In both The Rock Garden and Red Cross while female characters are able to give the appearance of expressing their own viewpoints, their views actually express and reinforce the male characters' predicaments.

In The Rock Garden the boy's monologue, which he speaks in order to prove to his father that he is a sexually active adult with a different identity to that of his father's, is reminiscent of the subject's entering of the Symbolic Order. The boy expresses the fact that he wishes to maintain his place in the Symbolic Order by using language which describes the female body as a sex object, which is an attempt to control the female body in order to ward off the threat of returning to a state of non-differentiation. The boy's speech therefore expresses that he desires to return to the womb, but fears returning to a state of non-differentiation and simultaneously wishes to maintain his place in the Symbolic Order. The conflicting desires to return to the womb and to remain in the Symbolic Order are expressed in Shepard's later dramas, where women are represented as objects of desire or viewed as a force which threatens to engulf the male characters' identities.

The negative qualities which are placed on the mother symbol in the play are connected to Shepard's de-emphasis of the generative abilities of women, and the foregrounding of these abilities in the male characters. In The Rock Garden, water, rain and milk are portrayed as the life-giving force. For example, in scene three the man says, "It's uh - the lawn. Doesn't seem too

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Red Cross, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.124.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, Suicide in B<sup>b</sup>, in Fool for Love and Other Plays, p.196.

bad for this time of year (a long pause). Except around the sprinkler heads. It's always wet around the sprinkler heads so it grows all the time, I guess" (p.40, emphasis mine). "In India water is generally regarded as the preserver of life, circulating throughout the whole of nature, in the form of rain, sap, milk and blood."<sup>1</sup> The female characters in the play are, however, deprived from containing the life force. The girl drops the milk, and the sick mother constantly requires more water which she cannot seem to contain. In contrast, the male characters in The Rock Garden are the creators in the play and, therefore, it is their ability to produce life which is emphasised. The male characters are, however, inept at both creating and nourishing.

The woman's father made a stew out of mushrooms which were poisonous. "He got very sick and threw up for a whole week" (p.36). He also "tried to make a tree house and fell down and broke his leg" (p.36). The woman tells us, "Mother told me he was a painter, but I never saw him painting. He'd stay up there for three days. I guess he was a painter. I don't know" (p.37). The woman's husband creates a garden out of rocks and fails to work with putty.

The male characters also appear to drain the life force from the female characters. Each time the woman mentions either her father or her husband, she requires more water. The woman says, "I am really thirsty (a long pause). Your legs are a lot like Pop's. Pop had the same kind of legs.... He was a funny man. Would you get me another glass?" (p.37).

Although in The Rock Garden Shepard demonstrates the male characters to be inept creators, he persistently emphasises the productivity and creativity of his male characters throughout his later works where the male creative and regenerative force is foregrounded and the female characters' abilities to generate and nurture are either suppressed or presented in a negative light. In The Rock Garden, the derogatory representation of the female body is connected to the boy's fear of having his identity within the Symbolic Order threatened by the mother. This fear becomes full blown in Shepard's later plays in which there is a concomitant increase in negative representations of both women and mothers.

#### Red Cross

In Red Cross, Shepard depicts the consequences which occur when an infant sacrifices the desire for the mother in order to gain entry into what Lacan termed the Symbolic Order. However, he dramatises this process almost entirely from a male perspective. Although Red Cross is one of Shepard's only plays in which a female viewpoint is expressed (since the Maid is able to describe the harmony which exists between an infant and the mother in the womb, and contrast this maternal world with her feelings about the entrapment she experiences in the Symbolic Order) he ends the play with an image which presents the mother as an engulfing force, thus

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.364.

counteracting the female viewpoint, and ensures that the lasting impression made by the play is one in which men's fear of women is demonstrated to be a valid one.

For the greater part of the play, the female body is represented only as it is viewed through a male gaze and since the play dramatises the conflicting desires of an adult male, who desires to return to the womb of the mother while simultaneously wishing to retain his place in the Symbolic Order, women are represented as objects of desire and/or as a threat to the male characters' identity within the Symbolic Order. Since, in patriarchal society, the female body is able to symbolise the period of development where the male infant did not experience himself as a separate entity from the mother, she is able to be seen by men as the force which threatens to dissolve the boundaries between his self and others. In Red Cross, the female body is represented as this threat. This results in the male character attempting to control and dominate the female body so that his fear might be reduced.

In Lacan's theory of language acquisition, he utilises the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of a sign to expose the fact that language always defers and replaces desire, and that desire can never be authentically expressed. Ferdinand de Saussure claimed that a sign was composed of two parts: a signifier, "a word sound, recognised by being heard as different from Others within an expected range," and a signified, "a concept, singled out from an originally undifferentiated continuum of thought."<sup>1</sup> The signified is constituted and verbally communicated through signifiers. Lacan revealed that the use of a signifier could not ensure that the exact intent of the signified could be communicated. "Illusion can enter the sign system because the identification of the signified depends on human judgements which can notoriously and justifiably differ."<sup>2</sup>

Lacan developed his theory and deduced that a signifier could never accurately record or express unconscious desire for a number of reasons. Unconscious desire is related to the infant's original desire for the mother which is suppressed and sacrificed in order that the infant might enter the Symbolic Order and acquire the ability to learn language. The ability to use language is related to the suppression of the desire for the mother, and that desire then becomes unconscious. Therefore, unconscious desire cannot be expressed by a language which defers and suppresses it.<sup>3</sup> "Language imposes a chain of words along which the ego must move while the unconscious remains in search of the object it has lost."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice, p.109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.109.

In his essay "Language and Desire," Leonard Wilcox draws on Freudian and Lacanian analytic theory to demonstrate that the characters' use of signifiers in Red Cross are disassociated from their unconscious desires. He uses Kristeva's theory of the Abject to articulate that in the play Shepard dramatises the consequences which result from the infant's suppression of the desire for the mother in order to enter the Symbolic Order.

There is a radical disjunction between context and monologue, between words and actions. It is as if words themselves have become detached from things, that the signifiers float unattached from anything real.... In this sense the signifiers of the play function ... in terms of a Lacanian model of desire, in which desire (and the language which constitutes it) can find no final signifier or object because that final object of desire - the imaginary harmony between the mother and the world - has been lost forever. Part of this sense of desire in language as a continual deferral, as an impossibility of satisfaction, is evoked by metamorphosis and mutations of the central images, and the utterances of the characters which form a network of displacement.... The restless and unsettled movement of desire is manifest in Red Cross, as it is in other Shepard plays, in a world where characters spin out fantasies, attempting to displace or subsume the fantasies of other characters.<sup>1</sup>

Displacement in Red Cross appears most noticeably in Carol's "inheritance" of Jim's crabs. Jim's very act of re-arranging his and Carol's beds causes Carol to catch the crabs before she has actually occupied Jim's bed. Carol's fear that her head will break open is also displaced and manifests itself in Jim. At first it is Carol who says, "My head aches so bad. I can't believe my head.... It hurts. It's breaking open all the time. It crashes around inside."<sup>2</sup> At the end of Red Cross it is Jim's head which gives the impression of breaking open since "a stream of blood" runs down his forehead. (p.138).

Red Cross demonstrates the fact that, since the male infant sacrifices the desire for the mother in order to enter the Symbolic Order, not only is language continually displaced from unconscious desire, but the mother and the female body, which are both able to represent "reproductive woman," are continually seen as a threat, and therefore in a negative light because they represent for the subject the possibility that he might regress to a time when the boundaries of the body were undefined.<sup>3</sup> In the play, women are represented as a threat since Shepard associates the female body with the abject. Abjection is a term which Julia Kristeva uses to describe all that individuals who have entered the Symbolic Order feel should be rejected from the body or viewed in a negative light. "Kristeva defines the abject in cultural terms. It is usually associated with sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire: The Abject in Shepard's Red Cross," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, pp.108-109.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, Red Cross, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.124. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

<sup>3</sup> Julia Kristeva, The Revolution of Poetic Language, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.453.

perversity, incest, decay and death; often it has to do with corpses, bodily waste (blood, shit, urine, puss), the female body, and menstrual blood."<sup>1</sup>

Kristeva theorises that the mother and the female body are associated with the abject in the following way. Even prior to entering the Symbolic Order, the subject is required to learn to define the boundaries of her/his body. This takes the form of the child's learning to expel various objects such as waste products from the body. As the child tries to define the boundaries of the body, she/he begins to separate her/himself from the mother and define the boundaries between her/himself and others. Like the waste products, the mother then must also be expelled from the boundaries of the child's body and she becomes firmly associated with the abject. Since it is usually a child's mother who teaches the child how to expel objects from the body, she easily symbolises the abject. "With the various little rituals tied to cleanliness, toilet training, eating habits, etc. the 'mother' is gradually rejected through becoming, at the pre-symbolic level, the prototype of what the drives expel."<sup>2</sup> For Kristeva the rejection of the mother as abject is "at the origin of all the various misogynistic affects and rituals of culture."<sup>3</sup>

The child's attempts to expel objects from the body can never be successfully mastered. "The subject must expel these objects (which include tears, saliva, faeces, urine and mucus), to establish the 'clean and proper' body of Oedipalization. Yet they can never be expelled, for they remain the pre-conditions of corporeal, material existence."<sup>4</sup> Objects are then always able to threaten the boundaries of the child's body and, therefore, the child's identity, which is constituted as separate from the mother, in the Symbolic Order. Since the mother, or the female body, is firmly associated with and seen as the abject, and since the abject is the threat of "unassimilable non-unity," the female body will always represent the threat of the boundaries between the child's body and other objects and bodies collapsing.<sup>5</sup>

The abject is undecidably both inside and outside (like the skin of milk); dead and alive (like the corpse); autonomous and engulfing (like infection). It signals the precarious grasp the subject has over its identity and bodily boundaries, the ever present possibility of sliding back into the corporeal abyss out of which it was

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.110.

<sup>2</sup> John Lechte, Julia Kristeva (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.159.

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Chase, "Primary Narcissism and the Giving of Figure: Kristeva with Hertz and de Man," in Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva, ed. Andrew Benjamin and John Fletcher (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.127.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Wright, ed., Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p.198.

<sup>5</sup> John Lechte, Julia Kristeva, p.159.

formed.<sup>1</sup>

In Red Cross numerous images of the abject appear. In Carol's first long speech, the female body is associated with abjects such as blood, decay, death, and the corpse. This ensures that the female body is viewed in the same manner as individuals who have entered the Symbolic Order view bodily wastes and other abjects, as that which "disturbs identity, system, order."<sup>2</sup>

CAROL:                   The ski's will cut into both my legs and I'll bleed all over. Big gushes of red all over the snow. My arms will be broken and dragging through the blood.... Then my head will blow up. The top will come right off. My hair will blow down the hill full of guts and blood. Some bluejay will try to eat it probably. My nose will come off and my whole face will peel away. Then it will snap. My whole head will snap off and roll down the hill and become a huge snowball and roll into the city and kill a million people. My body will stop at the bottom of the hill with just a bloody stump for a neck and both arms broken and both legs. (p.125)

The female body in Carol's speech is represented as a force which is able to annihilate existence, and is able to symbolise the force which threatens to destroy an individual's identity within the Symbolic Order. Since Jim's fears are continually displaced and manifested in Carol, her speech can be seen to represent Jim's fear of the female body. This fear leads to his attempts to control and dominate the female body.

Since the abject reminds the male subject of a time when the boundaries of the body were indistinct, the crabs in Red Cross are an image of the abject. They exist outside Jim's body, as is shown by the way that he is able to "get hold of a small bug" and hand "it carefully to the Maid" (p.127). They, however, can also gain access to the inside of the body. Jim calls them, "Bugs that get in your pubic hair and eat your skin and suck your blood and make you itch" (p.127). The crabs then, like the abject, are "ambiguous, the in-between."<sup>3</sup> When the Maid suggests that Jim put sheep dip on the crabs to kill them, Jim says, "You'd put sheep dip on them, and kill your skin along with the crabs. Is that it?" (p.128). Jim's words reveal that he does not experience a boundary between his body and the crabs, and that the crabs do in fact blur the boundaries of his body.

Once the male subject has gained entry into the Symbolic Order, the mother poses the threat of engulfing the male subject's acquired, differentiated identity. Since the male subject gains access

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wright, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p.198.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), p.94.

<sup>3</sup> John Lechte, Julia Kristeva, p.159.

to the Symbolic Order when he is able to identify with the father's sexuality and recognise the mother's sexuality as being different to his own, the male subject then perceives that the mother lacks a penis and fears that she will castrate him. As Wilcox has asserted, Jim's fear of being castrated and of being devoured by the mother is expressed through the crabs which attack his body.<sup>1</sup> He says, "They pinch so hard I think they're going all the way through. They grab and squeeze. I think they must have teeth too. Along with the pincers I think they have teeth" (p.128). This image of the abject is associated with what Jung termed the "Terrible Mother," which is an image that is projected onto the mother.<sup>2</sup>

The fear of being devoured and engulfed by the mother is a constant theme in Shepard's early plays. In Chicago, Stu threatens Joy with the image of a barracuda that is about to devour her.

STU: All them fishes gettin' ready fer a feast.  
 JOY: Cut it out!  
 (They stand struggling with each other)  
 STU: Big striped fishes with long teeth and pink tongues.  
 JOY: Stop!  
 STU: (Normal voice) They like you. They want you for their very own.  
 They want to eat you up!<sup>3</sup>

Jung has stated that certain types of fish, along with whales and dragons, "are used by the imagination to disguise the image of the Terrible Mother."<sup>4</sup>

Since the crabs in Red Cross are able to represent "The Terrible Mother", Jim's fear of the crabs represents his fear of the mother. Kristeva states that, "Fear of the ... mother proves essentially to be a fear of her generative power. It is this power, dreaded, that patrilineal filiation is charged with subduing."<sup>5</sup> The generative power of the mother is expressed through the Maid's description of the manner in which the crabs reproduce.

MAID: I'd have enough sense to have my bed changed, knowing that crabs lay eggs inside the sheets and the blankets and that eggs hatch and that when eggs hatch new crabs are born. Baby crabs are born and baby crabs grow up like all crabs have to. And when they're grown they lay new crabs and it goes on like that indefinitely for years.  
 (p.128)

The Maid's description of the generative power of the crabs that are associated with the mother, can be viewed as a manifestation of Jim's displaced fear of the mother and the female body.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire," p.114.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p.251.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Shepard, Chicago, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.51.

<sup>4</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.80.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p.92.

Jim's relationship with the crabs is ambiguous. Although he desires to rid his body of the crabs, he insinuates that he also enjoys his relationship with them. He says, "I've had crabs for about ten years now and it gets worse every year. They breed very fast. It's nice though. It's like having two bodies to feed" (p.129). Wilcox has observed that Jim's attitude towards the crabs demonstrates the contradictory manner in which subjects who have entered the Symbolic Order view the abject.

Although the abject, which threatens life, must be excluded, it must also be tolerated, for as the 'other' it also defines life. The abject in the form of body wastes, for example, is experienced as horrific and threatening to the integrity of the subject who has gained access to the (paternal) symbolic order and therefore construes (or rather misconstrues) his identity as a whole, complete, and in opposition to the other, the abject (not I); on the other hand, it fascinates and attracts precisely because it points back to a time of primal unity between subject, mother and nature, and a time when body wastes produced no shame.<sup>1</sup>

Since the crabs which attack Jim's body are an image of the abject and are associated with the female and the mother's body, Jim's contradictory attitude towards the crabs and the abject symbolises the contradictory attitude of male subjects who have entered the Symbolic Order towards the mother. The desire to maintain one's place in the Symbolic Order (which the infant is only able to enter if the desire for the mother is sacrificed) is coupled with a concomitant desire to return to that period of development where the mother and the infant existed in a harmonious relationship. In Red Cross these contradictory desires are expressed through the Maid, who represents a mother figure, and Jim, who has entered the Symbolic Order, and experiences conflicting desires to remain in the Symbolic Order and also to return to the pre-Oedipal stage of development or to the womb of the mother. Wilcox comments that the Maid is able to represent the mother figure since the stage directions which describe her character emphasise her maternal nature. Shepard writes, "A Maid appears on the porch through the screen door, holding two pillows, sheets and bedspreads in her arms, she is rather fat and older than Jim" (p.126). Jim represents the male subject who has entered the Symbolic Order since he demonstrates that he is threatened by the abject and attempts to exert control over the female body which threatens him.

As Wilcox has also noted, Jim's desire to return to the womb of the mother and to the pre-Oedipal stage of development, where the infant exists in harmony with the mother, is expressed in his fantasy about night swimming.<sup>2</sup>

JIM:           It's really better at night. You'd be surprised the way it changes. All the different sounds and the air gets wetter. Sometimes it rains. That's the best time for swimming. When it rains. That way you get completely wet. A constant wetness.... Your body stays warm inside.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire," p.111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.115.

It's just the outside that gets wet. (p.132)

Jim's use of water symbolism and his desire to swim in the forest at night time all point towards an association with the mother and the female body. "Immersion in water signifies a return to the preformal state."<sup>1</sup> The forest symbolism "is connected at all levels with the symbolism of the female principle or the Great Mother."<sup>2</sup> Jim's desire to swim at night time is also connected to his desire to resume his relationship with the female body since night time is related to the "passive principle, the feminine and the unconscious."<sup>3</sup>

Jim's actions and language express the conflicting desires which plague male subjects who have entered the Symbolic Order. On the one hand he expresses the repressed desire to return to a relationship with the mother's body, but on the other, he perceives the female and the mother's body as a threat to his ability to maintain his place in the Symbolic Order. It is for this reason that he seeks to control the female body by subjecting the Maid, who represents the mother, to what Kristeva terms "rituals of defilement."<sup>4</sup> Kristeva theorises that "rituals of defilement" usually take the form of religious rituals and are executed because the male subject fears that the mother will engulf his entire being.

This is precisely where we encounter the rituals of defilement and their derivatives, which, based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the maternal, attempt to symbolize the threat to the subject: that of being swamped ... thereby risking the loss of ... the totality of his living being. The function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother.<sup>5</sup>

Wilcox has observed that Jim partakes in a type of "ritual of defilement" when he gives the Maid a swimming lesson in order to ward off "the inviting maternal figure and ... to point to the ... paternal law of the phallus and the symbolic order."<sup>6</sup> The Maid is subjected to Jim's orders, which are shouted in the language of the Symbolic Order. This language is composed of the "Father's rules, laws and definitions."<sup>7</sup>

JIM:                   The kicking is important. You have to keep your legs straight and kick from the waist. No bending the knees. And the arms too.

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.364.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.228.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p.64. Quoted by Leonard Wilcox in "Language and Desire," p.116.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.116.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire," p.116.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism, p.109.

Once the arm hits the water on the downsweep, you have to keep it straight. No bending from the elbow. (p.132)

Jim enacts the ritual of the swimming lesson in order to avoid the threat of returning to a symbolically incestuous relationship with the mother and to the stage of development where the mother's body was utilised to obtain oral gratification, yet his words are able to demonstrate that he experiences the swimming lesson as if he were committing a sexual act with the Maid, who represents the mother.

JIM: It's no sweat. Keep it up. You can't poop out in the middle of a lake. Stroke! Stroke! Keep it moving. One, two. One, two. 'Atta girl.  
 MAID: It's my back. There's a pain in my back.  
 (She continues to swim, Jim goes faster.)  
 JIM: That's good. It's good when it hurts. It's working then. Keep it up! We've almost got it. Hup, two! Hup, two!  
 MAID: It really aches, Jim.  
 JIM: That's all right. We're halfway already.  
 MAID: I'll never make it! My back.  
 JIM: Use it all. Everything at once. Make it work. One, two. One, two.  
 (He is going very fast with perfect coordination.)  
 In, out. In, out. Breathe! Breathe! (pp.133-134)

Although, during the swimming lesson, Jim is attempting to ward off the possibility that he might engage in an incestuous union with the mother figure, his words exactly mimic the action which he fears and is attempting to suppress. "Freud argues that obsessive rituals repeat the very acts that they are thought to neutralize."<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Jim's "ritual of defilement" is enacted in order to suppress his desire for the mother and all that she represents.

The Maid at first responds to Jim's orders by assuming "a variety of roles of the abject: the hysteric, the menstrual woman, the woman beset by Freud's 'housewife neurosis.'"<sup>2</sup> After the swimming lesson is over, however, the Maid appears to retaliate and she rejects Jim's view of the mother as representing a threat. Her speech refers to the infant's blissful relationship with the mother while she/he is in the mother's womb.

MAID: You move through the water like you were born in that very same place and never knew what land was like. You dive and float and sometimes rest on the bank and maybe chew on some watercress.... and you forget all about swimming lessons and just swim without knowing how. (p.165)

Although the Maid's speech is a rare representation of a female viewpoint in Shepard's plays, it actually serves to reinforce Jim's desire to return to the womb of the mother, which contradicts his simultaneous view of the mother as a force which threatens to engulf him. The female

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<sup>1</sup> Maud Ellman, "Eliot's Abjection," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and John Fletcher, p.179.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire," p.115.

viewpoint is thus expressed, but it neatly coincides with one aspect of a male viewpoint.

Certain critics have seen the Maid's speech as a victory for the maternal world in the battle between the maternal world and the paternal Symbolic Order. Wilcox sees the Maid's speech as follows:

The maid's speech is such a stunning turn in the play's direction because it undercuts Jim's masculine, 'thetic' world of organizing experience discursively, of naming and instruction giving, of struggle and mastery ... and transforms it into a maternal underwater world, a preverbal world of instinctual drives where the jouissance of death and rebirth is co-extensive with nature and seasonal change.... We are left with a powerful image of the oceanic mother whose generative and procreative principles lie outside patriarchal constructs and outside the law.<sup>1</sup>

A closer look at the Maid's speech, however, reveals that she moves from being in her underwater maternal world to existing in the paternal Symbolic Order. The Maid's speech represents an expression of the consequences for female subjects who are forced to sacrifice their relationship with the mother and take their place in the Symbolic Order. We are in actual fact left with an image of a woman whose instinctual drives and unconscious desires are repressed in a world where language is unable to express them.

MAID: ... and before you know it the winter has come and the lake has frozen and you sit on the bank staring at the ice You don't move at all. You just sit very still staring at the ice until you don't feel a thing. Until your flippers freeze to the grass and you stay like that for a very long time until summer comes around. (p.136-137)

The underwater world which the Maid previously refers to represents the maternal world which the infant inhabits prior to her/his entry into the Symbolic Order, while the world above the ice refers to the Maid's experience of existing in the Symbolic Order. Even though the Maid "glides to safety on the shore," (p.136), she experiences her ability to express herself as being "frozen." (p.137). The Maid inhabits the paternal world above the ice where her instinctual desires are stultified.

In Red Cross, Shepard allows the Maid to triumph over Jim, as she overturns his attempt to dominate her, only to have her switch almost imperceptibly to existing submissively in the Symbolic Order. Shepard's pattern of allowing a female character to state her viewpoint and challenge an aspect of the male characters' views, and then to conclude his plays by reinstating the male characters' authority reappears in Cowboy Mouth, Fool for Love, and A Lie of the Mind. At the end of Red Cross a stream of blood runs down Jim's forehead. This is an image of the abject that is able to signify that Jim's identity has indeed been engulfed by a symbol of the abject which is associated with the female body and the mother.

It can be argued that in Red Cross, Shepard merely criticises the manner in which men

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Wilcox, "Language and Desire", pp.117-118.

associate women with the abject as well as the manner in which they attempt to dominate and control women. Such a view could be arrived at if one superficially observes the manner in which the Maid reacts against and criticises Jim's attempts to dominate her. However, Shepard allows the Maid to criticise Jim's attempts to control her, only to manipulate her so that, minutes later, she is in a subordinate position when she describes the entrapment she experiences in the Symbolic Order. The Maid's expression of the fact that women are unable to exist in the Symbolic Order other than in a way in which their instinctual desires are stultified and frozen, serves to foreground the authority of the Symbolic Order and not to deconstruct it. In Red Cross, Shepard is unable to criticise men's behaviour because he presents the play from a perspective which enables the audience to view women, and the symbols which represent them, from a patriarchal gaze, thus enabling the audience to clearly understand the manner in which the male character views women, and also to comprehend Jim's conflicting desires. The audience are positioned to sympathise with men's predicaments, rather than to criticise their actions.

The final image of the play, the blood which runs down Jim's forehead, can also be interpreted as Shepard's attempt to demonstrate the power of the abject and therefore, symbolically, of women. This interpretation would still, however, ensure that the image is presented from a male viewpoint since in the play it is the male character who views the abject and the female body as a powerful, but destructive force.

It has been said of Shepard's plays that his endings are always ambiguous<sup>1</sup>, yet it is my premise that they clearly state his views. The male characters' authority and their view of women and the symbols which represent them are reasserted time and again.

#### Fourteen Hundred Thousand

Fourteen Hundred Thousand reveals another display of a battle between the maternal and paternal worlds. The play dramatises the conflicting desires of subjects who have entered the Symbolic Order and who unconsciously desire to return to the womb of the mother or the pre-Oedipal stage of development, while simultaneously fear being engulfed by the mother. In the play the subjects' movement from the pre-verbal stage of development to entering the Symbolic Order, where the desire for the mother is replaced by the acquisition of language, is symbolised by the characters' actions which include bringing piles of books onto stage and attempting to build a bookcase in which to contain them. The theme of obliteration in the play, which manifests itself in the characters' expressed fears about becoming extinct, can be related to their fear of being engulfed by the mother.

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<sup>1</sup>David Savran, "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison: Action and the Unseen Hand," Theatre Journal, 36 (March 1984), 72.

In Fourteen Hundred Thousand, the snow, because of its similarities to water, can be read as a symbol of the mother. It is presented as having the ability to engulf both individuals and houses, and represents the characters' perception of the mother as an engulfing, threatening force. In the play, all the characters are utilised to express the view that the mother is a being who threatens the male subject's position within the Symbolic Order. This creates the impression that the play is presented from a male perspective. Although Mom does express the viewpoint that gaining entry into the Symbolic Order leads to a type of death experience, since the desire for the mother is suppressed, she is not able to represent a positive image of a mother figure which would enable Tom's vision of the mother as a destructive force, to be counteracted. Donna also expresses various views which involve her moving from being satisfied with her position in the Symbolic Order to regretting all she has had to relinquish to enter this Order, but she is mainly utilised to express Jim's fear that the female body, or the mother has the ability to threaten a male subject's position within the Symbolic Order. Although Donna uses this fear of Tom's to construct a fantasy in which she tells him he will regress to a state of non-differentiation, where the boundaries of his body are not defined, in order to threaten him and react to his attempt to dominate her, her character is still a representation of women which implies that they are, in fact, what Tom perceives them to be - a powerful, but threatening force. The ending of the play clearly expresses the fear that the mother is an engulfing, threatening force, since devouring images are associated with symbols which represent the mother. These devouring and engulfing images, which are projected onto the mother symbols by the characters, help to create a lasting impression that the male dread of women and the mother is valid.

The fear of being engulfed by the mother is most clearly expressed by the character, Tom. His unsuccessful attempt to build a bookcase represents his unstable position within the Symbolic Order because entry into this order is marked by an individual's ability to learn and contain language and, since the bookcase, which is a structure which contains books that in turn are comprised of words and language, continually collapses, it is able to symbolise that Tom's position within the Symbolic Order is also precarious. When Tom asks Ed to finish building the bookcase for him, Ed refuses, claiming that he has to return to working on his cabin before the snowfall becomes so heavy that he will not be able to enter it. Since "mystics have always traditionally considered the feminine aspects of the universe as ... a house," and since there is "the association of the house with the human body, especially regarding its openings," Ed's desire to return to his cabin can be interpreted as a desire to return to a representative of the feminine aspect of the universe and to an opening in the human body.<sup>1</sup> Ed, therefore, symbolically desires to return to the womb of the mother.

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.153.

Tom reveals that he experiences Ed's desire to symbolically return to the womb of the mother as threatening because he fears being engulfed by the mother. Tom uses Ed's stated desire to work on fixing up his cabin to mock the protective and nurturing abilities of the mother, while the child is in the womb, in order to ward off his own fears of returning to the womb and regressing to a state of being nurtured and protected by the mother because this would also involve returning to a place where the boundaries of his body would collapse. His precarious, threatened position within the Symbolic Order leads him to fantasise that the snow, which represents the mother figure, and hail and sleet will surround and engulf the cabin.

ED: I have to finish the cabin before it snows. (Ed stands as though to leave.)

TOM: (Without turning) And it does snow up there! boy, oh boy, the way it can snow when it wants to. A little tiny, eety, beety, teeny, weeny cabin like yours in the midst of a raging blizzard. In the midst of hail and snow and sleet. Calling out for some insulation. Calling for someone to warm its little hearth and seal up its cracking paint. Run to its side before it's too late! Run to its aid and attention.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the white snow is represented as an engulfing force is echoed by Donna's bringing in white paint which she wants to use to cover or envelop the bookcase.

Each of the characters' feelings towards the books reflects their attitude towards the Symbolic Order. Tom demonstrates that he finds it very difficult to relinquish his place in the Symbolic Order. He says, "At times I've found myself very briefly getting very attached to books. Very emotionally attached. Like you would with a pet dog. It becomes something that's very hard to give up." (p.106). As Mom enters with a pile of books, she reveals that she has found gaining entry into and maintaining her place in the Symbolic Order exhausting.

MOM: Whew! It's such a long way up. It's like climbing three or four mountains in succession. It's also very much like rowing a rowboat in a rowboat race or running many miles over rough terrain in the freezing coldness. My goodness. Dearie. (p.106)

Mom's speech is reminiscent of Jim's speech in Red Cross in which he describes his devotion to physical exercise, which is a discipline which he engages in, in order to be constantly aware of the boundaries of his body, to maintain his place in the Symbolic Order and to ward off his fear of sinking back into the mother's body.

Although Donna attempts to express to her mother the benefits of having gained entry into the Symbolic Order, Mom asserts the fact that gaining entry into this paternal Symbolic Order, with its language which is comprised of the laws of the father, results in a type of death experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Fourteen Hundred Thousand, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.104. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

- DONNA: It's worth it though, Mom. When they're all stacked in and divided into topical categories, it's really a sight to see.
- MOM: Oh indeed. Libraries fascinate me to death. Like ancient tapestry of chinese urns or butterfly collections that I've seen in the past. Many times. Goodness yes. (pp.106-107)

Donna's fantasy about Ed's cabin further expresses her opinions on the benefits of existing in the Symbolic Order, where the subject is separated from the mother and operates in a self sufficient manner. She says of the cabin,

- DONNA: And somehow it maintains itself all year round. Somehow it adapts itself to every change in the weather and turns on its own lights at night and then turns them off again in the morning. It even flushes its own toilet and builds its own fires and makes its little bed. There's no footprints around it at all. Just buried one quarter of the way in snow, and smoke coming out of its chimney. Just sitting there in a small clearing about half a mile from a frozen lake. A Christmas house. (p.110)

Donna's reference to a frozen lake, which Ed tells her doesn't exist, is reminiscent of the frozen lake in Red Cross, which separates the maternal underwater world from the paternal Symbolic Order above the ice.

Donna's position within the Symbolic Order leads her to threaten Ed with the fact that his desire to return to his cabin, which symbolically represents his desire to return to the womb, will result in imminent death. This allows the mother, once again, to be symbolically associated with death and destruction.

- DONNA: Well how will you stay there all year round if you don't have a chimney?
- ED: Who says I'm staying?
- DONNA: You did. You told me that.
- ED: I might.
- DONNA: You will. I can tell you will. You won't ever come back once you get all moved in. (p.110)

As the play progresses, Donna symbolically expresses her regret for suppressing her desire for the mother in order to enter the Symbolic Order. She remembers that when she was a child, her father talked about having a "Christmas house," and says, "Pop used to talk about a house like that when I was a girl and he was a father. How come you stopped thinking of that house, Pop?" (p.111). Since the house is traditionally associated with the feminine aspect of the universe and with openings in the human body, Donna's dissatisfaction with the fact that the house was forgotten and never talked about in her later life symbolises her regret that her desire for the mother was relinquished and forgotten in order for her to enter the Symbolic Order. She also says to her father, "How could it happen like that? I mean so easily. Without any regrets. To start hauling books for your very own daughter" (p.111). Donna's words can be interpreted as her questioning her father as to why he aided her in gaining entry into the Symbolic Order.

As Donna becomes unconcerned with the wonders of the Symbolic Order, she becomes disinterested in finishing the bookcase. She is no longer fascinated with the visual symbols of the Symbolic Order.

- TOM: We can't leave it plain no matter how you look at it. We bought the paint already.
- DONNA: That doesn't matter now. The color's unimportant. (She gets down off the stool and crosses to the pile of books that Tom brought in, she picks a few of the books up; she turns as though to go back to the bookcase, Tom stands with the paintbrush in his hand.)
- TOM: Just leave the books where they are.  
(Donna stops and faces Tom, her arms full of books.)
- DONNA: Look. I don't give a damn anymore about how it looks.
- TOM: That's just too bad. We started it now we'll finish. (p.112)

Since the unfinished bookcase represents for Tom his unstable position within the Symbolic Order, he becomes obsessed with completing it.

- TOM: It's become essential. It's become overpowering to me. Coloring every moment of my waking hours. I wake up thinking of this bookcase and I sleep dreaming of it. I walk around with the smell of it in my nose and I can see it in the future. I have a picture in my head of what it might become and I plan to fulfil that picture if it's the last thing I do. (pp.112-113)

Tom and Donna's fight symbolises a battle between the maternal world of the pre-Symbolic stage of development and the Symbolic Order. In this battle, however, the maternal world is represented as being a terrifying stage of development to return to and is portrayed as a place where the boundaries of the body and those between the self and others dissolve. Tom tries to assert the superiority of the Symbolic Order and emphasises his skill with words.

- DONNA: You've become very definite very fast.  
(She moves slowly toward the second paintbrush as Tom stalks her, holding the brush in front of him like a weapon.) ...  
Right on top, as they say.
- TOM: Exactly.
- DONNA: Must be nice.
- TOM: It is. I feel right at home in any situation. I baffle everyone around me and I'm known for my wit. (p.113)

Donna retaliates and threatens Tom with his greatest fear: regressing to the pre-Oedipal stage of development where the boundaries of the body are indistinct. She constructs a fantasy in which Tom's body is not differentiated from his surroundings, and in which he is unable to separate himself from objects such as pus, urine, tears and faeces.

- DONNA: You'll fall back into it again. Wait and see. You'll sleep for days, afraid to get up. You'll wet your bed.... Prone on your back forever and ever. You'll cry to be read to. You'll want a bedtime story twenty-four hours a day. And no light. I'll have to read to you with a flashlight tucked under my arm. The room will be dark and you'll whimper until you fall asleep.
- TOM: It could never happen now! (They charge and viciously paint each

other with the brushes, they back away; they are both covered with white paint by now.)

DONNA: All you'll have is a tiny little glimmer of your present excitement. The rest will have gone and you'll lie there forever, trying to get it back. The bed will be your house and home and your head will be glued to the pillow. Your arms will be stuck to the sheet and your legs will be paralysed from the hip down. You can't turn your head because you drool from the mouth and pus will run out your nose. Your eyes will fill up with water and pour over onto your cheeks and each ear hums from hearing nothing. You lie in pools of urine and feces for days on end until the bed and you become one thing. One whole thing and there's no way of telling where the bed stops and you begin. You smell the same, you look the same, you act the same, you are the same. (pp.114-115)

Although Donna is reacting to Tom's claims of the superiority of the Symbolic Order and his ability to use words, by threatening him that he will return to the pre-Symbolic stage of development and to the stage of development before toilet training has occurred, her speech results in the maternal, pre-Symbolic world being constructed as a terrifying stage of development. In Donna's fantasy, Tom's inability to separate himself from various objects symbolises his inability to disassociate himself from the mother, which enables the mother to be symbolically represented as a powerful force that threatens the subject's perception of her/his body's boundaries. The fact that the mother is perceived as the being which threatens to engulf the male subject and threaten his position within the Symbolic Order is symbolised by the fact that Tom and Donna are both covered with white paint, which has already been associated with the snow which symbolises the engulfing mother.

Donna's fantasy initiates the movement of regression in the play. This movement is made manifest by the fact that all the characters, except Ed, speak together as if they were one person, which symbolises that the boundaries between the self and others have collapsed. When Ed returns to the room, he tries to regulate the image of engulfment. He says, "There's not so many books down there as you had me believe. I mean by the way you were talking anybody would think you were flooded with books. But there's just a few. A couple more trips and you'll have it done" (p.113, emphasis mine). Ed, is however unable to combat the movement towards regression, and the boundaries between himself and the other characters collapse as he narrates the story about the snow with the other characters. The narrated story contains an image of the snow, which represents the mother, engulfing a community of people, which links the image of the devouring mother to the collapse of boundaries between the characters. Mom and Pop say, "It got thicker and thicker and covered all the trees.... It got so bad that they had to climb a hill and watch from the top while their houses disappeared" (p.116).

The snow story continues the theme of extinction in Fourteen Hundred Thousand. This theme appears in virtually all of Shepard's early plays. In Chicago it is expressed when Stu fantasises

about the community that developed as a result of the mating between the sailors and the beach virgins. As soon as they build a house, they begin making rugs until the whole house is covered.

STU: They start screaming all together because they can't breathe. On account of the rugs.... And they come out.... They don't say anything. They don't even breathe. They just walk in a line. Down to the beach. They walk across the beach and right into the water. One behind the other. They just keep walking until you can't see them anymore.<sup>1</sup>

As in Fourteen Hundred Thousand, the theme of extinction in Chicago is highlighted by Shepard, by means of using symbols which represent the mother to symbolise a destructive, engulfing force. In Chicago, the sea which represents the mother, since "to return to the sea is to return to the mother," is portrayed as swallowing the community of people and results in a representation of mothers which associates them with death.<sup>2</sup>

At the conclusion of the snow story, all the characters hum "White Christmas" while they dismount the set and remove virtually all the props from the stage, creating the impression that they are returning to the beginning of the play and, symbolically, regressing. The visual enactment of regression coincides with Mom and Pop's reading aloud of a dialogue from scripts in which a radial city and a linear one are contrasted. The image of cities symbolically associates the mother with the movement of regression which is visually dramatised, since, "The city is a Maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children."<sup>3</sup>

The radial city can be associated with a circle which "symbolises the return to unity from multiplicity."<sup>4</sup> The radial city, therefore, symbolically represents the unity between the mother and child prior to a child's birth, as well as the pre-Oedipal relationship between the mother and the infant, during which the infant does not perceive there to be any differentiation between her/himself and the mother. Mom and Pop at first insinuate that the linear city is more ideal than the radial one, symbolically rejecting a return to the womb or to the pre-Oedipal stage of development. Their description of living in the linear city, however, which is at first presented as a desirable alternative to the radial city, involves an expression of the constant threat of engulfment and extinction as the boundaries which are erected between different linear cities grow smaller and smaller.

MOM: Elevated cities suspended under vacuum air.  
 POP: Forming two-mile squares in between.  
 MOM: Cities enclosed in glass to see the sky.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Chicago, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.57.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.281.

<sup>3</sup> C.J. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p.208.

<sup>4</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp.46-47.

POP:           Forming one-mile squares.  
MOM:          Cities in the sky to see the glass.  
POP:           Forming squares in between. (p.119)

Since the construction of linear cities is associated with being threatened by engulfment, the linear cities can be said to symbolise the Symbolic Order. Mom and Pop's descriptions of the two types of cities, neither of which are entirely satisfactory, express the fact that male subjects within the Symbolic Order unconsciously desire to return to the womb of the mother or to the pre-Oedipal stage of development, but are also terrified of returning to a state where the boundaries of the body become blurred and of having their identities within the Symbolic Order engulfed.

In his early plays, Shepard's female characters are utilised to express male desires and fears. This ensures that the plays are presented from a male perspective. Female viewpoints which might enable "women as women" to be represented are silenced.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Gledhill, "Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism," in Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, ed. Mary Anne Doane, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1984), p.40.

CHAPTER 2: IMPOSSIBLE TRANSFORMATION IN CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS

Curse of the Starving Class is the first of Sam Shepard's full-length family dramas. The play reflects the manner in which greedy capitalist land-owners destroy the average person's struggle to survive, and the way that Americans have become more interested in making money out of land than in respecting it. Shepard presents a family that is struggling to survive in a world where the values of the past and the practice of living in harmony with the environment have been abandoned. The members of the family all suffer from a lack of nurture. They are spiritually and emotionally impoverished and appear to be cursed. They all long to transform their lives in some way. Shepard, however, is persistent in expressing, through his characters, the desire to escape confining situations, and yet in suppressing the possibilities of their doing so. He rules out all the possibilities which might enable his characters to succeed in transforming their lives, since even when Weston undergoes a transformation, the rest of the world will not allow him to transcend his imprisoning circumstances. As Wesley says, "They've got it worked out so you can't."<sup>1</sup> In the play, the family are doomed to continue living a meaningless existence in a world where rituals have lost the ability to bring about effective rebirth and regeneration, and only result in causing degeneration.

Within Shepard's attempt to suppress the possibility that the family in Curse of the Starving Class might be able to transcend their debilitating circumstances, can be seen a suppression of the female characters' potential to transform their lives that is much more severe than that in the male characters. Shepard stresses the male characters' capacities to transform their lives, and, even though the transformations which occur in their lives are ultimately ineffective or negative, they are able to give the appearance of being much more complete characters than the female characters. The transformations which occur in the female characters only appear to happen as a result of Weston's transformation. Shepard also presents the female characters' abilities to produce and nurture offspring in a negative light, and connects the female characters to the "curse" which plagues the family. The female characters are indirectly blamed for continuing to produce individuals who are spiritually and emotionally impoverished. Furthermore, only the male characters are seen to express a desire to resume a relationship with the land. The female characters are created as being unable to respect the land or to exist in a harmonious relationship with it. They are far more concerned with using the land for their own selfish purposes.

There are two movements which can be identified in Curse of the Starving Class. The first relates to Shepard's presentation, through his male characters, of a longing to reclaim the values

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Curse of the Starving class, in Seven Plays, p.193. (All further references to this play are quoted in the text.)

of the past, to return to a relationship with the land. The second is connected to Shepard's desire to subvert tradition by striving to revolutionise traditional realistic theatre. In traditional realistic theatre, audiences are often able to identify with characters, but in Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard creates female characters whose personalities are ambiguous and whose behaviour continually contradicts their previous actions or words, which makes audience members' abilities to identify with the female characters difficult. Shepard's desire to dismantle tradition is apparent in his attempt to create female characters who do not behave in ways which include stereotypical feminine behaviour. Ella, the mother figure, does not engage in looking after her family on a full time basis and can be seen to behave in a manner which does not embrace the stereotypically feminine roles of helpmate and homemaker. However, these qualities in Ella allow her to appear as a negative representation of women, as she prefers to cater to her own selfish needs and to ignore the needs of her family in the process. Since her character is ambiguous, she is also able to behave in a stereotypically feminine manner. When she does not have a man supporting her, she crumbles and loses all her strength. Emma, her daughter, is at first only able to dream about behaving in ways which do not include stereotypically feminine behaviour and her actual behaviour involves submitting herself to male dominance. When she eventually transforms and begins to behave like a male cowboy, she is presented as being unable to survive. Shepard suppresses the possibility that his female characters might positively demonstrate the benefits of behaving in ways which do not include stereotypical behaviour.

The female characters are ultimately reminiscent of traditional representations of women since their behaviour reinforces patriarchal attitudes that women who don't look after their children are not performing their "jobs" correctly, and that women are unable to survive when they do not have a male protector catering to, caring for, and dominating them. Shepard's construction of female characters, therefore, highlights the contradictions in his plays. His desire to dismantle tradition results in an attempt to create non-stereotypical female characters, but his desire to reclaim the values of the past results in the creation of female characters who represent women in the same manner as they have been portrayed in the past - as being inferior to men. "Shepard rebels against and subverts the system only to fall back in panic upon the very structures which he undermines."<sup>1</sup>

Ella is created as being an ineffective mother figure. She appears to be periodically concerned about her children, but her actions continually belie that concern. This results in her giving the impression of being a strangely ambivalent character.

Sometimes she is the concerned mother looking out for her children; other times

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<sup>1</sup> David Savran, "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison: Action and the Unseen Hand," Theatre Journal, 36 (March 1984), 72.

she is the selfish woman embittered by all she has missed in life. At one moment she is concerned about the danger to Emma in taking a wild horse, and the next she is complacent about it since she does not want to bother herself to go look.<sup>1</sup>

Ella reveals herself to be an incapable nurturer when she takes her daughter Emma's chicken to feed herself. Emma had been looking after it to use it for her demonstration on how to prepare a chicken at her 4-H club. Ella manages to eat breakfast unperturbed by her children's crises. She appears to be the concerned mother when she tells her daughter about menstruation, but demonstrates that she is an inadequate nurturer since she lies about it.

ELLA: But I want you to know the truth. I want you to know all the facts before you go off and pick up a lot of lies. Now, the first thing is that you should never go swimming when that happens. It can cause you to bleed to death. The water draws it out of you. (p.139)

Ella's inability, or lack of desire, to adequately nurture her children may result in her character being viewed as a non-stereotypical representation of mothers since she does not take on the roles which are traditionally associated with motherhood. Ella's behaviour contrasts markedly with Shepard's creation of female characters who are created as capable nurturers, but who result in stereotypical representations of women. Oolan from Forensic and the Navigators is one of these women.

OOLAN: You boys should have told me what hour it was getting to be. Why, my goodness sakes, I look at the clock and the time is getting to be way past the time for your boys' breakfast. And you both know how uptight the two of you get when breakfast isn't just exactly when you get the most hungry. So here it is. Hot and ready.<sup>2</sup>

Although, unlike Oolan, Ella's behaviour does not include the stereotypical feminine role of homemaker, Shepard is not able to present her inability to adequately nurture her children as being a way in which she intentionally rejects the stereotypical roles of motherhood, or as a type of behaviour from which she is shown to benefit. Her inability to nurture her children is presented as a negative trait that, together with his negative representation of women's ability to give birth, results in a representation of women in which their abilities and power are suppressed. Shepard therefore refrains from making a comment that women might benefit from behaving in ways which do not involve taking on traditional feminine roles.

It is not only Ella who is presented as having a dual nature, but also Emma. Emma's adolescent stage in life allows her to speak both as an adult and a child.

Shepard can make Emma by turns wise - she sees that her mother is really looking for self-esteem - and foolish - she behaves impetuously.... In her adult voice Emma

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis R. Randall, "Adapting to Reality: Language in Shepard's Curse of the Starving Class," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, p.128.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, Forensic and the Navigators, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.158.

can carry on a mature conversation with her mother about the futility of their going to Europe. Ella seems to think that just getting away will solve all their problems; Emma can see they will carry their problems with them wherever they go.... But she can also be the conventionally bratty adolescent.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the female characters have dual natures can also be seen in the manner in which both of them are able to swing from appearing as assertive characters to placing themselves in subordinate positions to men. Emma's ability to be both wise and childish allows her to stand up to her mother and Taylor and to state quite clearly what she wants out of life, but she also backs down and is able to behave like a slave around her brother and her father. Ella is capable of plotting what she wants from her future, and confronting the various people who stand in her way, but the play reveals that her assertiveness can be attributed to her being encouraged by Taylor. When she loses his support, her assertiveness dissolves. The ambiguities within the female characters' natures represent Shepard's contradictory impulses to express, on the one hand, the desire and potential of his female characters to disrupt traditional feminine roles, but, on the other hand, to suppress their chances of being able to do so.

His [Shepard's] writing always enacts a struggle between the entrapment of the past and the desire for escape (a desire, however, which never transforms into a positive anticipation of another kind of world.) As a result his plays are situated, both synchronically and diachronically, in the conceptual space defined on the one hand by the appropriation of tradition and, on the other, by the attempt to destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

Shepard's female characters demonstrate their desire to escape tradition when they strive to behave in ways which explode the traditional view that women are submissive, but they demonstrate the impossibility of escape when they fail to become truly autonomous characters, or when their acquired assertiveness fails to enable them to authentically destroy stereotypical representations of women. Shepard's insistence on suppressing the very possibilities he presents in the female characters results in the fact that Ella only appears to be assertive, but is in actual fact dependant on men, and the fact that Emma is unable to use the assertiveness that she eventually acquires to transform her life positively or to deconstruct stereotypical notions about women.

The dual nature of the female characters in Curse of the Staving Class provides Shepard with the potential for creating very strong female characters. John Timpane notes of Tennessee Williams's female characters:

Those characters, especially his women, call on the viewer to regard a true pluralism of possibilities - which almost always include ambivalence and repulsion. Female characters in Williams's dramas are deliberately constructed to arouse these two feelings in the audience.... I must ... define what constitutes a worthy characterization of women. First, it does not seem necessary that she be written

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis R. Randall, "Adapting to Reality," p.123.

<sup>2</sup> David Savran, "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison," p.68.

to a program - that is, that she have any required attributes at all. What does seem necessary is that there be a wide range of "play" in the character.... The object of this "play" will be the feelings the written woman evokes. She should not be subject to complete consumption - that is, some of her attributes should escape paraphrase or easy reconciliation. To insist on such a play is to insist that the written woman not be prejudicially reduced, over-simplified, or idealized.<sup>1</sup>

Williams, himself, comments on the necessity of ambiguity in the construction of characters. He says, "Some mystery should be left in the revelation of a character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of a character in life, even in one's own character to himself."<sup>2</sup>

Although Shepard's female characters have ambiguous natures that cannot be "easily reconciled," the manner in which the ambiguities in their natures manifest themselves prevent the female characters from being strong or truly interesting. The transitions in both Ella and Emma's natures are effected largely because they are influenced by male characters in a negative way, which reduces their strength as female characters. Ella's transitions from being assertive to being subordinate are directly related to her relationship with Taylor. At first it appears as if Ella is attempting to become self-sufficient, and actively trying to remove herself from her destructive relationship with Weston by planning to sell her house and go to Europe. Emma comments on Ella's subordinate role in her relationship with Weston.

EMMA: She doesn't want to be stuck out here in the boonies all her life.  
 WESLEY: She shoulda' thought of that a long time ago.  
 EMMA: She couldn't. Not with Pop. He wouldn't let her think. She just went along with things. (pp.160-161)

It is later revealed, however, that Ella is merely relying on one male to remove her from an entrapping situation with another. Her strength of purpose in desiring to change her life can be attributed to the fact that she believes she has Taylor's support. In Act III, Ella returns from her lunch date with Taylor, unafraid of Weston.

WESLEY: (quietly) I told you, you better not wake him up.  
 ELLA: I'm not tiptoeing around anymore. I'm finished with feeling like a foreigner in my own house. I'm not afraid of him anymore.  
 WESLEY: You should be. He's going to kill Taylor, you know.  
 ELLA: He's always going to kill somebody! Every day he's going to kill somebody! (p.173)

Later, however, when Ellis claims the house as his own, and Malcolm, the policeman, arrives to notify everyone that Emma has been arrested, Taylor sneaks away, and it becomes apparent that all of Ella's courage could be attributed to her support from Taylor. Without Taylor, Ella's strength appears to drain away from her. She says, "Everybody's running off. Even Mr. Taylor. Did

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<sup>1</sup> John Timpane, "Weak and Divided People: Tennessee Williams and the Written Woman," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> Tennessee Williams, "The Timeless World of a Play," in Where I Live: Selected Essays, ed. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods (New York: New Directions, 1978), p.72.

you hear the way he was talking to me. He was talking to me all different. All different than before. He wasn't nice at all" (pp.180-181). Therefore, the assertive aspects of Ella's character only occur because of her reliance on Taylor, and she is revealed to be a character who subordinates herself to one or other man at all times.

Taylor's desire to help Ella is directly related to his desire to swindle Weston. Taylor has previously sold Weston a completely useless piece of land, which Weston calls, "A real piece of shit. Just a bunch of strings on sticks, with the lizards blowing across it" (p.158). It seems highly likely that Taylor is helping Ella to sell her house and to leave Weston, because he views Weston as a rival whom he desires to swindle. The relationship between Taylor and Weston is an example of male homosocial desire which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines as "the whole spectrum of bonds between men, including friendship, mentorship, rivalry, institutional subordination, homosexual geniality, and economic exchange."<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Ella returns from her lunch-date with Taylor a day later suggests the possibility that they are romantically involved. This makes Taylor and Weston erotic rivals. Sedgwick also mentions that in his early book, Deceit, Desire and the Novel, René Girard explores the possibility that "in any erotic rivalry the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals of the beloved."<sup>2</sup>

The bonds of rivalry and love, differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.... Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival. In fact, Girard, sees the bond between rivals in any erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either the lovers and the beloved.<sup>3</sup>

Ella is desirable to Taylor not because she possesses various qualities that he is attracted to, but because of her position as the wife of Weston, who is Taylor's rival and whom Taylor desires to swindle. In Fool for Love, May claims that Eddie's desire for her also stems from a desire to defeat a rival. She says, "As soon as that's over you'll be gone again."<sup>4</sup>

With the character of Emma, Shepard's creation of a female character appears to be stronger. Emma, however, is at first only assertive in her fantasy life. When Taylor asks her whether she is frightened to live in her house with her father and his temper, she claims she is unafraid. She says, "No, the fear lies with the ones who carry the stuff in their blood, not the ones who don't" (p.152).

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Shepard, Fool for Love (New York: City Lights Books, 1983), p.35.

In reality, however, she is terrorised by her father.

WESTON: (staggering) I gotta sit down.  
(He stumbles toward table and sits at stage right end. Emma stands)  
WESTON: (to Emma) Sit down! Sit back down! Turn off those artichokes!  
(p.165. Emphasis mine)

Emma appears to be a strong female character because in her fantasy life she rejects traditional feminine roles. For example, she wants to work on fishing boats.

EMMA: Deep-sea fishing. Helping businessmen haul in huge swordfish and barracuda. I was going to work my way along the coast, stopping at all the little towns, speaking Spanish. I was going to learn to be a mechanic and work on four-wheel-drive vehicles that broke down. Transmissions. I could've learned to fix anything. Then I'd learn how to be a short-order cook and write novels on the side. In the kitchen. Kitchen novels. Then I'd get published and disappear into the heart of Mexico. Just like that guy.  
(p.149)

Shepard is obviously suggesting that Emma is disrupting stereotypically feminine behaviour since he contrasts Emma's fantasy with Ella's view of how women should behave. Ella says, "Snap out of it, Emma. You don't have that kind of background to do jobs like that. That's not for you, that stuff. You can do beautiful embroidery; why do you want to be a mechanic?" (p.149). While Emma might be able to fantasise about behaving in ways which involve non-stereotypically feminine behaviour, she desires to take on a stereotypically masculine role. She would like to base her life on the male author W.B. Trellis. As Bonnie Marranca notes, "The one character written by Shepard who comes close to rebelling against female stereotypes is Emma in Curse of the Starving Class, but she is written as a tomboy.... Rebellion and individuality are given a specifically male character."<sup>1</sup>

Strong women in Shepard's dramas are replicas of Shepard's created male heroes. Although Emma is able to dream about behaving like a man, in her actual behaviour, she assumes a stereotypically feminine role in the face of her father's temper.

WESTON: (pushing laundry to one side) She didn't do any of this. It's the same as when I brought it. None of it!  
EMMA: I'll do it.  
WESTON: No, you won't do it! You let her do it! It's her job! What does she do around here anyway? Do you know? What does she do all day long? What does a woman do?  
EMMA: I don't know.  
WESTON: You should be in school.  
EMMA: It's all right if I do it. I don't mind doing it.  
WESTON: YOU'RE NOT DOING IT! (long silence). (p.166)

When Emma is threatened she also relies on her father's strength - not her own.

TAYLOR: Do you mind if I sit down?  
EMMA: I don't mind. My Dad might mind though.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Marranca, ed., "Alphabetical Shepard," in American Dreams, p.31.

TAYLOR: He's not at home is he?  
 EMMA: He might come home any second now. (p.152)

Since Emma's behaviour in her fantasy life is disassociated from her behaviour when with the male characters, Shepard fails to make a comment about the fact that women do not have to take on the stereotypical domestic and submissive roles which have traditionally been allotted to them. When she is around Wesley, Emma also takes on a stereotypically feminine role.

WESLEY: If you're not doing anything, would you check the artichokes?  
 EMMA: I am doing something.  
 WESLEY: What?  
 EMMA: I'm remaking my charts.  
 WESLEY: What do you spend your time on that stuff for? You should be doing more important stuff.  
 EMMA: Like checking artichokes.  
 WESLEY: Yeah!  
 EMMA: You check the artichokes. I'm busy.  
 WESLEY: You're on the rag.  
 EMMA: Don't get personal. It's not nice. You should have more consideration.  
 WESLEY: Just put some water in them, would you? Before they burn.  
 (Emma throws down her magic marker and crosses to the pot of artichokes). (p.162)

Shepard has Emma comply with Wesley's demand.

When Emma does succeed in asserting herself, outside the boundaries of her fantasy life, she behaves exactly like one of Shepard's male characters. When she and Wesley are thinking of ways to save the house, she thinks like Weston. She says, "We could occupy it. Dad's got a gun" (p.163). When Emma attempts to take control of her life, she transforms into a criminal. On horseback, she shoots up the Alibi Club, which is an action based on the myth of the cowboy who behaves according to his own laws, and later she ends up dead. Emma cannot be viewed as a strong female character since her powerful moments occur only when she is thinking or behaving like a man and she is unable to use this behaviour to transform her life positively.

Since Emma is created as being unable to benefit or survive from employing a type of behaviour which is modelled on a cowboy, Shepard is able to make a comment about the fact that a frontier style of behaviour is strictly for men, which reinforces the attitude that the frontier is a place where only men are able to survive. Her inability to utilise her physical prowess to effectively assert herself, also contrasts her to Shepard's male characters who are able to employ violence to win any battles. This can be seen as a way in which Shepard emphasises male superiority.

The creation of Emma's character and her behaviour might be seen to uphold the principles of Feminist Theatre because it demonstrates that women are able to take on what have traditionally been thought of as male roles.

Drama that embraces transformations inspires and asserts the possibility for

change; roles and roleplaying, not hidden essences, merit attention; we are what we do and what we become, and no-one, neither woman nor man, is restricted from becoming other.<sup>1</sup>

Shepard, however, does not succeed in creating a female character who is able to demonstrate that behaving in ways that do not involve stereotypically feminine behaviour are beneficial to women. At first, Emma is only able to disrupt stereotypically feminine behaviour in her fantasy life, and when she does behave like a man, her behaviour leads to her death in a shooting incident. Her transformation into behaving like a male character is not shown to empower or benefit her and is demonstrated to be ultimately negative. Shepard therefore undermines the goals of Feminist Theatre since he seems to be commenting on the negative consequences which occur when women attempt to behave like men.

Through Emma, Shepard stresses the notion that women are only able to survive if they behave in stereotypical ways, and reinforces the illusion that if they attempt to behave like cowboys on the frontier, they will get physically hurt. He creates representations of women which re-establish traditional American beliefs about women.

More vividly than any of his contemporaries, he [Shepard] addresses the deterioration of bourgeois American civilization through what appears to be a revolt against the forces of oppression.... In the end, however, his revolt is only a duplicitous mask for a theatre which longs nostalgically for the re-establishment of some comforting assurances and which reinforces and even glorifies the American past.<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis Savran's)

Emma's appearance of being a strong female character is enhanced by Shepard's creation of lengthy monologues for her. However, a closer look at the differences in language that Shepard employs in the creation of his male and female characters reveals his underlying attitudes to gender.

Wesley's reverie is a soliloquy of the young man as artist, vividly aware of what is going on inside himself as he hears his father coming home drunk, breaking down the door, yelling at his mother.... When he begins his reverie, he reports totally subjective sensations that can have meaning only through consciousness, a mind aware of itself experiencing. He smells the avocado blossoms, hears the coyotes, feels himself in bed, sees the model airplanes hanging above him suspended from the ceiling. The planes excite his imagination ... he becomes the enemy ... he becomes like an animal, listening intently.... With sharpened acuity he hears the Packard as his father comes home from his bout of drinking. Now the imagined details intertwined with reality.... This concentrated, rhythmic language, highly charged with sensory images of every sort, establishes Wesley as a budding poet, a creative sensibility.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Helene Keyssar, Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women (New York: Grove Press, 1985), p.xiv.

<sup>2</sup> David Savran, "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison," p.57.

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis R. Randall, "Adapting to Reality," p.126.

Weston, too, has expansive monologues. Although he does not achieve the level of introspection that Wesley does, he also talks about what is happening in his mind. His monologues are conversations with himself.

Emma's first long speech is a fantasy about her mother and Taylor's car breaking down. In her fantasy, she is the mechanic who fixes their car and swindles them. The language in Emma's monologue contrasts markedly to the language in the male characters' monologues.

Though it reveals Emma as an imaginative storyteller, the tale is of a totally different sort both from Wesley's reverie and from Weston's eagle story. Both men stress feelings and sensations; Emma stresses narrative.... Emma speaks in complete sentences, full of detail, but totally devoid of consciousness of self ... Emma's made-up fantasy solo about being a car mechanic in Mexico ... contrasts sharply with Wesley's solo. He, too, is imagining a scenario, just as Emma had, but he tells it with far more attention to style than to narrative, to language rather than to events.<sup>1</sup>

Although Shepard's female characters ultimately fail to disrupt stereotypical representations of women in a positive manner, and to escape the ties of the past, they are created as being unable to engage in a traditional relationship with the land. In Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard dramatises the manner in which American capitalists have lost their respect for the sacredness of the land and only use it as a money-making device. Although Shepard uses all of the characters to demonstrate the manner in which Americans have relinquished their relationship with the land, he emphasises his male characters' potential to reclaim it and his female characters' loss of respect for it.

Wesley constantly stresses his desire to remain on the farm and to work on the land. Weston succumbs to selling the land to Ellis, who wants to open up a steakhouse on the farm, but his character is ambiguous, and even when he is considering selling the land, he demonstrates that he cares for an inhabitant of the land, the lamb. After he undergoes a transformation, he reflects that he strongly desires to remain and to work on the land. In contrast, the female characters are created as having no respect for the land and the livestock on the farm. Emma kills the chicken, which Ella eats and does not exist in a harmonious relationship with the land or the livestock on the farm, as is demonstrated when the horse drags her "clear across the corral" (p.147). Ella is influenced by Taylor to use the land to gain money. She says, "everyone wants a piece of land. It's the only sure investment. It can never depreciate like a car or a washing machine. Land will double its value in ten years. In less than that" (p.146).

The negative representation of women, the need to present a strong female character in the form of a man, and the creation of a mother figure who is ambivalent about her role, are linked to Shepard's portrayal of the lack of nurture which the characters have received in Curse

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.131.

of the Starving Class, since this is blamed on the female characters. The slang word for menstruation, which is connected to a woman's ability to nourish her baby in the womb and her ability to give birth, is 'curse'. By utilising the pun on the word 'curse', Shepard ensures that women are connected to the curse which plagues his characters who are spiritually and emotionally impoverished and starved of sufficient nurture. Shepard implies that women's ability to produce offspring and their inability to nurture their children allow for a curse to continue to plague the starving class. Ella states that the curse which plagues the characters first manifests itself in the womb.

ELLA: Do you know what this is? It's a curse. I can feel it. It's invisible but it's there. It's always there. It comes onto us like nighttime. Every day I can feel it.... And it goes back. Deep. It goes back and back to tiny little cells and genes. To atoms. To tiny little swimming things making up their minds without us. Plotting in the womb. (pp.173-174. Emphasis mine)

The prevalent lack of nurture in Curse of the Starving Class is symbolised by the lack of food in the refrigerator. When Weston does bring home food it is in the form of artichokes which are extremely difficult to eat. It is also symbolised by the fact that Emma's chicken, which she raised "from the incubator to the grave," and which she fed on crushed corn every morning for a year, was nourished for the sole purpose of being killed. (p.140).

The characters' desire for feminine nurture is also linked to the fact that Ella takes on the role of an adulteress, which is suggested by the fact that she returns from her lunch date with Taylor a day later. Since she is a shared woman, she can also be perceived of as a whore. She symbolises the male characters' desire to return to a stage of development where the female body was perceived as a means of obtaining gratification. Although the male infant receives oral gratification from the mother, rather than the sexual gratification that the whore figure can induce, the whore figure nevertheless symbolises the male characters' desire to utilise the female body to obtain pleasure. Ella is one of the first "whore-wife-mother" figures who re-appear in Shepard's other family dramas.<sup>1</sup> The similarities between Shepard's creation of mother figures is marked. Ella bears a striking similarity to Halie from Buried Child. Both of them go out on a lunch date with men who are not their husbands and return the following day, which suggests that they commit adultery.

Since Ella represents for the male characters, the possibility that they might regress, she is perceived as a threat which needs to be controlled. The male characters seek to control women by assuming nurturing roles, which are traditionally thought of as female roles.

In order to understand the differences in the manner in which Shepard creates male and female

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<sup>1</sup> Florence Falk, "Men Without Women," p.100.

characters, it is important to observe the manifestation of the feminine archetype in the characters in Curse of the Starving Class. "In analytical psychology, the primordial image or archetype of the feminine has two characters which in their co-existence and antagonism are an essential part of the feminine as a whole. These are the elementary and the transformative characters of the Feminine."<sup>1</sup> In the female characters in the play, both the elementary and the transformative characters of the feminine archetype are not positively realised for a lengthy period of time, or in a dramatic manner. In contrast, the male characters in the play engage in a much more obvious and substantial realisation of the transformative and elementary characters of the feminine archetype.

"To nourish and protect, to keep warm and hold fast - these are the functions in which the Elementary Character of the Feminine operates."<sup>2</sup> All of the characters appear, at one time or another, to positively realise the elementary character of the feminine archetype. However, in each of the female characters this process occurs at only one point in the play, whereas in the male characters the realisation of the archetype is much more continuous. Furthermore, Shepard stresses only the male characters' nurturing behaviour. The only behaviour of Ella's which demonstrates a positive manifestation of the elementary character of the feminine archetype involves her buying groceries which Weston discovers on the morning of his rebirth. Not only does she seldom engage in nurturing behaviour, but she never benefits from, or succeeds in, receiving nurture from the other characters. Emma can be seen to, very briefly, positively manifest the elementary character of the feminine archetype when she agrees to cook the artichokes for Wesley, but her actions do not result in anybody being nurtured.

Shepard far more obviously stresses the nurturing capacities of his male characters than those of his female characters. Wesley is seen to be constantly engaged in looking after the lamb and to positively manifest the elementary character of the feminine archetype since he nourishes, protects and keeps the lamb warm. Even before he undergoes a transformation, Weston claims that he is the nourisher and nurturer in the household. He says, "I'm the one who brings home food!" (p.143). When Weston undergoes a transformation, his nurturing role is even more foregrounded. Not only does he cook and do the laundry (a task which Ella has refused to do and which Emma offers to do, but actually doesn't), but he wants to resurrect the orchard too. He is also seen to verbalise concern for the lamb. The elementary character of the feminine archetype is manifested in Weston's behaviour in a much more dramatic way than it is in the female characters.

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Neumann, The Great Mother (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1953), p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.30.

There are a number of ways in which Shepard contrasts the male characters transformational experiences to those of the female characters. First, the transformations that occur in the male characters' lives are far more dramatic than those which occur in the lives of the female characters. Secondly, although ultimately, the transformations which occur in all the characters lives are shown to be negative, Shepard emphasises the male characters' potential to realise the transformative character of the feminine archetype positively, and stresses the female characters' negative realisation of this archetype.

In the transformative character of the feminine archetype, "the accent is on the dynamic element of the psyche which, in contrast to the conservative tendency of the elementary character, drives towards motion, change, and in a word, transformation. The transformative character drives toward development; that is to say - it brings movement and unrest."<sup>1</sup>

Neumann states that there is a difference in the manner in which men and woman experience the transformative character of the feminine archetype.

We must distinguish between man's experience of this transformative character and the woman's experience of herself.... The transformation mysteries of the woman are primarily blood transformation mysteries that lead her to the experience of her own creativity.... Menstruation is the first blood transformation mystery.... The male experiences this aspect of the feminine directly and indirectly as provocative, as a force that sets him in motion and impels him towards change.... The anima ... is the man's own inner femininity and soulfulness, an element of his own psyche.... The anima is the vehicle par excellence of the transformative character. It is the mover, the instigator of change, whose fascination drives, lures and encourages the male to all adventures of the soul and spirit.... The transformative character of the anima ... sets the personality in motion, produces change and ultimately transformation.... But even when the transformative character of the feminine appears as a negative, hostile and provocative element, it compels tension, change and an intensification of personality.<sup>2</sup>

The transformative character of the feminine archetype is manifested negatively in the female characters in the play, since they are not able to positively experience their own transformative abilities and their own creativity in a positive manner. Menstruation, the first transformative mystery that Emma experiences, is presented as being a "curse", and a woman's ability to transform an egg into a human baby is also presented in a negative light. In Weston, although the transformation which occurs in his life is, ultimately, negative, and has severe consequences for every other member of his family, Shepard creates him as being able to, briefly, manifest the transformative character of the feminine archetype positively. He also creates Weston's transformation experience as being far more central to the play than the female characters' transformation experiences. Although Wesley does not manifest the transformative character of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p.18.

the feminine archetype positively, Shepard enables him to stress his belief that he is transforming himself and those around him.

Emma can only dream of being a transformer. She says, "I like cars. I like travel. I like the idea of people breaking down and I'm the only one who can help them get on the road again. It would be like being a magician. Just open up the hood and cast your magic spell" (p.149). Wesley, however, claims that he is a transformer when he pisses on his sister's charts and says, "I'm opening up new possibilities for her. Now she'll have to do something else. It could change her whole direction in life. She'll look back and remember the day her brother pissed all over her charts and see that day as a turning point in her life" (p.143).

The fact that Weston's transformation is created as being so central is demonstrated by the manner in which his transformation causes all the other characters to transform. The other members of Weston's family are negatively affected by Weston's positive transformation, since they all inherit aspects of Weston's former self after he undergoes a rebirth. Wesley, through wearing his father's clothes, appears to have taken on Weston's previous personality; Ella passes out on the kitchen table, which is something the audience have already seen Weston do; and Emma becomes a criminal. Shepard's failure to present his characters as being able to transform their lives effectively can be related to his desire to suppress the possibility of the family being able to escape their confining circumstances.

The lamb in Buried Child is also utilised to foreground and symbolise the male characters' experiences. The lamb, which is first infested with maggots and later shot, is traditionally thought of as a symbol of "unwarranted sacrifice".<sup>1</sup> In Christian theology Jesus Christ was constantly compared to a lamb.

O Lord, the only-begotten-Son Jesu Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.<sup>2</sup>

The lamb supposedly represents Christ and is sacrificed so that Weston transforms from sinner to saint. The lamb has throughout the play been associated with Wesley, since he looks after it. It possibly also represents the sacrificing of Wesley's personality when Weston transforms into a nurturer and Wesley takes on Weston's former personality traits. Weston's parable about the eagle and the cat tells how the eagle swooped down to pick up the lamb's discarded sexual organs each time Weston castrated a lamb. If the eagle symbolises the greedy landowners in America (since a picture of the eagle is present on numerous American banknotes), then the eagle's stealing of

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<sup>1</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.175.

<sup>2</sup> "The Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Communion," in The Anglican Book of Common Prayer: The Church of England (London: Thomas Yardley, n.d.) n.pag.

the lamb's testes supposedly also symbolises the loss of masculinity in the common man who struggles to survive economically amongst the corrupt landowners. The killing of the lamb would therefore represent the sacrificing of masculinity. It is my premise that the lamb, however, is able to symbolise the mainly rejected and suppressed female nurturing force in the play. When Emerson and Slater have shot the lamb, Slater says, "Oh it's a lamb! (they laugh) Looks like somebody's afterbirth to me! (they laugh hysterically)" (p.198). The afterbirth is the nourishing force within the womb, prior to a baby's birth, which is discarded once the birth is over. The lamb, which is called the afterbirth, therefore, represents the discarded female nurturing force in the play.

In Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard portrays the female characters' ability to give birth and to nurture offspring in a negative light. The female characters are unable to use their abilities to create changes in their own and their families' lives. Weston's parable about the battle between the eagle and the cat recounts that the eagle seizes the "fresh little remnants of manlihood," implying that the eagle ingests male power. In Curse of the Starving Class, it is the feminine abilities of nourishing and transforming which the male characters ingest and which are used to such negative effect. The solutions to solving the predicaments of the family, allowing the women to give and receive nurture, and enabling all the characters to transform, are suppressed.

Elsewhere, Shepard has failed to utilise the female characters as a means to solving the problems which beset the male characters in his dramas. David Savran has made the observation that in Action, Shepard has failed to make use of the female characters to help the male characters escape the existential predicaments which plague them.

In the final minutes of Action, Lupe and Liza are absorbed in activity, pegging laundry to the clothesline, unaware of the pain and horror which engulfs the men downstage. The women refuse to acknowledge the institutionalization of crises and remain in the background.... Far from denying the possibility of deliverance, the women's relegation to the background and to silence merely suggests Shepard's own inability to see what he has created through them.<sup>1</sup>

According to Savran, through their actions the female characters in Action find a way to solve their existential queries, while the male characters continue to become increasingly anxious about who they are and their purpose for existing. Shepard's failure to utilise his female characters as a possibility for enabling the characters in Curse of the Starving Class to transform and transcend their predicament relates to his insistence on suppressing the possibilities of escaping from constraining situations in his dramas.

When asked what effect he would like a play of his to have on an audience, Shepard has said, "Well, it depends on the play, but hopefully it would be something that would transform the

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<sup>1</sup> David Savran, "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison: Action and the Unseen Hand," 72.

emotions of people watching. People come into the theatre for very different circumstances, expecting something to happen, and then hopefully when they walk out of the theatre the chemistry's changed."<sup>1</sup>

Audience members are not able to transform emotionally through the characters in Curse of the Starving Class, since Shepard suppresses the possibility for lasting transformations, which positively alter the characters lives, to occur in the play. Audiences' stereotyped perceptions of women can also not be transformed after viewing Curse of the Starving Class, and, like Ella and Emma's dreams to transform their lives which cannot be realised, traditional modes of representing women are not transformed in Shepard's plays.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Kenneth Chubb and the editors of Theatre Quarterly, "Metaphors, Mad Dogs and Old Time Cowboys," p.202.

CHAPTER 3: THE MALE HERO AND THE TERRIBLE MOTHER: IMAGERY AND  
 MYTHOLOGY IN BURIED CHILD

Buried Child is often described as one of Sam Shepard's realistic family plays. This simplification fails to take into account the underlying layers of symbol and myth. As outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods appear, it is evident that behind the realistic style, Shepard is dramatising and exploring a world which is full of mythic symbolism. In 1974, just before writing Buried Child, Shepard said he wanted "to try a whole different way of writing now, which is stark and not so flashy and not full of a lot of mythic figures and everything, and try to scrape it down to the bone as much as possible."<sup>1</sup> In Buried Child, however, Shepard does not abandon the creation of "mythic figures" which appear in his earlier plays. Shepard's use of mythology in the play enables his male characters' desires to return to the womb of the mother, and their fear of being engulfed by the mother to be foregrounded. The mythology used in the play also enables the male characters' regenerative capacities to be emphasised and the female characters' association with death to be stressed. The myths which appear in Buried Child, therefore, only allow for male experience and the male characters' perceptions to be dramatised, and they contribute to a representation of women which suppresses their positive abilities.

In Buried Child Shepard's characters take on mythological proportions in various ways. First, they are constructed in such a way that they are able to portray various aspects of American mythology, which Shepard utilises to comment on the manner on which individuals strive, but fail, to uphold the values of the American Dream.

Although they [Shepard's characters] themselves are incomplete, each is imbued by the playwright with an important characteristic of American mythology. For example, Dodge makes several statements about drive and fortitude, and although he is the shadow of what he once must have been, we can still sense these attributes in him; drive is, of course, central to such conceptions as the American dream. Halie's obsession with family, Tilden's affinity with the land, and Bradley's violence also mark out American mythological territory. More of it is covered in Vince's yearning for the values of small town America .... Shepard has Vince, in his transformed condition, synthesize the American mythological qualities of Dodge, Halie, Tilden and Bradley and he thus becomes an emblem of the American character.<sup>2</sup>

Shepard's characters also possess the ability to resemble characters who appear in a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Kenneth Chubb and the editors of Theatre Quarterly, "Mad Dogs, Metaphors and Old Time Cowboys," p.208.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce J. Mann, "Character Behaviour and the Fantastic in Sam Shepard's Buried Child," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.91.

myths and who encounter various "archetypal situations."<sup>1</sup> In Buried Child, Shepard utilises the myths which specifically enable the male characters' predicaments and their perceptions of women to be foregrounded. For example, Shepard utilises the myth of the sun hero who returns to the sea each night in order to be reborn. Since the sea symbolises the mother, Shepard use of the myth contributes to his dramatisation of the male characters' desires to return to the womb of the mother in order to undergo rebirth, and their simultaneous fear of being engulfed by the mother.

In Buried Child, through the use of mythology, Shepard manipulates the mother figure and the symbols which represent the mother to dramatise the male characters' conflicts. He simultaneously de-emphasises the mother figure's regenerative and nurturing qualities, and stresses these qualities in the male characters. In the play, Shepard presents a mother figure who is incapable of nurturing her children. This allows the male characters' displayed desire for more nurture to be explained. In contrast to this mother figure and to the male characters, who are at first associated with death, destruction or immobility, Shepard presents the Mother Earth as a procreative, regenerative force which produces sufficient crops to nurture the family; and the rain, which represents the mother, as a nurturing force. However, the male characters demonstrate a desire to return to the womb of the mother as well as a fear of being engulfed by the mother, and the symbols which represent the mother become utilised to express their fears of engulfment. The rain is presented as not only nurturing, but also as destructive, and throughout the play the suggestion is made that it is possible to view the Mother Earth as a devouring mother. The male characters' fear of engulfment are also demonstrated in their determination to associate the female characters with death and destruction. In Buried Child, the mother figure's regenerative and nurturing qualities are de-emphasised or presented as negative in order that the male characters' fears of being engulfed by the mother might be highlighted. While Shelly displays nurturing behaviour, her ability to nurture is obstructed by the male characters, and her actions of nurturing are ineffective.

Once Shepard has succeeded in presenting the female characters' nurturing and regenerative abilities in a negative light or as ineffective, he stresses the regenerative capacities of the male characters. Since the buried child in the play is buried in the earth and later returned to the mother's womb at the play's conclusion, and because Vince, who is also the buried child, undergoes a rebirth, it could be interpreted that Shepard is hinting (at the end of the play) at the regenerative qualities of the mother. However, the rebirth which occurs in Vince is artificial and ineffective, and even if Shepard does attempt to dramatise the regenerative qualities of the mother, these qualities are dramatised as ineffective. Shepard far more obviously attributes the

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Brooke defines archetypal situations as "the primal situations of life such as birth, death, motherhood, and transformations." Roger Brooke, Jung and Phenomenology, p.140.

rebirth that occurs in Vince to the male characters' actions, since he continually stresses their regenerative capacities through the use of mythology. Even the death of two of the male characters and the fact that one of them is portrayed as a murderer are shown to stress the male characters' regenerative capacities, since it is the death of the male characters that are shown to produce rebirth and regeneration. The male characters are therefore contrasted to the mother figure, in that their regenerative capacities are far more obviously foregrounded, as they go through the motions of performing regenerative rituals.

In the exploration of Shepard's representation of women, it is necessary to observe the manifestation of the mother archetype in the characters and in Shepard's dramatisation of the outside world, as it sheds light on Shepard's manipulation of the female characters to express male predicaments and on his creation of female characters whose abilities are suppressed. In the light of the above comments, the mother archetype is at first manifested positively in the Mother Earth. In contrast, the mother figure is created by Shepard as being incapable of nurturing her children and unable to positively manifest the mother archetype. She is created as being an apt carrier of the projections of the "Terrible Mother" which the male characters place on her. As the male characters' fears of being engulfed intensify, the Mother Earth and the water symbols are also seen to manifest the archetype negatively.<sup>1</sup>

In Buried Child, Shepard presents an American family who represent the dying American dream. The male characters are all associated with death, destruction or immobility. Dodge, who is confined to his couch, frequently goes into violent, spasmodic coughing attacks and Halie says to him, "You sit here day and night festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body! Hacking your head off till all hours of the morning! Thinking up mean, evil, stupid things to say about your own flesh and blood."<sup>2</sup> Dodge also accuses Halie of wanting to "dress up the corpse for company" when she insists on his having a haircut, and responds to his sons with violent behaviour. (p.67). He says, "You tell Bradley if he shows up here with those clippers, I'll kill him!" (p.67). Dodge is also responsible for drowning the buried child, who is also male. Tilden, the oldest son, is a simple-minded, late forties, ex- All-American fullback who got into trouble in New Mexico and came back to the family farm in Illinois. His inertness is imaged in his inability

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<sup>1</sup> While it might appear as if the originally positive manifestation of the mother archetype in the outside world is later mirrored in the male characters' realisation of the archetype, the male characters actually only go through the motions of enacting procreative rituals, which do not result in rebirth or regeneration. Thus they do not, in fact, positively realise the archetype. Nevertheless, they are created as being able to give the appearance of being the regenerators in the play far more obviously than the mother figure, and of being much more complete characters.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, Buried Child, in Seven Plays, p.76. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

to drive. Bradley, who is five years younger than Tilden, cut off his leg in a chain-saw accident, and Ansel, the third son, who was the star athlete, seems to have died in a motel room while on honeymoon with an Italian Catholic girl.

The decaying family desperately require nurture. Halie expresses the characters' inability or lack of desire to look after one another.

HALIE'S VOICE: Dodge! He's not drinking anything, is he? You see to it that he doesn't drink anything! You got ta watch out for him. It's our responsibility. He can't look after himself anymore, so we have to do it. Nobody else will do it. We can't just send him away somewhere. If we had lots of money we could send him away. But we don't. We never will. That's why we have to stay healthy. You and me. Nobody's going to look after us. Bradley can't look after us. Bradley can hardly look after himself. (p.72)

The characters' acute desire to be nurtured is represented by their child-like behaviour, since the need for nurture is marked at this stage of development. Halie says of Tilden, "He's still a child" (p.77). Tilden says that he likes to drive, but suspects it is childish. He asks Dodge's permission to bring in the stool from the kitchen (p.70), and starts crying when Halie tries to kick him out of the house. (p.76). He is also fascinated by Shelly's fur coat and immediately wants it. (p.101). Dodge also behaves like a child at times. When Tilden asks Dodge if he can leave him for a moment Dodge says, "I don't need anything! ... But I might need something any second. Any second now. I can't be left alone for a minute!" (p.79). Later, when Shelly tries to leave him in Act III, he says, "Don't leave me alone now! Promise me? Don't go off and leave me alone. I need somebody here with me. Tilden's gone now and I need someone. Don't leave me! Promise!" (p.113). In Act III, when Shelly steals Bradley's leg, he behaves like a child. He yells, "Mom! Mom! She's got my leg! She's taken my leg! I never did anything to her! She's stolen my leg!" (p.120). Bradley and Dodge also squabble over a blanket like children. (p.119). When Vince returns to his family home and no-one recognises him, he, too, resorts to childish behaviour, attempting to behave as he did when he was a child in order to make his family remember him. (pp.95-96). Shelly too behaves in a childish manner by smashing her cup against the wall in an attempt to gain attention. (p.119). The buried child of the title is also the child buried within the characters.

The fact that the characters in Buried Child suffer from receiving insufficient nurture, although they desperately require it, is related to Shepard's creation of Halie as a mother who is incapable of nurturing her family. When Dodge has a coughing attack in Act I, she shouts from her room above the lounge, "You should take a pill for that! I don't see why you don't just take a pill. Be done with it once and for all" (pp.64-65). Halie would rather Dodge received external medication, than supply any human nurture. Halie's lack of desire to nurture her children is reinforced by her statement that she will not do any shopping that day.

The moments when Halie does appear to be concerned about her children reveal her inability to condemn their violent behaviour. She defends her son, Bradley, in his fight with Shelly which occurs in Act III, and condones his previous action of thrusting his fist into Shelly's mouth. When Shelly steals Bradley's leg in order to retaliate, Halie says, "Give my son back his leg. Right this very minute!" (p.120). Halie behaves like Lorraine in A Lie of the Mind, who constantly defends her son, Jake, and ignores his violent behaviour towards women. Rather than actively nurture her other children, Halie prefers to concern herself with building a statue for her dead son, Ansel. Halie periodically verbalises her concern for others, but her actions belie that concern. While kicking corn husks around the room and making an enormous mess, she says, "Bradley's going to be very upset when he sees this. He doesn't like to see the house in disarray. He can't stand it when one thing is out of place" (p.76).

The negative mother figure is at first contrasted to the earth, which has been seen as a symbol of the mother for centuries.

The concept of the earth as both bearing and nourishing mother has been extremely prominent in the mythologies both of hunting societies and of planters.... According to the planters, it is in the mother's body that the grain is sown: the plowing of the earth is a begetting and the growth of the grain a birth.<sup>1</sup>

The farm, which Dodge tells us has not produced crops since 1935, is now flourishing and provides ample nourishment for the family.

Although in numerous societies the growth of corn is related to the worship of a female corn deity, Shepard associates the corn in Buried Child with myths in which corn is personified by masculine corn deities. In Greek mythology, Demeter and Persephone are often treated as personifications of corn. "In Germany, the corn is very commonly personified under the name of the corn mother."<sup>2</sup> Among the Highlanders of Scotland, "the last corn cut is known as the Old wife or maiden,"<sup>3</sup> and in Lithuania and Poland, "the last sheaf of corn cut is known as the Old Woman."<sup>4</sup> Amongst the North and South American Indians, the belief in a maize mother predominates. The eastern Indians of North America conceived of the spirit of the maize as a woman, while the Iroquois believe the spirits of the corn to be three sisters who rule over corns, beans and squash.<sup>5</sup> The Peruvian Indians also believed in a maize mother<sup>6</sup>, while the Indians of

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology (U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1976), p.66.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough Part V: Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild, Vols. I & II (London: Macmillan & Co., 1933), p.132.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.144.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.177.

Mexico imagine maize to be a little girl.<sup>1</sup> The Cherokee Indians "invoke corn under the name Old woman".<sup>2</sup> In Buried Child only the male characters partake in the corn rituals. The only instance where a female character is even indirectly associated with corn in the play occurs when Shelly arrives wearing a rabbit skin coat, since "a common embodiment of the corn spirit is the hare."<sup>3</sup>

Shepard dramatises the male characters' desire to return to the womb of the mother in a variety of ways. It is symbolised by the male characters' childish behaviour, since their behaviour demonstrates their desire to regress, and by the suggestion of incest between Tilden and Halie, which represents the longing for reunion with the mother's body. The productivity of the farm outside emphasises and symbolises the male characters' desire to return to a time when more than enough nourishment was received and to a paradisaical state of harmony which exists between a mother and an infant. The rain which nourishes the crops also represents the nurturing mother, since water and rain symbolise the mother, and the relationship between the rain and the crops reflects the type of relationship the male characters long to return to.

There is a constant referral to a previous paradisaical state in Buried Child. Halie remembers a time, before she was married, when a man took her out to the races. She describes her experience as being "Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful! The sun was just gleaming. Flamingos. Bouganvilleas. Palm trees" (p.66). Dodge describes the way in which the family used to live as being like living in paradise. He says to Shelly, "See, 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" (p.123). What apparently precipitated the commencement of decay in the family was Halie's producing of a child which did not belong to Dodge. The play contains the suggestion that the child was conceived in an incestuous union between Halie and Tilden.

There is, at first, a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the paternity of the buried child. Tilden first claims paternity. He says to Vince, "I had a son once, but we buried him" (p.92). Dodge, however, denies Tilden's paternity by saying, "You don't know anything about that! That happened before you were born! Long before" (p.103). Dodge then also denies his paternity of the child by denying his paternity of Vince. He tells Vince, "You're no son of mine. I've had sons in my time and you're not one of 'em" (p.97). Since Vince is Tilden's son and it is suggested that Tilden fathered a son who was later buried, Shepard presents the possibility that Vince and the buried child are one character. "Vince cannot, surely, be the child's corpse and at the same time a young

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.204.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition (London: Papermac, 1987), p.372.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.452.

man who is very much alive - and yet this impossibility is precisely what the play suggests."<sup>1</sup> Tilden also places Dodge in the role of the buried child's father. He says, "We had a baby (motioning to Dodge). He did. Dodge Did" (p.103). Dodge, however, clears up the ambiguity in his confession of the family's secret to Shelly. First he denies his own paternity.

DODGE: Then Halie got pregnant again. Outa' 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 for about six years. (p.123)

Dodge goes on to intimate that Tilden fathered the child.

DODGE: It lived.... 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.... 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, singing to it. Used to hear him. Singing to it. He'd make up stories. He'd tell that kid all kinds a' stories. (p.124)

Tilden's suggested incest with Halie symbolises his longing for a reunion with the mother figure. This is also demonstrated in his attitude towards the rain. Both Halie and Tilden's attitudes towards the rain are reminiscent of the feelings of the woman in The Rock Garden, who remembers the rain as being nourishing. Halie loves the smell after the rain has stopped (p.77), and Tilden loves the feel of the rain. He says, "Feels like it always did" (p.79).

In psychoanalytic terms Tilden's incest reveals the longing ... for the comfort of a prenatal condition. It betrays his primary narcissism and love for his mother which coincide during early childhood. This stage in a child's development is characterized by a sense of identification with the environment, including the mother. Significantly, it is Halie and Tilden who are most sensitive to their surroundings, to the crops and the rain.... Seen in this broader context, the rain in Buried Child can be interpreted as releasing in Tilden memories of the sea, of the (incestuous) union with his mother and a feeling of One-ness in a primal world.<sup>2</sup>

Tilden's desires to be enveloped by the mother and to return to his mother's womb are further suggested by his attraction to Shelly's rabbit-skin coat, since the rabbit and the hare are associated with the "Feminine Character."<sup>3</sup> After Tilden stares at Shelly's coat and asks her if he can touch it, "Shelly takes off her coat and hands it to Tilden. Tilden takes it slowly, feels the fur and then puts it on. Shelly watches as Tilden strokes the fur slowly. He smiles at her.... Tilden walks around stroking the fur and smiling at the coat" (p.102).

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<sup>1</sup> Gay Gibson Cima, "Shifting Perspectives: Combining Shepard and Rauschenberg," Theatre Journal, 38 (March 1986), 172.

<sup>2</sup> Johan Callens, "Memories of the Sea in Shepard's Illinois," Modern Drama, 29 (Sept. 1986), 407.

<sup>3</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition, p.452.

The suggested incest between mother and son can also be related to Shepard's use of corn imagery in Buried Child, since there are numerous myths which deal with the Mother Earth's relationship with a male corn god. In Mexico, for example, the corn god Xochipilli is the youthful lover of the "Great Mother" who appears in the form of the earth and the sky.<sup>1</sup>

The archetypal marriage of the Great Mother with the son ... who appears as god of the light, of the maize and the flowers is celebrated in Mexico.... Xochipilli is the young god of life, of the morning, of procreation and of foodstuffs.... He is a phallic god ... who belongs to the maternal night sky.<sup>2</sup>

Since Tilden is created as a character who is devoted to picking and preparing the corn and who loves the rain and the earth, his relationship with Halie is mirrored in his relationship with the Great Mother. The fact that the Great Mother (who is symbolised in Buried Child by the Mother Earth and the rain) reflects aspects and activities of Halie, later enables the male characters negative attitude to the earth and the rain to reflect their attitude to Halie.

The crime of incest between Tilden and Halie is also related to the infanticide in Buried Child. "An ancient Roman law ... prescribed that when incest had been committed, an expiatory sacrifice should be offered ... for we know the crime of incest is commonly supposed to cause death."<sup>3</sup> Shepard, who is devoted to the use of ritual, intimates that Halie and Tilden's incest is what caused Dodge to sacrifice their baby.

The fact that Halie represents that which is desired by the male characters, enables her to bear a striking similarity to Mary in Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night.

She [Mary] is the focus of strong Oedipal associations and, as woman, of the logic Oedipal narrative weaves around her.... The play is composed of a tissue of narratives (including Mary's) that circle the Oedipal conundrum of women as haven / lure. She represents both the 'paradisal' past with its illusions of status and origin and its consequence: time as seduction, betrayal, loss.<sup>4</sup>

Halie, too, must bear the consequences of representing the desired state of harmony which the male characters long to return to, as well as representing the loss of that period. Halie's ability to symbolise the period of development where the infant's contact with the female body was omnipotent, also relates to her ability to symbolise a whore-figure, which is suggested by the fact that she returns from her lunch date with Father Dewis on the following day. The role of the whore is also projected onto Shelly, since Dodge, Tilden and Bradley all demonstrate that they view her in this light. Bradley thrusts his fist into Shelly's mouth and later calls her a "prostitute

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, p.196.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>3</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition, p.141.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Fleche, "'A Monster of Perfection': O'Neill's 'Stella,'" in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.28.

that Tilden brought in here" (p.120). The need to view women in this role symbolises the male characters' regression and their desire to return to a stage of development where a woman's body was perceived as an object which could be utilised to obtain gratification. Thus the female characters are manipulated to express the male characters' predicaments. Shelly's ability to symbolise a whore figure allows her character to be reminiscent of Ruth, in Harold Pinter's The Homecoming, who becomes the family's prostitute. Shelly's similarities to Ruth are also emphasised by the fact that after spending a night in the family house, she feels as if it is her home. This is strikingly similar to Ruth's experience.

DODGE:           This is my house!  
 SHELLY:          I forgot.  
 DODGE:          You forgot? Whose house did you think it was?  
 SHELLY:          Mine. (p.110)

Tilden's suggested incest with Halie symbolises his desire to undergo rebirth, since, as Jung states, behind the desire to commit incest with the mother lies the desire to re-enter the mother in order to be reborn through her. "It is not incestuous cohabitation that is desired, but rebirth. The incest prohibition acts as an obstacle and makes the creative fantasy inventive."<sup>1</sup> Jung asserts that man has to undergo rebirth through the use of mythology and heroes.

It is not man as such who has to be regenerated or born again as a renewed whole, but, according to the statements of mythology, it is the hero or god who rejuvenates himself. These figures are generally expressed or characterized by libido symbols (light, fire, sun, etc).... It is then, in the first place, the god who transforms himself, and only through him does man take part in the transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Although the male characters in Buried Child do not represent the libido symbols which are usually characterised and utilised in myths to express Man's return to the womb in order to undergo rebirth processes, some of them are, nevertheless, created as having the potential to represent gods and heroes. It is suggested that Tilden fills the role of a male saviour or god by the juxtaposition of Halie and Dodge's dialogue. Halie shouts from her room above, "It's no wonder people turn to Christ!", followed immediately by Dodge's shouting, "TILDEN!!" (pp.68-69). Halie and Dodge's words represent the possibility that Tilden is the saviour or god that people turn to. Halie also says of Ansel, her third son, "He was a hero. Don't forget that. A genuine hero. Brave. Strong. And very intelligent" (p.73). Ansel also represents a hero since, "in folklore, it is a recognised rule of narrative that the third son is the heroic one."<sup>3</sup> Since Shepard's male characters take on the ability to represent the gods and heroes who in various myths undergo rebirths, they

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.285.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.255.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Nash, "Sam Shepard's Buried Child: The Ironic Use of Folklore," Modern Drama, 26 (Dec. 1983), 487.

possess the possibility to represent, in some form, Man's ability to be reborn. Shepard, however, is intent upon suppressing both the possibility of escaping confining situations, and the regenerative possibilities of the mother figures in his dramas. He does not use the fact that his characters are able to represent mythological figures to demonstrate the authentic regenerative powers of the mother figure, or to enable his audience to positively experience rebirth through his characters.

Vince's character has the most potential to be utilised to dramatise a positive rebirth that can result from a return to the mother's womb because he exists as both the corpse of the buried child and as a live adult character. At the end of the play, Tilden carries the corpse of the buried child up to Halie. This can be interpreted as a symbolic return to the mother's womb. Since the child has been buried in the earth, he has also returned to Mother Earth's womb. The "idea of the earth as Mother and of burial as re-entry into the womb for rebirth appears to have recommended itself to at least some of the communities of mankind at an extremely early date."<sup>1</sup> The rebirth that occurs because of the buried child's return to Mother Earth, and mother Halie, could be demonstrated through the adult Vince. Shepard does not, however, effectively utilise this possibility. The fact that Vince's rebirth is related to the buried child's return to the mother's womb is overshadowed by Shepard's implication that it is the male characters' regenerative rituals that lead to Vince's rebirth. Furthermore, even if Shepard is attempting to demonstrate the rebirth that can occur as a result of a return to the mother's womb, he demonstrates the regenerative abilities of the mothers's womb to be ineffective, since Vince's rebirth does not enable him to alter his own or his family's existence in a positive manner.

Tilden's incest with Halie also symbolises his desire to merge with her identity, as his ability to create his own self and his own identity seems to have failed. He has returned to the family home because he was too "lonely" in New Mexico. (p.21). Dodge criticises Tilden's return to his mother and father.

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

TILDEN: I didn't know where else to go.

DODGE: I never went back to my parents. Never. Never even had the urge. I was independent. Always independent. Always found a way.

TILDEN: I didn't know what to do. I couldn't figure anything out.  
(p.78)

Tilden has succumbed to the desire to return to the mother, as the trials of his existence have

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, p.66.

become too burdensome to bear. "When the active project of selfhood feels too strenuous or too dangerously lonely, the temptation is strong in all of us to melt back into that form which we have carved ourselves out."<sup>1</sup>

Tilden's behaviour, which includes having attempted to leave the mother, but having returned to her, and his desire to return to the womb of the mother, are reminiscent of the myth of the sun god, who tears himself from the enveloping womb of the sea and who returns to sink back down into its maternal depths. Jung states that this myth is a symbolic expression of human fate.

In the morning of life the sun tears himself loose from the mother, from the domestic hearth, to rise through battle to his destined heights. Always he imagines his worst enemy in front of him, yet he carries the enemy within himself - a deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in his own source, to be sucked down to the realm of the Mothers.... If he is to live, he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past in order to rise to his own heights.... The natural course of life demands that the young person should sacrifice his love for his childhood and his childish dependence on the physical parents, lest he remain caught body and soul in the unconscious bonds of incest.<sup>2</sup>

Tilden appears unable to sacrifice his desire for the mother or to succeed in leaving her to establish his own identity.

A son's inability to leave the mother is believed by him to be the mother's inability to release the child. This is often projected on to the mother.

The forward-striving libido which rules the conscious mind of the son demands separation from the mother, but his childish longing for her prevents this by setting up a psychic resistance that manifests itself in all kinds of neurotic fears - that is to say, in a general fear of life. Thus a vicious cycle is formed: fear of life and people cause more shrinking back, and this in turn leads to infantilism and finally 'into the mother.' The reasons for this are generally projected outside oneself.... The fault lies with external circumstances, or else the parents are made responsible.... The son will naturally try to explain everything by the wrong attitude of the mother.... The fear seems to come from the mother, but actually is the deadly fear of the instinctive, unconscious, inner man who is cut off from life by the continual shrinking back from reality.<sup>3</sup>

An individual's desire to return to the womb and the paradisaical state of existing in harmony with the mother is coupled with a fear of engulfment and of having one's identity subsumed by the mother. This results in negative images being projected onto the mother. In Buried Child, this fear is demonstrated through the imagery of drowning and of sea monsters, and the negative images which are projected onto the mother figure appear in the symbols of water and rain which

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur, p.28.

<sup>2</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp.355-356.

<sup>3</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp.297-298.

represent the mother figure.

In Buried Child, water and rain are presented as having ambivalent characteristics. The rain which nurtures the crops can also be a destructive force. It forces Vince and Shelly to seek shelter in Vince's family home. Halie blames Dodge's sickness on the rain. She says, "You know what it is, don't you? It's the rain! Weather. That's it. Everytime you get like this it's the rain. No sooner does the rain start than you start" (p.64). Water is also associated with destruction. When Dodge doubts that Vince can get him a bottle of whisky he says Vince would "probably drown himself if he went out back. Fall right into a hole" (p.99). Dodge also drowns the child produced by the incestuous union between Halie and Tilden. Vince refers to "Tentacled animals! Beasts from the deep!" when he returns from his expedition to get Dodge a bottle of whisky. (p.127). The images of drowning and of sea monsters express the negative aspects of the mother archetype. "Since maternal protection (over-protection) can also be a threat to developing individuality, the negative aspects of the maternal archetype are expressed in such symbols as witches, dragons, devouring and entwining animals ... or the sea in which an individual may drown."<sup>1</sup>

The images of drowning and of being buried express the male characters' fear of engulfment and loss of identity.

A firm sense of one's own identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with a loss of identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment.... The individual experiences himself as a man who is only saving himself from drowning.... There are many images used to describe related ways in which identity is threatened which may be mentioned here as closely related to the dread of engulfment. For example, being buried, being drowned.<sup>2</sup>

The negative qualities of the water symbolism are related to the male characters' fear of engulfment. This fear results in their determination to perceive the female characters' nurturing abilities in a negative light. The male characters continually obstruct the female characters' attempts to nurture, and they persistently associate the female characters with devouring or destructive imagery. This results in a de-emphasis of women's nurturing abilities. Vince prevents Shelly from preparing the carrots and rejects that which the Mother Earth has produced.

VINCE: Shelly put the carrots down will ya! We gotta deal with the situation here! I'm gonna need your help.  
 SHELLY: I'm helping.  
 VINCE: You're only adding to the problem! You're making things worse! Put the carrots down! (Vince tries to knock the carrots out of her arms. She turns away from him, protecting the carrots.) (p.94)

When Dodge has a coughing attack at the end of Act II, Shelly attempts to help him, but

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Storr, Jung (London: Fontana, 1973), p.47.

<sup>2</sup> R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (England: Penguin Books, 1965), p.44.

Bradley distorts her desire to nurture, and transforms the nurturing quality of the water symbol, and therefore of women, into a destructive force.

SHELLY: Can't we do something for him?  
 BRADLEY: (looking at Dodge) We could shoot him. (laughs) We could drown him! What about drowning him! (p.106)

Dodge also demonstrates a desire to emphasise the destructive nature of the female ability to nurture offspring. Shelly describes her observation of Halie as she is displayed in the photographs upstairs. She says, "She's looking down at the baby like it was somebody else's. Like it didn't even belong to her" (p.111). Dodge reacts to Shelly by inverting the nurturing qualities of the women.

DODGE: That's about enough outa' you! You got some funny ideas. Some damn funny ideas. You think just because people propagate they have to love their offspring? You never seen a bitch eat her puppies? Where are you from anyway? (pp.111-112)

The ability to devour human life, which is projected onto women by means of the water symbol, is further demonstrated in Halie's description of Ansel's wife who, she claims, was responsible for his death.

HALIE: Tilden told him time and time again. Catholic women are the Devil incarnate. He wouldn't listen.... I kissed him and he felt like a corpse. All white. Cold. Icy blue lips. He never used to kiss like that. Never before. I knew then that she'd cursed him. Taken his soul. I saw it in her eyes. She smiled at me with that Catholic sneer of hers. She told me with her eyes that she'd murder him in his bed. Murder my son.... (p.74)

The negative representation of the mother figure, of the Mother Earth, and of the female characters' nurturing abilities are also related to the infanticide in Buried Child. If the Mother Earth is viewed as a devouring monster, along with the mother figure and the water symbols which represent the mother, the killing of the infant may be viewed as a sacrifice to the Mother Earth.

Blood sacrifice and dismemberment belong to the fertility ritual of the Great Mother. Both fecundate the womb of the earth, as can be seen from a number of rites in which pieces of the victim ... are solemnly spread over fields.... The need for fecundating and reviving the feminine earth with blood, death and corpses - this conception, perpetually reinforced by the flow of life and death in nature, constellates the Great Mother as terrible, killing, and dismembering.<sup>1</sup>

In Buried Child, the male characters' fear of the generative and nurturing abilities of women results in the suppression of the female characters' nurturing and regenerative abilities, or the inversion of these into a negative, destructive force. Shepard simultaneously emphasises the regenerative capacities in his male characters through the use of ritual and the myths of male corn gods and fertility kings. The masculine regenerative force is emphasised by the fact that the male characters represent mythological corn gods or kings. Their ability to represent mythical figures

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, p.189.

is connected to the fact that they take on attributes of gods and heroes, as has already been discussed. In Buried Child, Dodge represents a dying corn god or king whose death, it is implied, is responsible for regeneration and rebirth. "Among the themes Shepard plays with are those of fertility, especially the myths of fertility kings.... The barrenness of the field behind the house, the decline of the farm, seems correlated to Dodge's declining health ... and on Dodge's death, Vince takes over ... a spring king replacing a winter king."<sup>1</sup> The fact that Dodge represents a dying corn god or king in the winter of his life is emphasised in Act II when Tilden "gently spreads the corn husks over the whole length of Dodge's body" (p.81).

There are a variety of ways in which Shepard clearly constructs Vince's potential to represent a hero and/or a mythological corn god or king, and his ability to demonstrate the fact that Dodge's death has resulted in his (Vince's) rebirth. First, he is able to represent a hero because Tilden and Bradley's immobility and Ansel's death make it "clear that a kind of 'heroic vacuum' paralyses the family," which is a void that Vince is able to fill.<sup>2</sup> Vince's ability to represent a hero is created by the timing of his return from his trip which, ostensibly, was to fetch Dodge a bottle of whisky.

HALIE: (to Bradley) Ansel would've stopped him! Ansel would've stopped him from telling those lies! He was a hero! A man! A whole man! What's happened to the men in this family! Where are the men! (Suddenly Vince comes crashing through the screen porch door up left, tearing it off its hinges.) (p.124)

The words are hardly out of Halie's mouth when her answer arrives in the form of Vince. Vince is the new hero/saviour who fills the heroic void in the family.

Shepard emphasises the fact that Vince is a corn king in another way as well. Vince has come back to the family farm to find his roots and his identity. He accomplishes this during his journey to buy Dodge a bottle of whisky, when he sees his ancestors' faces and traces his family in the reflection of his own face in the car's windshield.

VINCE: 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.... 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 recognised.... I followed my family clear into Iowa. Every last one. Straight into the corn belt and further. (p.130)

Vince's geographical position in the Iowa Corn Belt is related to how far back he is able to trace

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Hays, "Child Murder and Incest in American Drama," Twentieth Century Literature, 36 (Winter 1990), 442.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Nash, "Sam Shepard's Buried Child," p.487.

his ancestors. The fact that his male ancestors appear in the reflection of his face in the windshield, as he travels further into the Corn Belt, suggests that his ancestors are able to appear when Vince is near corn and that Vince's ancestors are connected to corn gods or kings. This is supported by the fact that Dodge already represents a corn god or king, and, since he is one of Vince's ancestors, it seems likely that all Vince's male ancestors are too. Since Vince returns knowing who his ancestors are, and creates his own identity from his roots, his identity includes being a new corn god or king.

Shepard foregrounds Vince's rebirth, and the fact that it occurs because of Dodge's death, by means of various techniques.

When Vince returns from his drunken travels ... he is recognized by all. Clearly, Shepard has used this dramatic moment as a symbolic rebirth, calculated to correspond to the exact moment when Tilden, alone in the rain, must be pulling the decayed corpse of the buried child from the mud in the cornfields.... The ritual atmosphere of this rebirth scene is reinforced in several ways.... Dodge's testament and Vince's reawakening are presided over by the ineffectual figure of Father Dewis.... When Halie stumbles into the assembly, she carries a single rose, which she drops between the legs of Dodge.... Halie's rose apparently signifies the figurative castration and imminent death of the old man, coming especially as it does, during the moment of Vince's rebirth.<sup>1</sup>

Since the adult Vince's rebirth occurs as Tilden is digging up the buried child, who is also Vince, it could be observed that the play emphasises the regenerative abilities of the Mother Earth, as has previously been suggested. Shepard, however, focuses the audience's attention more obviously on the male characters's ability to regenerate life, as he presents Dodge's death as being responsible for rebirth and regeneration. Dodge announces his impending death, and requests a burial suitable for a corn king whose death signifies a regeneration of fecundity. He asks for certain of his possessions to be "pushed into a gigantic heap and set ablaze in the very centre of my fields" (p.129). He says, "When the blaze is at its highest, preferably on a cold, windless night, my body is to be pitched into the middle of it and burned till nothing remains, but ash" (p.129). In ancient civilizations, members of agricultural communities would partake in the ritual of burning the figure who represented the spirit of vegetation.

Light and heat are necessary for vegetable growth and on the principle of sympathetic magic, by subjecting the personal representative of vegetation to their influence, you secure a supply of these necessities for trees and crops. In other words, by burning the spirit of vegetation in a fire which represents the sun, you make sure that, for the time being at least, vegetation shall have plenty of sun.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nash, "Sam Shepard's Buried Child," p.489.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition, p.755, as quoted by Thomas Nash in "Sam Shepard's Buried Child," p.490.

Dodge seeks a burial befitting a dying spirit of vegetation. This emphasises the procreative abilities of the male characters.

Dodge's death is reminiscent of the fertility legend of the impotent Fisher King whose deposition makes the wasteland bear fruits again. Dodge's ability to represent a dying corn king or god is aided by the fact that, throughout the play, his behaviour can be associated with various myths. Bradley's ritualistic cutting of Dodge's hair has mythical significance since in many myths hair-cutting symbolises a loss of strength and power, and is said to bring on death. For example, "Nisus, king of Megora, had a golden or purple hair in the middle of his head, and it was fated that whenever the hair was pulled out, the king should die."<sup>1</sup>

Dodge's request to be enveloped by fire, which symbolises the sun, highlights the male characters' association with male deities.

The sun ... has been linked to male gods ... Other common associations of the sun are with kingship, gold and fire, and with qualities like rebirth, success, joy and abundance.... Alchemy as well as the Tarot presents the sun as masculine.... The fourfold symbolism of fire, water, earth and air is generally divided ... into a polarised grouping where fire and air are masculine elements, while earth and water are female. Alchemy as well as the Tarot presents the sun as masculine.... The sun - has been linked to male gods.... Other common associations with the sun are with kinship, gold and fire, and with qualities like rebirth, success, joy and abundance.<sup>2</sup>

In Buried Child, the fire, which represents the sun and men, is used to symbolise the male characters' regenerative qualities.

The visible father of the world is the sun, the heavenly fire, for which reason father, God, sun and fire are mythologically synonymous.... In worshipping the sun's strength, we pay homage to the great generative force of Nature.... The sun and male principle are thus identified with the creative life force, the sun is the father-god from whom all living things draw life; he is the fructifier and creator, the source of energy for our world.<sup>3</sup>

The use of fire in Buried Child also symbolises a weapon with which to counteract the threat of engulfment by the mother. In Symbols of Transformation, Jung mentions the fight of the sun hero with the whale dragon who is a symbol of the "Terrible Mother." The whale dragon symbolises the unconscious. The sun hero's weapon is fire, and, since fire making is a conscious act, he is able to kill the dark state of union with the mother. In Buried Child, the fire within which Dodge wishes to be burnt symbolises a victory over the "Terrible Mother."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition, p.670.

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Goodison, Moving Heaven and Earth: Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Change (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p.250.

<sup>3</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p.89.

<sup>4</sup> C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p.251.

In Buried Child, Shepard makes use of traditional symbology where the sun and fire always represent men, and water and earth women. This represents his upholding of theories and values which came into being with the birth of patriarchy. Symbology which aligns males with the sun and fire, and women with water and earth implies that "men are power, dynamism, regality and spirit while women are earthy and watery, linked with sexuality, material concerns, changeability and emotionality."<sup>1</sup> Many societies that existed before the birth of patriarchy, which believed in a female deity, did not believe the sun was masculine. The sun-like radiance of the womb and its powerful transforming qualities led the early Cretans in the Aegean era, for example, to believe the sun was feminine.

It would be a surprise to many astrologers to know ... that in the Aegean era ... the sun was female.... What Jung fails to notice is that his examples of male sun symbolism all come from the era of patriarchy. In the pre-patriarchal era, the sun was not an exclusively male symbol.<sup>2</sup>

In his book, The Sex of the Heavenly Bodies, anthropologist Lévi-Strauss presents numerous examples from South American mythology where the sex of the sun and moon contrast to the traditional symbols which came into being with the rise of patriarchy.<sup>3</sup> In Buried Child, however, Sam Shepard utilises patriarchal symbology, to reinforce the patriarchal notion that men are women's superiors.

At the end of Buried Child, Dodge wills his house to Vince. Vince, rather than establish a new order, takes his place on Dodge's couch and upholds the values of Dodge's reign. Dodge's death and Vince's rebirth are ineffectual as Vince transforms into Dodge, repeating Wesley's inheritance of Weston's character in Curse of the Starving Class, and prefiguring Eddie's upholding of the Law of the Father in Fool for Love. Shelly, Vince's girlfriend, apparently has no place in Vince's life. She is discarded.

Shelly differs from most of the other female characters in Shepard's plays because she is periodically able to assert herself in a manner which does not involve her behaving in a stereotypically masculine way. What is problematic about Shepard's creation of Shelly is that, although she is created as being far more resourceful and assertive than some of the other female characters, a closer look at her behaviour reveals that when she is threatened by dominating men she behaves in a stereotypically feminine manner, or like a child. Although Shelly enters the house displaying an ability to assert herself in an adult manner, and leaves the house as an independent woman, during her stay there, she appears to undergo regression. Her behaviour alternates

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Goodison, Moving Heaven and Earth, p.251.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.253.

<sup>3</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Sex of the Heavenly Bodies, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968).

between representing that of an obedient child and that of a disobedient child. When she feels threatened and resorts to stereotypically feminine behaviour, she behaves like a "good girl", placating those around her, and when she feels sufficiently confident to assert herself, she can only do so by throwing a childish temper tantrum.

At first Shelly appears as a strong, independent woman. Unlike Dana in Melodrama Play, she refuses to allow Vince to treat her like one of his possessions.

VINCE: You're not going anywhere! You're staying right here!  
 SHELLY: Let go of me you sonuvabitch! I'm not your property! (p.91)

After being in the house for a while, Shelly's assertiveness temporarily begins to dissolve, only to be reasserted later. When Vince decides to leave the house and buy Dodge a bottle of whisky, he insists that Shelly stay at the house. In order to survive, Shelly behaves in a manner which constitutes stereotyped feminine behaviour, and insists on chopping carrots. Although she is prevented from using her nurturing abilities, she is allowed to cut carrots which will not be utilised to nourish anybody. She tells Vince, "I'll stay and I'll cut carrots, and I'll do whatever I have to do to survive. Just to make it through this" (p.94).

In Action, Shepard also allows Lupe and Liza to escape from the terrifying situation of not knowing their purpose for existing, which is an issue that plagues the male characters in the play, by creating domestic chores for them that enables them to create identities for themselves. In Shepard's dramas, women avoid terrifying situations by resorting to stereotypically feminine behaviour. Unfortunately, Shepard fails to create Shelly as a character who is resourceful enough to discover an alternative method of surviving in a situation where she is surrounded by dominating men, other than behaving in a manner which maintains traditional notions of what women's roles should be.

As Florence Falk notes, Shelly also has the ability to represent what Erving Goffman terms a "child/woman."<sup>1</sup>

The 'child woman' is any woman who employs a set of expressions, gestures, or actions to protect herself from the abuses of male power and prerogative by acting as the obedient child accommodating the demands of an authoritarian parent. Culturally induced and reinforced by the commercial world of advertising, this behavioural syndrome recapitulates the child's survival mechanisms to defend itself and thwart or manipulate the parent.<sup>2</sup>

Shelly's ability to behave like a child/woman is demonstrated chiefly through her gesture of smiling, which she uses to placate Vince. Shepard's stage directions read:

Shelly looks at Vince then sits down on a stool, sets the carrots on the floor and takes the knife from Tilden. She looks at Vince again then picks up a carrot, cuts the ends off, scrapes it, and drops it in the pail. She repeats this, Vince glares at

<sup>1</sup> Erving Goffman, Gender Advertisements, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Florence Falk, "Men Without Women," in American Dreams, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.98.

her. She smiles. (p.94. Emphasis mine)

Goffman argues that smiling is a technique that children who are threatened utilise to ward off angry elders.

Smiles, it can be argued, often function as ritualistic modifiers, signalling that nothing antagonistic is intended or invited.... Those who warily keep an eye on a potential aggressor may find themselves automatically smiling should their gaze be 'caught' by its object, who in turn may find little cause to smile back.<sup>1</sup>

Shelly's ability to represent a child/woman is also demonstrated by the fact that the male characters talk about her, in her presence, as if she doesn't exist. For example, in Shelly's presence, Dodge says to Vince, "She could get me a bottle. She's the type a' girl that could get me a bottle. Easy. She'd go down there. Slink up to the counter. They'd probably give her two bottles for the price of one. She could do that" (p.94). Goffman states that the child, "is subjected to various forms of non-person treatment. He is talked about and talked past as though absent...."<sup>2</sup>

Shelly not only behaves submissively, but also like a disobedient child. This is demonstrated when she steals Bradley's wooden leg in Act III. Despite the fact that it is her revenge on Bradley - since he has already symbolically raped her and forced her into the position of a devouring mother, by forcing his fingers into her mouth (p.107), she is once again created as not being resourceful enough to find an alternative method of retaliation other than behaving like a child. Shelly also throws a temper tantrum in Act III, when she "suddenly throws the cup and saucer against the stage right door" to express the fact that she doesn't like being ignored. (p.119). Shelly's character is riddled with ambiguities. Although during the play she displays symptoms of regression, by the end of the play she manages to reach a certain level of independence. Earlier, when Vince asked her to remain in the house while he went to fetch Dodge a bottle of whisky, she desperately wanted to go with him, but by the time she leaves the family house she has proved she is able to survive without him. When female characters in Shepard's plays gradually become more independent within a play's narrative, Shepard usually allows them to achieve this level of development, only to subvert it in the play's conclusion. This practice can be observed in A Lie of the Mind and Cowboy Mouth. In Buried Child Shelly leaves the family home before her acquired independence and her level of self-realisation are subverted. While this can be seen as a positive movement in Shepard's work, Shelly's departure does prevent her from using her nurturing and regenerative abilities, which have been suppressed throughout the play, to stop the family from sliding into further decline, and her departure contributes to the view that Shepard fails to utilise the female characters' abilities to help solve the family's predicament.

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<sup>1</sup> Erving Goffman, Gender Advertisements, p.48.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.4.

As has been discussed in chapter two, ambiguities within a female character's nature often help to make the female character a "worthy characterization of women."<sup>1</sup> The ambiguities in Shelly's nature, however, involve her switching from behaving assertively to behaving like a submissive, subordinate woman or a petulant child around the male characters. Although she leaves the play as an independent woman, she is not able to be a valid representation of a strong woman because she is employed to represent the male characters' regression, and is unable to resist being influenced by the male characters' childish behaviour while in the house. Furthermore, she is not able to be viewed as a strong female character because she is employed in a system which suppresses women's abilities to regenerate life and to nurture it.

As Vince takes his place on Dodge's patriarchal throne, Tilden is seen to carry the dead child back up the stairs to Halie's room. This symbolically represents the male characters' return to the womb. The movements of regression and regeneration in the play merge at this point in the drama. As Vince, in the form of the buried child, is returned to his mother's womb, Vince the adult simultaneously rejects the mother and takes his place in the patriarchal world of the father. This moment in the play symbolises the dual desire for the mother and the rejection of her. If Tilden's carrying of the dead child up to Halie represents the regenerative qualities of the female womb and earth, then these qualities are made ineffectual by the fact that Vince's rebirth has only resulted in his assuming Dodge's personality.

The appearance of the buried child also operates as a resurrection symbol and emphasises the concept of a male saviour who has died for the sins of the family, and in order to promote regeneration and new life. Since there are numerous myths which depict the sacrificing and burying of male corn gods in order to regenerate crops, the buried child is therefore also associated with masculine corn deities, and contributes to the view that it is the death of the male characters that has caused the regeneration of life and rebirth. "Under the names of Osiris, Adonis, Attis and Tammuz, the peoples of Egypt and Western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead."<sup>2</sup> The buried child in the play further serves to emphasise the male procreative force, functioning like the dog in T.S. Eliot's, The Waste Land, which also causes regeneration.

That corpse that you planted last year in your garden.  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

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<sup>1</sup> John Timpane, "Weak and Divided People," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough Part IV, Adonis Attis Osiris, p.325.

Or has sudden frost disturbed its bed?<sup>1</sup>

Although Vince's rebirth is not a positive event, Shepard manages to emphasise the male characters' regenerative abilities in Buried Child by creating the impression that it is the elements which are associated with man that are responsible for the fecundity outside the family home. Tilden's action of returning the dead corpse to its mother is performed while Halie discusses which elements are responsible for the fecundity of the crops. She describes a return to paradise. "It's like a paradise out there, Dodge. You oughta' take a look" (p.131). At first she holds the feminine symbols responsible for the growth of the vegetables. "Maybe the rain did something. Maybe it was the rain.... Good hard rain. Takes everything straight down deep to the roots" (p.132). Her final words, however, emphasise the masculine role in regeneration. "I've never seen a crop like this in my whole life. Maybe it's the sun. Maybe that's it. Maybe it's the sun" (p.132). The homonym of sun and son leaves no doubt as to Shepard's emphasis of the masculine regenerative force.

Sam Shepard has created a drama in which he weaves myths and symbolism, and manipulates the female characters, and the symbols which represent women and mothers, to present a male predicament. In Buried Child, Shepard suppresses the regenerative and nurturing qualities of women, and only emphasises men's capacities to regenerate life. He creates male characters who obstruct the female characters' nurturing abilities and who fail to appreciate their procreative and regenerative abilities. If Shepard's plays can be seen to reflect, in some way, American society, he demonstrates that his vision of America is one in which it's inhabitants (because of their inability to understand the importance of viewing and relating to one another in a manner in which both men and women's positive qualities are equally appreciated) will continue to suffer from a lack of nurture and to undergo ineffective and futile rebirths.

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<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, in T.S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays (London: Faber, 1969), p.214.

CHAPTER 4: THE SUPPRESSION OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER'S  
VIEWPOINT IN FOOL FOR LOVE

By 1984, various critics had criticised Sam Shepard for failing to create female characters who were as dramatically viable as his male characters, and for refraining from representing female characters' viewpoints in his plays. Critic Herbert Blau had written:

In Sam Shepard - his major limitation perhaps - rebellion is mostly male, macho, and while he is turned on by the image of the cowboy, he rather treats his facsimile of a woman as if he were a John Wayne on a bender or Humphrey Bogart on a bronco.... It remains to be seen, for all the virtuosity of his plays, the right stuff, whether he can portray the female body as something other than the old stuff, camouflaged, concessive, evasive/passive, as a sort of tomboy overcoming the curse or a bitchy cipher from the Hollywood dream machine.<sup>1</sup>

In the same year, Shepard stated that with Fool for Love, he wanted to create a female character who could remain, "absolutely true to herself, not only as a social being, but also as an emotional being."<sup>2</sup> In another interview he said, "I was determined to write some kind of confrontation between a man and a woman as opposed to just men.... This one is really more about a woman than any other play I've ever written, and its from her point of view pretty much, though a man is there."<sup>3</sup>

In Fool for Love, however, the female characters' viewpoint is persistently undermined as Shepard presents the male characters' subjective views on what is real or true as being dominant. He constructs meanings for the audience so that subjects are positioned to view the play from Eddie and the Old Man's perspectives, and become drawn into supporting their viewpoints. When May's viewpoint is presented, it is viewed by the audience from Eddie and the Old Man's perspectives and it is therefore undermined. Fool for Love is, in fact, the story of male desire and power and demonstrates the multitude of ways in which men dominate women. The play focuses primarily on the father figure's attempts to manipulate his son's perceptions and behaviour in order that the male viewpoint remain dominant.

May is not only created to represent a female viewpoint, but also to represent the object of Eddie's desire. She periodically becomes employed in representing aspects of Eddie's mind or memory and does not behave in a manner which is consistent, since her behaviour and opinions

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Blau, "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy," Modern Drama, 17 (Dec. 1984), 521.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, Realities." Quoted by John Dugdale, File on Shepard, p.46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.26.

switch from representing her own desires to those of Eddie's.

Shepard also utilises May to dramatise the competitiveness which occurs among siblings and so she is created not only as Eddie's lover, but also his half-sister. May periodically behaves like one of Shepard's male characters, to provide Eddie with a suitable competitor, but appears in a female body so that she can represent the object of Eddie's desire. May's character is therefore created so that the predicaments of men, not women, might be further dramatised. The only way in which Shepard creates May as remaining "true to herself" is by ensuring that she preserves his construction of gender hierarchies that place women in subordinate roles. Sam Shepard's claim to have emphasised a female viewpoint in Fool for Love, is greatly undermined by his creation of the character of the Old Man whose subjective viewpoint is prioritised. In his opening descriptions of character, Shepard states that the Old Man "exists only in the minds of May and Eddie, even though they might talk to him directly and acknowledge his physical presence."<sup>1</sup> While the Old Man may not be seen by May and Eddie, his presence in their minds is so strong that he is able to influence their behaviour. In this sense the Old Man in Fool for Love effects power in much the same way that Michel Foucault theorised that Jeremy Bentham's architectural design for a prison, the Panopticon, was created to effect power: "The Panopticon is a generalizable model of functioning: a way of defining power relations in terms of the every day life of men."<sup>2</sup> Bentham's design consists of a large courtyard with a tower in the centre and a set of buildings, divided into cells, on the periphery.

The windows of the cells face the tower where a large observatory with windows allows for the surveillance of the cells. The major benefit Bentham claimed was a maximum of efficient organization. Foucault stresses that it did this by inducing in the inmate a state of objectivity, a permanent visibility. The inmate cannot see if the guardian is in the tower or not, so he must behave as if surveillance is constant, unending and total.<sup>3</sup>

Foucault theorised that in Bentham's model there is "no need for weapons, violence or material constraints, only a gaze. A gaze which watches attentively and which each person feeling its weight ends up by interiorising to the point of watching himself."<sup>4</sup> In Fool for Love the Old Man's power is enforced by the fact that his authority has been internalised by his children.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Fool for Love (New York: City Light Books, 1983), p.15. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p.205.

<sup>3</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p.189.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (London: Harvester, 1981), p.61.

Shepard also demonstrates the presence of the absent father by allowing the Old Man to break the conventions of traditional realistic theatre and enter "the fourth wall". This encourages Eddie to abandon his acknowledgement of May's perspective on the events which have shaped her history. He encourages Eddie to continue to treat May in precisely the same manner as he treated May and Eddie's mothers.

Of all the family plays, *Fool for Love* most successfully problematizes the paternal Law of the Father and seeks to subvert his authoritarian control by placing the Old Man outside the proscenium frame. But that project is doubly undermined through the metaphors of performance space when Shepard cannot resist the desire to allow the father to penetrate the interiority of the couple by coming onstage to interrupt and control their reunion. The movement reinforces and physicalizes the psychological intrusion that the father has already accomplished. Eddie has accepted May's version of their history when the father intercedes and demands that Eddie validate him. May's reality and her version of the truth is abandoned.<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis Hart's)

When May voices her viewpoint on the events that have occurred in her history, her version of the story demonstrates that the Old Man's behaviour, which involved having two different relationships and building families with two separate women, was the cause of her own mother's misery and Eddie's mother's death. By leaving May in order to chase after the Countess, Eddie chooses to disavow the essence of May's story and to defend the Old Man by living and behaving as his father did.

Throughout *Fool for Love* May's viewpoint and her belief in what is the truth is periodically challenged by Eddie and the Old Man, who create their own versions of reality and the truth in their own minds. What is problematic is that they impose their version of the truth on those around them and Shepard presents their perceptions more prominently than those of May, which allows the male characters' views to appear superior to May's perceptions and viewpoints. This is demonstrated in the manner in which Shepard gives the Old Man the final words in the play. Eddie and the Old Man's ability to construct truths and realities for themselves out of their fantasies can be likened to the work of a playwright who constructs characters and events which do not necessarily exist in the audiences' "real life" existence, but which are believed to be real or true by audience members at the time of watching a play.

Eddie and the Old Man represent both cowboy and artist figures. They represent cowboys in the way that they desire to live unconstrained lives. They long to roam free, but also to engage in relationships with women, which they feel they are able to abandon or resume at any given moment. To alleviate taking responsibility for their actions, which would restrict them, they choose to view events from their own subjective viewpoints, transforming the truth and creating their own versions of reality. Since artists, and especially playwrights, also engage in creating truths or

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<sup>1</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Vision," pp.74-75.

realities from their fantasies, Eddie and the Old Man's behaviour is associated with an artistic process, and can therefore be viewed as acceptable and even admirable.

Shepard has previously dramatised the freedom that he feels should be allowed to the artist in terms of her/his behaviour. In Icarus's Mother, the pilot represents the artist figure and both Jill and Pat pretend that they are the pilot's wives. Pat says, "Let him signal his wife if he wants to. He's probably been away for a while and he just got back."<sup>1</sup> When the pilot flies away, all the characters at the picnic site hurl abuse at him and judge him for abandoning his "wives". Shepard implies that, since they are always in the public eye, artists are constantly judged for their actions in their personal lives. Apparently members of society must allow their artists to behave as they wish to. The fact that Jill and Pat pretend the artist has two wives, and that Pat suggests he has been away for a period of time, also links Eddie and the Old Man to artist figures since they are created as possessing the same lifestyles as the made-up lifestyle of the pilot.

In Fool for Love, the Old Man educates Eddie on how to transform one's fantasies into being what one believes is real:

THE OLD MAN: I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist, right? Isn't that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Isn't that true?  
 EDDIE: (stays on floor) I don't know.  
 THE OLD MAN: You don't know? Well, if you don't know I don't know who the hell else does. I wanna' show you somethin'. Somethin' real, okay? Somethin' actual.  
 EDDIE: Sure.  
 THE OLD MAN: Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. (He points at wall stage right. There is no picture but Eddie stares at the wall.) Ya' see that? Take a good look at that. Ya' see it?  
 EDDIE: (staring at the wall) Yeah.  
 THE OLD MAN: Ya' know who that is?  
 EDDIE: I'm not sure.  
 THE OLD MAN: Barbara Mandrell. That's who that is. Barbara Mandrell. You heard a' her?  
 EDDIE: Sure.  
 THE OLD MAN: Well, would you believe me if I told ya' I was married to her?  
 EDDIE: (pause) No.  
 THE OLD MAN: Well, see, now that's the difference right there. That's realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that?  
 EDDIE: Sure.  
 THE OLD MAN: Good. I'm glad we have an understanding. (pp.26-27)

In this interaction, Shepard forces the audience to abandon verifiable logic, where a real marriage certificate would confirm the Old Man's marriage to Barbara Mandrell. The Old Man declares that in his mind his fantasy is in fact his version of reality.

The ... interjections by the Old Man suggest that our experience of something as

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, Icarus's Mother, in The Unseen Hand and Other Plays, p.65.

'real' depends not so much on a criterion of objective reality but on what we believe. The real is not something outside and independent of us; the real is constituted by the mind.<sup>1</sup>

For the Old Man nothing is real unless he believes it to be so. This allows him to remove himself from taking any responsibility or blame for the state of affairs which exist between May and Eddie. He denies paternity of his children and blames Eddie and May's mothers for the manner in which Eddie and May have grown up and behave. He excuses his behaviour of abandoning his children by claiming that he believes it was the best thing to do.

THE OLD MAN: Amazing thing is, neither one a' you look a bit familiar to me. Can't figure that one out. I don't recognize myself in either one a' you. Never did. 'Course your mothers both put their stamp on ya'. That's plain to see. But my whole side a' the issue is absent, in my opinion. Totally unrecognizable. You could be anybody's. Probably are. I can't even remember the original circumstances. Been so long. Probably a lot a' things I forgot. Good thing I got out when I did though. Best thing I ever did. (p.49)

The audience members are positioned in such a way by Shepard to accept the Old Man's version of reality and to utilise it as a context from which to view the play, for a number of reasons. First, they readily believe the Old Man's view of what is "real" since they are already in a theatre, watching the creation of a playwright, knowing full well that some of the events which occur in the play are not real, as in they could not really occur in the audience members' own "real life" existence, but they willingly suspend their disbelief.

The members of the audience are also able to believe the Old Man's subjective sense of reality because of the manner in which his character is constructed. Shepard's stage directions insist that the Old Man exists only in the minds of May and Eddie, and yet they address him as if he were really present with them. Therefore, the audience understand that a person or event that exists only in the mind, can be as real as if the person existed in full physical form or the event actually happened. It follows naturally that the audience believe that events which exist in the Old Man's mind are as real for him as if they existed externally from his mind, in his interactions with the world. The Old Man also has the ability to sway the audience into viewing the events of the play through his eyes, since he is created as a spectator who watches and comments on the action and encourages the audience to interpret events from his viewpoint.

In her essay, "Fool of Desire," Anne Wilson states that audience members are required to view the play from the male characters' perspective, not only because the Old man is created as a character who guides the audience into seeing the events from his viewpoint, but because Shepard

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Wilson, "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard," p.52.

forces them to view the events of the play from within what Lacan termed the Symbolic Order.<sup>1</sup> Wilson argues that the audience members are required to construct images of characters that they believe are "real", even though these characters do not have any empirical reality and are not seen, in much the same way that the Old Man believes that the absent picture of Barbara Mandrell on the wall is actually real. Wilson asserts that it is this factor which forces the audience to view the play from the Symbolic Order. Wilson gives an example of the way Shepard positions audience members in the Symbolic Order by quoting the manner in which he dramatises the Countess. The Countess only becomes "real" to the audience when the two beams of light, which represent car headlights, arc across the stage and May claims that the headlights belong to a Mercedes Benz, which is the car she always imagined the Countess would drive. The audience also hear the sound effects of a gunshot and glass shattering, which are meant to represent the Countess's actions of shooting at the windshield of Eddie's truck.<sup>2</sup>

For the spectator, the Countess exists only within the discourse of May's and Eddie's relationship. She is 'real' to them, but ... not to us until we have visual albeit metonymic confirmation of her existence.... Constructed by theatrical effects, first visually and then aurally, the Countess becomes 'real' to us because she is constituted as independent of the lovers discourse. Although unseen, she is 'real' because the sound of her destructiveness is evidence of her. Her status as 'real' is wholly contingent on our belief that she exists, she has no empirical reality, no human form except that she is constructed in the mind's eye.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson argues that this ability to construct images in the mind is linked to the male infant's entry in the Symbolic Order, and that if audience members are to understand the events of the play, they have to view it from within the Symbolic Order.

Freud's reading of Oedipus Rex suggests that the resolution of the psychic crisis precipitated by the boy's desire for his mother is twofold : First the censure of the desire and secondly, the acceptance of prohibition - certain things are the right of the Father.... The resolution of the child's Oedipal crisis is recognition of the father, including his prerogative, and, simultaneously is the entry of the child, into the order of language which for Lacan ... is characterized by the Symbolic, by the image.<sup>4</sup>

Wilson concludes that in Fool for Love audiences are required to construct an image of the Countess which "locates the spectator within the Order of The Father because its effectiveness is predicated on the spectator's ability to manipulate, and so interpret theatrical signifiers.... The

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Wilson, "Fool of Desire," pp.46-57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.55.

real is characterized by its capacity to be visualized and so is within the domain of the Father."<sup>1</sup> The audience members, therefore, view the play from the Old Man's perspective since both parties construct images which become "real" to them in their minds.

Eddie has inherited his father's practice of constructing his own form of reality in his own mind. He constructs an image of May for himself which enables him to manipulate and control her, and which allows him to view her as the object of his desire. When Eddie recalls the first time he saw May, he describes the experience for both of them as if May's experience of the encounter was identical to his own. Eddie says, "It was like we knew each other from somewhere but we couldn't place where. But the second we saw each other, that very second, we knew we'd never stop being in love" (p.67). This speech demonstrates that Eddie is determined to construct the reality of his and May's relationship. It is his view of reality that he enforces on May.

The masculine perspective is evinced.... Who is we? On whose behalf does Eddie speak? Surely he speaks reliably only of his own feelings; he saw May; he was in love with her and so silences her experience of the mothers. His constitution of May as the object of his desire parallels the gesture by which his father constituted Barbara Mandrell as the object of his desire. Eddie sees May as his beloved. At this moment 'their' love becomes 'real' because he believes it is.<sup>2</sup>

The audience members readily accept Eddie's constructed view of May and of their relationship, since they have already been positioned to view the play from Eddie and the Old Man's perspectives. May's attempts to counteract Eddie's construction of her as the desired, and to express her own views about their relationship are therefore undermined before they are even voiced.

Both Eddie and the Old Man's desire to construct images of women is a result of their need to control women. The Old Man's desire to control women can be related to his fear of them. The Old Man also reveals a fear of women in a monologue in which he describes to May how he and May's mother took her on a car trip when she was a baby. When May woke up crying, the Old Man stopped the car and carried her into a field.

THE OLD MAN: Then, all of a sudden, I saw somethin' move out there. Somethin' bigger than both of us put together.... But these things started to kinda' move in on us from all directions in a big circle. And I stopped dead still and turned back to the car to see if your mother was all right. But I couldn't see the car anymore. So I called out to her. I called her name loud and clear. And she answered me back from outa' the darkness. She yelled back to me. And just then these things started to "moo". (p.37)

The Old Man was surrounded by cows, which are associated with the "earth and the moon" and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

therefore can be read as symbols associated with women.<sup>1</sup> The Old Man's fear of women results in his attempt to control them by constructing his own images of them, and of the reality of his relationships with women.

Eddie assumes that May's desires correspond with his own.

EDDIE: (at bathroom door) May, I got everything worked out. I been thinkin' about this for weeks. I'm gonna' move the trailer. Build a little pipe corral to keep the horses. Have a big vegetable garden. Some chickens maybe. (p.23)

May does attempt to counteract Eddie's constructed reality of her desires, saying, "You got me confused with somebody else" (p.23). Eddie's constructed version of reality remains dominant, however, and he removes her choice in her decisions about her future, telling her, "You'll get used to it" (p.24). May's viewpoint is rejected. "May is as absent as the image of Barbara Mandrell. Eddie constructs the reality of their relationship even in the face of her denial of his claims.... From Eddie's dominant perspective May's history is made up of fragments of his desire."<sup>2</sup>

Like his father, Eddie creates his own versions of reality out of his fantasies. May, however, has suffered the effects of the male characters' preference for substituting fantasy for reality and their favouring of the image over the real. It is therefore not surprising that May reveals that she is more severely hurt by fantasies or pictures which form in her mind than by things she has actually experienced or seen.

MAY: All I see is a picture of you. You and her. I don't even know if this picture's real anymore. I don't even care. It's a made-up picture. It invades my head. The two of you. And this picture stings even more than if I'd actually seen you with her. It cuts me. It cuts me so deep I'll never get over it. (p.28. Emphasis mine)

May also utilises fantasy in a desperate attempt to deny the truth of her relationship with Eddie.

EDDIE: You know we're connected, May. We'll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago.  
 MAY: Nothing was decided! You made that all up.  
 EDDIE: You know what happened.  
 MAY: You promised me that was finished. You can't start that up all over again. You promised me.  
 EDDIE: A promise can't stop something like that. It happened.  
 MAY: Nothing happened! Nothing ever happened! (p.34)

Although May tries to pretend nothing happened between Eddie and herself, she reveals that she is aware of the difference between what is "real" and what is fantasy at all times, since, by referring

<sup>1</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Spectacle of Impossible Heterosexuality: Fool for Love" in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.220.

to Eddie's "starting that up all over again," she acknowledges their relationship. This ability of May's does not sway the audience into believing her version of the truth, since it is Eddie's ability to create and construct images of what is real and true that the audience identify with.

Eddie insists that even though his actions of alternately abandoning and returning to May demonstrate a distinct lack of commitment to the relationship, on this occasion he is adamant about desiring a relationship with May. He tells her, "I'm gonna take care of you, May. I am. I'm gonna' stick with you no matter what. I promise" (p.24). However, the interaction between Eddie and May quoted above reveals that Eddie's promises are empty. When May confronts Eddie with the fact that he has claimed the same level of commitment on numerous occasions, only to leave her soon afterwards, Eddie claims that this time he is telling the truth.

MAY: (calm) Okay. Look. I don't understand what you've got in your head anymore. I really don't. I don't get it. Now, you desperately need me. Now, you can't live without me. NOW, you'll do anything for me. Why should I believe it this time?  
 EDDIE: Because it's true. (p.50. Emphasis Shepard's)

The "truth" of May and Eddie's relationship, however, is that Eddie returns to May for a period of time which is just long enough for him to ensure that he has her under his control, and then leaves her to resume his relationship with the Countess. Eddie can only remain in a relationship with May if he periodically leaves her, since the measure of his love is loss. The only time he verbalises feelings of love for her is by describing how much he missed her. His desire to resume his relationship with May is also fuelled by the news that she has attempted to construct a new life for herself and has a date with Martin. This is another example of male homosocial desire that Shepard previously dramatised in The Tooth of Crime and Curse of the Starving Class.

Eddie is possibly lying to May about being back for good since he lies to her on other occasions in the play. At one point he asks, "You know how many miles I went outa' my way to come here and see you?" (p.21). Later on he tells her, "I didn't know where I was going 'til I got here" (p.46). According to Eddie's beliefs, however, he could also be telling the truth, since the truth is dependent on what one believes at the moment of telling it. When Martin arrives to fetch May and waits for her to get ready, Eddie describes his concepts of lying and telling the truth to Martin. Eddie suggests that Martin stay at home with May rather than go to the movies.

MARTIN: What would we do here?  
 EDDIE: Well, you could uh - tell each other stories.  
 MARTIN: Stories?  
 EDDIE: Yeah.  
 MARTIN: I don't know any stories.  
 EDDIE: Make 'em up.  
 MARTIN: That'd be lying wouldn't it?  
 EDDIE: No, no. Lying's when you believe it's true. If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying. (p.58)

Eddie's views on lying and telling the truth reveal that he can never be held responsible for

lying. When he tells May that he wants to remain with her this time, if he believes it's true, he would be lying, since according to him, "Lying's when you believe it's true" (p.58). However, Eddie also claims that things are real or true if one believes them to be so and therefore could not be blamed if he really believes it. If on the other hand, he is aware that he is lying, he's not really lying, since in his opinion if you already know it's a lie, it's not lying. Eddie's version of telling the truth enables him to refute May's accusations that his actions do not comply with his words that he claims are the truth.

The audience members are able to accept Eddie's construction of reality and truth, since they are engaged in the same practice. Eddie also reveals that his rule only applies to himself, and not to May. When Martin first arrives and May introduces Eddie to him as her cousin, Eddie says, "She's lying" (p.52). According to Eddie's rule, May already knows this is a lie and therefore is not lying. However, obviously Eddie's rule only applies to himself.

In the above interaction between Martin and Eddie, Shepard draws a contrast between the rugged cowboy, who is able to create his own versions of the truth, and polite Martin, who has traditional beliefs about lying. This contrast is already at work before Martin even appears. When May tells Eddie that Martin is coming to fetch her for a date, Eddie mocks her for calling Martin a "man" (p.36). Shepard deliberately draws a distinction between Martin, the "man" who is obviously more gentle than Eddie and treats women with respect, and his male hero, the "guy," who is not chained to living by any formal code of manners and comes and goes from domestic structures at his own will. (p.36).

The contrasts he [Shepard] draws between ... Eddie and Martin in Fool for Love clearly establish his point of view on desirable male lifestyle.... Eddie conforms to the best romantic traditions, and his attractions become even more obvious when Shepard deliberately contrasts him with the dreadfully dull, monochromatic Martin who, God forbid, actually allows the woman to choose the movie. Which character is the average spectator more likely to identify with - violent, crazy, irresponsible Eddie or wimpish Martin?<sup>1</sup>

By placing Eddie's views about lying and truth in his mouth at the moment when he is mocking Martin, Shepard sways the audience into believing Eddie's rule, since they identify with him.

Eddie, the artist and storyteller, demands that his version of his history be heard. Prior to telling his story to Martin, he pours the Old Man a drink, demonstrating the bond which exists between father and son. This influences the manner in which Eddie views the Old Man in his memory. In Eddie's version of the characters' history, he creates sympathy for the Old Man as he recalls a walk with his father across town.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine A. Schuler, "Gender Perspectives and Violence in the Plays of Maria Irene Fornes and Sam Shepard," in Modern American Drama: The Female Canon, ed. June Schleuter, p.222.

EDDIE: Then we stopped at a liquor store and he made me wait outside in the parking lot while he bought a bottle.... And I remember seeing the old man through the glass door of the liquor store as he paid for the bottle. And I remember feeling sorry for him and I didn't know why. (p.65)

Eddie also constructs for the audience a way of viewing his ritualistic inheritance of the Old Man's behaviour. Eddie reminisces about the Old Man's kindness as he passed on his behaviour to his son.

EDDIE: 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. (p.66)

This bond which exists between Eddie and the Old Man later causes Eddie to uphold the Old Man's values.

Eddie's recollection of his history is told with an emphasis on visual imagery. This encourages the audience to construct images in their minds, and therefore predisposes them to view the events from Eddie and the Old Man's perspectives, since they, too, create realities for themselves by constructing images which they believe to be real. The visual imagery in Eddie's monologue also foregrounds his firm position in the Symbolic Order, since out of all the senses, seeing is the most crucial in enabling the infant to differentiate her/himself from parents and to enter the Symbolic Order. It also contrasts with the contact based senses of taste, touch and smell which are predominantly used by the infant in the pre-Oedipal stage of development. Eddie's use of visual imagery also emphasises the fact that his version of telling his history is a creative act. He constantly makes use of the colour red. Eddie could see Spencer Tracey acting in a movie at the drive-in "speaking to a woman in a red dress" (p.65). Outside the bottle store he saw a group of Mexican migrant workers "standing around a pick-up truck with red mud all over the tires" (p.65). When Eddie and the Old Man arrived at May's mother's white house with the red awning, Eddie sees his father embracing a "real pretty woman with red hair" (p.66). Eddie's version of the past is joined to his present by May who stands watching Eddie in the doorway of the bathroom in her red dress. (pp.66-67).

The fact that Eddie's recollection of the events from his past correspond so neatly to his immediate surroundings at the time of telling the story, point to the fact that he sees his version of telling his story as a creative act which can contain bits of fabrication. That Eddie's story is comprised of fantasy, is given evidence in the form of two discrepancies between Eddie's version of the facts and the Old Man's version. Eddie claims that his father drove a Studebaker, whereas the Old Man says it was a Plymouth. Eddie also claims that his mother had no knowledge of the Old Man being involved with another woman, whereas the Old Man claims that she did know.

MARTIN: And you never knew what was going on?  
 EDDIE: Nope. Neither did my mother.  
 THE OLD MAN: She knew.  
 EDDIE: (to Martin) She never knew. (p.63)

Even though Eddie's version of the story is a fabrication of the truth, the audience have already been manipulated into accepting the fact that things become real and true if one believes that they are, and so understand Eddie's version of the story to be real for him. They have also been positioned to accept the fact that the truth can be composed of fabrications, since they have been made to understand that telling the truth is a creative act whereby one artistically transforms one's fantasies into reality, and that this cannot be called lying, since "If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying" (p.58). Therefore, they are already positioned to accept Eddie's version of the story even though it contains Eddie's constructed image of May and his constructed reality of their relationship.

As in Buried Child, the characters dispute the facts of their common history. May attempts to defy Eddie and the Old Man's constructed version of her history and present her mother and Eddie's mother's perspectives. She does not dispute the details of her encounter with Eddie, but she does paint the Old Man in a different light. She exposes his fear of women and presents the mother figures as devouring.

MAY: She [May's mother] hounded him for years and he kept trying to keep her at a distance because the closer these two separate lives drew together, these two separate women, these two separate kids, the more nervous he got. The more filled with terror that the two lives would find out about each other and devour him whole. That his secret would take him by the throat. (pp.70-71. Emphasis mine)

While she admits to having been in love with Eddie, May describes their attraction for one another as being like a disease, defying Eddie's construction of the reality of their relationship. "We couldn't eat if we weren't together. We couldn't sleep. We got sick at night when we were apart. Violently sick" (p.72). May's version of the story also demonstrates the effect of the Old Man's actions on the mothers.

MAY: And my mother - just turned herself inside out. I never could understand that. I kept watching her grieve, as though somebody'd died. She'd pull herself up into a ball and just stare at the floor. (p.72)

May also claims that Eddie's mother "blew her brains out" (p.73).

Although May attempts to speak her own version of the events, and voice the two mothers' experiences, the female viewpoint is undermined for a number of reasons.

Although May speaks the experience of the women, the space from within which she speaks is gender determined so that she speaks the experience of the mothers in the language of the Father.... The theatricality of Fool for Love, particularly the role of the spectator, counters the impulse of the narrative to give voice to the mothers because the perspective of the spectator is that of The Old Man.... The

m(others) figure in *Fool for Love* only through the agency of May who tells their story. It is the very fact of the telling of the story, that they are represented (if you like, inscribed in language and therefore within the Symbolic Order) that indicates the domination of The Father over the scene of representation."<sup>1</sup>

May's viewpoint is also counteracted by the Old Man who desperately attempts to reassert his own version of reality and truth, which the audience have already been positioned to accept. The Old Man so violently disavows May's version of reality that Shepard allows him to break the conventions of realistic theatre and enter the "fourth wall" to encourage Eddie to reinforce his version of reality. As Shepard revolutionises the conventional notions of traditional, realistic theatre, he simultaneously undermines the female viewpoint. The Old Man says to Eddie, "I wanna' hear the male side a' this thing. You gotta' represent me now. Speak on my behalf" (p.73). Eddie, however, for a brief moment does affirm the female side of the story. He says, "It was your shotgun. Same one we used to duck hunt with. Browning. She never fired a gun before in her life. That was her first time" (p.73). By saying that his mother killed herself with the same gun the Old man used to shoot ducks with, Eddie demonstrates the Old Man's part in her death.

In the face of Eddie's claims, the Old Man desperately constructs a reality for himself in which he emphasises his innocence and places the blame for engaging in two relationships on May's mother. He reminds Eddie of the threat of women, encouraging him to control it.

THE OLD MAN: But your mother - your mother wouldn't give it up, would she? ... 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 that right from the very start. But she opened up to me. She wouldn't listen. She kept opening up her heart to me. How could I turn her down when she loved me like that? How could I turn away from her? We were completely whole. (p.74. Emphasis Shepard's)

The Old Man, who previously denied his paternity of Eddie, now appeals to the fact that Eddie is his son. He says, "You gotta' hold up my end a' this deal. I got nobody now! Nobody! You can't betray me! You gotta represent me now! You're my son!" (p.75). The Old Man's appeals to Eddie seem to place Eddie back in the Oedipal stage of development where the son realises that "certain things are the right of the father."<sup>2</sup> Since Eddie's mother and May's mother are given representation through the voice of May, she can be seen to represent a mother figure. Eddie and May have an incestuous relationship since May is Eddie's half-sister. Therefore, Eddie's leaving May and adopting the Old Man's way of life dramatise the male infant's entry into the Symbolic Order, which occurs because he relinquishes his incestuous desire for the mother (who is

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Wilson, "Fool of Desire," pp.55-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

represented by May) and recognises the authority of the father.

When the Countess returns and blows up Eddie's truck, Eddie's two separate lives merge and he "holds up" the Old Man's end of the deal by continuing his father's way of life and leaving to follow the Countess. The very words he speaks to May announce his inheritance of the Old Man's behaviour. He says to May, "Well, I can't just let her get away with that. What am I supposed to do?" (p.76). These words bear a resemblance to the Old Man's earlier words to Eddie, "You're not gonna' let her off the hook with that one are ya'?" (p.73). On two occasions at the end of the play, May says to Martin, "He's gone," which reinforces Eddie's continuation of the Old Man's existence. (p.77). The words echo Eddie's saying, "You were gone," to the Old Man. (p.73). Shepard reinforces the male version of reality by giving the Old Man the final say in the play.

THE OLD MAN: (pointing in to space, stage left) Ya' see that picture over there?  
Ya' see that? Ya' know who that is? That's the woman of my  
dreams. That's who that is. And she's mine. She's all mine. Forever.  
(p.77)

The alliance between Eddie, the Old Man and the audience is reinforced and the male version of reality remains dominant. The final image of the play is of Martin's silhouette at the window which is outlined by the lights which represent the burning flames of the truck. This image demonstrates how absence and presence can occur simultaneously. The silhouette creates an image which is absent of content but contains the presence of an outline. It is reminiscent of the character of the Old Man in the play, who is created as being absent in physical form to May and Eddie, but whose presence in their minds and in the play is able to undermine the female viewpoint.

In Fool for Love, there is a considerable amount of gender doubling that occurs, as characters take on attributes and roles which have already been assigned to opposite genders earlier in the play. Shepard's male characters have engaged in physical violence throughout his work. When Eddie hears that Martin is coming to fetch May for a date, he prepares to take on his opponent, by entering May's room with a gun which he dismantles and cleans, thus demonstrating his violent intentions. May also, however, resorts to fantasising about ridding herself of Eddie and the Countess in a violent manner. She tells Eddie, "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" (p.20). This image of phallic insertion mirrors May's kneeling of Eddie in the groin and demonstrates that May fantasises and behaves in a manner that has already been associated with Eddie and male behaviour. May also takes the same competitive, "macho" stance in dealing with the Countess that we have already seen in Eddie's attitude to Martin. May screams, "I'm gonna' go out there. I'm gonna' go out there and tear her damn head off! I'm gonna' wipe her out" (p.50). The Countess's use of a gun to shoot the windshield out of Eddie's truck, further demonstrates that female characters behave in the same manner as male characters.

We learn that Eddie is the character who leaves, only to attempt to track May down when he wants her back. He says, "I'll track you down no matter where you go" (p.49). Tracking a partner down is at first associated with a male character. However, the audience witness the aural and visual effects of the Countess tracking Eddie down and hear May's story about her mother hunting down the Old Man. May says, "She kept hunting for him from town to town. Following little clues that he left behind, like a postcard maybe, or a motel on the back of a matchbook" (p.70). The audience has already seen May attempt to flee her motel room and so associate this behaviour with the female characters. (p.30). However, Eddie too takes on the role of fleeing when the Countess tracks him down. He says to May, "Get your stuff! We're gettin' outa' here" (p.48).

The characters continually double, displacing spaces of representation ascribed to their gender opposites, only to resume traditional spaces and to pass into the mirror again. In a universe in which chaos is natural, self can quickly become other, woman man and man woman.<sup>1</sup>

There are critics who feel that Shepard's use of gender doubling creates a positive representation of woman since it disrupts stereotyped and complicit images of women.

The level of discourse that now emerges in performance studies suggest a different space of representation, what Michel Foucault terms a heterotopia, embracing nearly endless doubling and transformation, which cannot be encompassed by binary critical constructs. In this view all relationships are ambiguous and there is no single action toward which all things tend, hence no single 'story' and no single 'meaning' that can be derived after the performative act is completed. The nature of transformational dramaturgy demands that dramatic action and its performance be continually displaced. In such a space of representation, gender transforms, doubles and multiplies, challenging and confounding received traditions concerning sex and sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Although Shepard's use of gender doubling represents women as behaving in ways other than in stereotypical, submissive roles, female characters in Fool for Love tend to engage in stereotypically masculine behaviour. May attempts to dominate Eddie by using physical force and adopting a male competitive stance to various situations. May's ability to behave like a man points more towards Shepard's desire to create a competitive opponent for Eddie, which he utilises to dramatise sibling rivalry, than towards his desire to demonstrate that women possess the ability to behave in ways which do not involve stereotypically feminine behaviour. It seems unlikely that he would endeavour to empower his female character in this aspect, when he undermines her ability to express her viewpoint in so many ways. It is my premise that there is a "single meaning" that can be derived from Fool for Love, which is clearly constructed by Shepard. He positions audience

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemarie Bank, "Self as Other: Sam Shepard's Fool for Love and A Lie of the Mind," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.230.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.228.

members to view the play from the male characters' perspective, and, by foregrounding Eddie and the Old Man's ability to construct realities in their minds, out of their fantasies, he excuses their derogatory treatment of women.

May is created not only as Eddie's lover, but also as his half-sister, and she is therefore required to play the double role of the abandoned lover and the warring sibling. Shepard has dramatised sibling rivalries in Curse of the Starving Class, Buried Child, and most prominently in True West. He favours a representation of this aspect of family life which dramatises the rivalries that exist between brothers. In Curse of the Starving Class, Shepard supposedly dramatises the battles that occur between a brother and a sister, but since Emma is constructed in a way that enables her to behave like a man, Shepard demonstrates that he is unable or unwilling to dramatise sibling rivalry as it exists between men and women. It seems likely that May's ability to periodically behave in a stereotypically masculine manner is related to Shepard's conception of her as a character who represents a warring brother figure. She necessarily appears in a female body, however, so that she is able to represent the object of Eddie's desire.

In an interview in which he discusses his screenplay, Paris, Texas, Shepard demonstrates his views on the similarities which exist in relationships between men and women and relationships between brothers, by revealing that his representation of a relationship between a man and a woman began as an exploration of the relationship between brothers.

We started with this idea of brothers; one a brother who is suffering from a kind of amnesia, although it wouldn't be explained in those terms: it was a kind of a - removal from the world and reentering the world; and another brother who's very much in the world. These two opposites. So it really began from an idea about brothers, and it turned into a whole other thing about the relationship between men and women. Basically it has more to do with men and women than the original brother issue.<sup>1</sup>

In Fool for Love, May's dual role of lover and sibling enables both types of relationships to be explored simultaneously. May is manipulated to express various aspects of the conflicts which occur between brothers and between men. Since May is required to take on this role, her behaviour is not consistent as she frequently switches between expressing her desire and portraying Eddie's opponent.

Shepard's inability to conceptualise women as behaving in assertive ways which do not involve engaging in stereotypically male behaviour results in May demonstrating a type of male sexuality. She knees Eddie in the groin and fantasises about stabbing him with a knife, which, as stated previously, are both images of phallic insertion. Luce Irigaray theorises that this type of behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by L.M. Kit Carson, "Interview with Sam Shepard," in Paris, Texas: The Screen Play, Wim Wenders, Sam Shepard and L.M. Kit Carson (New York: The Ecco Press, 1984), p.126.

enacted by May is inevitable in a representation of women that adopts a patriarchal discourse.

Caught in the specular logic of Patriarchy, women can choose to remain silent ... or to enact the specular representation of herself as a lesser male. The latter option, the woman as mimic, is according to Irigaray, a form of hysteria. The hysteric mimes her own sexuality in a masculine mode, since this is the only way in which she can rescue something of her own desire. The hysteric's dramatisation ... of herself is thus a result of her exclusion from Patriarchal discourse.<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis Moi's)

Shepard constructs May's character in a manner which enables her to behave like a man, but she appears as a female character to represent Eddie's desire. She is capable therefore of demonstrating both a male and a female sexuality.

Although May resists Eddie's construction of her as the desired, she is manipulated by Shepard to express, periodically, aspects of Eddie's desire, which results in her behaving in ways which are not consistent. She moves from telling Eddie, "I don't love you. I don't need you. I don't want you," thus attempting to defy Eddie's construction of the reality of their relationship, to undressing in front of him, thus representing the object of his desire. (p.50). Shepard's stage directions read, "As she speaks to Eddie and changes into the new clothes, she gradually transforms herself from her former tough drabness into a very sexy woman" (p.28). May therefore alternates between expressing aspects of her own desire (which is expressed either in a way that can be associated with what is traditionally thought of as masculine desire, or in a way that expresses what is traditionally thought of as female desire) and aspects of Eddie's desire, constantly allowing her actions to contradict her various verbalised desires.

May also represents Eddie's desire to unify the component parts of himself. This desire is expressed through Eddie's desire to engage in incest with May. "Incest in itself symbolises, according to Jung, the longing for union with the essence of one's self; in other words for individuation."<sup>2</sup> May is therefore constructed to represent Eddie's internal conflicts. She is also utilised to express an aspect of Eddie's desire when she appears in the bathroom door, to represent Eddie's memory of the first time he saw her.

EDDIE:           And then through the doorway, behind them both, I see this girl.  
                      (The bathroom door very slowly and silently swings open revealing  
                      May, standing in the door frame back-lit with yellow light in her  
                      red dress. She just watches Eddie as he keeps telling the story. He  
                      and Martin are unaware of her presence.) (pp.66-67)

In this instance, May is less of her own character and more an image of Eddie's desire; she is

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<sup>1</sup> Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, p.28.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p.157.

"simply his vision."<sup>1</sup>

Shepard's stated attempt to create a female character who remains "absolutely true to herself not only as a social being, but also as an emotional being," is flawed.<sup>2</sup> May displays a complete lack of consistency in her behaviour. She defies Eddie's construction of her as his desired object, asserts herself and tells him to leave, only to contradict herself.

MAY: I don't need you!  
 EDDIE: Okay (turns to go, collects his glove and bucking-strap) fine.  
 MAY: Don't go!  
 EDDIE: I'm goin'. (p.18)

May's actions are also contradictory. The stage directions in the opening scene of the play reveal that, at first, she "suddenly grabs his [Eddie's] closest leg with both arms and holds tight burying her head between his knees" (p.17), but later, when Eddie tries to push her back on her bed, "She erupts furiously, leaping off the bed and lashing out at him with her fists" (p.17). May's dual sexuality, her double role as both a brother figure and a lover, and her simultaneous attraction and repulsion for Eddie prevent her from remaining true to herself.

The female viewpoint in Fool for Love is undermined in numerous ways. The audience members are positioned to view the play from the male characters' perspective and May is required to express her viewpoint in a scene of representation which upholds patriarchal values. Any views that are expressed are contradicted by her actions, since she is manipulated to express Eddie's desire as well as her own. Trapped in a representation which constitutes women's opinions as subordinate, May is unable to voice a female perspective.

Shepard shares the role of "fantasist" with his father and son characters. His plays continue and perpetuate the story of male desire ... and power.... Shepard's attempt in Fool for Love to represent a heterosexual encounter turns out to be only his male characters' encounters with their imaginary others, "lies of their minds", monologues masked as dialogue.... Shepard may have succeeded in creating a female character who can announce her fear of being erased, but she has already been erased by the playwright's representation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, A Lie of the Mind (New York: Plume, 1986), p.71.

<sup>2</sup> Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, Realities." p.26. Quoted by Lynda Hart in "Sam Shepard's Spectacle of Impossible Heterosexuality," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.219.

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Spectacle of Impossible Heterosexuality," p.224.

CHAPTER 5: "SIMPLY HIS VISION": UNATTAINABLE SELF-REALISATION AND UNFULFILLED DESIRES IN A LIE OF THE MIND

A Lie of the Mind is Sam Shepard's most extensive play to date. In it he combines all his previous themes and obsessions to present a portrait of the American family whose inhabitants are divided both from themselves and from one another by conflicting desires. In A Lie of the Mind, Shepard presents female characters whose actions express a desire to become self-realised by means of attempting to create meaningful and lasting relationships with men where oppression and male violence are eradicated. However, Shepard creates male characters who are either able to remain in relationships with women, but only if they are dominating and controlling them, or who are unable to sustain lasting unions with women even if they are manipulating and abusing them. The male characters are incapable of relating to real women, and engage in liaisons with lies of their minds, living their lives in isolation. Since the manner in which the female characters attempt to become self-realised is by forming relationships with men, their goals are unattainable and their desires unfulfilled. They are unable to achieve self-realisation because they are periodically manipulated to represent the male characters' animas, and are depicted as being so desperate to enter into any form of a relationship with a man that they forgive men for their destructive behaviour.

There are many critics who believe that Shepard's creation of female characters in A Lie of the Mind deserves praise. David de Rose writes, "Those who have followed Shepard's career will be pleasantly surprised to find in the play female characters of amazing substance and complexity who interact on an equal level with Shepard's domineering males."<sup>1</sup> Johanna Dickey writes, "Shepard comes dangerously close to misogyny in many of his plays, creating female characters who are either non-nurturing maternal figures or controlling, entrapping sexual partners. In A Lie of the Mind, Shepard creates female characters who grow away from a masculine influence into self-sufficiency."<sup>2</sup> While Shepard's female characters might attempt to interact with the male characters on an equal level, their attempts towards self-sufficiency are not authentic, since they move away from one destructive relationship with a man, only to attempt to seek out another man who will not destroy, reject or abandon them.

Sam Shepard's female characters are unable to achieve self-realisation for a variety of reasons. Karen Horney defines self-realisation as follows, "With regard to ... [Man's self] it means striving

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<sup>1</sup> David De Rose, "Slouching Towards Broadway: Shepard's A Lie of the Mind," Theatre, 27 (Spring 1986), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Johanna Dickey, "A Review of A Lie of the Mind," Theatre Journal, 4 (Dec 1988), 544.

toward a deeper and clearer experiencing of his feelings, wishes and beliefs; ... toward a clearer perception of his direction in life."<sup>1</sup> The female characters in A Lie of the Mind do strive to fulfil and experience their wishes, and beliefs. However, their wishes and their perception of their direction in life generally involve becoming engaged in some form of a meaningful relationship with the male characters, who are created as being unable to engage in lasting or meaningful relationships with women.

The female characters in A Lie of the Mind, therefore, generally only attempt to reach self-realisation within the boundaries of seeking a relationship with a man. Engaging in healthy human relationships is one of the goals of self-realisation. Horney says, "The centre of the process is the evolution of one's potentialities as a human being; hence it involves - in a central place - the development of one's capacities for good human relations."<sup>2</sup> While the female characters' attempts to either transform their already existing relationships with men, or to seek out other relationships with men in which they will not be degraded, does indicate an attempt toward self-realisation, Shepard appears unable, or unwilling, to create male characters who are able to form healthy relationships with women, and therefore, the very manner in which the female characters attempt to achieve self-realisation thwarts their ability to attain it. Shepard's female characters' desires to enter into a relationship with a man who will not treat them as subordinates, manipulate or reject them are doomed to remain unfulfilled.

Beth's efforts towards attaining self-realisation are mostly within the boundaries of expressing her desire to integrate the masculine and feminine sides of her personality by requesting a union between herself and Frankie. This attempt is thwarted since Frankie feels unable to enter into a relationship with her. Her attempts towards self-realisation are also thwarted as she becomes manipulated by Shepard to express an aspect of Jake's psyche, and behaves accordingly. Meg, Beth's mother, moves towards self-realisation by attempting to transform her submissive role in her marriage. She develops from being a subordinate wife to acquiring the confidence to confront Baylor, her husband, about his continual desire for separation from his family, and to articulate to him the essential differences in the natures of men and women. At the end of the play, however, she forgives Baylor for all his sins with one kiss and ignores his attempts to control her. Lorraine and Sally also appear to move towards self-realisation and self-sufficiency as they supposedly relinquish their ties with the past and abandon their enslavement to dominant men. However, they disappear to Europe in search of yet another man and their attempts towards self-realisation are relatively inauthentic. For the female characters in A Lie of the Mind, self-

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Horney, Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-realisation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p.364.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.308.

realisation is not a goal which can be attained.

Although all the characters in A Lie of the Mind desperately require and desire to be nurtured and guided, Shepard repeats his earlier representation of ineffectual mother figures who are unable to nurture their children adequately. Meg is unable to adequately guide or help her daughter to achieve self-realisation since she is unable to realise her own self, and Lorraine is unable to give Jake adequate nurture since she has replaced her desire for her absent husband by attempting to smother Jake with her entrapping and cloyingly maternal affections. She also rejects her other children and favours the role of mothering and defending Jake

As Shepard's representational structures become more realistic, so too does his dramatisation of male violence. The female characters in A Lie of the Mind become entangled in defending their particular favourite male characters' dominating or violent behaviour, and Shepard concentrates on evoking sympathy for these male characters who supposedly are unable to help themselves. The male characters' desire to remain in dominant, powerful roles prevents them from forming some form of meaningful relationships with women. Their dominant, violent behaviour therefore helps to prevent the female characters from achieving self-realisation.

The divisions which exist between the characters in A Lie of the Mind are highlighted from the beginning of the play, as Shepard emphasises the gulf which exists between Jake and Frankie. His opening stage directions call for an "impression of huge dark space and distance between the two characters with each one isolated in his own pool of light."<sup>1</sup> The characters' state of separation from one another is also emphasised by the divided set. The characters in A Lie of the Mind continue to remain separated from one another, even though it appears that they are unable to survive alone.

A Lie of the Mind is a play of disturbing contradictions. Its characters leave home despite their desperate need for home; they forget the past even though the present is controlled by it; they are most alone when in the company of those they love; they look for truth in self constructed lies.... The stunning paradox of their lives is that they are inextricably bound together but seem inevitably destined for separation.<sup>2</sup>

Although the characters' estrangement from one another can be seen in all their various types of relationships with one another, the most marked disconnections appear in the relationships between the male and female characters. Shepard has said that the starting point for A Lie of the Mind was "the incredible schism between a man and a woman, in which something is broken in

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard, A Lie of the Mind (New York: Plume, 1986), p.1. (All further references to this play appear in the text.)

<sup>2</sup> Ron Mottram, "Exhaustion of the American Soul: Sam Shepard's A Lie of the Mind," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.95.

a way that almost kills the thing that was causing them to be together."<sup>1</sup> Shepard's male and female characters are divided by the essential differences in their natures and by their contrasting desires. Meg says to her husband, Baylor, "Maybe it really is true that we're so different that we'll never be able to get certain things across to each other. Like mother used to say.... "Two opposite animals" (p.103). She goes on to articulate the consequences that the differences between male and female desires cause to occur.

MEG:           The female - the female one needs - the other.  
 BAYLOR:       What other?  
 MEG:           The male. The male one.  
 BAYLOR:       Oh.  
 MEG:           But the male one - doesn't really need the other. Not the same way.  
 BAYLOR:       I don't get ya.  
 MEG:           The male one goes off by himself. Leaves. He needs something else. But he doesn't know what it is. He doesn't really know what he needs. So he ends up dead. By himself. (p.105)

It is the male characters' desire for separation, and their lack of commitment to family life which divides them from the female characters and causes the female characters' desires for meaningful relationships with men to remain unfulfilled.

Throughout A Lie of the Mind, the male characters, with the possible exception of Frankie, demonstrate the desire to exclude themselves from their families. Any emotional bonds appear to restrict their desire for freedom and are therefore eradicated. The younger male characters also appear to have inherited this trait from their fathers. Baylor is obsessed with hunting, not out of necessity for food, but for the sheer enjoyment of killing and because of the isolation it allows him from his family. Meg tells him, "Maybe you just wanna be alone. Maybe that's it. Maybe it's got nothing to do with hunting. You just don't want to be a part of us anymore" (p.103). Like the woman's father in The Rock Garden, Baylor often stays away for lengthy periods of time in his hunting shack. Meg says, "He's got everything he needs out there. His magazines. His flashlight. His radio. He even eats his meals out there" (p.47). The use of hunting is one of the ways in which men are able to assert their dominance, exclude themselves from women and overcome their fear of the female body. Dorothy Dinnerstein remarks that because the female body has the power to evoke in men the memory of infancy, they engage in activities which allow them to segregate themselves from women.

Since the first parent is female, heteroerotic feeling has deeper roots in infancy for men than for women. What these deeper roots mean is that in intimate relations between a man and a woman he is in one very important respect more vulnerable than she is: She can more readily re-evoke in him the unqualified, boundless, helpless passion of infancy. If he lets her, she can shatter his adult sense of power and control. She can bring out the soft, wild, naked baby in him. Men try to handle

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Jonathan Cott, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Sam Shepard," p.70.

this danger with many kinds of sex segregating institutions that they seem always and everywhere driven to create. Secret societies, hunting trips, pool parlours, wars - all of these provide men with sanctuary from the impact of women, with refuge in which they can recuperate from the temptation to give way to ferocious, voracious dependence, and recover their feelings of competence, autonomy and dignity.<sup>1</sup>

Jake's father also abandoned his family, thus rupturing Lorraine's dream of having a lasting relationship with her husband.

LORRAINE: You know a man your whole life. You grow up with him. You're almost raised together. You go through tornadoes together in the same basement. You go through a world war together. You have babies together. And then one day he just up and disappears into thin air. (p.91)

Any possibility of healing the split between the male and female characters in A Lie of the Mind is destroyed by the male characters' desire to segregate themselves from their families.

By moulding themselves on male cowboys and outlaws, not only do the male characters in A Lie of the Mind long for the lie of the freedom of the frontier, which is removed from the constraints of domesticity and women, but they enact the frontier code of behaviour which professes that dominance is asserted through physical prowess. The male characters in the play are all associated with death and destruction. Beth explains her father's character to Frankie. She says, "This - this is my father. He's given up love. Love is dead for him. My mother is dead for him. Things live for him to be killed. Only death counts for him. Nothing else" (p.45). Jake has also played a part in his father's death, beaten Beth into a brain-damaged state, and in his youth, we are told, seriously injured a goat. Baylor also shoots Frankie and Mike shoots a deer. The visual symbols which emphasise the association between the male characters and destruction include both Frankie and Baylor's clothes being covered in bloodstains and Mike's constant handling of a gun, which he uses to defend his territory. The male characters' behaviour succeeds in separating them from the female characters.

In A Lie of the Mind, Shepard also dramatises the internal psychic divisions which exist in an individual's nature. This is most prominently explored through the character of Jake who has a dual nature and cannot remember a large portion of his behaviour. He describes his inability to recall some of his behaviour to Sally:

JAKE: I just try to keep track of my own movements these days. That's enough. Have you ever tried that? To follow yourself around? Like a spy. You can wind up anywhere. It's amazing. Like, just now I caught myself shaving. I was right over there. Shaving my face. I didn't know I was doing that until just now. It's kinda scary, ya know?  
SALLY: Scary?

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur, p.111.

JAKE: Yeah. I mean there's a possibility that you could do something that you didn't even know about. You could be somewhere that you couldn't even remember being. (p.59)

Jake's divorcing of himself from his actions represents what R.D. Laing describes as schizoid behaviour. Schizoid individuals do not experience themselves as complete persons, but as split in various ways.

In this position ... the self, in order to develop and sustain its identity and autonomy, and in order to be safe from the persistent threat and danger from the world, has cut itself off from direct relatedness with others, and has endeavoured to become its own object: to become in fact, related directly only to itself. Its cardinal function becomes fantasy and observation.... Relationships with others and the world is ... delegated to a false-self system whose perceptions, feelings, thoughts, actions, possess a relatively low coefficient of realness.... The self engages in fantasy in the private 'world' of 'mental' things i.e. of its own objects and observes the false self, which alone is engaged in living in the 'shared world'.<sup>1</sup>

Jake's imprisonment in his own perception of reality prevents him from communicating with anyone effectively, and Lorraine and Sally's desires to engage in a meaningful relationship with him remain unfulfilled. Jake's inability to recall various incidents in his life allows him to create his own subjective sense of reality at various points in the play. He is conveniently able to forget the role he has played in his father's death, and remembers Beth as she looked before he beat her into a brain-damaged state. Since the actress playing Beth actually performs what is happening in Jake's memory at one point in the play (which will be discussed later), it would seem that characters and events in the play express various aspects of Jake's divided self.

In his essay "Two Opposite Animals: Structural Pairing in A Lie of the Mind," Gregory Lanier observes that Shepard explores two sides of one personality in the characters of Jake and Frankie. Jake represents the aggressive self and Frankie the passive self. Shepard has previously explored the idea that individuals possess dual natures by creating two characters who represent the component parts of one individual in an earlier play, True West. He says of the play:

I wanted to write a play about double nature, one that wouldn't be symbolic or metaphorical or any of that stuff . I just wanted to give a taste of what it feels like to be two-sided. It's a real thing double nature. I think we're split in a much more devastating way than psychology can ever reveal. It's not so cute. Not some little thing we can get over. It's something we've got to live with."<sup>2</sup>

In A Lie of the Mind, the point that Jake and Frankie represent two sides of the same self is emphasised by the fact that it is, at first, Frankie who goes to discover whether Beth is alive. The rational self seeks to determine the consequences of the violent self's behaviour. Since it is suggested that both Frankie and Beth represent component parts of Jake's psyche, a marriage between Beth and Frankie would represent the unification of Jake's psyche. However, the play

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<sup>1</sup> R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (England: Penguin Books, 1969), pp.137-138.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Robert Coe, "The Saga of Sam Shepard," New York Times Magazine, 23 Nov. 1980, p.122.

is about Jake's disintegration and regression, and this union does not occur. Since Beth attempts to achieve self-realisation through seeking to form a relationship with Frankie, she is unable to achieve it.

Lanier suggests that another way in which Shepard demonstrates the divisions which exist between his characters is through contrasting the play's plot, which is comic, with the play's texture, which is tragic. This contrast helps to demonstrate the differences between the male and female characters' natures, and the reasons why the male and female characters are separated from one another, because it is the female characters who become enmeshed in the comic plot of the play and express a desire for a comic resolution, while the male characters' behaviour makes up the tragic texture of the drama.

While the action of the play's plot may be moving to a kind of comic resolution, the play's texture draws on the methods used to produce the milieu of tragedy: actions that result in alienation, symbols of isolation and destruction, suffering, and final images of fragmentation.<sup>1</sup>

According to Lanier, comedy usually depicts the adventures of a hero and heroine who are separated at the beginning of a drama and who overcome obstacles which keep them apart so that they might come together just prior to the end of the drama. Lanier describes the plot as being Jake's quest for Beth and elaborates on the obstacles Jake has to overcome to be reunited with her. For example, he escapes Lorraine's attempt to lock him in his room, walks through a Montana blizzard in underwear and a jacket, and survives Mike's ritual of degradation in order to see Beth. Lanier proposes that Shepard demonstrates the female characters' desire for a comic ending when Beth announces her plans for a wedding, which is the typical resolution to a comedy. Meg expresses her approval of the idea. She says, "I think it would be wonderful up on the high meadow. We could invite the whole family. We could even have a picnic up there. Cake and lemonade. We could have music. We haven't had a real wedding in so long" (p.114). The female characters' desire for a comic ending is disrupted by the male characters' need for separation.<sup>2</sup>

The female characters in A Lie of the Mind seek a comic ending: the sense that everyone will live happily ever after.... But Shepard's male characters need something else. As soon as the male reaches the comic equilibrium desired by the female, he just ups and disappears into thin air. The males in A Lie of the Mind, consistently seek a means of escape, preferring the isolation that is the end point of tragedy to the socialization that is the end point of comedy.... No matter how strong the impetus toward union and harmony, the Shepard male rejects it. Even when the need for the female becomes as strong as the need for life, the male will

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory W. Lanier, "Two Opposite Animals: Structural Pairing in Sam Shepard's A Lie of the Mind," Modern Drama, 34 (Sep. 1991), 414.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.415-416.

ultimately reject her.<sup>1</sup>

The final image of the play, the fire in the snow, comments on the inability of males and females to live together harmoniously. Whether the fire symbolises the female characters (because of their association with the inside world) and the snow the male characters (because of their association with the outside world) or whether this symbolism is reversed, with the fire representing men as in traditional symbology, is not quite clear. What is, however, apparent, is that "like fire and snow the males and females may momentarily meet, they may even notice the balanced opposition of their contradictory natures. But they cannot remain together for any length of time."<sup>2</sup>

As in Shepard's other family dramas, the characters in A Lie of the Mind suffer from receiving either a lack of nurture or an abundance of inadequate nurture. The characters' desire to be nurtured is symbolised by the repeated images of cocooned and injured bodies. The audience first witness Beth immersed in bandages and later see Jake, Sally and Lorraine covered in blankets. Frankie and Baylor have a fight over a blanket which Beth also tries to steal in Act III, demonstrating the characters' desperation to be covered and protected, and symbolising their desire to be nurtured.

In the last two acts of the play, the repeated visual symbols of injured bodies, all of which are reminiscent of the initial image of Beth, also demonstrate a desperate need for nurture. Baylor appears with blood stains on his pants and his feet are cracked with frostbite. Frankie has a bullet wound in his leg, and Beth shows him an imagined lobotomy scar. (p.73). In the final scene of the play Jake appears with bleeding knees and hands. (p.122). Sally also tells the story of her father who was "splattered all over the road like some lost piece of livestock" (p.95). The frequency of images of characters who are either injured or retreat into a cocoon demonstrate universal suffering, a desperate desire for nurture and a desire to return to the womb.

The characters' desire, or need, to be nurtured is also expressed by the fact that they frequently behave like children, which also demonstrates the movement towards regression in the play. Meg behaves like a child, asking Baylor, "They locked me up once, didn't they, Dad?" (p.30). Beth speaks like a child since she is brain-damaged and also says that Jake is like a child. She says to Mike, "You won' hurd them. You won'. Nah can't a chile. A chile. Ah chile. (Like 'child'). You can hurd him, Mige. Hee a chile. Both" (p.17). Jake also behaves like a child when he rejects the cream of broccoli soup which is offered to him.

Jake suddenly knocks the spoon out of her hand and sends it flying. He rips the blanket and sheet off himself, grabs the bowl out of her hand, stands on the bed,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.417.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory W. Lanier, "Two Opposite Animals," p.419.

holds the bowl high above his head and sends it crashing down on the mattress. Then he begins to stomp on the soup, jumping all over the bed, exhaling loudly and grunting like a buffalo. (p.34)

Jake's regressive behaviour can be attributed to the fact that he is rejecting the nourishment he is receiving. He is being treated like a child since Lorraine desires to behave like a mother. The fact that Jake is receiving inappropriate nurture is symbolised by the fact that he is lying in a bed which is too short for him.

Although Shepard presents the behaviour of the fathers in A Lie of the Mind as being partly responsible for the lack of nurture the children have received, he emphasises the fact that the mother figures in the play (who are created as incapable nurturers) are mainly responsible for the lack of nurture their children have received. A Lie of the Mind differs from Shepard's earlier plays, where mother figures are disinterested or complacent about their children, in that Lorraine desperately wants to nurture her children, but for her own benefit and not theirs. Lorraine wishes to replace the gap left by her husband who abandoned her, by caring for Jake, but attempts to cure him by controlling him. She says, "I'm gonna take him on a permanent basis. I'm not even gonna let him outa' his room for a solid year. Maybe that'll teach him" (p.26). Lorraine treats Jake like a child, trivialising and excusing his behaviour because her need to take care of him is so urgent. Lorraine ignores Jake's violent behaviour and prefers to excuse it by blaming the female characters for all his actions. She blames Beth for Jake's attack on her.

SALLY:           He's not a boy. He's a big grown-up man and he might have killed his wife!  
LORRAINE:       He wasn't fit to live with anybody to begin with! I don't know why he ever tried it. Woman who lives with a man like that deserves to be killed. She deserves it. (p.23)

After Jake abandons his family, Lorraine blames Sally for his actions. She says, "He's abandoned me. And you put him up to it" (p.87). By creating Lorraine as a character who has a negative influence on Jake, Shepard implies that she is partly responsible for his personality development. Her defence of his behaviour enables Shepard to create the view that Jake is not responsible for his violent behaviour towards Beth. One of Shepard's rare representations of a mother figure who is concerned about her children involves a female character whose motivation to look after her son is to replace her own hunger for nurture. The other mother figure in the play, Meg, is so dominated by Baylor that her attempts to help Beth are ineffectual. She, too, defends her son, Mike, against Beth's accusations that he is attempting to possess her mind. Shepard's representation of ineffectual mother figures contributes to a negative representation of women in the play.

As in Curse of the Starving Class, the male characters in A Lie of the Mind, who have proved themselves incapable of either giving or receiving nurture, nevertheless assume that they are looking after the female characters. For example, in Act I, when Baylor and Meg arrive to visit their daughter in hospital, Mike requests that Meg stay with him and Beth, to which Baylor replies, "How're you gonna watch out for her and your sister both. That's more'n one man can handle. More'n two men can handle" (p.31). Even though Baylor proves himself to be incapable of assuming a nurturing role, because of his desire for separation, his penchant for killing, and his inability to engage emotionally with his family, he holds the fact that he believes he has to look after the female characters against them. He believes that his role of looking after the female characters prevents him from fulfilling his ambitions.

BAYLOR: I could be up in the wild country huntin' antelope. I could be raising a string a' pack mules back up in there . Doin' somethin' useful. But no, I gotta play nursemaid to a bunch a' feeble-minded women down here in civilisation who can't take care a' themselves. I gotta waste my days away makin' sure they eat and have a roof over their heads and a nice warm place to go crazy in. (p.106)

Meg attempts to destroy this notion, telling Baylor, "Nobody's crazy, Baylor. Except you. Why don't you just go. Why don't you just go off and live the way you want to live. We'll take care of ourselves. We always have" (p.106). Even though Meg's words are revealed to be true, the female characters cannot become truly self-sufficient, since Baylor and Mike persist in behaving as if they are looking after the women in their family in order to fulfil their own desires. Mike uses the excuse that he is taking care of Beth to inflict emotional and physical abuse on Jake and Frankie. Although Beth tries to reveal the real purpose behind Mike's actions, telling him, "Iz not for love! Iz pride!" both Meg and Beth's attempts to expose the fact that the male characters are not actually looking after them are in vain. (p.46). Mike and Baylor continue to act out the lie that they are looking after the women in their family because it allows them to resent the female characters, to place women in subordinate roles, and to utilise their positions as the female character's protectors to manipulate those around them. Consequently the male characters contribute to the prevalent lack of nurture in the family, and the female characters are unable to make their own decisions and further their attempts towards attaining self-realisation.

Not only do the male characters in Lie of the Mind assume that they are taking care of their families, but they also prevent the female characters from attempting to be nurturers. Baylor tells Frankie that Meg used to put socks on the dogs, but he put a stop to that. Jake's father also attempted to obstruct the female character's desire to nurture. Jake recalls his father's behaviour:

JAKE: He'd put on Lefty Fritzell and twirl you around the kitchen until you got so dizzy you had to run into the bathroom and puke. I remember lyin' awake listening to you with the dry heaves and listening to him bellowing down the hallway at Mom. Warning her not to go in and help you out. (p.64. Emphasis mine)

Jake's father possesses a history of not allowing women to give nurture. On the night of his death, he rejected Sally's desire to help him. Sally says, "I went over and tried to help Dad up but he turned on me and snarled. Just like a dog" (p.93).

The male characters in A Lie of the Mind assume the roles of looking after their families, while simultaneously proving they are incapable of successfully performing these roles. The mother figures are also rendered ineffective nurturers and a solution for solving the desperate lack of nurture which plagues these families is, yet again, abandoned.

In A Lie of the Mind, characters attempt to unify themselves by means of desiring and attempting to engage in relationships with other characters. They try to integrate the component parts of their selves by projecting the qualities that they most desire within themselves onto other characters and then attempting to form a union with that character. "The search for and confrontation with the Other is inevitable and endless because it is the search for and confrontation with the self."<sup>1</sup> In earlier plays, Shepard has demonstrated how negative images may be projected onto various characters, especially the mother figures. In A Lie of the Mind, he demonstrates that positive material can also be projected onto people. "It is, however, not only a person's negative conscious qualities that are projected outward, but in equal measure his positive ones. This projection of the latter then brings about an excessive, delusory, inappropriate overvaluation and admiration of the object."<sup>2</sup>

The characters are, however, unable to unify themselves since they attempt to become whole by seeking out relationships with other characters, and Shepard presents men and women as having such divided natures that there is no possibility that they can engage in lasting, meaningful relationships. "If the self is 'completed' in the Other, that completion is temporary and temporal. Presence is always defined in ... A Lie of the Mind in terms of absence: an absent person, a past time, a lost part of the self, a shattered dream, a jettisoned relationship."<sup>3</sup>

Jake desperately requires a union between the divided components of his psyche. In order to integrate himself, he projects the female side of his personality, or his anima, onto Beth. "At one level, the anima is simply a personification of male erotic desire, an image which may become projected upon real women, but which may have little to do with the actual nature of the real person."<sup>4</sup> Jake's projection of his anima onto Beth, and his longing to be reunited with her is a

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemarie Bank, "Self as Other," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.237.

<sup>2</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, Projection and Recollection in Jungian Psychology: Reflections of the Soul, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemarie Bank, "Self as Other," p.238.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Storr, Jung, p.50.

direct expression of his longing for the unification of his own psyche.

The anima is that which gives the man life; without her he is devoid of life. What happens when a man projects or denies the existence of the anima? Since the man is unconscious that he has a soul, the soul image is readily projected onto a woman, and she then becomes the screen onto which his positive (idealized, soul-like) or negative (witch like) anima is projected. The soul image will appear to a man as highly desirable.... He will find himself drawn to her as though by invisible power. She will seem to him to be the potential source of all his happiness. He will almost certainly find sexual fantasies involving her dancing in and out of his mind. He may believe his fulfilment lies in a sexual relationship with her. It entirely escapes him that at the bottom of all this is his unconscious longing for union with his own soul.<sup>1</sup>

Beth is the screen onto which Jake has projected his anima. She dances in and out of his mind and at one point in the play the actress playing Beth actually enacts one of Jake's fantasies about her. Jake's perception of Beth is vastly different to Beth's actual reality. Jake does not imagine her in her battered, brain-damaged state but as a seductive siren.

Jake stays in place, staring out across to stage left. Very softly light begins to come up on Beth's hospital bed, now made up with blue satin sheets. Beth is alone, sitting on the upstage side of the bed with her back to Jake. She is naked from the waist up with a blue silk dress pulled down around her waist and blue high heels with stockings. She is uninjured now - no bandage, her hair soft and beautiful. She is oiling her shoulders and chest from a small bottle beside her. Jake just stares across at her as the light very slowly rises on her. She continues oiling herself slowly and seductively, unaware of Jake. She is simply his vision. (p.41. Emphasis mine)

Jake's projection of his anima onto Beth is further proved in the way that he looks at Sally, but sees Beth. All he requires is a screen, and his anima projection onto Beth emerges. Jake says to Sally, "You remember when I tied you to me. That one night. You tried sneakin' off on me. In my sleep. Couldn't do it, could ya?" (p.24). Jung theorises that, "the mother is the first to bear the image of the anima which the man must project upon women passing from the mother to the sister and finally to the beloved."<sup>2</sup>

What is problematic about the fact that Shepard utilises Beth to express the projections Jake places onto her, is that Beth's character alternates between expressing her own desire to integrate herself, and representing Jake's anima and his desire for union within himself. Since Beth is utilised to demonstrate the way in which Jake views her, it becomes clear that the play concentrates on dramatising aspects of Jake's psyche. As the play progresses, Beth is manipulated to demonstrate Jake's regression. At the end of the play Beth transforms herself into a whore-like figure. This represents Jake's return to the pre-Oedipal stage of development. At this stage of development, the male infant sees the mother's body as an object whose prime function is

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Sanford, "Invisible Partners," *Odyssey*, Dec. 1988/Jan. 1989, p.27.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p.218.

perceived as inducing oral gratification. A whore's function can also be seen as inducing gratification, although it is sexual. Beth's transformation into a whore can be interpreted as another place in which Shepard uses Beth to demonstrate the way in which Jake sees her, and she therefore represents his regression. Although Beth's desire to marry Frankie is an expression of her own desire to unify the parts of herself, the manner in which she dresses for the wedding, and the fact that she has already been utilised to represent the way Jake views her, points to the fact that she is once again portraying Jake's projection onto her. Beth's transformation into a whore-like figure removes her from the journey towards self-sufficiency and self-realisation.

Beth's ability to express Jake's fantasies and projections is reminiscent of Shepard's utilisation of May at one point in *Fool for Love*. When Eddie recounts his story of the first time he saw May, she stands in the doorway of her bathroom, enacting Eddie's vision and memory. Both female characters are used to represent the male characters' visions of them; the lies of the male characters' mind. Consequently, the audience are able to view the female characters through a male gaze.

Jake's image of Beth is always more real to him than her real person. At the beginning of the play, Jake says that she is more real to him in her absence than in her presence. When She is not with him, Jake says to Frankie, "It's not a picture either! It's her. I see her. She's right here with me now!" (p.2). This comment proves that Beth is a component of his psyche since she can be present when she really is absent. Jake is able to see Beth when she's not there, far more clearly than if she really was present, because her real presence contradicts Jake's image of her, and she is able to comply with his vision of her when she is lying safely in his mind. Throughout his career, Shepard has dramatised the contradictions between the image his characters have of other characters and the real characters. He says:

It's an awfully big thing, in this relationship between men and women, the idea that each partner has of the other, the idealistic situation that's always at play in the real context of what it's like to be together. These two things are always in juxtaposition with each other; you know the idea of who I'm with and who I'm actually with."<sup>1</sup>

Shepard frequently constructs plots which enable his female characters to represent both their own characters and the images of women with whom Shepard's male characters believe they have relationships. Although female characters also construct images of the male characters which are divorced from the male characters' reality, the audience members never see the male characters from the female characters' viewpoints, only from an objective standpoint. The audience are, however, manipulated into viewing the female characters through a male gaze. Shepard's creation of female characters therefore, is designed to portray women as men view them.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by L. M. Kit Carson in *Paris, Texas*, p.127-128.

Jake's favouring of his image of Beth over the real person is an inherited trait from his father. Like the Old Man in Fool for Love, Jake's father prefers to engage in communications with pictures of people, rather than real persons. Sally recalls his trailer, as it was when she went to visit him.

SALLY: He had all these pictures of us tapped to the walls. Baby pictures and 4-H club pictures and pictures of Jake running with a football. But they were all squeezed in between these other pictures. Pictures of Bing Crosby and Ginger Rogers and Ida Lupine and Gene Autry.... I got the feeling he must've spent a lot of time talking to these faces. Maybe even introducing the pictures of us to the pictures of all these stars. Trying to make a family of us all. So we'd know each other. (p.90)

Sally and Jake's father's preference for engaging in relationships with pictures of his family and media icons demonstrates his desire to engage in relationships which he can construct and control. The male characters' desires to liaise with lies of their minds, rather than real women, is in direct contrast to the female characters' desires to engage in meaningful relationships with real, present men. The female characters' insistence on attempting to create lasting relationships with men who prefer to engage in dialogues with images prevents their movement towards self-realisation. The female characters are as chained to living out the male characters' perceptions of them as the male characters are to the lies of their mind, for in all of Shepard's plays the female characters are powerless to deconstruct the male version of reality. For the male characters in A Lie of The Mind, truth is a construction in their minds, which, if contradicted, is merely enforced by means of physical dominance over women.

Like Jake, Beth also expresses her own desire to integrate the masculine and feminine components of her personality, by means of requesting a union between herself and Frankie, but in this relationship she wishes to play the man and have Frankie play the woman. She says to him, "You other one. You have his same voice. Maybe you could be him. Pretend. Maybe. Just him. Just like him. But soft. With me. Gentle. Like a woman-man" (p.76). Beth desires to assert the masculine side of her personality and to have a relationship with a man who has integrated the feminine side of his personality. Her desire to behave like a man is a result of her experience that has taught her that men control women. She says, "You could pretend to be in love with me. With my shirt. You love my shirt. This shirt is a man to you. You are my beautiful woman. You lie down" (p.75). Frankie, however, is reluctant to comply with Beth's wishes as he is loathe to betray his violent brother, and Beth's desire for integration is unfulfilled.

The ubiquitous male violence and dominance over women in Sam Shepard's plays may be attributed to his dramatisation of the younger characters' inheritance of the violent traits of the older generation. A Lie of The Mind differs from Shepard's other plays in that Jake's brutality and violence appear to be inherited from both his parents. Jake appears to have assumed his father's

ability to brutalise his wife and to flee from situations which he finds entrapping. Sally has noticed the similarities between Jake and her father. She says, "Sometimes you sound just like him.... You do. The way you get that creepy thing in your voice.... That high-pitched creepy thing like you're gonna turn into an animal or something" (p.63). The clothes that Jake wears on his quest to find Beth, his father's flying jacket and funeral flag, signify his inheritance of his father's personality and behaviour.

In Act I, "Lorraine takes off one of her shoes, charges Jake and starts belting him over the head with it" (p.25). Lorraine's "slashing downward precisely mimic Jake's repeated smashing of the telephone receiver against the phone booth in the play's first scene."<sup>1</sup>

Since Jake has obviously inherited his violent nature from his parents, he cannot be fully blamed for his behaviour and he is excused for his treatment of Beth. In other plays, Shepard has also presented male violence as being something which is inherited and impossible to control. For example, in Shepard's comic operetta, The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing his Wife, Pecos Bill excuses his crime of murdering his wife by explaining that his actions are a result of the fact that he has inherited various traits from his family. Slue Foot Sue, his wife, says "Your crime was invented by lies of the mind/ It's a crime when a lie is so true." Bill replies, "But I was fathered by liars/ And my offspring was too/ Oh how can I ever escape it."<sup>2</sup>

Jake's inheritance of his father's personality traits and his father's identity is related to his inability to sustain his own identity. This is manifested in his dual nature and erratic behaviour. Like May in Fool for Love, he alternates between expressing two personalities, displaying uncontrollable rage at the woman he also feels he will die without. He displays symptoms of a borderline personality disorder .

They are provoked to rage uncontrollably against the people they love most.... Mood changes come swiftly.... Filled with anger one hour, calm the next, he often has little inkling about why he was driven to such wrath.... Central to the borderline syndrome is the lack of a core sense of identity.... It is when the struggle to find identity becomes intolerable, the answer is either to lose identity altogether or to achieve a semblance of self through pain or numbness.<sup>3</sup>

Shepard's audiences are manipulated into sympathising with Jake right from the beginning of the play, so that his responsibility for his actions is denied and his behaviour defended.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory W. Lanier, "Structural Pairing in A Lie of the Mind," p.412.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing his Wife, in Fool for Love (New York: City Lights Books, 1983), p.109.

<sup>3</sup> Jerold J. Kreisman and Hal Strauss, "I Hate You - Don't Leave Me" (Los Angeles: The Body Press, 1989), p.14.

In A Lie of The Mind, the first character introduced is Jake and the audience is invited to sympathise and identify with him: Jake, who believes he now has just killed his wife; Jake, who has beaten her frequently in the past; Jake, who is now a trembling little boy and who cannot live without the woman he nearly murdered.... Shepard manipulates the already credulous audience into identifying with Jake. The first action, a telephone conversation between Jake and Frankie, reveals Jake's suffering and emotional state. Thus the audience is asked to (please) understand this poor unfortunate soul who beat his wife because he cannot help himself.<sup>1</sup>

Jake defends his violent behaviour by conveniently forgetting it. Like Weston in Curse of the Starving Class, he has a selective memory. He cannot remember his childhood room even when he is in it, but he does remember that his father's ashes were put in a box. When Lorraine asks how he could remember that and not his room, he answers, "Some things stick in your mind" (p.38). Jake forgets his violent behaviour on the night his father died and only remembers behaving violently on one occasion, but manages to defend himself by blaming Beth for the incident. Referring to a previous attack on her for which he supposedly went to jail, he says, "I done my time for her. I already done my time" (p.12). He allows it to appear as if the whole episode were Beth's fault. Not only do the male characters in A Lie of the Mind excuse their violent behaviour, but they are under the impression that it is their right to engage in such activity, and they boast about their destructive achievements. After Baylor has shot Frankie, he tells him, "Yer just lucky I'm as old as I am. In my prime you'da been dead meat, son" (p.55).

Shepard helps to defend the male character's violent behaviour by creating female characters' who also excuse them for all their atrocities. Lorraine blames Sally for Jake's departure from her house and proposes that when Jake dies in the same manner as his father, she will hold Sally accountable. Lorraine tells Sally, "I know what's gonna happen. I can see it plain as day. They'll find him by the highway. That's what'll happen. Crumpled up. Busted open like a road dog. Then maybe you'll be satisfied" (p.88). Lorraine even incriminates Sally for Jake's actions during the night that her husband died.

LORRAINE: You sent that cop, didn't you? Back then. Jake never would done somethin' like that. He'da come and told me face to face. (p.88)

Sally's revelation of Jake's part in his father's death only aids in spurring Lorraine on to further proclamations of Jake's innocence. She says, "My son is not a murderer! Why is everyone trying to make him into a criminal? First, that woman of his. He never shoulda got tied up with that woman in the first place. She's the cause of all this. And now you've turned against him" (p.95).

The ability of mothers to defend the violent behaviour of their sons is the topic of a discussion

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine A. Shuler, "Gender Perspective and Violence in the Plays of Maria Irene Fornes and Sam Shepard," in Modern American Drama: The Female Canon, ed. June Schleuter, pp.224-225.

which occurs in a play called True Dylan which ostensibly records an actual conversation between Sam Shepard and Bob Dylan. In the play, Shepard claims that a mother's practice of defending her son's violent behaviour is just a law of nature.

- SAM: So you don't have much hope for women?
- BOB: On the contrary, women are the only hope. I think they're a lot more stable than men. Only trouble with women is they let things go on too long.
- SAM: What things?
- BOB: The whole Western sense of reality. Sometimes women have a tendency to be too lenient. Like a kid can go down and bust some old man on the head, rob a bunch of old ladies, burglarize his brother's joint, and blow up a city block, and his mama will still come down and cry over him.
- SAM: Yeah, but that's just nature isn't it? The nature of being a mother.
- BOB: Yeah I guess so. Nature.<sup>1</sup>

What Sam Shepard and Bob Dylan fail to realise is that this perception of any mother's behaviour is not just built into a mother's nature, but is simply their own subjective vision of a mother's nature designed to provide an excuse for male violent behaviour.

Sally counteracts Lorraine's defence of Jake by blaming her mother for her father's departure.

- SALLY: You didn't really care one way or the other, did you? You'd let him go a long time ago.
- LORRAINE: He left me! All right? Get that in your noggin. He left me! Not the other way around. (p.89. Emphasis Shepard's)

Lorraine and Sally become so absorbed in defending the male characters' behaviour and attacking one another, that the significance of the male characters' actions is overshadowed. The female characters turn against one another to justify the male characters' behaviour. With virtually no effort on their part the male characters' violent behaviour is excused. Shepard reinforces a patriarchal value that condones violence against women, since it helps to preserve gender hierarchies. He reinforces, rather than challenges, the idea that male violence towards women, is inevitable.

Jake's brutality towards Beth is a consequence of his desire to possess and control her. Jake is under the impression that Beth is having an affair, so he believes his lies of the mind and acts on his suspicions. This situation is prevalent in our society.

In every society for which we have been able to find a sample of spousal homicides, the story is basically the same: Most cases arise out of the husband's jealous, proprietary, violent response to his wife's (real or imagined)

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<sup>1</sup>Sam Shepard, True Dylan: As it Really Happened One Afternoon in California, Esquire, July 1987, p.66. Quoted by Lynda Hart in "Sam Shepard's Spectacle of Impossible Heterosexuality," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.213.

infidelity.... Men ... strive to control women, albeit with variable success; women struggle to resist coercion and to maintain their choices.<sup>1</sup>

For Jake, love is always associated with violence. Frankie reminds him that he once seriously injured a pet goat. Jake only remembers that he loved the goat.

FRANKIE: You've always lost your temper and blamed it on somebody else. Even when you were a kid you blamed it on somebody else. One time you even blamed it on a goat. I remember that....

JAKE: Yeah, I remember that goat. I loved that goat.

FRANKIE: Well you kicked the shit out of that goat you loved so much when she stepped on your bare feet while you were tryin' to milk her. You remember that? Broke her ribs. (pp.12-13)

Jake has also taught Beth to associate loving someone with being hurt by them. When, in her brain damaged state, she attempts to remember who it was who hurt her, she compares herself to a tree which has been felled by someone she loves. She says, "Who fell me? Iza - Iza name? Iza name to come. Itz - Itz - Inza man. Inza - name. Aall - aall - all - a love. A love" (p.6).

Beth is not only subjected to Jake's physical domination of her, but must also endure Mike's psychological manipulation of her thoughts. Mike decides that Beth is incapable of adequately confronting Jake, so he tries to take over her battle under the guise of being deeply concerned for her wellbeing.

By assuming that he knows what is best for her, he [Mike] goes beyond the bounds of protector and even of brother and seeks to absorb her into himself. His apparent concern for her and desire to save her further pain is progressively revealed to be a dismissal of her own judgement and a disregard for her individual worth. As Beth resists this manipulation, Mike's initial tenderness turns to violent force and finally to his own abandonment of the family.... Here, in Beth's predicament, we see what may be the most destructive of the lies of the mind in Sam Shepard's play, that which enables men to render women invisible, a violence far worse than Jake's.<sup>2</sup>

Ron Mottram proposes that in A Lie of the Mind Shepard actually presents the possibility of solving the problem of male violence towards women. He says the suggestion is contained within Beth's request to Frankie that they engage in a relationship, with her playing the man and Frankie the woman. The feminisation of the masculine psyche would supposedly cure the male desire to tyrannise and control women.

In the most extraordinary scene in the play, Beth who has herself been almost destroyed by hate and violence, confronts Jake's brother with two possibilities: castration (metaphorically presented as the amputation of his leg which has been injured by male violence) or the feminizing of his consciousness.... Frankie's

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<sup>1</sup> M. Daly and M. Wilson, Homicide (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1988), p.202.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Mottram, "Exhaustion of the American Soul," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.109.

imagination fails, however. Unable to make the leap, he wants to leave.<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion is futile and Shepard's male characters remain addicted to behaving like cowboys who conquer their obstacles with physical prowess.

Sam Shepard's female characters attempt to counteract the male characters' domineering behaviour in a variety of ways. Their efforts towards self-realisation are, however, in vain as Shepard persists in foregrounding the dilemmas which beset the male characters and especially Jake. Beth's character makes a variety of attempts to become self-realised, but they are all thwarted.

Certain critics believe that Beth's brain-damaged condition allows her the chance to re-create her identity. David De Rose writes:

Remembering little of her past, Beth ... has the opportunity to recreate herself, an opportunity that many of Shepard's past heroes ... have sought desperately. Sensing instinctively that her feminine role in the past has been a passive and consequently unfortunate one, she takes advantage of her present situation to construct a more satisfying self.<sup>2</sup>

What De Rose forgets is what led to Beth's brain-damaged state in the first place. He emphasises her luck at being beaten up, since it allowed her the opportunity to reinvent her role. By allowing Beth to announce her innovative perceptions in her battered condition, Shepard implies that Jake's brutality was an act which carried transformative power. Once again, Jake's violent behaviour is defended and converted into a positive event in Beth's development. Shepard's female characters need to be brain-damaged before they attempt to transform their stereotypical roles.

Shepard fails to present Beth's version of the events leading to Jake's attack on her, since she is unable to effectively communicate from the first moment we see her.

Beth's perspective is never introduced since she is rendered inarticulate by Jake's battering, and since Beth is brain-damaged when the play opens and never recovers during the course of the plot.... Shepard does not offer his audience a perspective from which to analyze the situation that is other than that of his male hero. Jake's brother and Beth's brother are characters who do not approve of Jake's action, but the former [Frankie] is intent primarily on rescuing Jake and the latter [Mike] is out for revenge. The objectives of the male characters are the focus of this play; Beth has no objective whatsoever; she is simply an image of a destroyed woman.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than record Beth's viewpoint, Shepard engages in creating sympathy for Jake.

Beth's attempts to combat male domination are ineffectual. She tries to subvert Mike's efforts

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>2</sup> David De Rose, "Slouching towards Broadway," p.71.

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," p.77.

to control her, unwilling to repeat the submissive role of her past. She tells Mike, "You have a feeling. You have a feeling I'm you. I'm not you! This! (Points to her head). This didn't happen to you. This! This thought. You don't know this thought. How? How can you know this thought? In me" (p.45). From the outset of the play, however, her attempts to be self-sufficient are futile. Her first attempt at escaping the confinement of her relationship with Jake is an attempt to perform in a play. Even as a character in her play, her body is utilised as an object by men. Jake tells Frankie about Beth's role. He says, "And these lines are all about how she's bound and determined to get this guy back in the sack with her after all these years he's been ignoring her. ... How she's saving her body up for him and him only" (p.9).

Beth is the character who demonstrates the potential to transform her life and her role. First, she is an actress capable of transforming into a number of characters. She also visually transforms into a male character with the help of a man's shirt. Her transformational power is, however, employed to represent Jake's lies of his mind and not to enable her to become self-realised. In Act I, Beth's body is employed in the representation of Jake's vision and at the end of the play she transforms into a childlike whore, representing Jake's regression. Beth is unable to use her abilities to transform her life, and her desire to become integrated remains unfulfilled. "For Beth ... to assert [herself] as a subject is not an end that can be realised within the Oedipal configurations of Shepard's plays."<sup>1</sup>

Self-realisation also becomes an unattainable goal for Beth's mother, Meg. At the beginning of the play, she is dependant on Baylor and confuses her identity with that of her mother's and her daughter's. Later on though, she is capable of drawing some devastating conclusions about Baylor's desire to withdraw from his family, dispelling the myth that he takes care of his family. Meg is also the character who articulates the fact that the broken link in relations between men and women can be attributed to a man's desire for isolation. Meg's movement towards self-realisation is, however, thwarted as she forgives Baylor for everything with one kiss at the end of the play. She becomes oblivious of Beth's predicament and doesn't hear Baylor asserting his control over her when he suggests that she come to bed early, lest she wake him from a good dream.

Although Sally refuses to follow the male characters' pattern of behaviour and does not abandon her family, telling Jake, "I decided to come back and see if I could maybe help you out," she later inherits her mother's behaviour. She also attempts to show Lorraine that to continue to defend the male characters' behaviour and to remain chained to memories of the past is a fruitless activity. Lorraine understands the importance of relinquishing her ties to the pain of the past, but

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<sup>1</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," p.82.

translates Sally's advice into behaving like the male characters, deciding to flee from her situation.

- SALLY: I'm just sick of coverin' up for him. I'm sick to death of covering up. I'm sick of being locked up in this room. In our own house. Look at this room. What're we doin' here? This was Jake's room when he was a kid. What're we doin' in this room now? What're we supposed to be hiding from? (Long pause. Lorraine stands there staring at Sally, then slowly turns her head up and stares at the model plans).
- LORRAINE: (staring at planes) I know one thing for sure. All these airplanes have gotta go. All these airplanes are comin' down. Every last one of 'em. All the junk in this house that they left behind for me to save. It's all goin'. We'll make us a big bonfire. (p.96)

Unfortunately Lorraine's movement from hoarding memories and possessions from the past to desiring the eradication of it all in a huge bonfire is too rapid to result in any effective consequences. Lorraine and Sally decide to leave their house and disappear to Europe which is reminiscent of Ella's futile plan of action to escape the confinement of her marriage. Lorraine doesn't wish to preserve any objects or memories from the past, but Sally and her mother symbolically change places as Sally becomes the hoarder of things from the past. "As the son [Jake] leaves again, Lorraine and Sally change roles, as Sally symbolically 'carries on' (preserves the photograph) and Lorraine destroys the things she saved."<sup>1</sup>

Although there are many critics who view Lorraine and Sally's burning of their home as an attempt to free themselves from the memories and the men which have prevented their self-realisation, they leave for Europe with a plan to "track down" yet another male. This is precisely the same tactic Lorraine would utilise to maintain her relationship with her husband. If he disappeared, she would "track him down." She tells Sally that when they go to Ireland they will find a relative to lodge with.

- LORRAINE: Someone's always left behind to carry on. There's always at least one straggler left behind. Now we'll just ask around until we find out who that is. We'll track him down. And we'll introduce ourselves. (p.119. Emphasis mine)

Lorraine is unable to burn away her ingrained pattern of behaviour that involves tracking down men and this effectively prevents her movement towards self-sufficiency and self-realisation.

At the end of A Lie of the Mind, Jake releases Beth into the arms of his brother Frankie. Frankie, however, rejects this responsibility as he adheres to a code of honour which dictates that Beth is Jake's possession. At the play's conclusion, Jake kisses Beth, while Baylor and Meg fold up an American flag and also kiss one another. These rituals, rather than signifying resolutions and integration, actually reveal the disintegration that prevails. Baylor and Meg's, "ritualized, repetitive

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<sup>1</sup>Rosemarie Bank, "Self as Other," in Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.239.

gestures" in the flag-folding ceremony, has a "destabilizing effect".<sup>1</sup>

By its very prominence it seems to suggest the absence of other kinds of coherence. The military drill stands in orderly isolation - schisms have not been healed, conflicting needs have not been resolved, and voices cry out unanswered.... The two kisses mark unbridgeable divisions, not reconciliations.<sup>2</sup>

In A Lie of the Mind, Shepard reveals a culture that is unable to eradicate the barriers which prevent meaningful relationships between men and women. Although Shepard demonstrates the male desire for isolation and men's need to dominate women as being responsible for the separation of the sexes, he does not succeed in presenting female characters who are capable of achieving self-realisation. Instead, they remain imprisoned in relationships with domineering males or continue to search in vain for relationships with men who will not destroy them. The female characters' dreams of becoming self-sufficient or entering into relationships where men and women interact on an equal level are simply not attainable.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Rabillard, "Destabilizing Plot, Displacing the Status of Narrative: Local Order in the Plays of Pinter and Shepard," Theatre Journal, 43 (March 1991), p.48.

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Rabillard, "Destabilizing Plot, Displacing the status of Narrative: Local Order in the Plays of Pinter and Shepard," p.48.

## CONCLUSION

In a viewing or reading of Sam Shepard's plays, two things are immediately apparent: Shepard's dramatisation of the quest for identity; and Shepard's continual manipulation of the female characters to express the male characters' predicaments related to this quest. While both the male and female characters engage in creating identities for themselves according to their desires and fears, it is the male characters' attempts and failures to do so which are foregrounded. While the female characters do engage in attempting to erect identities for themselves, they are more involved in activities which enable the male characters' identity-related conflicts to be expressed. On occasion the very manner in which the female characters construct identities for themselves simultaneously expresses the male characters' conflicts which relate to male identity formation. For example, in Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Donna constructs an identity for herself as the mother who threatens to lure her son back to the pre-Oedipal stage of development when she creates a fantasy to threaten Tom with his identity-related fear that he will regress back to a state of non-differentiation.

Shepard's characters frequently engage in constructing identities for themselves which are based on stars from films, the music industry and the heroes from the myths of the Great American frontier. Since the male characters construct themselves in this fashion, they frequently perform like cowboys. Weston behaves like a cowboy when he abandons the pressures and commitments of society and flees his family and his problems. Eddie and the Old Man perpetually behave like cowboys, demonstrating that they are unable to remain in permanent relationships with women, and prefer to come and go from domestic structures at their own will. Eddie also wields a lasso and periodically refers to himself as a rodeo man, enabling him to further represent a cowboy. Jake constantly demonstrates behaviour which conforms to the cowboy's credo that stipulates that problems are solved by means of physical prowess, and Mike and Baylor employ an identical code of behaviour when they use physical prowess to dominate Jake. What is problematic about Shepard's creation of male characters who are modelled on cowboys is that they are unable to behave in a manner which does not conform to the frontier code of ethics. The cowboy's lifestyle endorses and requires violence, and Shepard's male characters bring the cowboy's credo into social contexts like the family and relationships, which results in them behaving violently towards women. Since they are not merely violent men, but behave like cowboys, Shepard excuses and even glorifies their behaviour.

The fact that Shepard's male characters are created as behaving like cowboys and that they bring a frontier code of ethics into their homes ensures that there is a breakdown in communication between the male and female characters because the male characters' behaviour

conforms to the cowboy's credo, and the male characters' demonstrate a desire for separation from women. The male characters all, at one time or another, behave in the same manner as Weston's father in Curse of the Starving Class. Weston says of his father, "He lived apart. Right in the midst of things and he lived apart" (p.168).

In Shepard's plays the frontier is utilised to express the male characters' search to explore that which is unknown. The male characters' desires to escape to the frontier reflect their desire to discover and construct their selves in an area where they do not have to conform to rules and regulations. As Wesley in Curse of the Starving Class articulates, the attraction of the frontier is that it is unknown and isolated from society.

EMMA: What's in Alaska?

WESLEY: The frontier.

EMMA: Are you crazy? It's all frozen and full of rapiers.

WESLEY: It's full of possibilities. It's undiscovered. (p.163)

The male characters long to escape to the frontier, because they believe that, there, they will be able to find, or create, themselves in what they perceive to be an authentic manner, that does not require conformity to society's mores and norms. However, by behaving like cowboys, they actually do not, in fact, locate their authentic selves, since they embrace the stereotypical, media-inculcated code of male machismo. They simply replace one code of conformity with another. By creating male characters who behave like cowboys Shepard expresses men's desire to behave in ways that are divorced from society's rules, and, at the same time, comments on the problem that Americans behave in accordance with the images that surround them, as society also prescribes. This contradiction reflects Shepard's desire to express his characters' attempts to escape the constraints of society, and also to reflect the impossibility of their doing so.

While his construction of male characters enables Shepard to express the problem that Americans behave and construct themselves from the images which surround them, his representations of women serve as more incomplete images of women from which both men and women can construct their own limited views of womanhood. If the self is constructed out of figures who are promoted through the media (especially films and plays), we need to critically analyse the construction of those figures and determine whose interests are being served in the creation of images which represent women as objects of male desire and/or blame. We also need to promote those playwrights' representations of women which will aid people in constructing identities that reflect the full range of human experience and to discontinue applauding playwrights who express the problem (that Americans construct inauthentic identities for themselves from images from the media) while perpetuating and reinforcing this problem.

Sam Shepard creates female characters who either embody all that the male characters long to flee or who themselves attempt to behave like cowboys. Those female characters who strive to

emulate the male characters' behaviour are, however, unable to wield power in quite the same manner, or to assert themselves as effectively as the male characters. Cavale in Cowboy Mouth behaves like an outlaw on the frontier when she kidnaps Slim off the streets, but in actual fact she has no power over him, since it is Slim who is entrapped by his own conflicting desires to remain with Cavale and also to return to his wife and child. Emma in Curse of the Starving Class embraces the code of behaviour which cowboys live by when she takes the family's horse and "shoots up" the Alibi Club, but her physical prowess proves to be weaker than her father's, and she ends up dead. May in Fool for Love behaves violently, kneeling Eddie in the groin, and is reminiscent of a cowboy when she says to Eddie, referring to the Countess, "I'm gonna' go out there and tear her damn head off" (p.50). She is, however, powerless to use her physicality to fight the power of the Symbolic Order wherein Eddie and the Old Man construct their own images of women and of reality. By creating female characters who behave like cowboys, Shepard is able to give the appearance of creating strong female characters, yet on close inspection it is revealed that these female characters' employment of the cowboy's behaviour actually foregrounds their own lack of strength or power. By creating female characters who together with the male characters adopt a frontier code of ethics, Shepard places them in the same environment as the male characters, and is able to demonstrate that in this context the male characters reign supreme. He also reinforces the fact that the frontier and its code of behaviour is a place where women are unable to survive.

The frontier in Shepard's plays is a multi-faceted symbol. It symbolises the place that men long to travel towards, when the pressures and commitments of society begin to restrict and entrap them. It symbolises a place where men are able to roam free, unhampered by women. In Shepard's plays the frontier is also able to symbolise Shepard's desire to attempt to capture authentic experience. Shepard has expressed this desire in various ways. While speaking on playwriting at the Third Bay Area Playwrights' Festival in 1980, he said, "There is a tendency to trade experience itself for language which never really captures it and ultimately cheats experience."<sup>1</sup> In an essay in which he describes the process of writing, Shepard writes, "Words, at best, can only give a partial glimpse into the total world of sensate experience."<sup>2</sup>

In her essay, "Great Expectations," Anne Wilson has suggested that Shepard's desire to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Scott Wren, "Camp Shepard: Exploring the Geography of Character," West Coast Plays, 7 (1980), 72. Quoted by Ann Wilson in "Great Expectations: Language and the Problem of Presence in Sam Shepard's Writing," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.138.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Shepard, "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library," p.216.

"discover within himself the language which will make the signified fully present"<sup>1</sup> has resulted in his creation of representational structures which incorporate the myth of the American frontier:

The frontier is a myth of eternal presence because when the frontier is encroached upon either by wilderness or civilization it is not transformed, but moves and is reconstituted in a new location. A frontier is always the same, is always the borderline.<sup>2</sup>

Wilson argues that "the myth of the frontier enacts" Shepard's desire to make the signified fully present, since "the writer's desire is the discovery of a language which is pure at the borderline when the utterance is first made".<sup>3</sup> The frontier in Shepard's plays therefore symbolises both Shepard's desire and attempt to record authentic experience, and is the place that Shepard's male characters desire to flee to in order to escape the constraints of societal forces. Since the frontier has traditionally been associated with men who long to flee domestic relationships with women, it is little wonder that Shepard's method of expressing his desire to make the signified present does not employ a setting in which women's experience can be recorded accurately. Women's viewpoints and the representation of their experiences are undermined by the very structure he employs to symbolise the writer's desire to record authentic experience.

In the early plays, although Shepard does not overtly use the myths of the frontier, the male characters' desire to return to the frontier, which can be interpreted as their desire to resume their relationship with the earth (which represents the mother), is indirectly reflected through their desire to return to the womb of the mother. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in Shepard's early plays, where his use of the frontier myths is not extensive, there is at least an attempt on Shepard's part to express women's experience. In Red Cross, for example, the Maid expresses her feelings of entrapment on entering the Symbolic Order, and in Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Donna expresses regret at relinquishing her desire for the mother to enter the Symbolic Order. In Shepard's later plays, where the myths of the frontier are foregrounded, women's experience cannot be authentically or adequately represented. In his later plays, where Shepard purposely attempts to construct more complex female characters who can express women's experience, the female characters only become more capable of expressing male experience.

There are two movements which can be identified in Shepard's plays. The first is related to Shepard's continual attempts to disrupt traditional realistic theatre and his presentation of characters who desire to dismantle the systems of law and order which dominate society. The other is connected to Shepard's persistent dramatisation of the craving to escape to the frontier, and for

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Wilson, "Great Expectations," in Sam Shepard: A Casebook, ed. Kimball King, p.138.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.148.

the values of the past. "On the one hand Shepard deconstructs traditional theatre and subverts metaphysical categories; on the other hand his persistent nostalgia indicates a writer who clings to the past and its structures.... What is actually foregrounded is a longing for the past and its comfortable assurances."<sup>1</sup>

What is problematic in Shepard's thinking is his overly Romantic, self-satisfied view of the historical past (even as a presence in his plays) and his inability to examine the implications of this in broad terms. Side by side with Shepard's glorification of the frontier ethic, and its concomitant isolationism, oppressive view of women, retreat from group concerns, is his sixties-style radical politics with its dread of the 'system,' its pastoral ideals, and persistent criticism of the American way of life. There's always been this tug-of-war between radical ideals ... and a deeply felt conservatism that is never fully resolved in the plays and, in fact, is the source of their political tension.<sup>2</sup>

In Shepard's attempt to revolutionise the 'system', women are excluded since his female characters behave in traditional, stereotypical ways, and in Shepard's attempt to reclaim the values of the past and to dramatise the longing for the frontier, women are represented as the crippling 'system'. Thus in both instances women are left behind.

In Curse of the Starving Class Shepard's inability to resolve this "tug of war" has debilitating consequences for the female characters who appear to disrupt stereotypical behaviour (because of Shepard's attempts to disrupt the system), but fail to do so (because of his desire to return to the past).

In Shepard's portrayal of the male characters' identity-related conflicts, he portrays their desire to return to the womb (to the past), but also their fear of being engulfed by the mother. This relates to Shepard's portrayal of the male characters' desire to return to the frontier and to a relationship with the land (which represents the mother), and their desire to escape the constraining forces of society, embodied by women. The female characters therefore express, on numerous levels, that which must be escaped from. Shepard is intent on dramatising the impossibility of escape, and in some of the plays the female characters are utilised to ensure that the male characters' desires to escape confining situations remain unfulfilled. In The Rock Garden, the boy desires to escape his identity within the family, and yet his speech reveals a desire to return to the mother, making escape impossible. In Red Cross, the blood which "engulfs" Jim at the end of the play proves his attempts to ward off being engulfed by the mother were unsuccessful, since the blood represents the abject and the mother.

Mother figures in Shepard's dramas are created to express all that the male characters desire to escape from. They are either emotionally distant, selfish characters who are out of touch with

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<sup>1</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," p.71.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Marranca, ed., "Alphabetical Shepard," in American Dreams, p.22.

their family's needs, or characters whose nurturing behaviour towards their children is growth-stultifying. Shepard creates mother figures who are able to carry the male characters' projections of the "Terrible Mother." Their non-nurturing behaviour also provides an excuse for the male characters' violent behaviour because it is easy to deduce the manner in which the mother figures have contributed to the male characters' personality development.

In Shepard's dramas, the female body's ability to generate life, to nurture it and to regenerate it, are frequently presented in a negative light. Since the functions of the body and the body's abilities are considered a source of power in numerous societies, Shepard's representation of women suppresses the positive aspects of female power.

We ... are in a society of 'sex' or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate or its capacity for being used.<sup>1</sup>

In his plays, Shepard persistently demonstrates the power of the male body by emphasising the male characters' physical power, their ability to dominate women and their capacity to regenerate life, while simultaneously demonstrating the female body's capacity for being used. In The Rock Garden, the female body is presented as an object which is manipulated to obtain sexual gratification. In Red Cross, Jim employs the Maid's body to exert his "rituals of defilement."<sup>2</sup> In Curse of the Starving Class, Emma's body is exploited to demonstrate the manner in which individuals have lost their relationship with the land as she describes how the horse dragged her across the farm. In Fool for Love, Shepard manipulates May's body to represent the object of Eddie's desire, and in A Lie of the Mind, Shepard demonstrates the female body's ability to be utilised as an object of both blame and desire. His only methods of demonstrating the power of the female body relate to the male characters' desires and fears. The female body is only powerful in the manner in which it represents "the desired" or the force which threatens to engulf the male characters. It is never represented as powerful in itself, for the female characters' own purposes.

Shepard's female characters are created for the purposes of embodying, representing, and expressing male desires and fears. In The Rock Garden the woman's ambivalent attitude towards the rain expresses the boy's conflicting desires to return to the womb of the mother. In Red Cross, Carol's ski monologue expresses Jim's fear of the female body, and the Maid's speech about the maternal world expresses his desire to return to the mother. In Curse of the Starving Class, Ella's speech about the manner in which the 'curse' which plagues her family originates in the womb,

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1981), p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p.79.

expresses the male characters' fear of "reproductive women."<sup>1</sup> In Buried Child Halie's attitude to a previous paradisaical time in her life expresses the male characters' desire to return to the womb. In Fool for Love, May embodies the "desired" when she undresses on stage in front of Eddie. In A Lie of the Mind, Jake's desire to reconcile the opposites within himself is expressed through Beth's desire for Frankie. In Shepard's plays women are represented in the manner which best expresses male predicaments. "Shepard's preoccupation with the psychic conflicts and emotional development (or lack thereof) of male characters renders him virtually incapable of imagining or depicting interesting, believable women."<sup>2</sup>

Shepard's determination to present male characters who dominate the female characters results in a suppression of women, ensures that the male characters cannot form meaningful relationships with women, and results in the creation of male characters who cannot integrate the feminine component of themselves. At the end of Buried Child, Shepard foregrounds the sun's role in generating the crops, which symbolises the male characters' dominance. There is never a dialogic relationship between masculine and feminine in Shepard plays - be it between symbols, between characters, or within a character. Shepard's vision of an America peopled by violent men and suppressed women is directly related to this inability to represent dialogic relationships.

Shepard's male characters' treatment of the female characters is in the form of what Buber termed an "I-It" relationship, which is a monologic, narcissistic way of both viewing and engaging. In the "I-It" relationship, the Other is regarded as an object. In the "I-Thou" relationship the self does not merely see the other as a reflection of self, but acknowledges the other coming back at self. In Shepard's plays the male characters either view the female characters as objects or as reflections of self.<sup>3</sup>

With reference to Buber, woman in Shepard's dramas never become fully-fledged autonomous "I's". Shepard's representation of women is one which involves setting the female characters up in such a way as to receive the male characters' projections and their accusations or blame. As incomplete "I's", the female characters are never related to as "Thou's" by the male characters, but rather as "It's". Buber claims that, "Through the 'Thou' a man becomes 'I'."<sup>4</sup> Therefore neither the male or the female characters can become "Thou's". Since Shepard also suppresses women's

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, The Revolution of Poetic Language, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.453.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine A. Schuler, "Gender Perspectives and Violence in the Plays of Maria Irene Fornes and Sam Shepard," in Modern American Drama, ed. June Schleuter, p.72.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.53.

abilities to procreate, regenerate, and transform, and fails to utilise their abilities to revolutionise society, it is my premise that he will never follow through "that impulse towards" creating "another kind of world".<sup>1</sup> Shepard suppresses women "as a site of deliverance into an alternative conceptualized future"<sup>2</sup> in a number of ways. This results in a bleak outlook for both men and women. Only a dialogic way of viewing and regarding women will carry humanity into a future in which we are not starved or cursed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Shepard as quoted by Kenneth Chubb and the editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, "Metaphors, Mad Dogs and Old Time Cowboys," in *American Dreams*, ed. Bonnie Marranca, p.71.

<sup>2</sup> Lynda Hart, "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," p.71.

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