

## **Dissecting Sam Shepard's triad to illuminate Western Culture**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper aims to reveal how a family quarrel plays a major role in disintegration of the families in Sam Shepard's plays. From his earliest plays to one of his most recent works Shepard has been depicting the American family. Shepard writes about the complicated relationships within the American family. Shepard explores the myths of the American family using his own style by varying the conventions of nineteenth century. The traditional American family in Shepard's play are build of mainly with three character types: the father (who used to be a drunkard), the estranged mother and the torment son. In this paper, we are focusing on Shepard's family trilogy to depict the Western Culture. Shepard's family trilogy includes *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), *Buried Child* (1979), and *True West* (1980). *Curse of the Starving Class* – is a play about American family psyche which leads to the family disintegration. *Buried Child* – is a play which reflects the frustration among American people turning out to be family quarrels. *True West* – this play is all about the rivalry between two brothers who met each other after a period of five years time.

**Keywords:** disintegration, trilogy, family quarrels, bonding, relationship

## **Introduction:**

**Sam Shepard**, dramatist and performing artist, has been a pioneer of the cutting edge in contemporary American theatre since his earliest work. Shepard more than once analyzes good and weird starvation in shows. For quite a long time, his work has stunned, distanced and hypnotized gatherings of people. He has won 11 Obies and the Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child* and has been selected for an Academy Award. His topics are well known, subjects of the family and its disintegration, American Dream went wrong, the journey for character, subjects of rupture and they are established in mythology. The majority of Shepard's plays are described by adoration for dialect and energy for visual symbolism, built deliberately for most extreme effect. Frequently the symbolism that he makes is of the American West. Shepard utilizes representation and image, mythology and custom generously.

Family quarrel has caused the breakdown of American family in most of Shepard's play. Conflicts regarding family property, its annual income, migrations due to work and unhealthy affairs of women lead to the disintegration of American families. Mental awkwardness within a family is sometimes inevitable because of its economic strains. There is an emergent aspiration among younger generations to live far away from their families. It's clearly evident that the American family is disintegrating.

## **Curse of the Starving Class:**

This play is about sudden invasion of the strangers into the family and carrying out the terrifying violations and to threaten the family members. These strangers appear as the result of Weston's and Ella's individual attempts to sell their property and flew to a different place to lead a life of their own interest. Ella had some illegal affairs with Taylor, a slick attorney who had given assurance to her to buy her property for a fair deal. While Weston had a separate deal with sleazy bar owner (Ellis) for selling his house. These incidents clearly states that Weston and Ella doesn't care about the welfare of their own family. Shepard employs an implication in the shape of the unseen forces infecting the characters and determining their fates.

Also, Weston's violent attack upon his own family, especially on his wife (Ella) which symbolises the destruction of the protective circle of the family. He not only fails to provide safety to his family but also ignores his duties as a head of the family. Wesley seems to be sensitive to this kind of attitude by his father. Wesley alone tries to make the family united, but he fails at last.

*Ella: Europe may be. Wouldn't you like to go to Europe?*

*Wesley: No*

*Ella: Why not?*

*Wesley: What's in Europe?*

In the First Act of this play, when Emma opens the refrigerator she finds it to be empty. Emma asks the refrigerator as why there are no items available on it, are they not part of the starving class? So she shuts down the door of refrigerator with some sort of anger. Shepard frequently uses the lack of food or its frenzied consumption to indicate starvation. In this play, Weston family refute that they are part of starving class, but they look hungry every time.

There are no satisfactory evidences in this play to quote that these members of the family had lived a life of togetherness. Weston and Ella were not trying to engage the family to a better living standard. Everyone is more concerned about their individual interest than the family interest.

Weston – Plans to sell his farmland and go to Mexico to escape from his creditors

Ella – Plans to sell her farmland and go to Europe

Emma – Plans to move out of the family to lead a independent life

Weston's family lacks the family unity and harmony. These incidents clearly reveal the fact that the family disintegration starts due to the quarrels among the family members.

## **Buried Child:**

This play is pushed by two secrets needing to do with the family's failure to perceive a returning child, Vince, and with the personality of an unacknowledged baby cadaver that has been covered in excess of 30 years behind the family's farmhouse. At the point, when Vince arrives at his grandparents house, not one or the other his father, Tilden, nor his grandfather, Dodge, cares to recollect that him. The main kid absent from the family the extent that they are concerned is the one covered in the lawn.

Dodge is the father of the family, he ought to be the pioneer characteristically however conversely, and he goes about as the useless patriarch in the crew. He is constantly tanked and covering up and concealing first floor. He is embarrassed of his family and disappointment as a rancher and a father. He suffocates himself in liquor on the grounds that he would like to face the truth of being a disappointment to his crew. Halie is the mother of the family; she has to be the backbone. She doesn't seem to be the backbone. The pregnancy and the undertaking with Rev. dewis are cases of the ethical standing we can find from Halie. She sets exclusive requirements for her

family however does not ponder it herself. She rejoices in the past where she longs for the ideal family and she accepts that Rev. Lewis will remember it with her. Bradley is the most youthful of the three siblings. He is an amputee.

Tilden's son shows up with his girlfriend, Shelly. They are bridging the nation from New Jersey to see Vince's father, who they think is still in New Mexico and have ceased by unannounced to visit Dodge and Halie. They are expecting a cheerful family get-together. Rather, they are welcomed by the irritable, intoxicated Dodge and the far off, half-crazed Tilden, not one or the other of who appear to recognize Vince.

At a certain point, Dodge shouts after his son Tilden: "Don't go outside. There's nothing out there...everything's in here. Everything you need". Later in the play, Vince undermines Shelly from the patio: "No man or woman has ever crossed the line and lived to tell the tale! Don't come out here! I'm warning you! You'll disintegrate!" In truth, it is Dodge who dangers crumbling by going out where he has holed himself up for a long time, escaping the youngster covered in the yard and the results of his activities.

Shepard's utilization of Ansel as the perfect picture of the American dream and his demise speak to that the fantasy was no more existent for the crew. The men in the family demonstrated the attributes of the crackled American dream. Halie depicted the inverse of what the wife in the American dream should be. She shreds the crew. This play recommends to us that the ethical gauges of this family had majorly influenced them from arriving at the objective of their American dream.

As seen in *Curse of the Starving Class*, there is no unity or openness among the family members. This paved the way for not recognizing their grandson when he returns after a long time to meet with his family members. Bonding between the family members is missing which becomes the primary reason for their disintegration.

### **True West:**

This play recounts the story of two siblings who have met up, after a long detachment, at their mother's home while she is in Alaska in the midst of a vacation. The more youthful sibling, Austin, is a screenwriter who has arrived at his mother's home to take a shot at a screenplay and meet with a maker, Saul, from Los Angeles. Austin's more established sibling, Lee, drops by unannounced and gets Saul to dump Austin's screenplay for on that Lee says is a "valid to-life Western". Lee powers Austin to compose the screenplay as the desirous Austin gradually changes into a fierce tipsy and assaults his sibling.

From the opening snippets of the play, it is clear that these family connections summarize the battle between the conflicting ways of life of the Old West and New West. One lives off the area; alternate has served to clear over it. While each is basically disdainful of the other's way of life, they are secretly keen of one another. At the point when Saul drops Austin's undertaking for an old-style western script proposed by Lee, the two siblings all of a sudden, very nearly willingly, exchange personas. Austin gets drunk, discarding his own particular work and longing for the desert, while Lee sheds his criminal self trying to compose a screenplay.

Austin endeavours to keep up restraint, to play "inside" the guidelines. He has carefully created an association with Saul, and he deliberately supports it, expecting reasonable reward for his diligent work. Lee, then again, can't summon enough persistence to play inside the amusement. Austin exists by his refined aptitudes; Lee gets by on his senses. He has the inventive capacity to come up with a winning western; however he fails to offer the self inflicted control to put it on paper. Lee short-circuits the framework, exists outside the law, taking, cheating, gambling and utilizing power to attain prompt, if not long-term, satisfaction. On the off chance that Lee is the "raw talent", then Austin is the order and strategy expected to outfit that ability. Together, they speak to the restricting sides of Shepard's mind as artist.

Mom who returns in the final scene couldn't resolve the problem between her sons and she decides to move away from the house again. In spite of building a relationship among her son, she places herself in a distant position.

*MOM: Well, I'm going to go check into a motel. I can't stand this anymore.*

*AUSTIN: Don't go yet!*

*(MOM pauses)*

*MOM: I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless.*

Though the two brothers met after a long period of time, they fail to express their love for each other. There is no conversation where in they had exchanged the words of kindness or greetings. They just started to quarrel among themselves to gain the ownership of the property which their Mom had left for them both. Latter, they started to fight for their career in the name of screenplay. This clearly provides an indication that the western culture lacks the sense of family bonding within their relationship in a family.

## **Conclusion:**

On researching the Sam Shepard's family trilogy, we can derive a pattern wherein the family members are not strong in their relationship. Every people keeps trying get richer and settle in a peaceful manner without minding about their family. In *Curse of the Starving Class*, we noted that all the key members of the family are trying to sell their property without informing others about their plans to the family members. In *Buried Child*, there doesn't exist a family bonding wherein people recognise or remember their very own family members after a long gap. In *True West*, the two siblings are duelling among themselves to seek the ownership of their mother's property and to withstand in their career path.

These evidences clearly mark the disintegration of the American Family from the Sam Shepard's family trilogy. The reasons for the disintegration may be family quarrels, lack of family bonding, failing to love their family, giving importance to personal interest than the family interest, etc.

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