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**Sterility and its Symbolization of the Failure of the
American Dream in Twentieth Century American Drama
in Selected Plays by
(Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Sam Shepard)**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to study the failure of the American dream symbolized through the theme of sterility. This theme is examined in three major plays selected from the twentieth century American drama. Drama has always been a popular art form used to transfer, record, and challenge the ideas of a particular era. Contemporary drama is one of the best resources for understanding the way of thinking of recent generations and how people view the world around them.

Throughout this dissertation, we have referred to the numerous social, genders, political and economic issues that relate to the theme of sterility. Our study of the three plays written between 1955- 1979 ("*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*"1958 by Tennessee Williams, "*Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*"1962 by Edward Albee and "*Buried Child*"1978 by Sam Shepard has enabled us to diagnoses the different forms of sterility treated in each play i.e. the biological, the emotional and later the spiritual one. As we have endeavoured to demonstrate the cause /effect relationship of each form and the way each represents and symbolizes the failure of the American dream. As the theme of sterility is tied to American family, we have also emphasized the role of the family, the relation between husband and wife and the relation between parents and their children. Much stress is put on alcoholism, homosexuality, and aging as being determinant factors that lead to sterility and on how family members perceive themselves and others as "things" in America's capitalistic society.

In addition, we have investigated women status within American society which shifts from weak and powerless to a more powerful and domineering role. We have also opened a lens on the role of men and their emasculation by women. This study also explores the theme of family dysfunction and the impact of childless life on both mother's and father's attitudes and behaviours and thus on the deterioration of the American family. At the end of the analysis of the selected dramatic works we have compared their plot and how the transitions from one form of sterility to the other correspond to the time periods of the play's settings. Thus the conclusion leads us to confirm that the realization of the American dream is impossible.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse cherche à étudier l'échec du rêve Américain symbolisé à travers le thème de la stérilité. Ce thème est examiné dans trois pièces majeures choisies dans le théâtre Américain du XXe siècle. Le drame a toujours été une forme d'art populaire utilisé pour transférer, enregistrer et remettre en question les idées d'une époque particulière. Le théâtre contemporain est l'une des meilleures ressources grâce à qui on peut comprendre l'état d'esprit des générations récentes et la façon dont les gens perçoivent le monde qui les entoure.

Tout au long de cette thèse, nous nous sommes référés à nombreux facteurs liés à la société, au sexe et ainsi à des questions politiques et économiques qui se rapportent au thème de la stérilité. Notre étude des trois pièces écrites entre 1955 et 1979. La première pièce ("La Chatte sur un Toit Brûlant" 1958 par Tennessee Williams. La deuxième pièce "Qui a Peur de Virginia Woolf ?" 1962 par Edward Albee et "L'enfant Enterré" 1978 par Sam Shepard nous a permis de diagnostiquer les différentes formes de stérilité traitées dans chaque pièce soit le biologique, le psychologique et plus tard le spirituel. Comme nous avons essayé de démontrer la relation de cause à effet de chaque forme et la manière dont chacun représente et symbolise l'échec du rêve Américain. Comme le thème de la stérilité est lié à la famille Américaine, nous avons également souligné le rôle de la famille, la relation entre le mari et la femme, les parents et leurs enfants. Beaucoup insiste sur l'alcoolisme, l'homosexualité et le vieillissement comme étant facteurs déterminants qui conduisent à la stérilité et sur la façon dont les membres de la famille se perçoivent et perçoivent les autres comme des «objets» dans la société capitaliste Américaine.

En outre, nous avons étudié le statut des femmes au sein de la société Américaine qui passe d'un stade faible et impuissant à un rôle plus puissant et dominateur. Nous avons également ouvert une fenêtre sur le rôle des hommes et de leur émasculatation par des femmes. Cette étude explore également le thème du dysfonctionnement familial et l'impact de vie sans enfants sur les attitudes à la fois la mère et du père et leurs comportements, et donc sur la détérioration de la famille Américaine. À la fin de l'analyse des œuvres dramatiques sélectionnées, nous avons comparé leurs contenus et comment la transition d'une forme de stérilité à l'autre correspond aux périodes dont les événements des pièces se déroulent. Ainsi, la conclusion nous amène à confirmer que la réalisation du rêve américain est impossible.

ملخص الدراسة

تحاول هذه الأطروحة دراسة فشل الحلم الأمريكي من خلال استعمال موضوع العقم كرمز. يتم فحص هذا الموضوع في ثلاث مسرحيات رئيسية مختارة من الدراما الأمريكية للقرن العشرين. لطالما كانت الدراما شكل من أشكال الفنون الشعبية الذي يستخدم لنقل وتسجيل وتحدي أفكار حقبة معينة. كما تعد الدراما المعاصرة واحدة من أفضل الموارد لفهم عقلية الأجيال الحديثة والطريقة التي يمكن للناس النظر من خلالها إلى العالم الذي يحيط بهم.

طوال هذه الأطروحة، أشرنا إلى جوانب عديدة منها القضايا الاجتماعية، الاقتصادية، السياسية وكذا المتعلقة بالجنسين التي صاحبت موضوع العقم. إن دراستنا لثلاث مسرحيات المكتوبة بين 1955 و1979. المسرحية الأولى تحت عنوان ("قطة على سطح صفيح ساخن" 1958 من قبل الكاتب تينيسي وليامز، والمسرحية الثانية "من الذي يخاف من فرجينيا وولف؟ 1962 من قبل ادوارد ألبى. والمسرحية الثالثة بعنوان "الطفل المدفون" 1978 من قبل سام شيبيرد. سمحت لنا هذه الدراسة بتشخيص مختلف أشكال العقم المتطرق له في كل مسرحية: منه البيولوجي، والعاطفي وأخيرا الروحاني. كما سعينا لإثبات العلاقة بين السبب والنتيجة من كل شكل. والى الطريقة التي تمثل وترمز إلى فشل الحلم الأمريكي. بما أن موضوع العقم مرتبط بالعائلة الأمريكية أكدنا على دور الأسرة وعلى العلاقة التي تربط بين الزوج والزوجة وبين الآباء وأبنائهم. كما ركزنا على موضوع الإدمان على الكحول، والشذوذ الجنسي، والكبر كونهم العوامل المحددة التي تؤدي إلى العقم. وكيف أن أفراد العائلة يعتبرون أنفسهم وغيرهم "أشياء" في المجتمع الأمريكي الرأسمالي.

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، عمدنا على دراسة مكانة المرأة ودورها داخل المجتمع الأمريكي الذي تحول من ضعيف وعاجز إلى دور أكثر قوة واستبداد. لقد افتحنا أيضا عدسة على دور الرجل في المجتمع وتركيز المرأة على عجزه الجنسي. تستكشف هذه الدراسة أيضا موضوع ضعف الأسرة وأثر الحياة بدون أطفال على سلوكيات المرأة والرجل على حد سواء، وبالتالي على تدهور الأسرة الأمريكية. في نهاية تحليل الأعمال الدرامية المختارة قمنا بمقارنة مضمون المسرحية الواحدة بالأخرى. وكيف أن الانتقال من أحد أشكال العقم إلى آخر توافقت مع الفترات الزمنية وكذا الأماكن التي دارت فيها أحداث كل مسرحية. في الأخير توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى إثبات فشل الحلم الأمريكي واستحالة تحقيقه.

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General Introduction

American literature has always been proud of the fact that it is different from the European literature. Although the earliest beginnings of the American literature were thematically similar to British, later American literature succeeded in distinguishing one single factor of its uniqueness, which is of course the presence of the notion of the American Dream.

In literature, as in culture, the American Dream contains elements of adventure. The concept of the American Dream has been the representative of American culture and most importantly American literature.

In truth, the American Dream may mean different things to different people. Perhaps this is why it has become the focus of so much literature. Perhaps authors too have been trying to capture one illusive definition which explains "the American Dream".

American literature is regarded as a kind of imaginative and experimental projection of the questions raised by the American dream. Millions of pages are filled with the notion of the American Dream and countless articles and essays have been printed on the same matter. The American Dream has been written about in fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry and prose.

Many authors with different visions have been inspired by the term. So, they have included their own version of understanding the American dream. Not only have they explored the meaning of that concept, but also unveiled areas where it has succeeded and areas where it has failed.

From quite early in the colonial writings, American literature started to completely separate itself of the European literature and more precisely of the British literature, since all the writings of that time were confined to the British. Right after the declaration of independence, there was a rejection of the European models and a

demand for a typically new American literature. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in *The American scholar* (1837) addressed the public on this issue. In his famous speech, he asked for a complete divorce from the past. He thus, asked for bridging the gap and creating the new American spirit, the new self-reliant American scholar. Later, this became known as the proclamation of the American Dream. The essence of the American dream has not changed even to this day. The quest for liberty and happiness, the ability to lead a better and improved life is still engraved in Americans memories.

The topic of the American dream has been the concern of countless number of authors. Among the great authors, Benjamin Franklin has written several essays on how to achieve success and social upward mobility. In his essay, *The Way to Wealth* (1758), Franklin traces the path to obtaining wealth and prosperity. Another prominent figure is Walt Whitman who has addressed the issue of the American dream in the *Song of Myself* (1855) where freedom, life and death are celebrated. Most of his works are an attempt to strengthen the American spirit.

Of equal importance are the writings of the transcendental philosopher, Henry David Thoreau who believes that the true meaning of life and spirit can be found in the depth of the American dream through the discovery of a true moral spirit. In his *Walden or Life in the Woods*, (1854) Thoreau stands against materialism as being a destructive force to the American dream. In chapter four, *Where I Lived and What I Lived for*, he insists on living close to nature – living a life of simplicity, the real life.

In the late nineteenth century and under the influence of scepticism, the Dream begins to turn to nightmare. The American hopes and aspirations were replaced by disillusionment. The horrors and disbeliefs of that time were reflected by many novelists. Most Americans except perhaps the few wealthy ones such as landlords and factory owners were living a contradiction. The symptoms of a divided faith have begun to be shown clearly. The American people were lost between what they had been taught to believe and what they found purposeful to practise.

In his novels, F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays America's dream as a mere illusion in his own version of the dream in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Jay Gatsby, a true personification of the American dream had everything he ever hoped for. All of his aspirations came to life in the roaring twenties, except one. After his death, we come to a realization that Gatsby did not have his American dream. Even though he had the wealth, power and the girl, he was still unable to erase the devastating consequences of the past. The American Dream is an ideal, and that is precisely what Gatsby craved for. But all he got was its physical embodiment, wealth and power. His masterpiece is a comment on the decline and the corruption of the American dream in the Jazz Age¹ of the 1920s.

In American drama, the American Dream has always been a recurrent theme. In *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Arthur Miller gives different meanings to the American dream of success and shows what may result when this dream is proved to be false, shaken or unachieved. Edwards Albee's *The American Dream* (1960) is an examination of the American scene and an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in American society. And Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) which is full of symbols may well represent the failure of the American dream. The American Dream can be found in television, movies, literature, and arts. For instance, in Gabriele Muccino's the director of the film *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006).

What distinguishes drama from the other arts is performance. That is why I have chosen American drama as a medium for analysis. Two reasons justify my choice. Firstly, because I enjoy this particular genre which can not only be read but also reinforced through performances, i.e. it can also be viewed in the form of films. Secondly, American drama has mirrored vividly and peculiarly the American scenes i.e. the political, social, cultural, and historical scene. Unlike the other genres, American drama has been put under the lens of so many literary critics as it has also been overlooked by academics.

¹ The period between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Depression during which jazz became popular.

Ruby Cohn² notes in the Columbia Literary History of the United States, "...it is a virtual miracle that American drama merits admission to a history of American literature".

The failure of the American dream has been depicted through many themes. The theme of sterility³, or much more known for the term infertility, has been one of the major themes of twentieth century that symbolizes such a failure. The issue of sterility was not openly discussed in American literature because it did not draw the attention of American writers. It was revealed to the reader under the umbrella of other themes such as marriage, divorce, prostitution and other relevant themes. In fact, it remained hidden since only few scholars dare mention it in their works.

Sterility continues to be a pervasive theme in American literature as it shifted from physical sterility, to emotional sterility to spiritual one. Sterile characters are often leading an empty life which easily drives both male and female to fall into social evils like betrayal, illegal sexual relations, hatred, divorce, suicide and sometimes death. It is obvious that all the mentioned evils picture the failure of the American dream.

At the crossroad of the changes taking place in social, economic and scientific sphere, the attitude towards the way sterility is viewed by Americans has certainly changed. To the American mentality, the theme will probably take other directions in the light of the progress in genetics studies. Sterility will also be affected by economic and political upheavals as these constitute determinant factors.

My dissertation deals with sterility and the way it symbolizes the failure of the American dream in selected plays from the twentieth century American drama, namely in the works of Tennessee Williams *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), in Edward Albee's *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*(1962) and in Sam Shepard's,

² Ruby Cohn (1922 – 2011) a theatre scholar and a professor of Comparative Drama at the University of California, Davis for thirty years.

³ The state of being unable to produce offspring, in a woman it is an inability to conceive, in a man it is an inability to impregnate.

Buried Child (1978). These works may well symbolize the failure of the American dream through the different symbols related to the theme of sterility. The term sterility has always been associated with the close terms such as: bareness, infertility, and impotence.

My work is methodologically divided into four chapters. The first chapter will be about the American dream. It will therefore be divided into three sections. Section one will be a definition of the term “American Dream”. It will be followed by its conception in the American society and in the American culture. Section two will evolve the historical backgrounds of the American dream. It will focus on the founding fathers of this ideal as it will discuss the different views and reactions of many historians and theorists. Section three will evoke the evolution of the American dream. It will point out the different changes in perceiving its notion, its present conception and also the future of this dream.

The second chapter will focus on the first selected play written by Tennessee Williams in 1955 entitled *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and which tackles aspects of the failure of the American dream. This chapter will also be divided into different sections. Section one will be about the plot summary of the play. Section two will shed light on the biological sterility in the play.

Chapter three will examine the second selected play, *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* written by Edward Albee in 1962 and which symbolizes the failure of the American dream. It will be divided into two sections each of which has a task to perform. Section one will involve the summary of the play. Section two will highlight the second form of sterility-the emotional sterility. The task will be more a psychological one as this section deals with feelings and emotions. I will then put emphasis on what consequences will follow from this kind of sterility as this part is more individual dealing with the inner side of the character. In order to give evidence to my statement I will make use of scientific studies reporting the psychological effects of this sterility and how does it symbolize the failure of the American dream.

Chapter four will shed light on the third play, *Buried Child* and how it represents this failure. It is therefore divided into two sections. Section one will be the summary of the play. Section two will evoke the third type of sterility- the spiritual sterility; a more complex form of sterility – a hard, abstract concept dealing with spirituality. In this section, I will examine the way characters see this kind of sterility as God's punishment. As I will analyze the mental pains characters suffer from and the battle of nerves they undergo. Of course the results of such sufferings will represent an image of the failure of the American dream.

The conclusion leads us to say that the familiarity of the topic, its recurrence, its inescapable reality and its dominance in almost every field renders of sterility as a symbol, a pertinent theme in American literature. The presence of sterility in the three plays; though symbolic invite us to reconsider the issue of sterility as a hampering element to prosperity, improvement of the American society and as being a destructive factor of American religious, ethical and moral values.

Chapter I: The American Dream

Introduction

The American dream is a vague concept since for the majority of Americans it means different things. This vagueness and ambiguity is most of the time questionable as it has received a big amount of criticism especially by American scholars. It has also affected the readers' understanding and interpretations of American literature.

Most critics argue that this vagueness lies behind the different perceptions of the term as the idea suggests that the prosperity and happiness of people depends on a larger scale on hard work.

The notion of the American dream has never been definitely defined. Such definitions have been influenced by the category of the people and on the way they approach this notion. Religious people, for example, regard the American dream in a different way from politicians and therefore they interpret it accordingly. Literary men also have a different perception of the American dream. It is this diversity of opinions about the concept that has probably enriched American literature. American literature has been well outlined. It has differed from British literature because of the constant influence of the American dream on it; an influence that seems unconscious due to the vagueness of the dream. This vagueness has also influenced the plot of many American works, be it in fiction or in poetry.

At first, a closer study is taken at what the concept "American Dream" means. Various definitions will be given to cover its meaning. In the second step, we will look at the roots of the term and to the changing perception of the concept along history. Thirdly, another look will focus on the way this concept has evolved through time.

I.1- Defining the American Dream

Before defining the term, although no precise definition has been given, one has to start with defining the adjective American in the phrase “American dream”. It is of prime importance to define what ‘*America*’⁴ is as the American dream describes the dreams of a whole nation. The adjective *American* implies that the dream is linked to the American continent. So, what does the word America mean? And what does it imply to be American?

In contrast with Europe-the Old World, a world characterized by insecurity, corruption, injustice and tyranny, America was conceived of as a New World, free, virgin and full of riches. America was born out of a dream. Freese asserts, “long before ‘America’ became a country, it was a continent, and long before it was known to exist as a continent, it was a vision –that vision became known as a dream” (Freese.1994. p.25) According to Freese, the shift from a vision into a dream implies that progress is abundant in that continent.

America is that vacant continent of countless and endless opportunities. Geographically speaking, it is the continent that holds the most riches in the world. It is a nation with different natural resources and different regions with great diversity. Culturally speaking, America is a society formed by many different cultures, languages and religions. It is also a nation with different races, the red Indians -its original inhabitants, the white settlers and the indentured slaves, who formed the one race. These diverse races, states Crèvecoeur, “were melted into a new race of men” to form “the most perfect society now existing in the world”.

⁴ Used within quotation marks in this work, the words "America" or "American" refer exclusively to the United States.

In *What is an American?* (1770-75), the French aristocrat St .Jean de Crevecoeur (1735-1813) describes the American society as being different from European societies. He writes,

here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no bishops; no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinement of luxury (...) we are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself (...) we are the most perfect society now existing in the world.⁵

Crevecoeur states that the American citizen is a gifted man. This gift - God's gift, resides in his strength, his wisdom, his endurance and intelligence. He shares the Puritan faith in the great gift given to America. He also believes in the perfectibility of American citizens who are able to create miracles. He states that all nations are melted into a new race, and that the labours and prosperity of this new race will one day bring change to the world.

Another prominent figure of the same historical period, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) philosopher of the enlightenment and the epitome of the American Dream, highlights the concept of personal progress that could result from the American self-made man. He states that it is only through reason and natural resources that man can improve his present situation as he can make life worth living. Franklin arose in American citizens the will to work by confirming that the era of miracles no longer exists. In his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, Franklin sets the ideas on how to achieve success and wealth in the American society.

⁵ Crevecoeur, St .Jean. *What is an American?* (1770-75) p.71

Following the same path, the Calvinists⁶ emphasize on hard work, as being the sole purpose driving the dream. In the introduction to her book, *American Incarnation* (1986) Myra Jehlen writes,

When Americans said America they meant something they took to be fact: that their country, whose foundations defined and identified a previously vacant continent, represented a new and culminating development in world history and thus the fulfilment of progress.⁷

It follows that America is a country of limitless possibilities where anyone willing to prosper can fulfil his dreams. In a vacant continent, the American dream has been associated with terms like freedom, democracy and prosperity. John Locke (1632-1704) once stated: “*the entire world is America*” that it is every man has the right of ownership, that his property can’t be violated before the law and that any accumulation of wealth has limits. In his *Theory of Property*⁸ (1690), Locke believes that the ownership of property is created in the ownership of labour. In the late 1600’s, John Locke wrote the immortal words stating that “*all men are created equal*”. He indicates that through work man can acquire property. He adds:

In a natural state all people were equal and independent, and everyone had a natural right to defend his “Life, health, Liberty, or Possessions”, basis for the phrase in the American Declaration of Independence; “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁹

In 1931, historian James Truslow Adams published *The Epic of America*. It was not until that time that the phrase “*American Dream*” was coined. His discourse on the nature of the country included the landmark. He is credited with having invented

⁶ Calvinism is the theological system associated with the Reformer John Calvin that emphasizes the rule of God over all things as reflected in its understanding of Scripture, God, humanity, salvation, and the church

⁷ Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation the Individual ,the Nation, and the Continent*. 1986 p.20

⁸ Locke uses the word property in both broad and narrow senses. In a broad sense, it covers a wide range of human interests and aspirations; in a narrow sense, it refers to material goods. He argues that property is a natural right and it is derived from labour.

⁹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government* .Chapter Five. 1690.p.73

the term '*The American Dream*'; a concept which has come to represent the notion that the United States is a country of democracy where every man can find his ideal place. He contends that hard work will be rewarded accordingly, and that men can rise from rags to riches. He writes:

The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.¹⁰

The American dream is a concept which has played a big role in the daily lives of Americans ever since it was first coined. In his book, James Truslow Adams states that the American Dream is every American's right to pursue happiness, and make every effort to fulfil his dreams. In simplistic terms, Truslow states that the American Dream is the hope of leading a prosperous and fulfilling life. It is also about having the ability to shape one's own destiny. To conclude with, Adams calls the American dream a "*distinctive and unique gift to mankind*".

From the time of Truslow Adams the term has entered the American national lexicon. Different definitions have been coined in dictionaries. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the earliest appearances of the American Dream-"the ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative" date back to the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹⁰ James, Truslow, Adams. *The Epic of America*. 1931. p.24

The *New Dictionary of Cultural Literary* offers a different definition: “a phrase connoting prosperity and happiness...possibly applied at first to the hopes immigrants, the phrase now applies to all except the very rich and suggest a confident hope that one’s children’s economic and social condition will be better than one’s own”.

Not only novelists and historians took part in defining the term but economists, and political leaders too. According to Donald Davidson, the American dream is based on hard work¹¹ through which anyone is capable of making a better life. It also promotes effort and determination. He states: The “American Dream” is that anyone can make their fortune or fame in this country through hard work. It’s a great message in one respect, as it promotes effort and determination”

(Davidson, 2007 p.47)

In his philosophy called *The Theory of meaning / Interpretation*¹² (1967), Donald Davidson explains that the meaning of the term ‘*American Dream*’ ranges between who is the interpreter and the nature of what is interpreted. For him, the interpreter may be a simple humbler, a poor, a white or a black American. As for the interpreted, it may be a simple house, or a castle. In order to reach a deal, there should be agreement between the circumstances of the interpreter and those of the interpreted. Davidson argues that all sorts of interpretation depend on that agreement.

In criticizing both historians Adams and Davidson, Chuck Baldwin affirms that the true American dream which is rooted to the past is not the one linked with material gains. It is rather the ability to grow and develop without any obstacles or social pressure.

¹¹ In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), Max Weber opposes the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism and relates the rise of the capitalist economy to the Calvinist belief in the moral value of hard work and the fulfilment of one's worldly duties.

¹² Radical interpretation is a hypothetical standpoint which Davidson regards as basic to the investigation of language, mind, action, and knowledge.

He writes:

The American Dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of material plenty, though...It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as a man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being..¹³

Baldwin believes that any kind of progress is unachievable without liberty and equality, and that whenever social rules and injustice reign, this progress is hampered.

In his book *God, Gold and Civil Government* (2002), Tom Rose makes a very profound description of what constitutes liberty. True freedom or liberty is more than just having a lot of money. Having wealth will economically enhance a person's lifestyle and gives him more free time to do what he wants, but that is only one aspect of liberty. True liberty actually has three main parts:

Liberty is like a three-legged stool. It has three aspects, or legs: the Spiritual, the Economic and the Political. Each leg must be carefully preserved. If one leg is shortened or cut off, the stability provided by the other two will be hampered or lost, and the ideal of Liberty will come tumbling down.¹⁴

Today, only one of those legs remains strong: the Political. America is quickly losing sight of the spiritual aspect on which America was founded. And in recent years, America's strength has shrunken.

¹³ James, Truslow, Adams. *The Epic of America*. 1931. p.27

¹⁴ Tom, Rose. *God, Gold and Civil Government* .2002.p.46

I.2-Historical Background

The idea of an American dream is deeply rooted to the past. It can be traced back to the pre-colonial period mainly in the 1600s with the flow of the huge number of immigrants coming from different countries with all sorts of hopes to a new, virgin and unexploited continent, a continent that has been labelled “*the promise land*”, “*the land of opportunity*” or “*the land of dreams*”. The New world was depicted as a land of gold and riches.

The American Dream, dating back to the sixteenth century, consisted of three main ideas. These were that America was first, the land of plenty, second, the land of opportunity, and third, the land of destiny. The common word among these ideas is the word ‘land’.

Centuries ago, immigrants from all over the world fled to what came to be known as America. The newcomers craved something to believe in. This belief was then transformed into a dream since its realization seemed impossible especially during the hard times.

The first settlers went there with the hope of owning land. Others were persecuted and went there to seek religious freedom. The aim here was to purify the Church of England. The case here did not seem that simple. For the working class, the dream meant different things like living better than their ancestors something that was greatly desired among some parents who wished a better future for their children. This was especially common among the majority of immigrants who have escaped the precarious conditions of their homelands.

In her book, *American Dream, American Nightmare* (2002), Kathryn Hume outlines a broad idea of the American Dream by focussing on the immigrant. She writes,

Many longings and desires are expressed through that rubric (the rubric of the American dream). Prosperity for anyone willing to work hard is a crucial component of the dream, a house of one's own being the icon. In the past, immigrants knew that they might have a hard life, but they trusted that their children would be better off. For a long time, indeed, successive generations did acquire more personal property than their parents did. Reinforcing this perception is the technology that makes each generation seem better off indisputably, cars got faster, houses became larger and acquired more appliances, and more miraculous medical interventions proved possible.¹⁵

The significance of the American Dream has changed over the course of history. The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the second sentence of the Declaration of Independence as it is stated by Thomas Jefferson. *The Declaration of Independence* of 1776 defended the natural rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. America's Founding Fathers clearly understood that faith in the Creator and true Freedom are inseparable. In the Declaration of Independence, America's Founding Fathers laid out very clearly the true meaning of the American Dream.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...¹⁶

The American Dream is the prospect born out of the declaration of independence: the freedom of all men to pursue their dreams and goals in life. This pursuit should be the outcome of people who are willing to work for it.

¹⁵ Hume, Kathryn. *American Dream, American Nightmare fiction since 1960*. 2002. p.3

¹⁶ Jefferson, Thomas. *The Declaration of Independence*. A Declaration by the representatives of the united states of America, in general congress assembled (july,4,1776) –drafted by Thomas Jefferson

The American Dream, conceived out of liberty, encompasses the freedoms that all Americans enjoy, the same freedoms that have been an example, and set the bar to the rest of the world for many years. Furthermore, these freedoms can be enjoyed in a land of limitless possibilities.

The American Dream is generally interpreted as the romantic assumption that, in a land where all are created equal, any person willing to make every effort for a goal is limited only by the intensity of his or her commitment to self-improvement. It began long before Jefferson penned his Declaration containing the self-evident truths involving equality and the rights to pursue life, liberty and happiness. Thomas Jefferson also writes: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be”.

The American Dream has long been represented by words such as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. These ideals are the concern of many economists and politicians who affirm that through hard work these American promises can be realized.

One of the last people to mention in the history of the term American Dream is Martin Luther King Jr. His American Dream as an African-American was to have the same rights and the same opportunities as it is granted to everyone in the Declaration of Independence. In his famous speech, *I Have a Dream* he says that: “in a sense, America is essentially a dream, a dream as yet unfulfilled. It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities and creeds can live together as brothers”.

Martin calls out for equality between black and white. Martin Luther king had a dream of equality among races, a dream that where he envisioned the white and black race would come together and be the most productive force. He writes, “I have a dream that one day, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls, and walk together as sisters and brothers...”¹⁷

¹⁷ Martin, Luther, king’s Speech. *I Have a Dream* .1963.

In his speech he focuses on equality as being the key motivation and an end in itself to the pursuit of the American dream.

Following the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement and the black demonstrations and search for the American dream Martin Luther King writes in his "*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*" (1963):

We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands... when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.¹⁸

In his essay, *The American Dream*, which was published back in the October 1973 issue of *The Freeman*, John E. Nestler reflects:

Whereas the American Dream was once equated with certain principles of freedom, it is now equated with things. The American Dream has undergone a metamorphosis from principles to materialism...When people are concerned more with the attainment of things than with the maintenance of principles, it is a sign of moral decay. And it is through such decay that loss of freedom occurs.¹⁹

According to Nestler, the founding fathers gave up materialism for something noble and desirable -it is liberty and democracy and all the risks that may encounter these two principles.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.16-19

¹⁹ Nestler. E.John. *The American Dream* 1973.p.62

I.3-The Evolution of the American Dream

In spite of the fact that the American dream is almost present in every aspect of the American life, it is still not clearly defined. For some people, the American dream is linked with wealth and thus it goes hand in hand with the pursuit of material prosperity. This has forced people to work more than what is required to gain more money. Some dream of big cars and nice villas. Some others dreams' extends that to a more comfortable life and a better future. For the majority of rational people, the American dream is regarded as a far attainable target that it is not within the reach of ordinary people who are bound to accept two jobs to achieve the standard of living.

The American Dream has been one of the driving forces that helped America reach its present position. It has ranked the country the first all over the world. Because of its vagueness, its dominance in all fields, it has been unobserved. Therefore the American people are caught captive between the reality of this dream and its fantasy. Owing to its great impacts, the dream has governed the lives of many Americans. It has determined their thinking as it has also influenced their decision. And even though it is sometimes denied, marginalized it has been American's distinctions. As a result of the recurrent circumstances i.e. wars, political instability and economic upheavals, the realization of a perfect democracy seemed rather impossible. As a consequence, most Americans have become opponent to that ideal. Consequently, they have lost faith in it.

In our days, abiding by the standards of the American Dream seems to be a far reaching target. For ordinary people, the dream has become a sort of mockery. They regard it as an idea without significance, or merely an idea that has been betrayed. Most Americans believe that this abstract concept has lost its value and that its time has come and gone. This belief about the destiny of the American Dream has become a widespread feeling shared by not only ordinary men but also serious thinkers and philosophers who started questioning its future.

The perception of the American dream has changed. To most of today's Americans, the dream is linked to home ownership. Others would restrict it to that of being a boss, having a business or becoming rich and famous. While the American Dream certainly could include some or all of these things, none of them by themselves constitute the American Dream. Rather, they are the product of it.

More recently, Chuck Baldwin states in his article, *Can You Imagine This Country?* (2007) that material gain is not the American Dream. On the question of what really constitutes the American dream, Baldwin writes:

We hear much today about the American dream. By "the American dream," most people mean buying a big house, driving an expensive automobile, and making a lot of money. However, this was not the dream envisioned by the Founding Fathers. Remember that, for the most part, America's founders gave up their material wealth and substance for something they considered of far greater worth. Unfortunately, this hedonistic generation knows little of the kind of sacrificial spirit personified in the lives of America's patriarchs.²⁰

Most of the Americans today refer to material gain as "the American Dream". It is the freedom to pursue one's goals with honesty that should be celebrated. Material gain is only a fruit of freedom, not its origin.

The American dream has long been represented by words such as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. These ideals are touted by poets and politicians who affirm that through hard work these American promises can be realized.

According to Cal Jillson, the reality of that Dream, however, has long depended on the circumstances of the dreamer, on one hand, and on the quality of the dream, on the other hand. Such circumstances stand like obstacles and thus prevent some dreamers from pursuing their dreams. He contends that some dreamers have become

²⁰ Chuck, Baldwin. *Can You Imagine This Country?* 2007.p.51

successful in pursuing their dreams either by luck or by a mere chance. Consequently, they have tasted its fruits. Success here is not guaranteed by the American Dream. It is the abundant resources contained in the continent and the governmental idealism giving all individuals the same chance to pursue success that can assure a successful life.

In his book *Pursuing the American Dream* (2004); Cal Jillson examines America's complex and evolving social landscape to show the contexts that have shaped the Dream. Jillson offers a complete explanation on the origins and evolution of the ideal. He traces this ideal to its origins and records its progress to the present day. Jillson adds that the continuity, renewal, expansion, and the image of the Dream have been constant since well before the American Revolution. In his book, he also reveals the hidden motivations behind this dream. Such motivations have encouraged both leaders and ordinary people to be dynamic, active and more competitive in their quest of this ideal.

According to Jillson, the American Dream keeps changing at a fast pace, but still its image is constant since its emergence. It is that image of a better life and equal rights - an image that has urged economists, political leaders and even common citizens towards a more diverse, open and competitive society.

Indeed, Jillson recalls us that pursuing the American Dream should not stop there. It has to go far beyond. He asserts that the basic elements of the American dream which are health care, education and employment will give American citizens the same chance to compete for what may serve future generations and at the same time secure the American dream.

In his study of the American dream in 2004, Cal Jillson offers a more detailed overview of the ideal, by emphasizing on equality as its basis. He writes,

the American dream has always been, and continues to be ,the gyroscope of American life. It is the Rosetta stone or interpretive key that has helped throughout American history to solve the puzzles of how to balance liberty against equality, individualism against the rule of law, and populism against constitutionalism. the American dream demands that we constantly balance and rebalance our creedal values to create and preserve an open competitive entrepreneurial society in which the opportunity to, succeed is widely available .despite many conflicting strands of the American creed, the American dream insists that it must, and must increasingly, be a country in which opportunity is available to all honest hard work yields the chance to succeed and thrive. ²¹

Because of sticking and referring to the dream as being smothering of the past, Jillson receives critics supporting his opinion. James. A. Morone is one of the supporters. In his critics of Jillson he says that everyone knows about the American dream, but no one has ever explored it quite like Jillson in this bold and splendid book.

The vagueness of the phrase “*American dream*” has received harsh criticism, a dream that moderates between success and failure. In his novel, *Babbitt* written in 1922, Sinclair Lewis satirized materialism in search for the American dream. Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman* written in 1949 is a true criticism of the failure of the American dream represented in the fruitless pursuit of it. *The Great Gatsby* written by Scott Fitzgerald also criticizes the shaken dream.

Film makers also took part in ridiculing the quest of the American dream. Many of the novels and plays adapted into movies have pictured out the banality of the

²¹ Cal, Jillson. *Pursuing the American Dream*. 2004. p.5.

American dream. Economist and social thinker Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The End of Work and the European Dream*. He writes,

Many social critics would argue that what millions of Americans are really embracing is not the American dream so much as the American daydream. The authentic American dream combines faith in God with the belief in hard work and sacrifice for the future. ²²

Looking back to the history of the American dream, it becomes obvious then that we cannot arrive at a universal and objective definition. We have therefore to begin with the historical generation of the term; a term that has its ground in the twentieth century. It is generally assumed that the American Dream has its roots introduction in the discourse in 1914 by journalist and commentator Walter Lippmann's book, *Drift and Mastery* (1914). The ideal for Lippmann was a dream for future fulfilment. He continued stating that the American dream is a kind of dangerous tendency of the American citizens towards illusion and uncertain future. For him, it is a dream of an idyllic past. It is annexed with a rural common man of the golden age. Lippmann writes, "The American dream may be summed up, I think, in the statement that the undisciplined man is the salt of the earth" (Lippmann, 1914. p.27)

Lippmann believes that the future dream does not exist. It is because of the political and economic turmoil that one cannot dream of a better future. As a result, that future is destroyed with materialism, corruption and betrayal. Lippmann goes on saying that: "The past which men create for themselves is a place where thought is unnecessary and happiness inevitable" (ibid, p.29)

He thus recognizes the similarity between future dreamers and past idealists and then goes to criticize both.

²² Jeremy, Rifkin. *The End of Work and the European Dream*. 2004. p.75.

In his book he writes on the great shift in American thought from past idealism to future progress. He writes,

But there has arisen in our time a large group of people who look to the future .they talk a great deal about their ultimate goal. Many of them do not differ in any essential way from those who dream of a glorious past. They put paradise before them instead of behind them. They are going to be rich, so great, and so happy some day, that any concern about to-morrow seems a bit sordid.²³

Practically fundamental is that the dream which is founded on prosperity and success offers no guarantee for the dreamer, even though the concept of the American dream emphasizes optimism for a better future. Instead, only a unique chance is given to the American citizen to break all obstacles through hard work and so render this dream elusive. This is probably why many American dreamers have become doubtful about realizing their desires.

The American Dream is the ideal that exists only for the few rich and most powerful. While for the majority of people who immigrated to the US, the dream turned into a nightmare. Those immigrants were confronted with another reality and had discovered that the American Dream was nothing but a big lie. How can ordinary people realize their dream in a capitalist society where the government does nothing for its citizens? In a society where only the higher class is protected because it provides services like education and health care. As for the poor humbler, they are bound to abide by the rules just to secure their living.

It is worth noting that those who successfully live the American dream are the multi-billionaire. How dare then ordinary people live in privatized system that renders their dreams and their desires a pure hell.

²³ Walter, Lippmann. *Drift and Mastery*. 1914. p.27.

Talking about the future of the American dream requires setting expectations for the ideal. America's future places economic and material progress of first priority. It is within the achievement of this progress that one can dream of a steady job, stable house and a secured future. About restoring the American dream Ringer goes on saying,

There is a set of expectation in the American dream. First, a secure and steady job at good wages that steadily improve, not just in terms of money but in their purchasing power. Second, home ownership. Third, the affordability of an increasing number of things that may make life easier and more enjoyable - automobiles, washers, driers, microwaves ... and so on. Fourth, an array of fringe benefits -paid vacations, generous pensions, and adequate health care to name the most important. Fifth, travel and leisure. Sixth, college for kids and the hope and belief that the children's economic life will be better than their parents'. Finally, upward mobility.²⁴

Robert Ringer here lists seven expectations contained in the phrase 'American dream which are all about material and financial gains. Again, he stresses on high taxes, the fear of unemployment and the increasing regulations imposed by the government as being the real causes of the death of the American dream. However, on one hand, Robert Ringer was praised for stressing materialism and the socio-economic character the American dream for they constitute the inescapable reality of the dream. On the other hand, he was criticized and his expectations were rejected because no one of them is relevant to social idealism.

One may also talk about The American Dream today and may make predictions about its fate in the future. The talk about the American dream today is the focal point of many economists and more specifically politicians' speeches since their responsibility is to hold the dream alive and standing.

²⁴ Ringer, Robert. *Restoring the American Dream*. 2010. p.11.

In order to keep the dream surviving, Hillary Rodman Clinton insists on strengthening domestic affairs. She asserts:

The chance for every American to get ahead, regardless of background, is the engine of America's economic growth and social progress. A growing economy and a growing middle class go hand in hand. To remain strong in the world, the American Dream must be strong and alive here at home. And as we continue to navigate through these changing economic times, restoring the promise of the American Dream is the central economic issue of our time.²⁵

During the elections campaigns in 2008 for the presidency candidates, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, as well as many other American politicians, mentioned and are still mentioning the American Speeches of former presidents show that this is a common tool in U.S. politics. In his first inaugural address in 1969, Richard Nixon says that, “[t]he American Dream does not come to those who fall asleep.” Also Ronald Reagan refers to the American Dream in his first and second inaugural addresses in 1981 and 1985 when saying that: “[w]e have every right to dream heroic dreams” and that “we, the people, will build an American Opportunity Society in which all of us - white and black, rich and poor, young and old - will forward together, arm in arm.”

These are only few of many examples for the usage of the term American Dream in American politics which do not only make obvious that it is still an important topic and tool. It also shows that the American Dream still is a vision that did not come true for every American since politicians frequently promise that they will fight for its realization. This means that for many people, people of minority groups, poor people and people with other disadvantages, the American Nightmare might be more omnipresent than the dream of a good life.

²⁵ Jessica, Narloch. *Facets of the American Dream and American Nightmare in Film*. 2008, p.12.

Conclusion

For many internal and external factors, the American dream has been shaken and so its realization has become quite difficult. The dream which was once pretty has turned into a nightmare. As a result, most Americans found themselves bound to reassess their actions and values.

In fact, it is a real challenge since keeping to the ideals of the American dream has become impossible. In a rapidly changing and reshaped world, American ground is never stable as it used to be. The American dream has been subject to continuous changes. That is probably why it has slowed down so dramatically. The promises are not still alive for the next generation. It is therefore of first priorities for Americans to look at the future of the dream from different angles. The widespread fear is also due in part to the appearance of other dreams on the world scene. The talk about the European Dream especially after the emergence of the European Union is the subject of many discussions. This European Dream is gradually eclipsing the American dream. Thus, American people have to reconsider where the dream has proved successful and where it has failed.

It is the American dream that made of America a great country. Its ideals and its promises had contributed in the progress of the country. It has transformed the country from a provincial territory into the most powerful nation in the world.

To conclude, one must confess that the dream of a career “from rags to riches” has become impossible and unrealistic at the same time since today’s America has moved towards a from “riches to riches”.

Chapter II: Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Introduction

American playwrights of the twentieth century such as Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Albee, Williams, Sheppard and David Mamet are concerned with the American family situation. The struggle within these families is a common and recurrent theme that all these playwrights share. The dilemma of American family represents how the American Dream was corrupted. The failure of these families to attend their desires, symbolizes the difficulty of the realization of that ideal. It is the complicated aspects of the American family such as the broken family ties, lack of communication, violence, infertility and alienation that impede the fulfilment of the dream and so render its achievement impossible, as Tom Scanlon puts it: "We demand much of the family making it the focus of our dreams of harmony and the chief obstacle to their realization, the nightmare to be escaped..." (*Family, Drama and American Dream*.1978.p.54)

The dramas of the twentieth century are so concerned with alienation and social problems. They especially related to how families can be torn apart by disagreement over the disposal of property at the death of a patriarch. This leads us to focus on materialism that seems inherent in the American Dream and how destructive it is to so many American families.

One of the well-known twentieth century playwrights is Tennessee Williams (1911-1983). He is one of the most prominent dramatists in the United States. He produced many works, most of them were plays. His name is engraved in southern literature through which the South has found a strong voice. As a playwright, he presents the dark world of a modern civilization. This world is full of exploitation, of violation moral codes and of corruption. And it is this world's circumstances that drive the rebels, the artists, and the philosophers to lead a life of depression, madness and alienation.

Williams' family and early experiences in life prepared him for writing about society's outcasts. Williams may hold as a playwright - breaking taboos, being controversial, champion of the outcast. Most of his plays are called sex plays, which are considered as taboo and which are treated by Williams in a revolutionary manner; Tennessee Williams' open homosexuality and the way that his own life experiences may have influenced his writing. For the psychologically and physically delicate Tennessee Williams, whose homosexuality began to manifest itself at an early age, the Williams family turmoil left him alienated and lonely.

One such an influence can be found in his *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) which is Williams' third significant play preceded by *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), and *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947). In 1958, it was adapted into a film. The play encompasses many metaphors, symbols, themes and motifs. Tennessee Williams left a permanent mark on twentieth century American drama. He has a long productive career registered in his memories which consists of twenty four best plays. Three of his plays received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Battle of Angels* (1945) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955).

Most of Williams plays are based on short stories which by the end turn to be lengthy plays. For instance, his play, *A Street Car Named Desire* is loosely based on his short story *The Poker Night* and his play *The Glass Menagerie* is eventually the product of the short story entitled *Portrait of a Girl in a Glass, Man Bring This Up Road* was the starting point for the undervalued *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*; *The Night of the Iguana* became the play of the same name, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is loosely based on Williams' imagination as one of his best short stories, *Three Players of a Summer Game*.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is the outcome of the short story *Three Players of a Summer Game*, a story which reveals the impact of the famous British novelist D.H. Lawrence on Williams' early writings. The play confronts homosexuality, father-and-son relationships, greed, manipulation, age, death and sterility. It is considered

today with *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie* as his finest works for the stage.

The theme, American dream, has been the core subject of Tennessee Williams' writings. In his plays the failure of this dream has taken the lion's share. In *The Glass Menagerie* Tennessee Williams portrays the shaken dream through his characters Tom's sexuality and Laura's physical and mental retardation.

As a significant playwright, the majority of Tennessee Williams' plays are autobiographical in the fact that he uses his personal past, sunk in alcoholism and homosexuality. His characters are generally depicted from his family and friends. About this, Williams writes, "it is amazing and frightening how completely one's whole being becomes absorbed in the making of a play." (The foreword of *Camino Real*, 1953. p.419). His major works are a record of every details of his life. The latter are considered by scholars as self-constructing plays through which Williams calls for a removal of some of the impurities in one's life. It is a fact that even Williams himself admits that in the foreword of the *Camino Real*, he confesses, "It is almost as if you were frantically constructing another world while the world you live in dissolves beneath your feet, and that your survival depends on completing this construction at least one second before the old habitation collapses" (Ibid. p.469)

The characters in Tennessee Williams' plays try to create illusions in order to escape that unpleasant reality of human existence and also to forget certain awful experiences. These illusions help them remain disguised in an uncomfortable world. Williams' drama stresses on marginalized characters struggling with their own insecurities that rise from the fear of doubtful future - a future that seems gloomy as the conditions indicate no sign of optimism. This has forced these characters to be filled with melancholy, anger and corruption.

II.1- Summary of the Play

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is the portrayal of family tensions and individuals falling into traps that they created for themselves. These traps turn to be prisons that these characters find no way to escape from. The play features several recurring motifs, such as unpleasant truths, jealousy, lies, greed, superficiality, decay, sexual desire, and infertility. These themes reach its peak and turn to a boiling point especially, in act three.

The scene of the play took place in the south, in the Mississippi Delta. The latter is a productive region, a fertile place located in the western part of the state of Mississippi which is bordered by the Mississippi River. Brick and Maggie's plantation is located in this region, which is dominated by large cotton plantations and strong family traditions. One of these traditions is to pass family plantations from fathers to eldest sons, but only to sons who have children to continue the tradition. In Tennessee Williams' play, Brick's father, Big Daddy, is dying. He wishes to leave the plantation to Brick but hesitates because Brick has become a drunkard, and his wife, Maggie, has not yet been able to produce the necessary grandson to carry on the Delta tradition.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Brick and his wife are living in the bedroom. The latter was once occupied by Jack Straw and Peter Ochello²⁶, the founders of the plantation now run by Big Daddy. Straw and Ochello are dead, but the bed they shared dominates the setting. Homosexual love is both dead and central to the play.

The setting is in the Plantation house, and more precisely in the bed room of Brick and Maggie, whose large and beautiful bedroom opens on a veranda that encircles the second floor of the house. The room is clearly fit for important people to occupy and hold court; by the end of the play, the entire seventeen member cast has been received there. Also the place in which marriages are celebrated, the room is ironically a soft and beautiful prison in which Maggie's desire for Brick goes

²⁶ Jack Straw and Peter Ochello apparently hired Big Daddy when he was 10 years old, and Big Daddy saw the plantation grow to 28,000 acres.

unanswered. No matter how she appeals to Brick to make love, he rejects her, thus turning their bedroom into a place where Maggie suffers from pains and is trapped like a cat.

The story of the play recounts the crisis of a southern family which gathers to celebrate the birthday of its patriarch, who is seriously ill. For various motifs, the family members hide from Daddy the truth-his deadly disease. It is a play about the moral decay of a southern family. The whole play takes place in the bed-sitting room of the Pollitt plantation home in the Mississippi Delta. It is Big Daddy's sixty-fifth birthday. But he does not realize it will be his last. His two sons and their wives, however, know he is dying of cancer and want him to determine which of them will inherit his huge plantation.

Though his elder son is eager to inherit his wide estate, it is his younger, less successful son for whom he holds true affection. Brick is the privileged son, he is without hesitation his parents' favourite, yet Gooper and Mae keep pointing to his drinking and his childless wife and then to their own five offspring.

As the story begins, characters began exposing old secrets that have been hidden for a long time. The celebration was also an occasion to ravel some lies which were to a certain time considered as excuses used to escape the insupportable reality. Brick, the favourite son for Big Daddy, is in alcoholic decline following the death of a close male friend. His irritated wife, Maggie, has been active in forcing him to face difficult truths about himself that he continues to deny via the bottle. She is the so-called cat on a hot tin roof, full of agitated energy and determination, and likely to yowl.

The first act belongs to Maggie the Cat. The play starts with the presentation of the historical backgrounds of the family. As the play begins, Brick is having a shower in the bedroom he shares with his wife Maggie who enters the scene complaining about the misbehaviour of Gooper's children whom she compares as being not better than animals. These children are used by Mae, Gooper's wife to

remind Maggie of her childlessness. Maggie gets undressed and starts recounting how Gooper and Mae kept exchanging signal at the dinner table and how sophisticated tactics they used to win Big Daddy's affection. However, Brick makes no comments. Maggie realizes that she is talking to someone who gives no response. As a result, she attempts to resume her ordinary speech. After the couple have finished their shower, Maggie offers Brick an alcohol cap and at the same time complains that he remains the only one to drink in the family. She also complains about the way he has always looked. She recalls him that he looks '*enviously cool*'; detached and indifferent he always has been in bed with her, and how a wonderful lover he was.

Continuing her recite, she says that she is fond of Big Daddy, a man whom she admires for his endurance to reach the present position. She never stops complaining about her poverty and on how hateful her relatives were. She remembers how she has escaped a childhood of poverty to marry into the wealthy man, but finds herself unfilled.

It is this poverty that has made of her a sort of a cat on a hot tin roof. After she dresses herself, she murmurs that she has nothing to do. Thus, she begins announcing some of her mistakes. She confesses making love with Skipper and that she has slept with him out of revenge. She adds that the only true love in Brick's life –a love that remains the only true and good thing, resides between Brick and his friend. But Brick warns her to shut up because Skipper has already confessed that to him. Maggie and Skipper make love one to the other and dream that Brick is theirs. She goes on recalling Brick and Skipper relation in college. She finally admits that she values nothing for Brick.

Finally, Maggie confronts Skipper, she orders him to stop loving her husband. Not only Skipper smacks her but Brick too. This has made her screaming in anger. Skipper sinks himself to drink to death. After his death, the triangle plans have completely changed. Brick withdraws to alcohol living in a world of sadness and

Maggie cannot escape the consequences of a past that haunts her. The soul of the dead man continues to intervene in the couple's life. She screams and cries out of jealousy for she cannot have children. Although the doctor in the Memphis confirms that she can conceive, Gooper and Mae do not stop pointing at the fact that she is childless. Brick wonders why she has to visit the doctor that she knows that she cannot have a baby from someone who cannot stand her.

The most energetic character in the play is Brick's wife, Maggie, her major force and vitality have survived Brick's persisting sexual rejection of her. Deeply in love with Brick, she wants to produce a grandchild for Big Daddy. In an attempt to secure Brick's inheritance, Maggie tells him she is pregnant. She wants Brick to tell Daddy about the news. However, Brick refuses to cooperate with her plans and prefers to stay away along his visit. Both she and Big Daddy try to make Brick face the facts of his drinking and his sexual refraining.

In an interview with Williams on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and when referring to Maggie and Brick as being at the centre of his concerns, he reflects,

I think that deliberate, conscienceless mendacity, the acceptance of falsehood and hypocrisy, is the most dangerous of sins ... I meant for the audience to discover how people erect false values by not facing what is in their natures; by having to live a lie, and I hoped the audience would admire the heroic persistence of life and vitality; and I hope they would feel the thwarted desire of people to reach each other through this fog, this screen of incomprehension. What I want most of all is to catch the quality of existence and experience. I want people to think," this is life.²⁷

Act two belongs to Big Daddy, a self-made plantation owner and severe patriarch of the Pollitt family. He has worked his way up from riding cargo cars, to presiding over twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land in the Mississippi. He is a

²⁷ Tennessee, Williams. *Conversations Interview, a State of the Theatre*. 1957.p.65

monster, fat, vulgar and the richest cotton planter of the Mississippi Delta. He is savage in his treatment of Big Mama, his wife of forty years, a woman of boiling personality. After presenting the new characters in act two, Maggie continues her song. Although Brick does his best to silence Maggie, she continues her revelation in act two in which the question of masculinity appears to be more obvious along the dialogues with Big Daddy.

Act two begins with the meeting between Big Daddy and Brick, a meeting which is interrupted by the beginning of the celebrations of Daddy's birthday. It is Daddy's sixty-fifth birthday that gathers Gooper, Mae, their grandchildren and the reverend Tooker.

The father and son encounters of act two are of prime importance. Daddy starts interrogating Brick on his sex life and on his drinking. Over the course of the interrogation, Brick's sexuality and drinking has become clear. Still many facts remain hidden as Brick refuses to give answers to some of Daddy's questions. Brick could not declare the desire between him and Skipper. As the father-son dialogue progresses, the confrontation reaches its peak and so the revelation has become inadmissible.

It sounds as if Daddy calls Brick for judgment. Through the judgment of Brick, Daddy is judging himself because he sees himself reflected in the qualities of Brick. Big Daddy sees in Brick and Maggie his relation with Big Mama. He recalls how devoted wife she is. He is his double in that he has never loved Mama that he is shocked with his dishonesty. He confesses that he has spent his life with a woman he cannot stand. Despite this entire cruelty and hatred, Mama loves him things that he finds funny. He bitterly murmurs: "wouldn't it be funny if that was true ...". The same phrase is repeated by Brick in act three. These repetitions draw the parallel between the son and the father.

Williams writes of Big Daddy's confrontation with Brick:

The thing they're discussing, timidly and painfully on the side of Big Daddy, fiercely, violently on Brick's side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them. The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to "keep face" in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the "mendacity" that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with... The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, cloudy, flickering, evanescent-fiercely charged!-interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis.²⁸

The one long and vivid scene in the second act is criticized for being excessively powerful, profound and violent. This act of the play is considered a hallmark of contemporary drama.

In the third act, the relationship between Brick and Daddy has become clearer. Brick bears the same masculinity as Big Daddy. He is his portrait without doubt. Daddy continues to demand more truth that Brick finds it a sufficient revelation for a single evening. So, he collapses especially upon the revelation of homosexual desire. At last, Brick confesses his love for Skipper, a love he admits to be good, true and wholly sexless.

Daddy suggests that he understands his son. Daddy concludes that Brick is the heir to a tradition, a tradition that preserves fathers and excludes women. Brick's disgust to these traditions 'the family history' is clear. In turns, Brick also confronts Daddy with a truth that all the other characters could not support. Brick declares that everyone has lied to Big Daddy. He avows that he has cancer- a deadly cancer.

²⁸ Bloom, Harold. *Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. 2002. p.39.

The final act draws every character waiting for the big fortune inherited into a corner. After the secret has been revealed, it is Daddy's disease lie, a lie that people we tell to mask painful truth. Act three is also about Gooper revelations of his plan to take control of Big Daddy's estate.

At the close of the play Big Mama declares that Daddy wants above all that Brick provides him a grandson who is like his son, Brick. His dream is to have a son from Brick - a heir of the plantation as it is desired by Big Daddy,

Oh, Brick, son of Big Daddy! Big Daddy does so love you! Y'know what would be his fondest dream come true? If before he passed on, if Big Daddy has to pass on, you gave him a child of yours, a grandson as much like his son as his son is like Big Daddy!²⁹

Big Mama hopes these lies will change in the future. She dreams of Brick becoming a family man. She wishes he would stop drinking and that with the family responsibility; he could be the rightful heir of the estate. Mama confesses that there is a lack of affection between Gooper and his parents especially with Daddy. She explains that Gooper never liked Daddy. By the end of act three, Big Daddy is encountered with his death. Talking about the good sense of one's own, he says,

I'm not tryin' to whitewash my behaviour, Christ, no! Brick, I'm not good. I don't know why people have to pretend to be good, nobody's good. The rich or the well-to-do can afford to respect moral patterns, conventional moral patterns, but I could never afford to, yeah, but -I'm honest! Give me credit for just that, will you please? - born poor, raised poor, expect to die poor unless I manage to get us something out of what Big Daddy leaves when he dies of cancer! But Brick?! -Skipper is dead!³⁰

In the end of the play, Maggie realizes she can take control. She reveals her love to Brick who could not believe. The play ends in optimistic conclusion.

²⁹ Tennessee, Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. 1958. p.174

³⁰ Ibid. p. 61

II.2- Biological / Physical Sterility in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Throughout the nineteenth century, women were belittled. They were viewed as property of their husbands. The unmarried woman was hardly considered. Only a few women were to appear on the social register. But, by the turn of the twentieth century, early feminists were beginning to question the limitations imposed on women as passive mothers and homemakers. One such a limitation was the fact that once a woman marries, she loses her former identity, along with her maiden name.

Women were aware of the limitations that a patriarchal society had placed on their gender. Therefore, they demanded much freedom as they asked for equality with men regarding some life's aspects. Modern dramatists, both male and female, have been eager to explore these changing perceptions.

Although playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Susan Glaspell depict marriages within a contemporary society that expects wives to be obedient, they show how damaging such relationships can be. Rachel Crothers's³¹ depiction of women as independent, capable of holding down jobs outside the home and running their own lives without the constant guidance of men is evidenced in her works. In *A Man's World* (1915), the story was considered shocking when it debuted. It was considered as a violation of the rules of society. But Crothers and other feminists persisted in advancing such views, until women were given opportunities to live freer and more fulfilling lives. Although the widespread cultural myth had been that men were "*trapped by marriage*", the feminist viewpoint brought to public attention that it were really the women who were thus trapped.

Women were so weak that they could not support such a change. They were often forced to remain with either father or husband just to have a roof over their heads.

³¹ Rachel Crothers (1878–1958) was a prolific and successful American playwright and theatre director. She wrote *A Man's World* in 1915

The life of a solitary woman without male protection was not an attractive option. Faced with a lesser communicative husbands, women found themselves obliged to bring up children to distract them from a life that seems empty.

The idea of a childless woman was also negatively viewed. Women could not resist being without children who to a certain extent were the key to a secured future. Some women were obliged to adopt children and assume them as being their own just to suit some community expectations. At a time when those women were unable to have a career to support them, they looked for men to shelter themselves. No other American playwright is gifted in creating believable female roles as does Williams in his writings. Clurman asserts that no one in American drama has written more intuitively of women as does Williams.

Lione is one of Williams' female characters who found herself tired of trying to survive alone, she lands herself a husband. She admits, I'd marry any man that asked me, but also acknowledges the unfair likelihood of that. Complaining about the standard that reduces in importance unmarried women 'to old maid' status, Clara asserts: "If I were a man-the most insignificant little runt of a man-I could persuade some woman to marry me-and could have a home and children" (Murphy.1999. p.40)

In American society of that time, the relationship between men and men and women with men was explored as follow: Men are for friendship, women are for sex. Williams creates men who have had unusually close relationships with other men, who marry, and who then have conflicts over the two relationships. Unfortunately for Brick, those categories have become unclear. His best friend was sexually attracted to him, and his wife wants their marriage to have, in addition to sex, the honesty of a friendship. Brick hung up on his friend's admission of desire and has shut out his wife sexually and emotionally. Unable to bear any kind of closeness, Brick favoured the bottle over all other relations.

In most Williams' major works, women are often portrayed with great sympathy. They are the same time fragile and strong, attractive and repulsive. Maggie is the

main character for whom the reader feels a great deal of sympathy. This sympathy is due to the fact that although she has played all her cards, she remains alone on a hot tin roof. She remains subject to the family cruelty. She is victimized on so many levels. She is childless, loveless; and she cannot take control of Big Daddy's plantation. Of all the characters, Maggie appears to be the most talkative one. Although the lack of communication is prevalent in the play, Maggie does not only talk continuously but also overtly. In fact, she is bound to do so, since Brick tends to give only short responses and sometimes no responses at all. She makes the reader experiencing everything she says. One another character for whom we may feel emotionally attached is Gooper. For although he is a successful man with plenty of children, his father favours Brick upon him. Again we find ourselves confronted with luck's matters. Gooper seems unlucky in spite of all his acquaintances.

Williams is praised for his characterization. His choice of especially ordinary characters has been highlighted in every play he has written. Maggie is the passionate, vital cat. She is ambitious, cool and self-made. She never gives up getting what she wants. Unfortunately, her dream cannot be realized, she cannot produce the heir of the plantation from a remote husband. Her dreams are shattered by Gooper and his wife Mae for whom Maggie holds no small amount of disrespect. Brick, the favourite son for big daddy, is an ex- football hero, alcoholic a good-looking. Both are engaged in a loveless marriage. For Maggie, living with someone who does not love her has made her a *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In a state of anger, she confesses that she is making love with Skipper, a love that was also sad and awful as it lacks satisfaction. Brick is portrayed as a paralysed character. His paralysis is due in part to, his best friend death and to his addiction to alcohol in another part. Maggie's continuous nagging on Brick's alcoholism and on the kind of relation he has with Skipper has made Brick disgusting her. This opposition has cast Maggie from his bed. Brick wonders how Maggie plans to have a child by a man who cannot stand her.

In addition to the round characters Williams also uses flat characters. Along the course of the play, these characters rarely appear and remain most of the time unseen. Skipper, Brick's dead friend, embodies some of the most important issues in

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Skipper is Brick's closest friend, died some time ago but their relationship still haunts Brick. Quite to the contrary, Skipper is the sexual indicator in the play.

In the play, there is a great deal of information about sexuality, desire, and the inevitable troubles that the characters, alive and dead, inherit. Dean Shakelford argues that Skipper is a central figure in Williams' plays revealing "*gay male subjectivity*". Other unseen characters are Miss Sally who is Big Daddy's sister. Reverend Tooker represents the spiritual caretaker for the Pollitts and Doctor Baugh is the long-time physician to the Pollitts and is an active participant in Big Daddy's deception.

For Williams, the primary motive in creating these unseen characters is to demonstrate the power of human relationships, to reveal the incredible hold that one individual can have over another. The relationships are scrutinized among members of Big Daddy's family, primarily between his son Brick and Brick's wife Maggie the "*Cat*". Discussing *Cat* in a 1957 interview, Williams was referring to Brick and Maggie when he said:

I think that deliberate, conscienceless mendacity, the acceptance of falsehood and hypocrisy, is the most dangerous of sins... I meant for the audience to discover how people erect false values by not facing what is true in their natures, by having to live a lie, and I hoped the audience would admire the heroic persistence of life and vitality; and I hoped they would feel the thwarted desire of people to reach each other through this fog, this screen of incomprehension. What I want most of all is to catch the quality of existence and experience. I want people to think, "This is life." Indeed it is: chaotic yet ordered, clear *yet* mysterious, a play that acts on our minds like... well, one hesitates to say it, but like a cat on a hot tin roof.³²

All characters realize that they have been living with layer upon layer of lies for years. They have been lying for countless reasons. Chief among these are social

³² An Interview with Williams Tennessee in the *New York Herald Tribune*. 1957.p.3

expectation and family obligation. The truths that they impose on one another are at once painful and relaxing as they remain hidden within this family for years. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* spits with sexuality, frustration and guilt.

It is a three act play that forces the reader to be emotionally involved. The emotions are vividly expressed by Maggie the 'Cat' as she speaks to her husband Brick, a husband only in name. This attractive woman married to a wealthy but aged alcoholic man, has to endure being married to a man who does not touch her, a man who is disgusted even to look at her because of one single act of betrayal she committed. It was such a scandalous act that cost her the burial of her passion, vitality, her heat and so marginalized her as a cat on a hot tin roof. Such an act, also led Brick to abandon his career and continue his way as a drunkard. Brick's alcoholism is so extreme that he has to drink until he hears a click in his head –a signal that tells him that his body is full of alcohol that permits him to escape the life of betrayal and deception.

Many of Williams plays reflect the romantic southern traditions as it is the case with William Faulkner's writings. They also reflect sexual freedom as in the novels of D.H. Lawrence. These social traditions and sexual freedoms are factors which in part contributed to the infertility of a young couple full of energy. In another part, alcohol, homosexuality, prostitution and resentment were prominent factors. In spite of all that she does, Maggie was not able to produce the heir of the plantation. Both Maggie's desires and big daddy's wishes were shaken.

Besides the main themes included in the play power, greed, money, and sexuality; Prostitution appears to be dominant theme although expressed implicitly. The play explores the archetypal "*prostitutes*" (both men and women) as it explores Brick's indifference. Maggie might have had an affair with Big Daddy. The ambivalent relationships between Maggie and Skipper, Maggie and Brick, and Brick and Skipper are suspicious. The play also reveals to the reader the way homosexuality was viewed in the 1950s and how this has changed. In a review in 1955, Bentley addresses claims that *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is among the first dramas to deal with homosexuality.

Many early critics argued that the central conflict of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is Brick's struggle with homosexuality-his unwillingness to either admit his own homosexual tendencies or to understand those of his friend, Skipper. In an essay Hamilton, an English teacher at Cory Academy, discusses the possibility that the play centres not on homosexuality or truth but on the need for blessings conferred by a dying patriarch. Maggie cuts her hair short and titivates herself so as to replaces her husband in the world of male power by inhaling his masculinity. This leads to Brick's collapse, as it forces him to take a mistress.

Critics and film directors have long questioned the relationship between Brick and Skipper. They have been most of the time contradicting their views on the nature of Brick and on his relation with Skipper. On the same topic, John McClain of the journal *American* writes that Brick: "finds himself unable to rid himself of an infatuation for his college room-mate...and hence is incapable of a normal relationship with his wife or any protracted period of sobriety." (McClain. *Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams*.2005.p.32)

Tennessee Williams himself seemed uncertain about this relation. When he was asked, he gave different answers at different time. Sometimes, he gave ambiguous answers, sometimes no answers at all. In a letter to Elia Kazan, the play's director, Williams writes, "I now believe that, in the deeper sense, not the literal sense, Brick is homosexual with a heterosexual adjustment: a thing I have suspected of several others such as Brando, for instance." (Barton. *The Williams Films and Post-War America*.2009. p.314)

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is a play about the struggle between males and females. One of the main struggles in the play is the struggle of the weak, wealthy Brick, with his alcoholism, impotence and dysfunctional relationship with his wife. These struggles are portrayed along the play, even though sometimes with little emphasis on some flat characters. Both interior and exterior conflicts result from pursuing wealth. Williams focuses on materialism, capitalism and determinism as being the driving force for the deterioration of the Pollitt family which symbolizes the failure of the American dream.

The inner and external struggles are also the consequence of pursuing different intentions and plans by most characters. The tension of this struggle rises, especially when the members of the family have heard that the owner of the plantation is not going to live long. The use of children as a tool-a bargaining tool and the announcement of false pregnancy are parts of this struggle. Gooper, the greatest competitor for the inheritance is Brick's older brother. Though his elder son is keen to inherit his vast estate Brick remained remote from his younger brother, Gooper, a lawyer like Dakin in *The Glass Menagerie*, whom his father favoured over both the older children. Big Daddy favours Brick because of the subtle sexual affinities the father shares with his troubled son. Such affinities are developed by the playwright both through the action and form of the play by a canny and parallel identical line of dialogue.

Williams skilfully addresses the tendency of people to marginalize one another. Although Brick's specific struggle is with the nature of his relationship with Skipper and sexual orientation, Williams takes a special care in pointing out that subject matter of man's fight, that sense of isolation and the failure to come in terms with social expectations imposed on characters. Though to a lesser extent, he does mirror this conflict in the way that Big Daddy and Maggie deal with their pasts. Both come from lives of relative poverty and in spite of their financial security now, find it difficult to join the gaps and cope with their insecurities. Whether it is a matter of race, ethnicity, education, economic status or sexual orientation, most individuals feel compelled to fall in sins with the relative "norms" that surround them or face social consequences.

Despite the fact that William has also been accused of his excessive use of symbolism in many of his plays, he continues to ornate his plays with different symbols. Obvious symbols in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are the Cat, the Moon, and Brick's crutch. Of equal importance, symbols such as the diseases of alcoholism and cancer, homosexuality, impotence and lies are prominent in the play. All the mentioned symbols reinforce the sterility of the characters.

The Cat refers to a particular feminine desire. In the play, Cat refers to Maggie. Her loneliness has made of her a “Cat”, hard and bitter. She finds herself bound to a man who does not love her. The childless life of Maggie has made of her place in Big Daddy’s plantation not assured, to be Daddy’s rightful heir requires having at least one child.

The cat of the title is the heroine, the roof represents her husband. He would like her to jump off. That is to say, to find a lover. Driven by neither passion, he neither understands nor controls his actions. He takes to drink and envies the moon. The hot cat and the cool moon are the two chief symbols and points of reference in the play.

The crutches are used to symbolize broken things. They are used as a symbol, a sign of Brick’s impotency. Cancer is another symbol. It symbolizes Big Daddy’s kidney unhealthy state although farmland owners are known to be fertile and healthy.

Many of Williams’ plays elaborate a certain fantasy of broken masculinity. In the case of Cat, masculinity is abrupt with the homosexual desire. The desire is kept at bay because of Brick’s desirable coolness. This desire cannot be declared because Brick is alcoholic.

All the characters seem to live alive or lie. Each character is a ‘liar’ in some fundamental sense. The two big lies in the play are Brick’s homosexual desire and Daddy’s imminent death. At the end of the play, the two men are forced to confront these secrets by uncovering them.

The play is also about escaping real life. No character in the play likes his present situation. Brick favours the bottle over the life of mendacity. Maggie announces false pregnancy to escape the bitter reality of not being able to bring up a baby. The reverend, despite being a religious man lied for materialistic purposes. In criticising Williams play, Walter Kerr, the daily critic for the New York Herald Tribune wrote, “the play is beautifully written, perfectly directed, attractively acted play of evasion: evasion on the part of its principal character, evasion, perhaps, on the part of its playwright.

In order to win that battle most characters are forced to lie. They do not only lie to realize their goals, but also to escape the bitter reality. The doctor lies when he announces that big daddy has just a mere spastic colon. However, in reality, he suffers from an advanced incurable cancer -or to a certain extent a deadly cancer. Maggie also lies when she declares that she is pregnant. Actually how can she become so that she has not shared bed with Brick for a long time.

Williams enters the competition firstly for fame; and primarily for money. It is the urgent need for money that forces him to lie. This brings us to consider that people's attitudes concerning money and inheritances may change. People lie or live in self-defeating lies as the circumstances dictates for them. However in better relationships as in better conditions people do not lie, practice deceptions, or operate solely on pride and wealth.

In his play, Williams tries to unmask his characters from covers they create for themselves and force the audience to see the true nature of such characters.

Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller bring recognition of this tendency to hide from unpleasant truths into American drama. While some may carry on by living the lie, others are tired to face reality with varying aftermaths. For some, this awareness is productive, but for others, it is in the end destructive. Williams contends,

There no 'good' or bad' people. Some are a little better or a little worse but all are activated more by misunderstanding than malice. Blindness to what is going on each other's hearts. Stanley sees blanche not as a desperate, driven creature backed into a last corner to make a last desperate stand –but as a calculating bitch with 'round heels'...nobody sees anybody truly but all through the flaws of their own egos...That is the way we all see each other in life.³³

³³ Albert. J. Devlin. *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams (1945-1957)*. 2004. p.95

We are to a certain extent the slaves of societal rules. Society dictates for people the way they should look, behave, or feel to meet some of the life's expectations. In other words, we are sometimes pressured to hide the true image of ourselves, of who we really are as this is demanded to fit the quality of life we do want to live.

Drown in big lies, characters find it difficult to confront reality. In an attempt to face Big Daddy with reality, no one of the play's characters has the courage to tell him the truth. With such an attempt, the characters' intend to win Big Daddy's affection which is in itself a big lie driven from their personal profit. The case here is to take control of the estate. Only one character has been able to address his father about this reality as he has no motivation in pursuing Big Daddy's fortune. This was an exception for a character who was not indulged in the family affairs and who was distanced because of alcohol.

After dismissing everyone from the room, the right moment for unveiling the secret (they are lies in this case) Brick finds himself determined to inform his father about his serious disease and in turn Big Daddy finds himself bond to confront his son about his marriage, his drinking, and his homosexuality. After these revelations, the two characters realize that they have been living a life of lies for many years.

The two prominent characters, Big Daddy and Brick reach the conclusion that lying is a fundamental way of life and research indicates that they may be right. Why we routinely lie to one another is a complex matter, but how we feel about it is fairly simple. According to a principle known as the Fundamental Attribution Error, we assume that if we do something negative, it is because circumstances beyond our control force us to do it. However, if someone else behaves in the same way; it is because he or she has an innate character flaw. Two motivations drive this kind of thought. First, we need to believe that we are, at heart, good people, so we excuse our actions with rational justifications. At the same time, we naturally have better insight into our own reasons for doing things than those of someone else, so we assume that our motives are acceptable while another's are not.

In a recent study, researchers on human being behaviour learned that this principle also applies to lying. Just as Big Daddy finds it acceptable to continue a deceptive marriage with Big Mama and yet disapproves of being lied to about his own health.

The critical reaction to Williams' writings has been mixed. Certainly his contribution as a short story writer has been overshadowed by his fame as a playwright, and scholars have often focused on how Williams developed his plays ideas he introduced in his short stories. Some have regarded his stories as simplified and shortened versions of his plays. And as it is commonly assumed, the majority of people perceive their own lies as being less harmful than those of others, even if the circumstances are exactly the same.

Conclusion

Many reviewers have found his plays gloomy and bizarre. Detractors of Williams works contend that he is sadist who creates characters only to humiliate them, but his supporters assert that in general he treats his characters with sympathy and compassion.

Commentators have also examined autobiographical aspects of Williams' writings, particularly his treatment of homosexuality and family dynamics. Recent studies have elucidated the role of women in his plays and have investigated his excessive use of symbols particularly the religious ones. In stating the challenges brought by Williams, Brooks Atkinson states, that he broke the traditional rules. In spite of this, his works are still remarkable.

Tennessee's plays were subject to successive interpretations. For some critics, his plays are held to be a more successful inner struggle of characters lost in a materialistic corrupt world. He is recognised as one of the greatest writers to emerge from the South and a chief architect of the New American Drama. His plays shocked their contemporary audiences in their treatment of alcoholism, rape, violence and other secrets traumas.

The resolution of the play remains ambiguous, but the well-drawn characters and Williams' splendidly rhetorical Southern dialogue create high-powered drama, with some superb comedy as well. Maggie (the Cat) and Big Daddy remain two of American drama's most vital and fascinating characters.

One of such film director and critic is Elia Kazan who suggests softening Maggie's rough edges. He says that the major force in the play is Brick's wife, Maggie, whose vitality has endured Brick's persisting sexual rejection of her. Deeply in love with Brick, she wants to produce a grandchild for Big Daddy.

Both she and Big Daddy try to make Brick face the facts of his drinking and his sexual abstention.

Undergoing severe depression, Williams was obliged to accept Kazan's proposal here is another proof that social conditions dictates to us the way we should be and not the way we want it to be. In 1955, Williams wrote the new version of play, in which he stated that in new version the women give back her husband his manhood while in the original version stresses on a women dominating a man just to achieve her will.

Williams wants Maggie to be as tough at the end as she is at the beginning, but he thought that the Broadway Version of Act Three was sentimental, and a falsification of Maggie's determined nature. In the version Kazan first read, Maggie, who knows what it is to be poor and is determined never to be poor again, sees what she wants and takes it and will drag Brick with her if necessary. In the Broadway Version, however, her interest is, as Williams wrote Wood; in giving Brick back his manhood. This was one of the changes that Williams removed in 1974. Kazan sees that Big Daddy is too strong a character to go quietly to his death bed; the father-son relationship is clarified; Maggie can declare her victory as the cat on the hot tin roof.

Some critics said that they wanted literature to reflect life. They liked Williams' original, messier version; others commented that they read literature to escape from life's problems. They liked the version that eventually was produced. After the revival of the play in 1974, Kerr viewed it with different eyes and so appreciated the new version.

Although Williams was sufficiently dissatisfied with Kazan's desired revisions that he published both versions of Act Three in the play's early editions, he did not reject the resulting Pulitzer Prize or New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Still, while the positive reviews were some of the best professional news Williams had had in years, insignificant doubts remained in the mind of some as to just what Brick's

problem was, and who he was. Some of his detractors maintain that Williams does not provide a clear philosophy of life. They have found his ambiguity in judging human faults unacceptable. After receiving countless criticism Williams writes:

My next play will be simple, direct and terrible-a picture of my own heart- there will be no artifice in it-I will seek truth as I see it- distort as I see distortion- be wild as I am wild- tender as I am tender- mad as I am mad-passionate as I am passionate- It will be myself without concealment or evasion and with a fearless unashamed frontal assault upon life that will leave no room for trepidation.³⁴

Williams was viewed by his unconvinced observers, as a rebel who broke with the rigid conventions of drama that had preceded him. He has not only explored new territory in his search for a distinctive form and style, but also created characters as unforgettable as those of Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorn, or William Faulkner.

In spite of all the severe attacks Williams has received, he is still the most quotable of American playwrights. His pros admit the uniqueness of the language he brought to modern theatre. Furthermore, Williams has added to dramatic literature a cast of remarkable and memorable characters. He is also praised for turning attention to subjects that, before his time, had not been tackled.

³⁴ Margaret, Bradham, Thornton. *The Theatre in Spite of Itself*. 1961.p.12

Chapter III: Emotional Sterility in Edwards Albee's

Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Introduction

Edward Franklin Albee is one of the few American exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd. Shortly afterwards his birth on March, 12, 1928, Albee was adopted by a wealthy couple. The family was part of the New York high society and tried to bring up their son to be a respectable citizen of this community. Edward Albee sensed early that he was not the couple's biological son. He experienced several conflicts with his parents who disapproved of his lifestyle, interests, sexual orientation and acquaintances. After some years at various boarding schools and colleges, Albee finally and abruptly left home and broke ties with his adoptive parents in 1949. In a later interview, with Edward Albee at Academy of Achievement, he confessed that he had never felt comfortable with the adoptive parents. He does not only accuse them for being irresponsibility parents but also blame himself for not being the desired son.

The image of the dream child which exists only in the adoptive parents' imagination recurs in a number of Albee's plays, notably *The American Dream* and *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The latter, which has earned him an enormous success on Broadway, is undoubtedly one of the finest American plays. Being mostly realistic in form, *Who is Afraid* is also as an allegory of American society taking into account some of the absurdist's features.

All along his life, the American dramatist Albee has observed several decades of American society as well as changes in attitudes and values of the American population. In almost all of his plays, he looks at the American family and its various manifestations, criticises it, mocks it, and reveals its dishonesty.

His plays frequently contain the figure of the child which ranges from that of the adopted infant, real or imagined baby, young man, dead child, imaginary person, to that of a grown-up homosexual son. The figure of the child is often understood as the adjusted self-image of Edward Albee. Most of his plays centre on the absence of children in a marriage and the meaning of offspring for an ideal relationship.

Albee observes and scrutinizes people's behaviours. His experiences in life have strongly influenced his plays. He seems to have observed especially families and the relationships that govern their members. His childhood has greatly influenced his writings. Many scholars point out to the fact that most his plays are autobiographical. In an interview about the supposed analogies of his plays he said: "You must remember I've been watching and listening to a great number of people for a long time. Absorbing things, I suppose." (Flanagan, William, *Edwards Albee: The Art of Theatre*. 1966. p.23)

His plays are difficult to situate in terms of movements. A great deal of discussion has been put on whether to locate his plays among the realists or the absurdist. The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd in general, present a disillusioned, harsh, and bleak picture of the world. Plays in such volume are nevertheless essentially realistic, in the sense that they never evade the realities of the human mind with its despair, fear and loneliness in an unfamiliar and aggressive universe.

The realism of these plays is a psychological and inner realism; they explore the human sub-conscious in depth rather than trying to describe the superficial appearance of human existence. It aims to shock its audience out of satisfaction, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is sort of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity and nobility; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence. In other words, man is eventually alone in a meaningless world.

Edward Albee is listed alongside Eugene O’Neil, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller as one of the great dramatists of the twentieth century in the United States of America. Along his career, Albee has written many plays dealing with dysfunctional families including: *The Zoo Story* (1958), *The Sandbox* (1959), *The American Dream* (1960), and *The Goat: or, Who Is Sylvia?* (2002).

*Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*³⁵, written in 1962 by Edward Albee, is a major work from twentieth century family drama. It is the first full lengthy play and one of the most challenging plays of the contemporary American theatre. The play was written in a period painted by the illnesses of modern society such as: aggressive capitalism, ignored feelings, alienation, hatred and violence, and degrading sensibility. Those illnesses provided major themes for many writers of the twentieth century.

After its performance in the Billy Rose Theatre in New York, on October 13, 1962, audience was shocked. The relationships between the characters, and dialogue of the play were the topic of conversations in taxis and living-rooms. These discussions also reached the press. Countless newspaper and magazine pages were filled with the controversial effects left by the play. Following the opening night of the play, the critic Saul Colin admitted to having, never spent such an emotionally and physically upsetting evening at a theatre.

Albee’s position in American culture and his great contribution to the American theatre can be summed up within the memorable words of the former president of the United States Bill Clinton in an honour ceremony (1993), “tonight our nation-born in rebellion-pays tribute to you, Edward Albee. In your rebellion, the American theatre was reborn.”

³⁵ Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is a British novelist. Among Woolf’s famous novels are: *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Light House*, and *The Waves*. Her great literary innovations of the 20th c are discussed at Martha’s father parties.

Today, Albee remains active. He is writing, producing and directing his plays, as well as teaching at the School of Theatre of the University of Houston and giving lectures on his work at colleges around the country.

Up to our days, Edward Albee continues depicting cunningly human relationships and questioning human perfection. He shows that nobody is perfect and that social norms and expectations seldom can be fulfilled. He criticizes the social pressure imposed on the individual and indicates how its consequences might be overwhelming and destructive.

III.1-The Summary of the Play

The play takes place in the living room in a house on the campus of a small New England college. The two main characters of the play are middle-aged couple. The wife, Martha is fifty-two. She is a somehow large, energetic, and wealthy but not beautiful woman. She is the daughter of the college president. George is forty-six, the husband, a thin with grey hair, associate professor of history.

The three acts of the play are entitled, *Fun and Games*, *Walpurgisnacht*,³⁶ and the *Exorcism*. These titles pave the way for the reader to well understand the play and follow the path it will take.

Act one, *Fun and Games*, opens with the couple returning home from a faculty party at two o'clock in the morning. Right away from their return, there is a sense that they are the saddest couple in the world. As they get in, Martha demands George to make her a drink and then announces that they are expecting guests who should be welcomed with warmth. However, George seems hesitant as the guests are not his. Right from the beginning of the play, one can mark the differences between Martha and George. She is aggressive and loud whereas he is passive and quiet. He also fears that Martha after drinking a lot will reveal some of their secrets. But Martha insists and reminds him that this is the wish of her father - the college president who is the secret behind George's present status.

When the doorbell rings, the question of who will answer the door turns into a verbal fight. Finally, and in a reflection about his status, George finds himself forced to open the door. Their guests, the young couple Nick and Honey, a blond man from the biology department and his wife, a very slim woman, arrive a moment later and find the old couple already engaged in a brutal verbal battle, an endless games battle between Martha and George. George takes special care in treating the young couple

³⁶ German term for - a nightly European holiday when witches gathered to celebrate.

keeping in mind the he has the most to gain in terms of status only if he plays his cards the right way.

Along the first act *Fun and Games*, George and Martha keep insulting and fighting each other. Martha does not stop complaining about George's professional failure. In spite of her father's support, George is still an associate professor and could not even achieve the rank of a full professor. George warns her in advance not to start in on the bit. "The bit" here concerns a child "the kid", George and Martha's myth, a central factor to the play. However, she tells Honey about their son. Act one ends with George's singing "Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf" in the tune of *Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?*³⁷ At the end honey runs out too quickly.

Act two, *Walpurgisnacht* or (Walpurgis Night) after Martha and Honey have left the room, George and Nick are alone. George sees in Nick his younger version. He remembers himself before his marriage. He recalls every precious moment of his youth and compares it to his ties with Martha and the life of servitude he is suffering from. He tells Nick that his marriage to Martha has not made any advances regarding his academic career. He starts in with Nick who turns out to a deaf ear because he finds no fun in the sorts of games George is playing. Nick asks if George and Martha have children. George tries to flee by changing the subject of their discussion.

Nick reveals a secret about his marriage to Honey which results from a false pregnancy. He seems uneasy when George further interrogates him about his marriage and Nick displays that the couples' parents expected them to marry. He also admits that her father's money is one of the reasons of marrying her.

George tells Nick a story about a boy who by accident kills both his parents. Honey returns and informs the male couple that Martha is changing into something more comfortable. She announces to George that she did not know that he and Martha have a son. Later, Martha and Honey rejoin them. George gets upset when

³⁷ a song in the Walt Disney animated –cartoon version of "*The Three Little Pigs*" Virginia Woolf substitutes the animal's name

receiving the two bits of information. The first one concerns mentioning the forbidden topic - their son - to Honey. The second one is related to his suspicions that Martha is sexually attracted to Nick. The latter is confirmed through the way Martha looks "*more voluptuous*". While Martha was in the kitchen comforting Honey for her intoxication, George and Nick talk about children. George concludes that thanks to genetic engineering, people will have no problem as to procreation is concerned.

Then, he foresees that scientists like Nick are going to create children in dishes and that people will be able to decide whether they want to have offspring or not. He also foreshadows that couples who are not able to conceive children - like George and Martha - will be able to do so.

After drinking a lot, Martha and Nick start dancing in a very seductive manner. Martha tells Nick about George's autobiographical novel that is prevented from publishing by her father. It is worth noting that during his stay in Italy, Albee wrote a novel which has never been published. After Martha's *Humiliate the Host* game, George proposes a new game *Get the Guests*. He narrates his second novel by retelling Nick and Honey's story and at the same time Honey's hysterical pregnancy. Honey gets nervous and so runs to the bathroom. Martha and Nick continue dancing and then come together in a long kiss and then go upstairs. In an act of anger, George throws a book which he pretends he is reading. The book hits the door bell making a loud noise in the sense of George's intending Martha to come down stairs.

In the following scenes of act two, George finds himself in critical situations as he is subject to several attacks. He is criticised not only for his academic failure, but also for his inability to produce children. All the mentioned topics put George in an increasingly embarrassed situation. In spite of Martha's insistent criticism, George does his best to keep his temper from erupting.

The talk of sports is probably the incident that aggravates things and raises the tension, especially when Martha mentions the boxing match which occurred during George and Martha's early marriage. It is the second topic that George warns Martha

not to reveal it however she persists. She tells her audience that she puts on the gloves and surprises George by punching him in the jaw knocking him to the ground. In an act of revenge, George returns with a surprise - a shot barrelled short gun that he targets at Martha's head. The young couple react immediately, Honey screams and Nick moves to stop George. George pulls the trigger, and it is revealed that the gun is not a real one but just a toy that shoots Chinese parasol. George wishes it were real for he kills Martha for her cruelty and consecutive humiliations.

After getting exhausted, George tries to change the conversation by turning to Nick and bringing up the subject of Nick's profession. For the first time, Martha learns that Nick is in the biology department and not the maths department. George starts his conversation with Nick about his work with chromosomes and about genetic alteration. He sees in such a profession a threat to the future of mankind. He fears from this wave of the future that is capable of producing a race of men based on test-tube.

At the beginning of act three *The Exorcism*, Martha is alone. Things have really changed between Nick and Martha. Already drunk and exhausted, she calls for George after being abandoned cold. Nick comes in along with Honey back from the bathroom. Martha's way of looking at Nick confirms that he was a flop in bed. Nick, the so called "screwing machine" has failed in his function. And the name screwing machine has been substituted by Martha's calling these men "poor babies".

George gathers Martha and the guests and forces them to play one last game *Bringing up Baby* before going to bed. He then intentionally asks Martha to recount the story of their son. But this time, Martha refuses to talk about the kid. George who has been a slave in act one becomes the master in act three. He seizes the occasion, Martha's weakness and forces her to tell her own version of the story. Martha starts describing the child in a very detailed and beautiful manner. The way she describes the son has affected Honey to the point that she cannot stop crying. George recites in Latin the text of the dead and then announces the telegram carrying the news of their son's death. Announcing the death of the beloved son has marked the play's climax.

The play reaches the highest point of tension. In a reaction, Martha bursts into tears because their hope, the child, their only means of fortifying their relation is finally dead. Another battle of accusations starts. The old couple transfer their own bitterness, disappointment and hatred to the child by accusing each other of destroying their perfect creation. It is revealed that this fantasy has helped George and Martha avoid the pains of their lives. George does not kill the son because Martha breaks the rules but because he knows how important and precious he is for her. George, who has failed in almost every battle, has won the last war.

The last scene of act three is totally different to its preceding scenes. The violent atmosphere, the sharp language and the uncontrolled energies have turned to gentle short phrases, coolness and quietness. Ironically, the old couple never had a child of their own, but both of them seem to fulfil the perfect image of the American nuclear family.

Their marriage seems dysfunctional because of the absence of a child who constitutes a deep and unsolved conflict in their partnership. Both try to deal in their very own way with the loss and absence of a child. Martha becomes loud, drinking and domineering while George is pessimistic and not interested in other people except his wife. Edward Albee states that the son is a symbol as well as a “weapon they use in every one of their arguments”. He further argues that both George and Martha very well know that their son is a symbol and that because they are drunk, they occasionally become confused with his existence.

At last, Nick understands everything, every game. George and Martha cannot have children; therefore, they create an imagined son. The young couple discover that they were fooled by the old couple actions and that they function as vivid, moved spectators.

The party is over. Nick and Honey make their exit leaving George and Martha alone. The play ends the same way it opens George sings the same opening song and Martha replies to him.

Finally, Martha surrenders as she admits that she is afraid of life without fantasies. Albee has said that the real meaning of the play's title is "who is afraid of life without illusions?"

III.2-Emotional Sterility in *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In his plays, Albee treats various themes. He uses them as a vivid and faithful depiction of the everyday American scenes. Besides the themes of disappointment and disillusion, betrayal death and loss, the play also addresses topics such as the role of sexuality, impotence and infertility in the relations between characters. Infertility 'sterility' is evidenced in the play *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as it introduces two couples of which neither has a child. This topic has remained for long time a heavy burden and has created a sort of psychological imbalance. These imbalances are due in part to past abusive relationships and to sticking to durable pains on another part.

The play's central image of this failure of human feeling and contact is sterility-the inability to bear a child-and as its title suggests, Albee tries to give the image the widest possible social reference. He implies that the sterility which the audience sees in his characters is typical of the society as a whole, and is created and perpetuated by the society.

One of the most pertinent themes of the play is the question of George and Martha's child, "the imaginary child". The "child" does not only seem a desire for fecundity within their relationship, but also a projection through which they express many of their personal desires, needs, and problems. In this context, the child's subsequent "death" signifies a milestone in their understanding of their marriage and of themselves as well. By the end of play, after much suffering and pains, George and Martha appear ready to accept reality as it is and to cope with their new way of living.

In most of his plays, Albee is concerned with ways of how people get through life and with ways they waste their lives. Albee focuses on intermingled relationships of his characters. Such abnormal links are the results of materialism and modernism. He goes deeper to analyse society and its individuals already sunk in ethical and moral

problems. He asserts that it is because of materialism and capitalism, that the life of many people has remained unfulfilled. All they live and experience is indifference in their familial relationships and bareness in their marriage. The consequences of a materialistic society lead also to a sterile intellectualism. In such a society, children do not exist because intelligence can no longer find any reason for their existence.

In a materialistically oriented society, the individual is the first victim. Materialism and opportunism have a great impact on the individual and on the institution of marriage. Albee points out that owing to this impact; the individual creates fantasies and delusions to escape its effects. Albee claims that the play is about the ways people get through life and that the meaning of the title is “who is afraid of life without illusions”.

In fact, Albee uses his plays to criticize the moral and spiritual damage inflicted upon people by an excess of material wealth and a misguided pursuit of the American dream. *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was deprived of the Pulitzer Prize award because of the controversial public reception due to its explicit language and interest in taboo subjects.

It is commonly assumed that George and Martha symbolize the American couple on one side, and the failure of the American dream on the other side. The imaginary child does not only symbolize emotional sterility of the modern age, but also the illusion that man creates in order to survive the horrors of life. Nick and Honey also take part in representing the future that is full of deception and sterility. The four characters' sterility is evidenced by the play's use of the imaginary child for the old couple i.e. George and Martha's fabricated boy and by the hysterical pregnancy that honey has after a careful tactic avoided.

In this play, Albee attacks American values that comprise the dream, including marriage, children, success, wealth and religion. He claims each of these values to be empty. Such emptiness results in a loveless and sterile marriage, failed careers and

powerless religion. He compares the country as being void of these principles as a barren one, a kind of *Waste Land* where people are forced to imagine another reality just to escape or compensate for that is missing.

According to Harold Bloom, Albee's play is a reaction to the necessities of the modern American society. Thus, he wants to wake people up from a real disaster, from a fatal collapse. He purposefully shows that George and Martha have experienced a change in their life. Moreover, he shows that marriage is not necessarily a prison of emotional sterility.

In this play, the characters have gone through a long and painful night. After two decades of marriage full of disappointment, George and Martha seem to lead an unsuccessful life. Being unable to accept the bitter reality due to their barrenness, the two characters create their own imaginary son—a myth they lived with until the end of the play. This myth has helped George and Martha to escape hard life and to forget some of their pains. It also serves as a secret that comforts them until Martha reveals it by mentioning it before the guests in one of the games. After this revelation, George decides to kill the invented son.

It is worth mentioning that sterility is treated along the play at many levels. Firstly, the choice of the names is one level. The two main characters George and Martha are named after the first president and his wife.³⁸ According to Bigsby, “this implication, Embodies the fate of American dream which has moved progressively further away from the supposed liberal idealism of those revolutionary principles” (*Critical introduction to 20th c American Drama: Tennessee, Miller, Albee*. 1985 p.266)

³⁸ George Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, a widow, who was only a few months older than him. The marriage also brought Martha's two young children, Jacky and Patsy. Washington lavished great affection on both of them and was heartbroken when Patsy died just before the Revolution. Jacky died during the Revolution and George adopted two of his children.

We can draw parallels between *Heart of Darkness* (1902), and *Virginia Woolf* in the savage way George and Martha treat each other. The quarrels about their fictional son show that the American society has not progressed since the time of the first president and his wife. The two characters seem fighting about the same American Dream. Both have failed in pursuing their dream the same way Conrad has failed because of the bitterness and intense hatred. Along the play, the imaginary child remains a myth and the same way the American Dream has always remained a dream and cannot reach the statue of reality.

Albee himself insists on the idea that the husband and wife of his best-known play, *Who's Afraid Virginia Woolf?*, who spend much of their time viciously quarrelling about their non-existent child, were intentionally named after the first president of the United States, George Washington (George here is representative of the American ideals of the past) and his wife, Martha, the First Lady. He states, "The play is an examination of whether or not we, as a society, have lived up to the principles of the American Revolution".

Nick is also named after Nikita Khrushchev representing the communistic "wave of the future". His name brings to mind that of Nikita, a leader of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964. The period marks the era of the Cold War of the early 1960s. For this, the play can be interpreted as a political allegory as well as psychological war. The choice of names indicates the fear expressed by the two parts, a kind of sterility which results from the disintegration of the American revolutionary spirit.

Mathew Roudané, another critic affirms that both George and Martha are addicted to their make-believe world. According to Roudané, "the three acts which structure the play, Chronicles George and Martha's realization that their pipe dream-their imaginary son- is kidding as well as killing them" (Bottoms, *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*.2005.p.46)

Secondly, the place is another level, Albee's decision to name the play's college town after a vanished civilization (which was known for its artistic achievement as

well as its military power) clearly invites parallel to the contemporary civilization. America may not be destroyed by another country, as Carthage³⁹ was, but it may meet its collapse through internal corruption and spiritual emptiness. The Roman salt renders of Carthage a sterile area. The inferior morals and empty values have also made of New Carthage, a figuratively sterile city. New Carthage is also the home of George and Martha, sterile because they can have no children.

Placing New Carthage in New England ironically links the setting of the play to one of its themes, "American values". New England was a place of birth of America's freedom and has long been considered a solid pillar of American values. By setting a play that analyzes the corruption of some of these values in an area long identified with them, Albee emphasizes the difference between what these values were and what they have become. Albee here tries to compare the past with the present. He does not only question the forces that have dominated the new civilization and that have conquered the American dream, but also tries to compare the Carthaginians with modern civilization.

In comparing the four characters, we can reveal other types of sterility too. Martha and Nick prove to be of a dominant personality. The way she treats her husband makes of her a "domineering" character. Both characters are ambitious. They belittle their partners and treat them as inferiors; Martha by humiliating George, Nick by his strange attitude towards his wife. At the first view, the couple seems happy. But later on in the evening, Nick speaks unfaithfully about his wife and attempts adultery with Martha. Martha and Nick are also physically stronger than their spouses. Nick has been a boxing champion, and Martha has won her one match by knocking George down with a punch in the jaw.

³⁹ Carthage was the centre of the Carthaginian Empire in antiquity. The city has existed for nearly 3,000 years, developing from a Phoenician colony of the 1st millennium BC into the capital of an ancient empire. According to Greek historians it was founded by Canaanite. It became a large and rich city and thus a major power in the Mediterranean -speaking Phoenician colonists. Following the Third Punic War, the city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC.

As the play progresses, one can discover some of the reasons why women want to emasculate men and why men want to escape women. George's masculinity comes to question when Martha mentions that the only higher position her husband could reach is being the head of the department during World War Two. George is the only faculty male who did not join the service. Most of the time, Martha treats George as a child and as being inferior. One can also notice George's reaction when Martha asks for a kiss he always tries to find excuses just to escape the hot issue. His avoidance of physical contact may reveal something hidden about the couple sex life.

However, in the late scene of the same act, it is revealed that Nick is impotent and incapable of satisfying Martha. Martha confesses that George is the only man who has been capable of filling her desires. The description of Honey and George allows us to deduce not only a physical sterility but also a psychological one. Honey is small and less attractive. From the very start Martha describes her as being meagre and pale.

Later, in Act II, George description indicates a sense of belittlement and inferiority. George is also seen as thin and weak, a man whose wife can knock down, and one of her speeches highlight those features: "George, here, doesn't cotton much to body talk... do you sweetheart? (No reply) George isn't too happy when we get to muscle. You know...flat bellies, pectorals..." (Albee. p.53) George tries to defend himself against a clearly hurtful comparison with Nick by claiming that he does not have a "paunch" George says: "What I've got... I've got this little distension just below the belt...but it's hard ...It's not soft flesh. I use the handball courts" (Ibid. p.35)

We can also draw similarities between honey and George. Honey's hysterical pregnancy is similar to George's disturbed attempt to publish a novel. In the same way, Honey's avoiding conception can be compared to George's his killing the only child he was able to produce. Another characteristic that links them is their tendency towards escapism. George plunges into the past, i.e. into History as an attempt not to have to face reality, as in the scene where he reads a History book while his wife is "necking with" Nick; but that feature takes its final form in Honey, for, unwilling to

confront the fact that in many ways 'consciousness is pain', she retreats into a childish dependence.

The similarities between Martha and Honey are commented above, but it is their contrast that becomes clearer in Act I. Honey is thin. This brings into doubt her capacity to generate children. Even if she is fertile, she willingly avoids motherhood because she fears that. Martha, in contrast, is ample enough to bear many babies and desperately wants to, but cannot have them. Honey is simple, innocent and naive. On the contrary, Martha is a very skilful player, full of cruelty and seduction. She has experience, with a quick mind and sharp tongue. In most senses, Martha's and Honey's characteristics are so opposed. That is even more clearly the case of the remaining pair, George and Nick.

With regard to fecundity, both couples suffer from some sort of sterility, but we should remember that Honey's inability to conceive is done intentionally, whereas George and Martha's sterility is authentic. Hence, Nick would stand as the reproductive element of the four characters. Although he fails with Martha, his impotence is attributed to excess of alcohol and is therefore only temporary. Honey might be infertile too if we take into consideration her physiology. However, in other fields, like the production of ideas or stories, it is George who is producing many works.

Another type of sterility appears on the professional sides of the male characters. George does not seem to enjoy physical activity or work, and, unlike Nick, is not so concerned with his job or career. Work and leisure also differentiate the two men. At the beginning of the play, when George complains he is tired, Martha replies: "I don't know what you're so tired about ... you haven't done anything all day, you didn't have any classes or anything..." (Albee. p.7)

George is more attracted to leisure activities. He mentions holiday travelling and proposes the riddles and games. As Nick states when talking to George alone in Act II: "You've got history on your side... I've got biology on mine. History, biology." (Ibid. p.112)

The two subjects and their differences describe the two professors accurately. Nick represents objectivity. He is more practical and experimental. As a scientist, he is concerned with data, not values. George sees this man and his science as a menace, leading to the adjustment of genetic makeup which would produce good results, such as health and long life, but with awful side effects, as he puts it:

Everyone will tend to be rather the same. ... Alike. [...] A certain amount of regulation will be necessary [...] a certain number of sperm tubes will have to be cut [...] which will assure the sterility of the imperfect [...] with this, we will have, in time, a race of glorious men. [...] I suspect we will not have much music, much painting, but we will have a [...] race of scientists and mathematicians [...] Cultures and races will eventually vanish ... the ants will take over the world. [...] the surprise, the multiplicity, the sea changing rhythm of... history, will be eliminated.⁴⁰

Albee's play is a large metaphor for the American Dream. This is clearly reflected in two of the main characters being named after the presidential couple of George and Martha Washington. However within this metaphor are many smaller symbols which are used to illustrate the relationship between the two couples of the play and therefore comment on the human condition.

To a certain extent, the play can be seen as an allegory as the characters reflect different ideas and situations. Nick, who is young, blonde and good-looking, symbolizes the threat of a completely perfect future in which every newborn child is genetically engineered to flawlessness "wave of the future". By contrast, George represents the consequence of professional and marital failure. Martha's loud and aggressive nature on the other hand represents an animal instinct. This relates to an inner realization that her father, whom she adores and worships, does not respond to her feelings. Honey, on the other hand who is the daughter of a preacher, could symbolize the tendency of humans to revolt against rules and regulations, as she

⁴⁰ Edward , Albee. *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1962 p. 65-67

nearly conceived prior to marriage. Therefore, the characters are used as symbols to represent the different stages that can occur in life.

The relationships between the couples of George and Martha and Nick and Honey, on one level represent the idea of a successful American Dream and on the other hand, symbolize the affects of a broken dream. As George and Martha create a son together in the hopes of realizing their American Dream, they enter a union which is meaningless. When Martha reveals the dream to Honey, George feels cheated and in the act of 'killing off his son' destroys their dream.

The last section of *Virginia Woolf?*, finds George offering new tenderness to Martha, assuring her that the time had come for the fantasy to die, forcing her to admit that she is afraid of Virginia Woolf. It is "Time for bed," and there is nothing left for them to do but go together to face the dark at the top of the stairs. In the last scene, there is the confirming testimony in Honey's tearful reiteration "*I want a child*" and Nick's broken attempt to sympathize, "*I'd like to....*" Then, too, the last act is called "*The Exorcism*," a name that had been the working title for the play itself.

After George kills the illusory son, he symbolically "eats the telegram" which was supposed to have announced his death. In Albee's play, we have a symbolic death that suggests the sterility of an infertile future. The play ends with the wife sadly accepting the necessity to live without myths while whispering that she remains "afraid of Virginia Woolf," afraid, apparently, of life, art and truth.

Albee draws parallels in the way George kills his imaginary child and also in Honey's abortion. As for the implication of rape, it lies in George's accusations of his wife's sexual relations with the fictional son.

Compared to the factors of alcoholism and aging, homosexuality appears to be a very dominant factor in fostering sterility. Martha has been harshly criticized for she is not the kind of women suitable to bear children. The author rises against those who saw the play as anti-female. He contends that the character of Martha is "one of the

most complete females that he had experienced in the theatre in a long time, and adds that she is "worthy of sympathy, affection and even love."

Lee Baxandall holds the same opinion as Albee in defending his character, saying that: "Martha isn't stupid, she is capable of criticizing her own actions, and she can be very affectionate, but she can have no realistic hope of becoming more than a Discontented Housewife" (*The Theatre of Edward Albee* .1965. p. 19)

In spite of that, many remained unconvinced. Others considered that what some viewed as an unsympathetic presentation of female characters was in fact the portrayal of the relationship between two homosexual couples. For example, they claim that the reason that George and Martha cannot have children is because they are really men-homosexuals. But Albee again insisted that such interpretations are misleading.

Albee's play consists of many games. Each game in Virginia Woolf has plenty of symbols and carries a variety of images. All these symbols and images are to a certain extent connected with the emotional effects left by the invented son. The choice of words, content which refer to nature, the four seasons and especially spring and also the creation of the appropriate atmosphere by giving a detailed description of the son, are all factors that appeal to emotions. The games in the play were also carefully examined and analysed. In his *Game Analysis of Albee's Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Louis Paul put emphasis on one of the games that George and Martha play, *Our Son the Pretend Child* Paul finds that the couple's game about the child serves to repair a major imperfection in identity, the lack of procreation and generativity and to hold back 'a core of grief'.

Other commentators move on to study the character function in the play. Light here is mainly shed on the invented son and on the question of whether or not to consider the child as a fifth character. In the article the theatre of Edward Albee in 1967, Lee Baxandall contends, "are there valid grounds for the invented child in who is afraid of Virginia Woolf? or is Albee artistically callow and unable to structure a

play properly?" (*The Theatre of Edwards Albee*.1965.pp.19-40). Baxandall reaches the conclusion that Albee's device of the imagined son does work. The validity of the invented son has aroused limitless discussions.

In 1970, Foster Hirsch raises the same question in his book "*Who is Afraid of Edward Albee*" where he states that, those who are unconvinced by the imaginary child argue that the patent symbolism of the fantasy child conflicts with the play's naturalistic quality, and suggest that George and Martha should really be committed. Hirsch argues that the invented child highlights the characters' loss. The invention of the child was so debatable that it continues until the 1980's. Many scholars voice their opinion on the necessity of the child for emotional encounters.

If we compare it with the other plays, *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is not full of symbols. Some critics see the play as an allegory. While his latest plays are criticised for being full of with symbolism *Tiny Alice*, for instance, uses more symbols than that of *Virginia Woolf*.

It seems as if the couple were looking at the distorting mirror at the farmhouse when they face each other. Nick and Honey can be said to stand for George and Martha's past, when they were newly married starting in life together and in an academic career. The young couple thus represents their hosts' dreams and aspirations, but also, in Bigsby's expression, "a warning of the next stage of decline." The older couple, on the other hand, offers the two guests an insight into what the future might hold in stock for them, a satirical warning about the sort of life they may be walking into unconsciously.

These warnings are not only implicit, but even get voiced in Act II as illustrated below: "George: I'm giving you good advice, now. [...] There's quicksand here, and you'll be dragged down, just as... [...] ...before you know it... sucked down..." (Ibid. p.115)

But there are still similarities between the female characters. Both wives have had something of a religious background. Martha's family was religious, she has attended a convent. Honey's father was a "man of god. Either the wives fathers' are childless; both men have an academic background. All of the characters seem to have two sides or faces-at least-like the cards: one that represents a public side, the level of appearances, and another, hidden, private, that keeps secrets. If Nick only by drinking too much would admit to having married into money and because of a supposed pregnancy, George cannot take a decision about revealing his shameful past, i. e., of having destroyed his family. Both are extremely sorry and angered at the disclosure of such secrets. And whereas Martha holds on to a child that is no more than a figment of her imagination, the parallel in Honey's case extends even further, at a physical level, by contracting a hysterical pregnancy.

George and Martha have a long history. They are also emotionally trapped by this history, especially that of their respective childhoods. As a consequence, both are overwhelmed by low self-image and self-doubt. This history is revealed to the in the play, in bits and pieces. Martha tells Nick and Honey in Act one, how she lost her mother early and grew up very close to her father. She was married to a gardener but this marriage did not last because her father annulled it. She returned to live with her father after college, and met and fell in love with George. Yet she reveals that part of the reason she wanted to marry George was to please her father. What come into sight is a picture of a lonely, "Daddy's girl" who has spent much of her life unsuccessfully trying to win her father's support, the worshiped 'god'. She has been unsuccessful because she reveals to Nick in Act three how low her self-image was.

Thus, the "child" they invent is a symbol of many things for George and Martha. For both, the idea of their own child symbolizes maturity and adulthood. It represents their desire to grow up and leave behind the painful memories of their own childhoods' by becoming parents themselves. The invented child is in some respects a projection of themselves, of the inner child of each that is still alive, hurting and trapped.

The symbol of the child also connects George and Martha to Honey and Nick. The younger couple is also childless. It is indicated that Honey is afraid of childbearing because she, too, does not want to grow up. However, the link between the two couples can also be understood in the sense that Honey and Nick have also apparently come into their marriage with unresolved emotional baggage and the two do not entirely know and understand each other. If they stay together their relationship, their future image might also become a battleground similar to Martha's and George's. Ironically, these two couples, who have such difficulties with the idea of children, are precisely the kind of couples that should not have children, at least until they can cope with their emotional problems.

Critics psychoanalyzed the mental states of George and Martha, diagnosing their behaviour as evidence of being emotionally arrested "children". For example, Henry Knepler identifies George and Martha as: "really children in a statement on arrested development which corresponds to Freudian theory." (*Disability Presence in Who is Afraid*. 2011 p. 277-78). He proclaims that:

The imaginary child in Virginia Woolf is an indication of his parents' sickness. The principal one being the imaginary son they have created as a private game between them, countering and filling the "lack" of their childlessness. Albee, though he may not have intended this, cannot rid his plays of the idea that illusion is sick or at least a matter of clinical concern.⁴¹

Some psychologists have gone a step further, ignoring the play as an artistic construction and interpreting it in a scientific way. Even recent, more sympathetic interpretations of the play have fallen victim to the push to psychological diagnosis, such as one that attempts to explain some of the dysfunction in George and Martha's relationship by pointing to the mental and emotional charge of infertility. By reprocessing the moral model, some interpretations transform Martha's refusal to stick on to firm conventions of modest femininity into a physical diseases.

⁴¹ Ibid , p.258

John Kenneth Galbraith, for instance, writes that the "expert creation" of Martha practically expresses a type of faculty wife who is self-confident, noisy, and rough-talking. In fact, Galbraith is imposing weight-as-pathology in a way that appropriates Martha's embodiment away from the play, since the script calls for Martha to be distinct from the "petite blond" Honey through describing her as "a large, boisterous woman" who is attractive because of her overt sexuality, and because she is "Ample, but not fat".

Allen Lewis (1905-2000), the British film director is even more direct in shaping Martha to fit his own contempt of her; linking her with other "monstrous" women who have destroyed their children such as: Hedda Gabler⁴², "he deems Martha as a mother, She provides comfort to all men, but she is also a deformed Cybel, whose body seeks pleasure but will never bear a child. Unable to create, she destroys." (Singh, *Albee, the Playwright of Quest*.1987 p.43) She also manipulates Nick as the living manifestation of the son she and George were never able to have.

Bonnie Blumenthal Finkelstein argues that "Albee paints Martha as being tragically stifled by these gender norms, which allow no passage for her enormous energy and vitality, Martha is denied the right to be the main character in her own life: she is only someone's daughter, someone's wife, no one's mother" (*Disability Presence in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*2011). He points out that a mother's adherence to this "natural" role became a measure of her fitness, not simply her genetic makeup. And indeed, a woman who somehow deviated from these roles might not only be an unfit mother; she might induce sterility itself.

The notion that infertility was frequently a result of psychological rather than physiological disorders became a "newly fashionable idea" in the 1950s, when some doctors estimated it was the cause in up to seventy-five percent of all cases. This new theory of infertility appeared not only in medical journals, such as *Fertility and Sterility*, but in popular magazines, such as the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Infertile

⁴² Hedda Gabler is a play first published in 1890 by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen

women were sometimes blamed for their sexual maladjustment, their "lack of femininity," an "unconscious rejection of motherhood," or refusing to give up their careers.

One can imagine why an interpretation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* might turn seriously close to this idea, identifying Martha's emasculation of George as symbolically the source of their infertility.

Suzanne Macdonald Winkel asserts that instead, Albee rejects compulsory maternity of the times that marked the decade between 1950 and the early 1960s. But Albee's play not only mocks these ideas, it aggressively rejects Pronatalism.⁴³ Nick and Honey are the standard bearers of youth, gender complementarities, and fitness, and would seem ideally poised to produce the perfect nuclear family. George observes Nick running toward this biological imperative and bounded procreation. He states: "You people are going to make them in test tubes, aren't you? You biologists. Babies. But you are going to have kids...anyway. In spite of history." (Albee, 1962.p.42-3)

But as George puts it, marriage or to a certain extent, the relationship between a male and a female is essentially a commercial transaction, since Nick has married Honey largely because of her father's wealth. Whether through hysteria or abortion, Honey has terminated her own pregnancies. Either scenario makes her a kind of satirical embodiment of pronatalist thinking. Honey was not ready for motherhood exposes itself as a ridiculous notion. But the alternative that Honey aborted her foetus gives the lie to the supposed inevitability of an innate maternal drive in women.

In one sense, one also sees from Albee's portrayal of the couple that George and Martha have been thrust into the game of creating a pretend son by the sexist, pronatalist environment of the time.

⁴³ The policy or practice of encouraging the bearing of children, especially government support of a higher birth-rate and positive eugenics through both couples.

Finkelstein observes that: “Martha and George's infertility is a key area where the sex stereotypes of 1962 have a dreadful impact, especially on Martha.”(Knepler.1998 p. 277-8)

Although the child is just an imaginary product of them, they try to protect him and also struggle with each other over his belonging. As for George and Martha, they certainly bear on their backs a similar punishment for their own lack of procreation; Martha speaks plaintively of how often she has wanted to be able to speak of her "son": “Sometimes...sometimes when it's night, when it's late, and...and everybody is...talking...I forget and I...want to mention him...but I...hold on...I hold on...but I've wanted to...so often...” (Albee .p. 251)

It is because of the pressures imposed by society that the old couple create their mythical child. The response they have affected in the creation of their imaginary son seems to norm them in their own eyes, even as it satirizes compulsory parenthood and underscores the "lack" by which they are therefore defined in such a world. And so Albee at once damns the pressures of pronatalism and extends the refutation of infertility-as-pathology even to the very end of the play; when Nick specifically asks him, "You couldn't have...any?", George pointedly replies, "We couldn't." Martha repeats this "we couldn't" statement with what Albee describes as a "hint of communion". This is a striking contrast, for example, to Nick's constant repetition throughout the play that Honey is "slim-hipped" and "frail" and therefore implicitly to blame for the couple's childlessness in any case.

George and Martha unify in the face of what Nick-as-normative represents, and at the same time deny him the power to diagnose either one of them alone as imperfect. However, Nick represents extends well beyond a critique of compulsory fertility.

Finkelstein, for example, observes that When George projects a future world of test-tube-babies,-enforced-conformity,-and-"*the-sterility-of-the-imperfect..the..unfit*", he may conversely be implying that the unintentionally sterile feel unfit, like failures, in the 1962 world of the play's setting. This definition of failure is particularly sharp for Martha, since a woman's whole identity at the time revolved around her role as mother.

Finkelstein reads these references to sterilization, both historically and metaphorically, as a way to describe Martha's feelings. Mandl also reads a different part of George's extended comments in that moment as part of the game-playing of George and Martha that highlights the tight relation of gender and maternity.

The game of *Bringing up Baby* is at the heart of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Though claiming to Nick pregnancy and then a false pregnancy, Honey was apparently aborting the children she conceived by him. All is a disorder in the motherland. But the world that George detests as an alternative, with "a race of men...test-tube bred...incubator born...superb and sublime"...would cause much troubles and much fears, as he guesses, it may also lead to a "certain loss of liberty"...diversity, art.

George has a strong reaction early in the play when he learns Nick is a biologist; he sees himself, personally and professionally threatened by Nick. He finds himself bound to expose what has been rendered in the past by biologists like Nick. He asserts, "You're the one! You're the one's going to make all that trouble...making everyone the same, rearranging the chromosomes, or whatever it is. Isn't that right?" (Albee.p.71)

It is George's business to know history, and as the violent and even autobiographical novel suggests, his approach is about laying bare humanity's darker instincts. Not surprisingly, then, as a historian, George has good reason to point out the "trouble" caused by the scientific quantification of identity taken to an extreme.

At first, his revelation of Nick's wicked purposes have a joking tone, in which George seems to turn his mockery of Nick into a self-deprecating joke:

Biology, hunh?...I read somewhere that science fiction is really not fiction at all...that you people are rearranging my genes so that everyone will be like everyone else. Now I won't have that! It would be a...shame. I mean...look at me! Is it really such a good idea...if everyone was forty something and looked fifty-five? ⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Ibid p.40

As an individual, George knows how his own life has been bounded by his failure to carry out the role of worthy, masculine heir to Martha's father seemingly crafted for him. As a historian, he understands the larger social context in which that failure appears in a threatening way. In this sense, the danger of Martha's continued playing of the two games she has going simultaneously, *Hump the Hostess*, as well as the extended narrative of her son's existence, is dangerous. It is not just that Martha seems personally to have trouble distinguishing between truth and illusion; she supports, in filling both games, disturbing narratives of biological determinism. It is therefore striking to see George make the multiple strong diatribes against eugenicist thinking in speeches made about Nick to Martha toward the end of Act One.

Indeed, this set of speeches provides a model for understanding the larger pattern of the play's attack on eugenic ideas. George uses Martha's confusion about Nick's profession as well as her ignorance about the fields related to biology as a strong weapon in attacking eugenicists. He describes Nick's work to Martha as follow:

It's very simple, Martha, this young man is working on a system whereby chromosomes can be altered...well, not all by himself- he probably has one or two co-conspirators - the genetic makeup of a sperm cell changed, reordered...to order, actually...for hair and eye colour, stature, potency...I imagine...hairiness, features, health...and mind. Most important...Mind. All imbalances will be corrected, sifted out...propensity for various diseases will be gone, longevity assured. We will have a race of men...test-tube bred...incubator born...superb and sublime. " ⁴⁵

Martha describes her marriage to George, for example, as originating in an attempt to find a suitable heir for her father: "When you've made something, you want to pass it on, to somebody. So I was sort of on the lookout for...prospects with the new men. An heir apparent" (Albee.1962. p.88)

⁴⁵ Edward, Albee .*Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1962. p.39

George was "*young...intelligent...and...bushy tailed...and sort of cute,*" but their union never materializes into what Martha or her father defines as success, since both discover that the will to make any kind of progress neither personally nor professionally. George has an acute, fanatical mentality, but will not mind Martha's father in either ambition or imaginative prowess, choosing to write a disturbing novel, reject nervous masculinity, and refuse to climb the academic ladder.

Although the central device of the play is the quarrel between George and Martha, the plot concerns their nonexistent son. From George's "Just don't start on the bit, that's all," before Nick and Honey enter, the play builds through hints, warnings, and revelations until "sonny-Jim" is created and then destroyed. Out of the ruins, presumably, new strength comes. The last section, which is to be played "*very softly, very slowly,*" finds George offering new tenderness to Martha, assuring her that the time had come for the fantasy to die, forcing her-no longer maliciously-to admit that she is afraid of Virginia Woolf. It is "Time for bed," and there is nothing left for them to do but go together to face the dark at the top of the stairs. In the last scene, there is the confirmed proof in Honey's weepy reappearance "*I want a child*" and Nick's broken attempt to sympathize, "*I'd like to....*" Then, too, the last act is called "The Exorcism," a name that had been the working title for the play itself.

The last scene between Martha and George may be another one of their games. the death of the child may not be the end of illusion but an indication that the players have to go back to and start again their painful trip to home. Although there are many indications that George and Martha live a circular existence, going over the same ground again and again, the development of the plot and the tone of the last scene seem to deny that the game is still going on.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Edward Albee's works dominated the American theatre world in the 1960s; his works have continued to be put under the lens of severe criticism. The early evaluations of *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* were quite extreme. In *What is the Matter with Edward Albee?* 1964, Tom. F. Driver regards Albee as the author of six bad plays and declares that *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is built upon an unbelievable situation. Furthermore, he goes to indicate that Albee's characters are false ones and that the protagonists in the play are not two couples but four homosexuals. Even though it is considered a classic of the American stage, *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has been criticized on a variety of grounds, and the most recurrent charges are those related to the half-disguised homosexuals, and of the damaging weakness of the imaginary-son device.

Many critics regard the play as revolutionary and marking a new era in American drama. Many others have found the play "*dirty-minded*". In spite of all this, the play is labelled a masterpiece and declares Albee to be one of the most important playwrights of the contemporary world theatre.

Peter Hays came out with a tiny observation upon the symbolic action of child murder in American drama. In his article *Child Murder and Incest in American Drama* (1990), he states, Albee again combines child murder and incest, but doubles the child murder and possibly tosses in parenticide as well.

Richard Schechner, for instance, invokes a set of harsh images in his attack on the play; Albee, he says, panders to a "*morally blind*" theatre, and an "impotent" audience. According to Schechner, Albee follows better playwrights "meagrely and blindly" as he creates work that is a "disease" and a "plague," representing a decadence that "is likely to have an infective...influence on our theatre". At the same time, The New York Daily News likewise called it, "a sick play about sick

people. They are neurotic, cruel and nasty. They really belong in a sanatorium for the mentally ill rather than on a stage.” (Bottoms,1984.p.84)

Whatever can be said about the play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* rests as an art of great significance and as an outstanding play that will forever remain a true classic in American Literature.

We can sum up with the memorable words of Oscar Wilde when he says that, “the vitality and complexity of a work of art are revealed in the diversity of opinion about it.”

Chapter IV- Spiritual Sterility in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*

Introduction

Samuel Shepard Rogers is an American playwright, actor and film director. He was born in Fort Sheridan, Illinois on November 5, 1943. He began his career as a playwright in New York in 1964 with the Theatre Genesis. As a young playwright, Sam was influenced by plays written by Samuel Beckett and other European dramatists. Before he was thirty, Shepard had produced over thirty plays in New York. By 1980, he was the most outstanding playwright in America after Tennessee Williams.

His first complete play, *Cowboys*, was autobiographical, and received good review in *The Village Voice*. Shepard's reputation was built with a series of one act-play, produced in off-off Broadway theatres. In the mid-1970s, Shepard wrote in California the plays that secured his reputation -*Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Buried Child* (1979).

The idea of the American Dream permeates nearly all of Shepard's plays and is used as a criticism of contemporary American society in *Buried Child*. This theme is not limited to just these two plays; Shepard has used the destruction of the so-called American Dream as a recurring topic in many of his works.

The deception and disillusionment among Shepard's characters may originate from his unstable childhood. For the first several years of his life, Shepard and his family moved from military base to another, following his father, a serviceman in the Army Air Corps. Shepard's youth was shadowed by his father's attitudes. During this period of life, Shepard spent time living in at least two countries and four US states. He was also very influenced by the brand of Hollywood westerns that were being produced with great frequency during the 1950s. It was during this period that the institution of the family began to dissolve and relations between members of the

family were torn especially in the American Midwest which was known for its strong ties.

In most his plays, Shepard has repeatedly examined the moral and spiritual starvation that characterize the world of his drama. Shepard presents the disintegration of the American family and portrays its guilt and shame. In *Buried Child*, he criticises the American society of the late-twentieth century. He views it as being the one of selfish, hypocrite and tyrant. In such a society, individuals care little for one another and are mainly interested in physical pleasures and power over others.

After having achieved the huge success, national fame and attention with his 1979 Pulitzer Prize-winning family drama *Buried Child*, Sam Shepard continues writing and at the same time directing numerous plays he gained from *Buried Child*. In 1986, he wrote *A Lie of the Mind* and in the same year he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Among his works from the 1990s are *Simpatico* (1994), and *Cruising Paradise* (1996) which contains forty short stories. After a pause of twenty years, Shepard directed his new play, *The Late Henry Moss* (2000).

Whether he sought it or not, *Buried Child* marked a turning point in Shepard's career. With its success, he found his plays in demand in New York and across the country, and during the next ten years he created commercial successes like *True West* (1980), *Fool for Love* (1983), and *A Lie of the Mind* (1985) that found their way to Broadway and film. In 1995, Shepard rewrote *Buried Child* (the original director made changes to the play that went against the playwright's intentions). The new, author-approved version premiered at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago before transferring to Broadway in April, 1996. In both cities, the play was hailed as a comical and insightful presentation of the disintegrating American dream.

IV.1-Summary of the Play

Buried Child takes place in Dodge's farm in the large downstairs living room of a Midwestern farmhouse. About thirty years ago, the farm was fertile and prosperous. However, now it becomes infertile giving off no crops. The farm is occupied by a family filled with suppressed violence, full of doubt, fear and a gloomy atmosphere. The play consists of six characters: an angry alcoholic grandfather; a nagging grandmother who goes on drinking with the local minister; and their sons: Tilden, an ex-American footballer; and Bradley, who has lost one leg to a chain saw. Later, comes Vince, a grandson none of them remembers, and his girlfriend, Shelly, who cannot understand the madness to which she is suddenly introduced.

The family members are caught as hostages because of the dark secret. Years earlier, the grandfather, Dodge, had buried an unwanted newborn baby in the backyard. The family is now harbouring the consequences of that secret. Such a secret comes to light and its cloud is dispelled only when Tilden unearths the child's mummified remains and carries it upstairs to his mother. His act transforms the gloomy atmosphere into a lightened and clear one. It finally provides solutions by which the family members are washing their sins. It also suggests the possibility of a new beginning.

The entire play takes place in the living room of this Midwestern family's farm home. The house of the old estate is occupied by the frightening family which is removed from any traces of civilization outside. Due to that shame the family ceases to have contact with the outside world. In order to avoid contact with his neighbours, the patriarch, Dodge has imprisoned himself in the living room. Halie goes outside from time to time but that is only at night. The other characters also suffer from the burdens of shame and consequently do their best to avoid any confrontation or to answer any question. Even the doors and the windows of the house are most of the time shut.

At the beginning of the play, the first character to appear is Dodge, a weak, lifeless man sitting on a couch and staring into the blue screen of his television set almost with no sound. This character, Dodge, is the principle father in the story. His “thin and sickly” form reflects his deteriorated status in the family. Throughout the play, Dodge calls himself “an invisible man” and a “corpse” as he is weak and feeble, and most of the time dependent on the rest of his family to care for him. He feels his position of authority has passed to others such as his wife, Halie, and younger son, Bradley. Bradley even reflects his father’s change of character when he comments to Shelly that Dodge used to differently “[w]hen he was a whole man”. In his own marriage, Dodge no longer fulfils the roles of masculine stability or even companion. Halie continually reminds him of her past and present love affairs.

From the opening scene, we notice the big bridge between couple who is weld only in name. Even though the opening dialogue between Dodge and the unseen Halie is short, it provides more details about the kind of relation that exists between them. In *Buried Child*, the wife, Halie, presents the old time of women being part whore. Despite the fact that she lives with Dodge in the same house, they are in fact separated. Dodge and Halie do not have a wonderful marriage. Although Halie and Dodge are married for quite a few years, they seem estranged. She remains upstairs, except when she leaves the house. He seems to reside downstairs, on the sofa, and he never goes out. He drinks, smokes, wears dirty clothes, and watches television almost constantly. She seems to have a preachy, religious band in her, advocates propriety, and nags her husband continuously.

On her way to a lunch appointment, Halie descends the stairs completely dressed in black. She has a rendezvous with father Dewis. Dodge comments on these repeated meetings but receives no answers. As usual his comments go unexplained. Thus, the only way for him is to take a sip from the bottle or to curl upon the sofa and fall asleep. Tilden steals the bottle of whiskey and leaves. As, silence hang over the house, Bradley creeps toward Dodge and cuts his hair while he sleeps. The light fades on the first act.

In the second act, Vince, Tilden's son, appears with his girlfriend, Shelly late at night. They are travelling across the country and have stopped to visit Dodge and Halie. The young couple are expecting to find the family in its joyful unity. Both Vince and Shelly hop to find the family in the way he describes it -a perfect American family. Instead they are greeted by the drunken Dodge, the distant Halie and the Stranger Tilden. None of the family members seem to recognize Vince. From the beginning, Shelly is terrified by the gloomy house and its strange inhabitants. So, she asks Vince to leave and spend the night in a hotel. Even though she insists, Vince tries to prove he is a member of the family. He starts making funny gestures and noise he used to make at the dinner table when he was a child. Still, he is ignored by his father and grandfather.

While helpless, Shelly sits with Tilden in an attempt to restore some sense of normalcy. Vince goes out to fetch more whiskey for Dodge. Once Vince leaves, a conversation is opened between Tilden and Shelly. Tilden confesses that he once had a sense of adventure and that this sense changed with the arrival of a baby in the house. At last, one of the terrible secrets that permeate the family is revealed. Bradley comes in; he insults and humiliates his older brother. He also orders Shelly to stand up and open her mouth. He places his fingers in her mouth. The powerless Dodge remains passive in spite of all that is happening.

In the third act, what was a rainy, dark night has changed into a bright morning. Many changes have come over the household. The heavy rain has stopped and the sun shines outside. After being exhausted, Bradley has fallen asleep. Dodge leans against the television. Shelly, who has been terrified all night becomes more confident and feels secured. She has become the fostering figure to Dodge in the absence of the careless mother Halie. For Dodge, Shelly is the caretaker and deserves to be the householder. While Shelly attempts to care for Dodge, Halie returns home with father Dewis. She is wearing a bright yellow dress, carrying an armful of roses. Halie senses the big change in the family. Totally ignoring Shelly, she tries to regain her usual position in the house.

In the presence of the pastor who looks amazed, Shelly confronts the family members with their shames. She tells them that they are strangers in their own house. She also recalls them they all complicit in the fact that they commit murder and bury bodies in their backyard. Shelly's words draw a confession in Dodge who breaks down and explains the family tragic secret: years ago, after the children were grown and the farm was prosperous, Halie became pregnant from her son Tilden. There was no other solution, but to bury the child and bury the secret with it. At the close, Tilden walks on carrying the corpse of the child Dodge had drowned and buried years previously, as Halie, behind the scenes, comments on the wonderful crops outside. Vince takes possession of the family farmhouse, chasing off Bradley and taking Dodge's place after his death.

IV.2-Spiritual Sterility in *Buried Child*

Buried Child is a tragic, symbolic tale of the breakdown and disillusionment of the American Dream. Set in 1970s America, it reflects the economic stagnation and the postmodern disillusionment with American legends.

The characters previously were 'All-Americans' as they describe themselves. Now they are lost, angry and broken. They are trying to care for their failed dreams. Dodge, the father of the family, gives a brilliant performance and immediately conveys that there is something deeply wrong with this family home. Halie, the weak, distant mother, has a powerful presence. Later comes Bradley, with childish, sexualised dominance over the stranger Shelley who finds herself alone with him. Shelley is the girlfriend of the prodigal grandson Vince, who is returning to the family home. Both Vince and Shelley are disturbed and confused by the dramatic malaise and madness they discover in the house and try to understand what has happened, leading to some quite disturbing revelations.

Such malaise and distortion contradicts with western families who were famous for the strong ties that related their members. They were also strongly tied to land which to a certain extent represented honour and dignity. The family lived in harmony, understanding and respect. Responsibility had reigned in the family which was leading a normal life until things took a worse deviation. All starts when Halie becomes pregnant with someone else since Dodge, the patriarch has become impotent and therefore incapable of impregnating. Things gets worse and what was a stable family has become a shaken one. Questions about who might be the father put everyone under suspicion.

It is finally suggested that Tilden is the father. The baby holds no signs of the patriarch Dodge. There are other evidences to support the proofs that Tilden is the father. These include the fact that the baby is small, and that Tilden would sing to it and take it for long walks all day, just talking to it and treating it as his own.

Dodge asserts, "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..."(Shepard,1978 p.124)

For fear from the outside world, and for reasons of shame and honour, Dodge decides to put an end to such an abomination so as not to let it grow up and live in his family. He drowns and buries the baby in the backyard. With the burial of the child, the family members also bury the secret inside. Since that time, the farm has ceased to be fertile, and fallen into abandonment. This is a symbol of the death of honesty and the birth of the family's terrible secret.

This secret has handicapped each character in his way. Bradley cuts off his own leg in a chain saw accident and is now mentally imbalanced. Tilden is non-functional and has been driven out of New Mexico. Dodge is a crazy old sick guy, and Halie is doing shady things with the preacher. Vince is the only person capable of facing the world and life, but he too is corrupted by the secret at the end. The answer to the question is that their secret, the dead child, is a secret decaying them from the inside. This moral degradation may have taken years to happen. It is certain that the secret has left everyone impotent.

In *Buried Child*, sterility takes many forms. All characters suffer from disability and impotence. Bradley is the brightest example of this impotence. Figuratively, his false leg is his support. With it, he has the most power of any of the characters in the play. He shaves Dodge with no aftermaths, frightens Tilden to the point of making him run away. He also rapes Shelly by sticking his hands into her mouth. Without his leg, however, he is no more than a weeping and whining baby. He seems incapable of even adult reasoning.

There is a major difference in the effect this impotence has on Bradley and Tilden. While Bradley denies the truth, telling Tilden he does not know, he was not born yet; Tilden is on an active search for the body of this child. Bradley wants the secret to remain a secret. By contrast, Tilden wants it out in the open. He wants to put an end

to all the troubles. That is why he finds corn, carrots, and potatoes out in the fields, while Bradley and the others see only the rain.

The land represents the soul, and is fertile for Tilden because in his way he is seeking to correct this terrible wrong by revealing the child. When Tilden covers Dodge with the corn husks, but leaves his head uncovered, he is covering him with something good. He is trying to help Dodge to become conscious that the truth must be told.

Bradley comes into the room and throws the husks off, shaves Dodge's head and cuts him while he is powerless, like a punishment for the secret. Then, he covers him up with the blanket from feet to head. This shows a denial of the truth and a denial that it needs to be told. Bradley's rough treatment could show that he wishes Dodge would die, so the secret would no longer matter. Tilden wants his father to live on and tell the secret, and be healed.

No character sees the crops because of the rain. It is revealed that it has been raining since the day the child was killed. In this sense the rain and the clouds come to symbolize the layer that covers the secret and keeps it hidden. The others can't see the truth through the rain. After the secret has been revealed to Shelly, it stops raining and everyone sees the crops outside. They can see that it is better not to keep such a terrible secret. It is important that they tell an outsider the secret because it is a sort of washing out to them. They are finally getting this terrible secret off their chests. Sometimes, realization comes too late to help, though. In this case, Vince becomes corrupted and a member of this crazy family again. Dodge dies, but he has let covering him with something good that the land, or in this case his hurt soul, has produced.

Vince and Shelly come impatiently to visit a house which is completely American. But what they face is completely the opposite of what they had in their minds: a shattered family, a drunkard grandfather, a disorientated father who does not recognize his son and a child who is buried in backyard. The incestuous relationship of Tilden and Halie does not match the standards of the traditional, moral, American family. Also, none of the family's sons could be the true model of what American Dream supposes them to be, as all are impotent and irresponsible figures of a corrupted family. In this way, Shepard portrays a life which is completely the antithesis of American Dream and the ideal American kind of life is completely deconstructed in this play. Character of Father Dewis seems intended to deliver an imminent message; that religion and rituals are no longer resurrecting. In other words, Shepard tries to reveal that contemporary culture has come to the end. Getting access to any universal truth is no longer possible in any place in America.

In the course of the play, characters constantly change roles and functions. They are not dramatized as unified and coherent figures; rather Shepard portrays them as void, perhaps to show both the emptiness of their lives and the void of their contemporary culture. Characters of the play, as Bottoms notes, seek to create and recreate their personal appearances. Many of them manipulate an ever-shifting series of roles and masks, thereby, suggesting the absence of any underlying sense of the self.

The fact that all members of this family have forgotten is that they are all trapped in the hands of postmodern condition. The disintegration of identity, lack of meaning, and purpose in life, are facts of the twenty-first century and all these together lead to the pessimistic outcome in *Buried Child*. Characters of the play reside in a world in which parents deny any kind of understanding with their children. Take for example Dodge's comments on this point, "You think just because people propagate, they have to love their offspring. You never seen a bitch eat her puppies?"(Shepard, p.76) Becoming disintegrated, they cannot show any kind of affection to one another; they become disloyal, they get involved in incest, and life is all of a sudden insupportable. This is in fact, another outcome of postmodern

culture, due to that everybody feels a great contempt to one another, but at the same time, no one is able to make a complete break because there is nowhere to take refuge.

There is a great gap among the family that nothing can feel it in, neither the return of sons home, nor the digging out of the buried child from the barren backyard, because in the presence of all of them there is an absence and a lack. Jacques Derrida⁴⁶ refers to this lack as "difference"; this gap "serves not only to create the impression of the full presence of the character, but also to maintain its absence"

Buried child follows a family as it falls apart in the context of the 1970s economic and political troubles of the United States. Following the same decline, the family sons were also incapable of holding their family and their farm standing. The family here refers to internal affairs while the farm reflects the external one. The farm failed and the family gradually fell to ruins. The play explores the theme of failure of modern society to fulfil the American dream and live up to the mythology of America.

The play does not reflect economic or political decline but rather the decay of the nuclear family engendered by the impotency of organized religion that has ceded the moral ground of the family through hypocrisy. Father Dewis, the flirtatious priest who is supposed to represent morality, is an ineffective spiritual father. Halie, who is supposed to be the ideal mother, has former lovers and cheats her husband with strangers because of her insincere religious morality.

As the members of the family deviate from the principles of the American dream and from the organized religion, they receive the curse. This curse is symbolized in the buried child who has been the source of inflicting punishment on the family along the two acts. Digging out the corpse of the buried child and bringing it

⁴⁶ A French philosopher (1930-2004) known for deconstruction, postmodern philosophy.

Deconstruction: philosophical movement and theory of literary criticism that questions traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth; asserts that words can only refer to other words; and attempts to demonstrate how statements about any text subvert their own meanings. it originated in France in the late 1960s, has had an enormous impact on Anglo-American criticism.

upstairs signifies the end of the curse, and the atonement of the sins of the previous generation.

All the characters, except Shelly have failed in one way or another to fulfil their dreams. Dodge, the patriarch failed to make the farm fruitful. He has not planted anything for years. He cannot even fulfil his role both as a responsible and as a companion. He sits and decays in the living room. His physical immobility is a sign of disappointment and disillusionment.

The two sons, Tilden and Bradley have also failed in realizing the American dream. Both have been handicapped-Bradley physically and Tilden emotionally. Both have failed to meet their parents' expectations. None is capable of taking over the farm or even to take care of the parents in their old days. Ansel too has not been able to meet his parents' expectations, although he is regarded as an American hero. His death in a motel room symbolizes decadence and reflects disappointment.

Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* is about an eccentric family who has tried unsuccessfully for years to cope with the emotional destruction inflicted upon them by the horrible acts of incest committed between the mother Halie and son Tilden. This act is also annexed with the murder of the new born child by Halie's husband Dodge. Both incest and murder were considered the great sins in religion. They were severely rejected in western communities.

Haunted by the spiritual sterility that resulted from the family sins, all members try desperately to restore hope and give meaning to their lives. They hope that the latter will disappear from the family's collective memory. However, the arrival of Tilden's forgotten son Vince and his girlfriend Shelley forces the family to confront the incest and murder once Shelley senses that something is wrong within the family. This family systems analysis focuses not on how the event itself affects family functioning but instead on the reactions that follow the event: the devastating sense of shame felt by all members. It is this shame that causes disability to the entire family.

Shepard's play which is structured in three-acts is a depiction of three generations in the lives of a monstrous family. In the first act, the characters and conflicts are established. The tension rises and the conflict gets worse in the second act. The third act provides solutions to the characters' bizarre behaviour and to the generational conflicts that have shaped their lives.

The plot of the play recounts how the family farm passes from one generation to the next and goes through cycles of decay and regeneration. But on the mythic level, the play tells about a family story of guilt and betrayal, in which the older generations have failed to undertake their responsibility, and handed down an inheritance of emotional sterility. By the end of the last scenes of the play this has turned into a spiritual sterility that the younger generation are devoted to rise above.

Halie's infidelity both past and present and Dodge's drinking have greatly contributed to the breakdown of this family. Dodge, who by all means wants to hide from the truth and deny reality, is evidently worn out from the start. His health and temper show how the effects of guilt wear a person and destroy him. This destruction has ruined Dodge to such an extent that he denies any affective attachment with his family.

In the course of the play, the problems of the past are always in progress with the present. The past in *Buried Child* is in some way the present. The present generation has to pay back the sins of the past generation. Still, Halie, like almost all the characters in the play at one time or another, recalls the past, a time when things seemed more exciting and more normal. Unfortunately, the wonderful and exciting past has turned to a flue and uncertain present.

Obsessed by past deeds, Dodge is unable to make any progress. He tries to deny the possibility of new development, even as Tilden covers him with the corn he has picked from outside. In an attempt to forget about the guilt and to escape from the memory of past deeds, Dodge continues drinking. It is until the end of the play that we learn that Dodge has drowned his wife's illegal child. Though there is no

certainty, it is implied that the child is the result of an incestuous relationship between his youngest son, Tilden, and his wife, Halie.

There is also uncertainty about whether Ansel ever existed: he may be an invention of Halie's imagination to help her deal with the death of the child that Dodge buried. Halie's emotional estrangement from her family is shown by the fact that she frequently speaks from offstage, creating a great distance from her family. She suffers from a spiritual sterility, as she confesses having multiple affairs with strangers. In Act one, she enters dressed in black, dreaming of honours for Ansel. Her change to yellow clothing and the armful of yellow roses she carries in the final act contribute to the possibility of hope as the burden of death seems to have lightened. But Halie is drunk, and still ends the play offstage as she began. So any progress remains ambiguous.

Dodge as his wife, Halie represent of traumatized hopes and undone dreams of a western family. They never get tired of nagging. He shares with Halie her intolerance and her irresponsibility to manage the farm. Dodge has been rendered invisible; his two living sons don not appear so much. Tilden has returned home after having unspecified problems when he was living in New Mexico. He is a former All American football player, but now he spends his time harvesting corn while Dodge insists there has been no corn since 1935. Son Bradley cut off his leg with a chainsaw and now likes to creep up on his father and shave his head. There was another son, Ansel, who was a basketball star and a soldier, but was killed in a motel room under unspecified circumstances. Later the grandson, Vince enters, with Shelly, his girlfriend. He has not been home in six years and now finds none of his family recognizing him; his feelings of exclusion and resulting frustration become the means for the eventual revelation of secrets.

The family members in *Buried Child* suffer from a host of disabilities, both physical and emotional. Yet, the physical disabilities seem to be of minor importance. What weigh for the family is their emotional disabilities which are engendered by the only traumatic event -the incest -that has changed the family from

the bottom to the top. What was once a happy family has become a family full of deceit and resentment. More importantly, the incest and resulting birth of the child creates shame so powerful. That shame has forced the family to shut down the system. Owing to this closure, the family has become completely devoid of meaningful communication.

By murdering the infant, the family has collectively dealt with the shame in the most shocking manner possible. In a twisted view, they believe their survival depends on its death; otherwise, the baby would cause them endless dishonour. By killing the child, the family hopes to preserve the system. To Dodge, the murder of the child was a collective effort, not something he undertook by himself. He tells Shelly,

We couldn't let a thing like that continue. We couldn't allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives. It made everything we'd accomplished look like it was nothin'. Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness⁴⁷

In other words, the family can continue only because they killed the baby. Even more abnormal, this act of solidarity is one of the few cohesive actions of the family. It accelerates their destruction, however, and the unearthing of the child in Tilden's final act indicates that the secret cannot be buried forever. Finally, and forever they will never live down their past transgressions. Halie's final words, and the final words of the play, describe the backyard: "It's all hidden. It's all unseen. You just gotta wait till it pops out of the ground. Tiny little shoots. Tiny little white shoot. All hairy and fragile Strong though, Strong enough to break the earth even. It's a miracle" (Shepard, p.131)

Even though more than a decade has passed between Edwards Albee's *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*, the theme of sterility reappears under another umbrella. But this time, the form of sterility has shifted from the emotional one to the spiritual. The changes in economic, social and demographic

⁴⁷ Sam, Shepard, *Buried Child*. 1978 p.124

trends have been accompanied by fears of moral and cultural decline. The wind of modernity threatens traditional communities especially those of the west. The successive and rapid changes occurring around were unsupportable. Western families fell the victims of such changes. They fell to decay as they suffer psychological and mental imbalances.

All starts from the time the baby was buried. Dodge comes to suspicion that the older sons Tilden and Bradley are not his. Parent-children relations can to a certain extent explain Dodge harsh treatment. His rejection and denial to both sons is most of the time inexplicable. He is the kind of father who does not care about his sons. He really wishes they were all dead. Such rejections have led to the destruction of the spiritual bonds between father and sons. Furthermore, there are implicit intentions that the sons do not exist in Dodge's life.

The two sons were not the only characters to suffer from denial. There is another son called Ansel who is referred to as being the "buried child". For Dodge, Ansel is the only character who has the characteristics of the American man. He is strong, smart and wise. We can notice that there is a certain hypocrisy as Dodge neglects the actual sons and admits Ansel to be his own son. The situation would seem different if Ansel was alive or at least present, he would not be recognized as the others. But since he is absent (or dead) Dodge refers to him as being his 'flesh and blood'. Ansel is regarded as the admired or to a certain degree, the worshipped son.

Halie senses the big change in Dodge behaviour. She tells him that he used to be a good man. Now, he becomes an evil man. These denials and change in attitudes lay behind deeper motifs. Dodge was most of the time questioning Halie's unlimited relation with strangers. She is the kind of woman who had lots of affairs with strangers. Even though, she is described as a total whore, Dodge remains a passive consumer of what is happening. His suspicions grow wider as Halie becomes pregnant. Dodge has not shared bed with Halie for quite a long time and so her pregnancy comes to question.

In the second act, a new character is introduced. It is Vince, Tilden's son who has come for a visit after six years of absence. Vince wishes he would find the family in good temper. However his expectations did not come true. Instead he finds the family members enveloped by a hidden curse. Vince was not welcomed by the family members. None recognizes him, neither his father nor his grandfather. Such signs indicate that Vince also will face rejections and denial.

Vince is estranged, he senses as if he is a stranger within his family members. The more he wants to approach them, the more they try to distance him. A person can be rejected by grandpa but not by a father. Tilden holds the same traces as his father, Dodge. He just keeps staring at Vince but not accepting him as his son.

Certain features seem inherit in the family. There is the conviction that the passage of sins from older generation to young one is inevitable. Family members seem to have a tendency towards lack of recognition. They refuse to acknowledge the existence of the buried child in the family. But they have been haunted by that pretention.

Shelly, is Vince's girlfriend. She also has been deprived of recognition. She receives the same treatment as Vince. Both are considered as outsiders. The case is different for Vince who has been deprived of the right of being the biological son.

Such denial and rejection force Vince to seek deeper into the inexplicable transformation within the family. He feels the necessity of uncovering the hidden matters.

Tilden refuses to give clear responses to Shelly's questions. After insisting, he came to recognition that he had a son but he buried it. Tilden seems hesitant to unbury the child. Although, the first revelations come from Tilden, they are interrupted by the other members of family.

The question concerning the child who has been buried in the backyard emerges on the scene. The child who has the right to life was buried. Dodge buried it⁴⁸ putting in mind that it should be the outcome of Halie's illegal sexual intercourses. The tiny baby has a long story. The baby is the product of a mother - son sexual relation. This act has destroyed the family as it has driven Dodge to madness. For Dodge, the only way to get rid of the child is burying him. And the only way for Dodge to forget about the incest was through the bottle. Dodge cannot hold the secret inside because he cannot support its pains and suffering. As a consequence, he decides to reveal it. He is considered the second character to unveil the traumas of the secret. Though Dodge gives no clear answer to Shelly at beginning but he changes his mind. He reveals to Shelly the story to the least details.

The secret which has been buried and forgotten for so many years has come to light. It is not easier for both Tilden and Dodge to unravel the secret, for they seem to talk about an unwanted object that becomes something of the past. This could explain the fact that the child who results from incest is unwelcomed and undesirable. This also explains why all family members are eager to put an end to it. The family does not only deny the murder of child but also his existence.

Finally, Dodge starts reciting the whole story about the baby while the others members insist on keeping the secret buried. They remember him that by uncovering the secret he is breaking the pact they all have agreed upon.

What counts for Dodge is not the killing of the child but the buried of incest. He is not much more ashamed by murdering the child but by the dishonest and shameful act of incest. He feels betrayed. It not the first time that Dodge has been cheated by Halie. She continues belittling and emasculating him all long his life.

Dodge can no more endure such painful situation. So, he decides to kill the child and bury it with the hope of restoring happiness and harmony to the house.

⁴⁸ Throughout the play the name of the dead son, the buried child, is never mentioned. To be a fear of evoking the ghost from mentioning the names of the dead comes from antiquity as James.G.Frazer comments in his book: *The Golden Bough* (1890)

After getting bored, he reaches the conclusion that the secret must be told. He confesses to Shelly that what was once productive ceased to be so. The farm which was the most productive gives off no crops, no fruits as it used to be. The cow which produced enough milk (capable of filling Michigan Lake twice), give off no milk. Everything around has become sterile. Dodge also confesses that he and Halie were not planning to have children because they had more. He reveals to Shelly that he has not shared bed with her for about six years. Dodge says:

We were a well-established family once...Everything was settled with use... Then Halie got pregnant again. Out the middle of nowhere, she got pregnant. We weren't planning on havin' any more boys... in fact, we hadn't been sleeping in the same bed for about six years⁴⁹

Halie tries to escape the conversation. Once again, it sounds as if she is called for judgment, the same way Big Daddy calls Brick as in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

At last Tilden enters the house carrying the body of baby he brought from the garden. It is revealed that the child who was responsible for the family curse is also responsible for the infertility of the farm.

Finally, the rain stops, the sun shines, the secret vanished and harmony is resorted to the family. Vince comes to rescue the family from a real risk. He is regarded as the healer. He brings salvation with him.

Their insistence on keeping the secret enlightens their behaviour throughout the play, from their communication patterns to their attempt to close the system, while pretending that nothing ever happened. However, the phantom of the event is never far from the family's thoughts, and while they try to ignore its presence, it creates an underlying tension that fills the members with anxiety.

⁴⁹ Shepard, Sam. *Buried Child*. 1978. p .66

Such a secret has traumatized and oppressed the family members. Its oppression freezes every character's function. The secret has disturbed the family's reaction to any event. Open families who talk about the precipitating event are likely to see the event in less shameful terms because they are able to express their emotions in an open form. On the other hand, individuals in closed systems who shut themselves off both from the outside and from other members in the system, who refuse to acknowledge that anything bad even happened, are condemned to dysfunction because their silence reinforces their shame. Closed systems are prone to disorder because they are resistant to change in spite of the dysfunction surrounding them. These families, according to the family therapist Evan Imber-Black are: "Loyal to the 'don't talk, don't trust, don't feel' rules and often create family myths or dishonest stories to hide secrets" (Evan, *Secrets in Families and Family Therapy*, 1993.p.31)

In other words, incest does not guarantee dysfunction, though in many other ways it does. It is usually dealt with poorly because affected family members are devastated by shame and humiliation. As a result, families frequently do their best to suppress any memory of the incident.

In *Buried Child*, Shepard intends to show the incapacity of America to carry on its promises. He also tries to bring to light the fact that the so-called American Dream proves nothing but a fantasy of baffled minds.

The fact that all members of this family have forgotten is that they are all trapped in the hands of postmodern condition. The disintegration of identity, lack of meaning, and purpose in life, are facts of the twenty-first century and all these together lead to the pessimistic outcome in *Buried Child*. Characters of the play reside in a world in where parents deny any kind of understanding with their children.

Becoming disintegrated , they cannot show any kind of affection to one another; they become disloyal, they get involved in incest, and life is all of a sudden insupportable. This is in fact, another outcome of postmodern culture, due to that everybody feels a great contempt to one another, but at the same time, no one is able to make a complete break because there is nowhere to go to.

Conclusion

Shepard's family drama *Buried Child* is an eloquent depiction of the inescapability of the family bond. Although a surrealistic play; it pictures what was happening in America in the 1970s. The play is an effective criticism of contemporary American society. The very setting and the particular age of the play are symbols of a dark vision of the American Midwest. The play is also a representation of the disintegration of the American family. It questions the moral and spiritual embarrassments inflicted upon American people.

Shepard uses shock values .he uses different symbols and prominent among them if the sterility of the characters. Although implemented implicitly, the spiritual sterility appears to be of devastating effects. Shepard satirises the shaken faith and depicts the state of the American society in the 1970s and its pervasive dysfunction.

Critics who had followed his ten-year career Off-Broadway were happy for Shepard's mainstream success, while mainstream critics who were unfamiliar with the playwright were pleased with the new discovery. Even critics who were not quite sure what it was they had found in *Buried Child* assured their readers that they liked the play.

Buried Child is the second in his trilogy of family plays, preceded by *Curse of the Starving Class* in 1977 and followed by *True West* in 1980, with its themes of infanticide and incest; it has understandably undergone considerable psychoanalytic criticism. Matthew Roudané, for instance, writes,

One needs not be a devout follower of Freud to respond to the Oedipal dimensions in the play ... The buried child and the buried truths of the past, repressed through years of denial, rejection, and indifference, are the greatest sources of disconnection in the family⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Roudané, Matthew, *American Drama since 1960*. 1996.p.219

However, other critics have also spoken of the family dynamic in the play and the dysfunctional interactions among the members, Christopher Bigsby, for example, writes that, Shepard is concerned with the failure of the relationship, the space between those who should be physically and emotionally close⁵¹

Both critics discuss the effect of the secret on the family's functioning. More specifically, Bigsby's "space" is the distance among the members, whose interpersonal relationships and emotional closeness have all evaporated because of one secret. Many literary critics focus on the play's thematic discussion of the American West and its frontier imagery.

⁵¹ Bigsby, Christopher. *Critical Introduction to Twentieth-century American Drama*. 1984. p.186

General Conclusion

The present dissertation shows how the theme of sterility evolves following the different periods and the different changes taking place in American society. In the same way, the American Dream has kept changing due to the unstable circumstances. Each play chosen for study highlights a specific date. The three plays show how in spite of its hideousness, sterility has become a recurrent theme. Although there are apparent features about the same theme, each playwright has introduced his own vision.

Since sterility is linked to childlessness, the figure of the child whether alive, imagined or dead represents the milestone. The image of the child has also been linked with materialism. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the child projects the image of secured future. In pursuing money, Maggie tries by all means to get pregnant and that is only for the sake of inheriting Big Daddy's estate. The invented child has to be killed in *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* so that materialism will be eliminated and love and truth can at last reign and survive. Vince's return and his persistence on the exhumation of the buried child is no exception. He too is corrupted by the end of act three. By the end of the play, all the other characters vanished, however Vince holds power and possession of Dodge's farm after his death.

The first play depicts the theme of sterility in its natural state i.e. the conditions that go along with the theme were still in their start and so was sterility caused due to biological factors. The sterility of that time was authentic; it was instinctive in human being, although it was sometimes the outcome of external factors such as age, homosexuality and alcohol.

In the second play, there is a shift from the biological sterility to the emotional one. This shift indicates that the circumstances are no longer the same. And though the imagined child is symbolic, the characters wanted to project their aspirations. It is in fact, a lack of emotional "baggage" that led to the destruction of the American

family. *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* places the theme of sterility in a different perspective. Although Albee shows it through an absurd universe, it metaphorically projects the image of an invented child who is killed by the end of the play. By the closure, the characters accept to face reality as they also recognize their failure.

In the third play, Shepard moves back to the traditional theme of sterility. He indicates that the drowned child functions as a healer. It is not until the child was unearthed that the characters were able to wash themselves from the sinful atmosphere that enveloped them for so many years. All the characters seem eager to bring to light the spiritual sterility inflicted upon them by performing rape. By committing the act of incest, the family sinks into illegal and immoral actions that grow against faith and religion. *Buried Child* depicts a spiritual sterility and functions as a means of permitting the characters to look for redemption.

The three plays have similarities and differences. They are common in the way they are structured, in their setting, in the characters' careers and behaviours as well as in the theme. As for the structure, all of the plays are a three –act plays. The length of each play differs one from the other. With regard to the setting, the living room is the common area where the events of the three plays take place. The opening scenes of the three plays describe an uncomfortable setting which symbolizes the characters' despair. The inside is equipped with dusty old sofa, blankets, and frayed carpets. The outside gives a sense of foreboding and gloom. The darkness that hangs over and pervades the character is also dwelling inside them.

Since they belong to American drama, the plays have in common the same theme, the failure of the American dream, and the dysfunction of the American family. The three playwrights point out to the fact that the dream has moved from a triumphant ideal into a false promise. Countless factors have led to this shift including the changes taking place on the economic and political scene, the loss of faith, family disintegration and many others.

All of the truly great American playwrights have a common tendency; they each explore the sense of alienation by illustrating a breakdown within the family unit. They populate their plays with characters desperately trying to relate to one another. The characters are typically loners, traveller caught between a mythical past and the materialized and industrialized present.

There are also apparent features in the characters' qualities. In almost every play, female characters are portrayed as being violent, nagging and unfaithful. They are also powerful and domineering. By contrast, male characters are aged, impotent, powerless, alcoholic, and most of the time absent. Their children who were once athletes and were supposed to be future heroes are now handicapped, idiots and dysfunctional.

These playwrights create a new theatrical landscape, a type of drama that explores the elusive American dream from the inside out. Their work dramatizes what the theatre scholar Christopher Bigsby called, "a sense of removal-from other people, from a rooted surrounding, from the self. This is the "central concern of a writer whose plays explores the American psyche at a time of failed dreams and lost visions"

The end of each play varies from one another. The characters in *Cat* reach a new level in their lives; they come to the recognition of love and a rejection of materialism. In the last scenes of *Who is Afraid*, husband and wife reach the level of reconciliation and in *Buried Child*; the characters reach the level of a spiritual death.

In short, the life that had once been interrupted seems to come back again as the characters reach a higher stage in their lives away from all the negative aspects that once involved them. This suggests that there is a possibility in restoring the American dream. Therefore the time has come for the American to look back at the institution of family. They have to consider the kind of relations that link their members. They have to look deeper at the boundaries around individual members

that are collapsing because of materialism, incest, betrayal and all the social ills that lead to the destruction of the family and to the distortion of each individual role.

Through their plays, twentieth century playwrights might be signalling the way materialism and capitalism have deteriorated American families and shaken their dreams. They might signal the effects of such disintegration as well. They acknowledge that there is something wrong that is penetrating their lives and rooting out their principle and promises. James Wilson⁵², commenting on the causes of the moral decline in the American society states that, “the American people believe that this nation is on the wrong track, not because it is constitutionally ill-founded or economically backward, but because its family life is deteriorating”. (Wilson,1999)

Even to these days, sterility continues to be a challenging theme. Whether authentic or willing, sterility brings defeat as it also causes emotional and spiritual impotence. As a consequence, keeping to the principle and promises of the American Dream is something of a miracle. Thus, the realizations of such promises will constitute a far reaching dream. The theme still raises many questions that remain unsolved. The American conception and attitude toward sterility will probably change following the huge progress in the field of genetic research. And it might also change if the vision of what constitute the nuclear family is altered.

⁵² James Quinn Wilson (1931 – 2012) an American academic, political scientist, and an authority on public administration. A Ronald Reagan Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University and a senior fellow at the Clough Centre for the Study of Constitutional Democracy at Boston College.

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