

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 9325092

**Impossible love: A study of the incest theme in the plays of
Ibsen, O'Neill, and Shepard**

Fechter, Steven Jerome, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

Copyright ©1993 by Fechter, Steven Jerome. All rights reserved.

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

IMPOSSIBLE LOVE: A STUDY OF THE INCEST THEME
IN THE PLAYS OF IBSEN, O'NEILL, AND SHEPARD

by

Steven Fechter

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1993

(c) 1993

STEVEN FECHTER

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

3/22/93

Date

Harry H. Carlson

Chair of Examining Committee
Prof. Harry Carlson

3/22/93

Date

Marvin Carlson

Executive Officer
Prof. Marvin Carlson

Daniel Gerould

Prof. Daniel Gerould

Marvin Carlson

Prof. Marvin Carlson

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

IMPOSSIBLE LOVE: A STUDY OF THE INCEST THEME
IN THE PLAYS OF IBSEN, O'NEILL, AND SHEPARD

by

Steven Fechter

Advisor: Professor Harry Carlson

One of the most pervasive and least understood themes in modern drama is the theme of incest. Three predominant dramatists of modern drama who have used the incest theme extensively in their works are Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, and Sam Shepard. Examining a selection of their plays illuminates the complex nature and far-reaching influence of this theme, both in text and in performance.

In Ibsen's Little Eyolf, Rosmersholm, and Ghosts, incest and incestuous desire are prominent symptoms of the emotional and psychological turmoil that his characters attempt to repress or, at least, contain. Furthermore, we observe the playwright's deep empathy for the child-victim, whose fate, and ultimate doom, is linked to the incestuous desire and consequent hypocrisy within these bourgeois homes. In Ibsen hands, incest becomes a weapon that annihilates not only "difference" in the family structure, but subverts the hierarchic foundations of a restrictive, patriarchal society.

In O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms and A Moon for the Misbegotten, the incest theme is foregrounded by his characters' mysterious (and unconscious) search for and possession of the Great Mother. In their attempt to re-experience the sublime bond

of mother and child the hero searches for the mother in nature, property, other women, and in death.

The families in Shepard's Buried Child and Fool for Love live in a dangerous, brutal landscape where parents and children, sibling and sibling are locked in bloody and confused Oedipal battles. The fathers live in a denatured world, where manhood and masculinity have become worthless, even poisonous; and the sons either carry on the father's poison, or, following the incestuous trail, destroy him.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Harry Carlson. His editorial assistance, steady reassurance, and wise advice were invaluable throughout the process. Marvin Carlson and Daniel Gerould completed my committee and each contributed in special ways: Professor Carlson's tough academic standards compelled me to raise mine; Professor Gerould's courses awakened me to a theatre of dreamers.

I am also grateful to Lanie Lee who stepped in as an experienced and very helpful reader when I needed one the most.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife Holly O'Grady. She read the rough early drafts, gave thoughtful criticism, and, most importantly, supported me through the long haul with constant encouragement, faith, and humor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapters

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. <u>LITTLE EYOLF</u> AND THE GREAT HUNGER	15
3. <u>ROSMERSHOLM</u> : INCEST AND ANARCHY	47
4. THE DESTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCES IN <u>GHOSTS</u>	79
5. <u>DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS</u> : SEEKING THE GREAT MOTHER	104
6. <u>A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN</u> : ENTERING THE GREAT MOTHER . . .	135
7. <u>BURIED CHILD</u> : DEATH OF THE GREAT FATHER	183
8. <u>FOOL FOR LOVE</u> : INCEST AND THE FAMILY MYTH	235
9. EPILOGUE	285
BIBLIOGRAPHY	295

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that the modern "triangle" drama might be regarded as . . . husband, wife, and lover being the disguise for father, mother, and son. If this were so, then the answer to the question, why modern playwrights have been obsessed with adultery is that they have not been obsessed with adultery: they have been obsessed with incest.

--ERIC BENTLEY
The Life of the Drama

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine one of the most pervasive and least understood themes in modern drama: the theme of incest. When I began my research, I found almost no significant studies of drama (let alone modern and contemporary theatre and performance) related to this subject.¹ What I did find was a growing body of work on the prominence of incest in literature.

Most impressive among these studies were a number of excellent surveys on Gothic, Romantic, and Victorian literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Three that stand out are Eino Railo's guide to "horror romanticism," in The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism; Elizabeth MacAndrew's learned and readable The Gothic Tradition in Fiction; and Russell Goldfarb's Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature, that features a chapter on the numerous incestuous relationships in the novels of Charles Dickens.

Also available are critical works that take a broader outlook, as well as studies that bring us more up to date on this subject. Henry Miles's Forbidden Fruit: A Study of the Incest Theme in Erotic Literature, for example, deals with the incest fantasy in pornographic literature, from the Marquis de Sade to the 1960s. For an in-depth psychoanalytical study of the incest theme in myth and classical literature, we have Otto Rank's The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend. Providing an excellent cross-section of related literary works is the anthology, Violation of Taboo: Incest in the Great Literature of the Past and Present, edited by Donald Cory Webster and R. E. L. Masters. Included in this collection are Sophocles's Oedipus Rex and John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. James Twitchell offers a cultural overview of this theme in Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, beginning with eighteenth-century literature to modern advertising.

The shortcoming of such studies and anthologies is that when they do discuss drama, it is included not only as part of the literature, but as literature. A notable exception to this rule is the collection of symbolist plays, Doubles, Demons and Dreamers, edited by Daniel Gerould. In his introduction, Gerould points out that these daring dramatists were fascinated with the incest theme. The difficulty for us is that incest is presented as one among other themes of perverse and subversive sexuality, fantasies, and behavior that were used by the symbolists; just

as, similarly, in the studies of Gothic literature, incest is lumped with other themes of evil.

In attempting to discuss this subject in a fresh way, my approach is fairly basic. First, I intend to examine drama as literature and theatre. Secondly, I have isolated incest, as much as possible, from other groups of so-called perversities and unnatural acts. Keeping on such a course, I believe, will lead to areas not yet fully charted.

That so little to date has been written about incest's presence and effect in drama and performance may strike one as a strange omission. This seems especially true when one considers that Freud's groundbreaking theory of the Oedipus complex was, at least partially, inspired from seeing a play! After attending a production of Oedipus Rex, Freud wrote the following in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess (Oct. 15, 1897):

The Greek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he has felt traces of it himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and this dream-fulfillment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror."²

One questions whether Freud would have felt that "dream-fulfillment" as viscerally had he simply read the story of Oedipus. If one believes that Freud had to be inside a theatre to fully experience the story's terror and desire, then the

answer is clearly no. As if to underscore this point, Bert O. States suggests that "theatre--unlike fiction, painting, sculpture, and film--is really a language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that are what they seem to be." In other words, only in theatre does "image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close."³

When the sign of incest appears on the stage, the audience may be affected by feelings of desire, discomfort, even dread. This kind of audience response is stimulated from three areas: the words and actions of the characters on the stage; the private thoughts of the spectator, who becomes, in Ann Wilson's words, a "desiring subject who sates that desire by constructing images with the mind's eye"⁴; and, finally, the self-conscious awareness (and anxiety) of sharing a forbidden experience with a group (the other spectators). The theatre is one of the last public places left in our culture where people can still gather and openly dream together.

It was to comprehend the power of the incest theme and its intensity in performance that became the impetus for writing "Impossible Love." In the midst of this study, several questions begged to be answered, such as: If incest is such a taboo, why have numerous dramatists used it? How does incest affect the text? What kind of impact does it have in performance, on the actors, on the audience, and on the performing space? The purpose of this study was to pursue those questions, by analyzing

a select group of plays, playwrights, and performances; and, most importantly, to search for new insights into this theme, and, possibly, about theatre itself.

A major point of departure was to examine how playwrights subvert the Establishment's "myth of the family home." This myth goes like this: Within the sanctity of the family home there lies security, order, and love; with the presence of these qualities, the home is assured of happiness. This myth has been cycled and re-cycled since the rise of the middle classes 150 years ago and is still forcefully with us. It usually gains popularity during conservative periods; the Victorian era and the 1950s are two notable examples. During the 1980s, the Reagan Administration was highly effective in exploiting the myth of "family values" to further its own conservative policies. Most recently, "family values" became a rallying cry for the far Right during the 1992 presidential campaign.

It is striking that during conservative, even reactionary, times, dramatists have written plays that radically re-define the traditional family structure. Invariably, it seems, the motif of incest can be found in these plays. Some of the playwrights who have, in varying degrees, used incest to attack this myth are Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, Sam Shepard, and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. Incest is a potent weapon because it connotes a world of lust, danger, chaos, destruction, and the Unknown. What frightens the

patriarchal system about incest is that they view it as being anti-family, anti-law, anti-state, and anti-God; which is antithetical to everything that this hierarchy represents.

The works I have selected are essentially all representative family dramas where incest, as theme and motif, is both explicitly and implicitly present. These works include Ibsen's Little Eyolf, Rosmersholm, and Ghosts; O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms and A Moon for the Misbegotten; and Shepard's Buried Child and Fool for Love.

Ibsen, O'Neill, and Shepard, in addition to being among the most revolutionary playwrights of their time, span the major periods of modern drama. Ibsen's career covers the end of the Romantic era, the height of Naturalism, and the beginning of Symbolism in Europe. O'Neill was America's first great modern dramatist; he integrated the expressionism of Europe with his own psychological realism. For the past twenty-five years, Sam Shepard has been our "most original and vital playwright."⁵

Despite the wide gap between them in time and culture, there are strong bonds that tie the Norwegian and the two American playwrights together. As is well-known, O'Neill freely admitted to Ibsen's influence on his work, comparing his own dramatic experiments to "Ibsen's revolutionary works."⁶ What is less known is that Shepard has spoken of his high admiration for O'Neill. He views Long Day's Journey Into Night as "overwhelmingly honest" and "truly the great American play."⁷ In our discussion, we will detect a number of similar structural

and thematic elements that resound amidst these dramatists. Such parallels will be compared and contrasted as we find them.

Two other factors influenced my decision to focus on these three playwrights. One was their persistent and penetrating probe into the psyche of the family unit. In their own way, each presents a vision of the family home as a kind of interior wilderness. While studying their plays, I thought of Ekdal's repeated warning in The Wild Duck: "The woods take revenge." Their dramas display the family home as a fragile institution, where the thicket of lust, alienation, subversion, and anarchy threaten to run unchecked. Theirs is a universe where just one wrong desire can take the whole family down.

The second factor will seem obvious, but it was the determinant for choosing these three artists: there is a recurring pattern of incest or incestuous desire in their work. This is not a case of where a particular motif is introduced in one play and then discarded. We are speaking of a major theme that runs deeply throughout a number of their works, and in O'Neill's case, many. The seven plays that will be the core of our discussion are ones that I felt best highlight each playwright's vision of the family and his handling of this theme.

In the plays of Ibsen, we will observe the playwright's deep empathy for the child-victim, whose fate will be affected by incestuous desire in the bourgeois family structure. In the work of O'Neill, this theme highlights the hero's search for the Great Mother. His plays embody the mysterious (and unconscious) search

of modern man to re-experience the sublime bond between mother and child, and to seek a "sense of intimacy in his loneliness and desolation."⁸ With Shepard, the focus shifts from the love-bond of mother and son to the fierce battle between father and son to possess the mother. Shepard presents a blood war that is savagely American and mythically eternal.

One of the common threads that drew me to the plays that will be discussed is the question of incest's influence on staging. What kind of challenges (and problems) did directors and actors face? How explicit could (or should) they be in performance, considering incest's inherent emotional intensity, its attraction-repulsion qualities, its horrific and erotic elements. In creating these works, our playwrights seemed to anticipate those very issues.

This is primarily true of Ibsen. In nineteenth-century Norway, censorship was not a casual threat, it was a harsh reality. Handling a theme as explosive as incest meant that Ibsen had to be artfully subtle. One feels that he dared to go as far as he could, and it is a testament to both his craft and artistry that Ghosts and Rosmersholm retain as much terror and sexuality today as O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, or Shepard's Buried Child.

In the following chapters, we will examine the erotic nature of incest on stage. This includes the spectators' desiring gaze on performers, as well as the performers' gaze upon the spectators. With plays dealing in incest and other

forbidden matters, the voyeuristic element is especially significant. O'Neill and Shepard were both astute at exploiting the spectators' gaze. In our concluding chapter, we will find that audience response has been pushed and manipulated even further, as we discuss the incest theme in women's performance art.

French theorist Julie Kristeva wrote, "Metaphor, we are told simplistically, makes things visible. But can the unbearable, death and the sun, or incest be made visible?"⁹ One could argue that the most vital role of the playwright is to make the unbearable visible. The playwright who takes such a risky journey will surely arrive at the theatre of another French theorist, Antonin Artaud. After all, the "outbreak" of incest on stage is an image straight out of Artaud's "essential theatre" as plague, which he described as the "exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized."¹⁰ Artaud wanted theatre to free us from our "repressed unconscious."¹¹ It may well be that it was this idea of being liberated that attracted Ibsen, O'Neill, and Shepard to the incest theme. By moving into the Unknown, this "taboo territory," they became, in effect, explorers into the uncharted lands and dangerous seas of unspoken desire. Truly, there is something romantic in that.

Part of that romance may be the danger of offering challenging plays to an unprepared gathering of spectators and

critics. Our own group of plays were met with a variety of reactions when first presented to the public. Sometimes the response was confusion, often it was misunderstanding, and, occasionally, it could be highly negative. Ghosts, for example, was greeted with a roar of vociferous hostility by the theatre Establishment before it was even produced. The play's wide condemnation, immediately after its publication, was enough to keep it off the European stage for two full years.

To seriously discuss incest's impact in drama (or any of the arts), one should be aware of the sociological perceptions and facts surrounding this issue today. In the last fifteen years, incest has finally been brought out of its dark closet into public light. Since the 1970s, research efforts to learn more about the characteristics and patterns of incest or child sexual abuse has dramatically increased. As Louise Armstrong pointed out in her pioneering book, Kiss Daddy Goodnight, incest was never the problem, talking about it was.¹² We now know that sexual abuse of children, mostly young girls by their fathers, is alarmingly widespread, cutting across class and race. It is estimated that "as high as twenty percent" of the female population "has had an experience of incestuous abuse at some time in their lives."¹³ Armstrong suggests that as high as "twenty-five million women in this country . . . have been sexually abused by their fathers."¹⁴ But the problem goes deeper than victim and perpetrator. It involves the "whole environment of the family."¹⁵ R. E. L. Masters feels that there

is one forceful argument against incest (where no coercion or abuse is present):

The family would be disrupted, and in some cases, destroyed, were its members permitted sexual access to one another. Sexual rivalries, with consequent hatreds, would spring up in some cases . . . Roles within the family would be confused and [the] always precarious harmony of the family unit could not survive the tension.¹⁶

When we encounter Shepard's Buried Child, we will behold a most telling example of incest's destructive environment.

It should be stated that this dissertation is not a sociological study of sexually abused children in modern drama (though that could be a worthwhile subject). Our focus is to engage in a theoretical discussion of how incest influences the drama's text and performance, which will include an awareness--and commentary when applicable--of the social consequences of incest in the family.

Such an awareness is pertinent when we examine the plays of Ibsen. We now know that "there was an alarming increase in sexual assaults upon children during the Victorian era."¹⁷ The fact that Ibsen was writing his cycle of family plays during this period adds a chilling resonance to his recurring theme of victimized children. And Ibsen is not alone. In almost every play we discuss, there is the shadow of an emotionally (if not

physically) abused child hovering in the background, waiting to be called forward.

Conspicuously, Ibsen's Little Eyolf is the only play (in our group of seven) where a real child actually steps on stage and speaks; and he cannot live past the first act! The figure of Eyolf's crippled body, but beautiful eyes, makes him the ideal symbol for all the children whose innocence has been shattered.

When writing dramatic criticism, there is always the danger of reducing a play's meaning to fit within a particular thesis. I have tried to avoid that danger. I began with no defined theories or assumptions, only a desire to understand and then articulate an idea that began as a mystery. As I worked to unravel the mystery, the plays in this study became, for me, more complex, more daring, more modern, and more profound.

1. An exception is Mark Taylor's book, Shakespeare's Darker Purpose: A Question of Incest (New York: AMS Press, 1982). It is an interesting and overdue study of the Shakespearean father (Polonius, Brabantio, King Lear, Prospero among others) and his implicit incestuous feelings for his daughter.
2. Sigmund Freud, The Origins of Psychoanalysis, trans. E. Mosbacher and J. Strachy (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 222.
3. Bert O. States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 20.
4. Ann Wilson, "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 30, No. 1 (March 1987), 51.
5. Carol Rosen, "Silent Tongues: Sam Shepard's Explorations of Emotional Territory," The Village Voice, Aug. 4, 1992, p. 32.
6. Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Artist (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 249.
7. Jonathan Cott, "Sam Shepard," Visions and Voices (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 155.
8. James J. Preston, ed. "Conclusion: New Perspectives on Mother Worship," Mother Worship: Theme and Variations (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 340.
9. Julie Kristeva, Tales of Love, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 366.
10. Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 30.
11. Artaud, 28.
12. Louise Armstrong, Kiss Daddy Goodnight: Ten Years Later (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), 239.
13. Christine Courtois, Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors In Therapy (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 5.
14. Armstrong, 7.
15. Blair Justice and Rita Justice, The Broken Taboo: Sex in the Family (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1979), 32.

16. Armstrong, 6-7.

17. Louise DeSalvo, Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 8.

CHAPTER TWO

LITTLE EYOLF AND THE GREAT HUNGER

The desire for a wife begins with the sister.

--AZANDE PROVERB¹

Of the three Ibsen plays under discussion--Ghosts (1881), Rosmersholm (1886), and Little Eyolf (1894)²--it seems fitting that we go chronologically backwards, beginning with the last work. This somewhat peculiar format is justified for two reasons. First, there is Ibsen's unique appreciation of history. In all his major plays, there comes a time when the past appears to irrevocably change a character's future. Jane Ellert Tammany speaks of the illuminating "Moment" in Ibsen's plays "when the present is shown to contain the past within it."³ Tammany describes such a moment as an "existential encounter."⁴ It is a moment when the facade of solidity, form, and familiarity is wiped away--for the characters in the play, and sometimes for the audience in the theatre. As Rolf Fjelde states, there is a point in an Ibsen play when there is a "sense of the immense void of the primeval European wilderness."⁵ It is a revelation filled with desire, fear, and terror. In each of these three plays, Ibsen appears to be testing his heroes and heroines (and himself) to see how far and how long they can remain inside that forbidding wilderness.

Second, going backward is appropriate for the theme of incest. In two of the three plays, the incestuous acts begin when the protagonists are adolescents. In the case of Ghosts, incestuous desire is a direct outgrowth of earlier crimes of passion. Ibsen astutely recognized both the poetic and the political power of the incest theme. To his credit, he never uses incest the same way twice, but adapts it to each play's theme and situation. Considering the highly conservative period in which he lived, one could say that Ibsen pushed further into unexplored psycho-sexual territory than any dramatist before (and well after) Freud. With Little Eyolf, Ibsen may have taken the deepest plunge into the nether world of the human soul. For this reason, it remains one of his most elusive plays, and, in Michael Meyer's opinion, "among the greatest that Ibsen ever wrote."⁵

If there is one mood that dominates in Little Eyolf, that mood might be called "hungriness." There is a terrible hunger that sweeps through the play. It is a hunger that is powerful, ravenous, and aches with desire; it constantly threatens to swallow up the central characters in its voracious jaws. This hunger is a desire for love, physical closeness, sexual fulfillment, and spiritual growth. It is a hunger that is both carnivorous and cruel. It is a hunger where children become the primary victims. The play's language is full of voracious imagery: "little rat babies," "raging fires," vampires, werewolves, and devouring man-eating females. In Little Eyolf's world, where no God exists, the sexual needs and emotional

desires of men and women are acted out in frank, realistic, and fearful discourses. Examining incest's role in these discourses will further our understanding of the play's themes and sexual and social world.

A better way to understand this world is to view it in the context of its time, specifically within the genre of Romantic literature. A valuable article in this field is Errol Durbach's "The Geschwister-Komplex: Romantic Attitudes to Brother-Sister Incest in Ibsen, Byron and Emily Bronte." Durbach feels that the importance of Little Eyolf is not only its participation in this tradition, "but its explicit criticism of unstated Romantic assumptions and attitudes."⁷ By rejecting certain Romantic illusions,

Little Eyolf . . . suggests a way of coping with the Romantic dilemma: the fear of mutability, the failure of substitute religions to fill God's empty spaces, and the failure of the body--of human sexuality--to assuage the human wound.⁸

The play presents the simultaneous collapse of both the Romantic spirit and of classical forms. Moreover, the institutions of the outside world (God, social morality, public laws, politics, family) no longer offer support for Ibsen's central characters--all fail to give fulfillment to the spiritual needs of the human condition. Thus, Ibsen's heroes and heroines

create personal missions and causes to act as substitutes. They are also susceptible to visions, voices, and visitations from the dead. Ultimately (and paradoxically), the desires and fantasies of these people subvert the very missions and made-up structures they have resolutely constructed. In effect, they are all like Halvard Solness--master builders dreaming of church towers in the sky. The terrible irony of the "bourgeoisie grasping at romantic possibility" is that "in the very attempt to make it viable,"⁹ they devastate and destroy life itself. The result of such conflicting forces make for disastrous lives, but fascinating plays. For this reason, no Ibsen play is more fascinating than Little Eyolf. In the stark view of Durbach, "Alfred Allmers is a brilliant study of sexual asceticism verging upon impotency, and Rita Allmers of sexual frustration verging upon nymphomania. They are the perfect Ibsen pair."¹⁰

Standing between Rita and Alfred is little Eyolf. Eyolf is the name Alfred has given to their child. It is also the secret identity he gave to his sister, Asta, when she was a child. Eyolf thus comes to symbolize the unspoken desires that Alfred and Asta secretly acted out when they lived together. However, this state of "Eyolf" leads our siblings to a major crisis when their hidden desires are forced to the surface. Little Eyolf, the son, is an outer manifestation of Alfred and Asta's psycho-sexual condition: the child is crippled, twisted, forgotten, "underweight" and "sickly," but he "has beautiful,

intelligent eyes."¹¹ Within the secret meaning of Eyolf is another word, a forbidden word, that is never spoken--incest.

When we first meet the central triangle, Alfred's incestuous desire for Asta has settled into (on the surface) a pure and platonic attachment; whereas his relationship with his wife Rita has developed into something dangerous, pathological, obsessed, even murderous. In act 1, Rita's frustration at being neglected by her husband in favor of his sister, his work, and now their son, erupts into a scene of violent, jealous rage. As she repeatedly throws her arms around his neck, she becomes progressively more hysterical.

RITA: . . . I only care about you! Only you in this whole world! . . . You--you--only you!

ALFRED: Let me go, let go--you're choking me--!

RITA: (releasing him). Oh I'd love that! . . . Oh if you knew how I've hated you--! (887)

Our first impression of Rita is that of an obsessed, devouring female, a figure prominent in Romantic literature. Ibsen even brings in a grotesque version of this type of female character in the Rat Wife. Later, we will learn that Rita's frightful histrionics are echoes not from the lofty heights of Romantic idolization, but from the rubble of romantic love, a tradition that, in Ibsen's eyes, had become sadly bankrupt. As Kierkegaard wrote in Either/Or, "romantic love" is never able to

build a durable bond between a married couple because "death already is lying in wait for it, because its eternity is illusory."¹²

Durbach suggests that the great Romantic Movement had long gone sour for Ibsen. And in Little Eyolf, we indeed see a play about the miserable failure of a small romantic man. With Allmers, Ibsen has created an ideal protagonist who champions the themes and imagery of Romanticism, which the playwright can then subvert for his own dramatic purposes.

Still, in order to become disenchanted, one must first be stirred. This seems to have been the case with Ibsen. It is notable that despite having read only a modest amount of Byron, this English Romantic left a lasting impression upon him. In a letter from 1872, Ibsen says, "I have not read very much Byron, but I have the feeling that his works translated into our language would be of great assistance in freeing our aesthetics from many moral prejudices--which would be a great gain."¹³

A Byron work that Ibsen may have admired is his verse-play Cain, which gained notoriety for casting Cain as a tragic Promethean figure. Of special interest is a scene that questions conventional ideas about love, shame, and incest. When Lucifer asks Cain's demure sister/wife Adah (who's name and demureness reminds one of Asta) if she loves Cain more than her mother and father she says, "I do" and asks if that is a sin. Lucifer prophetically replies, "No, not yet. / It one day will reside in your children."¹⁴ While Adah is horrified by this news, Lucifer

modestly does not take credit for this perversion of "pure love." He places it "in those who replace ye in / Mortality." Adah's following question frames the dilemma of not only Asta and Allmers, but of many Ibsen characters: "What is the sin which is not / Sin in itself? Can circumstances make sin / Or virtue?"¹⁵

For Asta and Allmers, "circumstances" play a profound role in the making of "sin or virtue." The most obvious condition is their blood relationship. This brings us to a fundamental question: Why did Ibsen decide to change their sibling relationship in act 2? Did Ibsen want to show that their love sprang from a "natural" desire all along? If so, then the discovery that they are not half brother and sister, but step-siblings, releases them from their sin.

But on closer inspection this elimination of the incest taboo produces quite the opposite, and more subversive, effect. Ibsen uses this new turn of circumstances to demonstrate how truly obsessed Alfred is. It is astounding that after Asta's confession about her mother's infidelity, Alfred can still deny that a change has occurred in their relationship. Emotionally and psychically, he is still clinging to an idealized love. Sadly, he appears as a pathetic version of the Byronic hero, a rather miscast Manfred.

ASTA: You're not my brother, Alfred.

ALFRED: (quickly, with a tinge of defiance, looking at her). Well, does that alter anything in our relationship? Essentially, no. (917)

If Alfred cannot see any difference in their relationship, the wiser Asta does: "It alters everything, Alfred. Our relationship isn't brother and sister." But Alfred still holds to his romantic notions: "No, but it's just as sacred. And it always will be" (917).

In his book, Ibsen the Romantic, Durbach states that "Ibsen's concerns lie not with the pathology of incest . . . but in the sexual attitudes of Romanticism, where pathological diagnosis is ultimately irrelevant to 'poetical circumstances.'"¹⁶ Here, one might differ with Durbach's small regard for the psychological aspects of incest, considering the complexity of Ibsen's characters.

As a response to Durbach, let us take a look at the tight psychic prison Ibsen has constructed around Alfred. He cannot break from his "sacred" bond with Asta, nor can he consider (at least consciously) consummating his unspoken lifelong love affair. Alfred's desire for his sister remains pure, yet intensely erotic. Conversely, Alfred views his relationship with his wife as something devouring, bestial, vampiric. A more extreme vision of the devouring female is of course the appearance of the Rat-Wife, who lures rats and men down into the

watery darkness, "where they sleep such a sweet long sleep" (877). Hers is a sexuality of a highly lethal kind. The Rat-Wife's disturbing visit, including her mysterious entrance and exit, is like a dream scene; it could even be manifesting from Alfred's unconscious--a revelation of his sexual terror.

Then there is Rita, who feels trapped in her own emotional cage. Her needs are made explicitly apparent when she says to Alfred, "I want you--every part of you--alone--the way I had you in those first sweet, ravenous weeks. (Fiercely.) I'm not making do with leftovers" (Fjelde, 889). Rita's diet of "leftovers," we learn later, has been going on for over eight long years--ever since little Eyolf's fall from the table. The trauma caused by the accident has left Alfred virtually impotent ever since. Equally important, however, is what their life was like before the misfortune. In the original Norwegian, Rita's lines, "Jeg vil ha deg helt og holdent. Och alene! Slik som jeg hadde deg i de forste, deilige svulmende tider," if literally translated, would read, "I want you completely. To myself! As I had you those first, deliciously full days."¹⁷ The tricky word is the rather vague "tider," which can mean "times," "days," "weeks," and "years." In Michael Meyer's translation of this same speech, Rita says, "I want you--all of you--to myself--the way it used to be in those first, few unforgettable years"¹⁸ (emphasis mine). We can see that Meyer chooses a longer duration of time than Fjelde; instead of only a few "ravenous weeks," Alfred and Rita possibly had two years of a "vigorous and passionate sexual

life"¹⁹ in their marriage. The advantage of Meyer's alternative is that it puts the marital problems of Alfred and Rita in a more contemporary context for modern audiences. But given the character of Alfred, the shorter duration seems more plausible. Moreover, the memory of a once happy, but brief, period of time makes Rita's barren existence all the more tormenting.

Clearly, these people have become locked in unhealthy and dangerous roles. It is only after the destruction of the play's most innocent and vulnerable figure, little Eyolf, that Alfred and Rita finally begin to move toward change. The sacrifice of young innocence is a crucial theme, and we will return to it later.

There are in Little Eyolf, as in many of Ibsen's works, distinct themes and imagery from folk and fairy tales. From the opening scene, we are introduced to images of orphans, werewolves, and pied pipers. And while Alfred and other Ibsen characters--such as Peer Gynt, Hjalmar Ekdal, and Ellida Wangel--may be attracted, if not intoxicated, by the land of romance, Ibsen's attitude is habitually ironic "toward these elements of Romanticism."²⁰ This irony comes from an awareness that these fairy lands may also be "destructive and regressive myths . . . and that mountain experiences may as frequently prove epiphanies of horror as well as Wordsworthian revelations of infinitude."²¹

What we see in this irony, as Durbach likes to point out, are the tensions and impulses of two opposing Ibsens, the "paradoxical simultaneity of Romantic and counter-Romantic

attitudes which make Ibsen a Romantic of extraordinary individuality."²² One could compare Ibsen's position to Romanticism with James Joyce's relationship to the Catholic Church--attracted to the powerful symbolism, imagery, and mythology of Catholicism, but aware of the harmful forces of the Church.

An excellent example of Ibsen's ironic attitude can be seen in the following dialogue:

ALFRED: (gazing straight ahead). When I think back on my life--and my lot--these last ten, eleven years, it seems almost like a fairy tale to me, or a dream. Don't you think, Asta?

ASTA: Yes, in many ways.

ALFRED: (as before). When I think back of what the two of us were once, Asta, a pair of penniless orphans-- (880)

Rita mercifully cuts him off from this Dickensian rhapsody. In this exchange, Ibsen comes close to metatheatre, if not self-parody, as if he were self-conscious of how often he has used the fairy tale structure in past plays. One senses that the playwright is mocking Alfred (and maybe himself) for articulating such an insipid vision. There is another bit of romantic babble by Alfred in act 1; his long-winded speech about his new mission in life is comically absurd and pathetic--"Yes! I went up into the infinite solitude" (883). Rita would call such rambling,

"sentimental gush." Alfred is like a later variation of Rosmer, another well-intentioned, but ultimately weak and misguided Ibsen hero. Alfred is a man who doesn't know what to do with his life; he invents missions and avoids real-life responsibilities until tragedy forces him to finally stare life in the face.

There are other arresting parallels between this play and Rosmersholm, written eight years earlier. It is not only in the handling of the incest theme, but in the similarity of the theme's structure. In each case, the object of incest (or incestuous desire) is a woman who was dominated by an older male when she was a young girl. There is also a discovery about this incestuous relationship which plays a key part in the plot. In Rosmersholm, Rebecca's discovery is that her stepfather was her natural father. In Eyolf, Asta discovers that her half brother is actually her stepbrother. In the former, oedipal desire led to incestuous consummation; in the latter, consummation is blocked, but desire is persistently charged by the taboo.

Having shown that incest is, at the least, a significant motif in the play, we will now examine how it plays a key part in a major Ibsen theme: the child-victim. By child-victim, we refer to those defenseless, trusting, vulnerable, loving, and loveless beings that inhabit Ibsen plays in the flesh, in the spirit, and in their death. One immediately thinks of the sweetly fragile Hedvig in The Wild Duck, the sick babies in Brand, the forgotten little boys that perished in the Solness fire, the unborn child of Hedda Gabler, the neglected "child-dolls" of Nora, and the

bitter young adults who recall childhoods without love, warmth, support, and home. In Rosmersholm, one can imagine the cold, joyless childhood of growing up in a house where children never cry, and "when they grow up, they never laugh. Never, as long as they live" (551).

We will discuss further the thematic link of the child-victim with incest; but first, it is pertinent we now look at what Barry Jacobs calls the "Eyolf Game."²³ Our discovery of this game, and the impact it had on its players, occurs early in act 2, when Alfred and Asta are alone together for the first time in the play.

They are seated in "a little wooded glen on Allmers' land" where "huge old trees on the left form a leafy canopy over the scene" (895). Those trees could be from the same psychological wilderness as the "two enormous elms" that bend their brooding, humanlike branches over Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms. Asta, sewing black crepe to Alfred's coat sleeve, moves closer to her brother. This mingling of death and physical intimacy brings a heightened eroticism to the scene. (Later we will examine how O'Neill, in Desire, combines elements of death, sex, and incest with stunning results in the climatic "parlor scene.") In a truly Freudian turn, Alfred must first kill off both of their parents before venturing any closer to his sister. This he does with swift dispatch. Alfred recalls the time--"when Father died"--that Asta first sewed black crepe "around my student cap" (899). The fact that Asta doesn't remember her doing this

indicates the estrangement that existed between Alfred's father and Asta (who was the illegitimate daughter of the father's wife). Four lines later Alfred brings up the death of Asta's mother, when Asta sewed a "black band for my arm, too." This she clearly recalls. Curiously, Asta's feelings of those double losses are not of remorse or sadness, but of joy: "That was really a beautiful time for us, Alfred. The two of us alone" (899). Having now gained Asta's full trust in this private setting, Alfred calls her "My dear, faithful--Eyolf" (899). Addressing his sister with that name triggers a startling change. The name, acting like words to a magic spell, brings them back to their most personal and sexually charged memories. This name is the key to their secret language (and secret lives), and this language is, in effect, a vocabulary for a desire they can neither articulate nor acknowledge.

Names and the action of naming in Little Eyolf, as in almost all Ibsen plays, are invariably important. A character's name not only signifies who he or she is in a social context, but it also plays a critical part of that character's sublanguage. The value of one's name is a central theme in John Gabriel Borkman. Mrs. Borkman's one obsession, in fact, is for her son Erhart to "restore . . . our name" (991). In the same play, Ella, Mrs. Borkman's sister (and rival), wants Erhart to carry on her name. The Master Builder illustrates the need and imagination of naming. Hilda and Solness's sublanguage contain names from mythology--trolls, fairies, devils, princesses, Vikings--and

birds of prey. While these names signify a language of attraction and repulsion, they are also (for Ibsen) the imagery of liberation.

Notice how Asta breaks the news of their relationship to Alfred: "I have no right to bear your father's name" (917). And at the end of act 2, Alfred whispers to himself, "Asta. Eyolf. Little Eyolf--!" (917). It is as if he is attempting to hold on to all three relationships by the sheer act of speaking their names. The action of naming takes on a dark side as well. Because Alfred named his son Eyolf, he and his sister could (and obviously did) call up their memories--communicated to each other in their private language--every time they spoke the child's name. In an insidious way, little Eyolf became a means where they could continue to play their game.

But how did this "Eyolf Game" actually work? From their private dialogue in act 2, we learn that when the siblings lived alone, Asta would sometimes wear Alfred's old clothes from his boyhood. The game's affect on her brother is made implicitly clear by Alfred himself: "(his eyes lingering on her) I remember so well the way you dressed up and walked around in them" (Fjelde, 900). Meyer's translation of that line gives it a more explicit tone: "How well I remember how you looked! When you put them on and walked round in them."²⁴ Meyer's alternative, which renders Alfred's titillation more explicitly, does come closer to the original Norwegian, "Hvor godt jeg husker deg nar du trakk dem pa deg og gikk med dem." Literally

translated, it would read, "I remember so well how you looked when you put them on and walked around in them." Fjelde's "dressed up," rather than "put them on," weakens the implied fetish of cross-dressing.

However one shades the line's meaning, there is no denying the strange thrill the game provoked for them. Jacobs suggests that Asta "loved to dress up in his clothes, because the disguise perpetuated the game and drew attention to the many ambiguous possibilities inherent in this complex emotional interaction." He concludes this thought with a rather provocative and insightful analogy: "This domestic life must have been something like a Genet play!"²⁵ What Jacobs suggests is the kind of role-playing, gender switching, transvestism, and fantasy rituals at the core of Genet's plays. Lucien Goldmann noted that in Genet's Deathwatch, "Love is at center, but it is homosexual love."²⁶ In Alfred and Asta's game, love too is at center, but it is incestuous love.

Their game might also remind us of Shakespeare's gender-switching comedies, where the lost brother and disguised sister are finally reunited after a heady period of male bonding. If one can imagine the "harmless" (yet lusty) image of two brothers wrestling with each other, then one can understand how Alfred and Asta's theatrical scenes became such an intense part of their relationship. One gets a hint of the game's erotic appeal in Michael Billington's review of the successful 1958 Lyric Theatre production of Little Eyolf:

[Ronald Pickup] astonishingly catches the man-child element in Ibsen's heroes as, in a memorable moment, he and Cheryl Campbell's Aster (a beautifully clear account of a woman struggling to suppress her physical passion) rock back and forth in a dream of remembered happiness.²⁷

Jacobs summarizes his article by suggesting that the "life they shared was fully satisfying to both of them--as long as the incest taboo held them in check."²⁸ But how are we to believe it did? And how "satisfying" was it for each of them? For Asta there is much ambiguity here.

Clues that might answer these questions arise later in act 3, when Asta and Borghejm are alone saying their goodbyes. One can see Asta emotionally struggling with herself. She, like Alfred, is also having difficulty making the transition to their new relationship. She tells her persistent suitor that she once shared "joy and happiness" with another person: "All that while when my brother--when Alfred and I were living together" (920). Asta's confusion intensifies when Borghejm innocently asks, "What if he hadn't been your brother?" Asta almost rises with a start, but remaining outwardly calm replies, "Then, obviously, we wouldn't have lived together. Because I was a child then. And he was hardly more" (921, emphasis mine). Ibsen's stage directions clearly establish that Alfred is older than his sister by eleven or twelve years. Put another way, when Asta was barely ten, Alfred was twenty-one! With such a serious age gap

between them, Alfred must be held the more responsible of the two, meaning that he should have known better when they were playing their private sexual games. By obscuring their age difference, Asta appears to be protecting Alfred. Again, the image of the innocent child-victim is brought into the forefront. One begins to wonder, uneasily, how far Alfred went with this child. It would not have been difficult for him to take advantage of Asta, as she obviously idolized him.

Another reason for Asta's concealment of the facts (consciously or unconsciously), may be to repress her own pain, guilt, and anger at the Allmers family. Both of her parents sound fairly Strindbergian in regard to their secret affairs, with poor Asta as victim of their deceit. They are a family, as James Kerans notes, that is "strikingly--even ominously--ingrown. They all look alike [and] their names always begin with vowels."²⁹ While Asta's family are all poor, they are as closed in as the wealthier Rosmer family. In a way, Asta is as much an intruder figure as Rebecca West. Indeed, even before her birth, Asta's "sex and destiny and personal qualities" were practically predetermined by what the family expected and would provide for. "That she disappoints them by being a girl (and illegitimate)"³⁰ would be an understatement. Presumably the father saw this baby as a strange, rupturing "intruder into the solidarity of the family."³¹ For being born, Asta received the cold, quiet fury of her father until he died. Later, in another ingrown family,

we will see this theme of patriarchal dread and rage taken to new heights in Sam Shepard's Buried Child.

Borghejm does not catch Asta in this lie. A well-meaning, though rather rustic, character, he too becomes a mouthpiece for some sentimental romanticism that Ibsen is debunking. In his speech to Asta, he says, "Yes, I'm sure that must have been a lovely life. A brother and sister, sharing their joys. (Shakes his head.) I can't understand how your brother could let you go, Asta" (921). While it is doubtful that Ibsen was well read on Byron's contemporaries, Borghejm imagines the kind of brother-sister rapture which the English Romantic poets wrote of (and that Dickens would later develop in his novels). William Wordsworth, in praising his devoted sister, Dorothy, wrote: "For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass / . . . With such a dear Companion at my side."³²

Alfred and Asta's relationship also underscores (as stated earlier) a prominent Ibsen theme: the domination of young women by older men. In Rosmersholm, Doctor West clearly took advantage of Rebecca's ignorance, if not her innocence. Ibsen further explored this kind of patriarchal molesting in The Master Builder. Halvard Solness is presented as a man who has a talent and taste for manipulating naive, vulnerable girls. If Solness's cold, calculating control over Kaja is disheartening, it is at least understandable. But one cannot easily forget the image, as Hilda candidly describes it, of a powerful older man's seduction of a twelve-year-old lass: "You held me in both your arms and

bent me back and kissed me--many times" (807). Then there is Maja, Rubek's young, vivacious wife in When We Dead Awaken. When it is apparent that her husband has grown tired of her, she poignantly asks him, "Were you only interested in coaxing me out to play, too?" (1037).

Possibly the most extended example of this type of seduction is in The Lady from the Sea. Arnholm specifically returns to the Wangel family to win the hand of Bolette, his former student. Though Bolette is not in the least attracted to this much older man, Arnholm offers the allure of travel, comfort, and culture. When she still resists, he astutely asks this sheltered, but restless young woman, "You mean you'd rather stay here at home and watch life slipping away from you?" (678). Arnholm finally breaks down Bolette's resistance when he plays upon her innermost fears; that, after her father's death, she may "stand alone and helpless in the world" (678). Arnholm and other Ibsen men, similar to him, are like trolls who coax, seduce, and take unspoiled girls from their homes and families.

There is bittersweet irony to Alfred and Asta's relationship. Alfred, who was clearly irresponsible for the way he exploited his sister's love, has been laboring for years on a "massive tome on Human Responsibility" (881). For a romantic like Alfred to have undertaken such an ambitious (and for him, impossible) project seems totally misguided. One might surmise that it was guilt that drove him to finish the book. If so, what is the source of the guilt? The remorse Alfred feels from

neglecting his baby son is apparent, but he began his book before meeting Rita. Hence, his guilt must have come from earlier events--when he lived with Asta. The irony is sharply penetrating when we consider that it has been Asta, and Asta alone, who has been pushing and goading Alfred to write it all those many years! Could gentle Asta be capable of such cruelty, though it be subliminal? For actresses acting the role of Asta, the most dangerous trap is to play her too sweetly. To portray Asta as an artless and innocent woman is to completely miss a subtext filled with dark wilderness, which lies in the soul of almost every Ibsen character.

Psychologically, Alfred's guilt gives him additional reason to throw himself, body and soul, into the role of Eyolf's tutor-mentor. But because he is motivated by guilt and not love, it is a sure sign that this mission was doomed to fail, even if Eyolf had not drowned. Ibsen has created other misguided heroes that carried lofty responsibilities on their shoulders--with disastrous results. In The Wild Duck, Gregers's actions unwittingly cause an innocent girl's death for the sake of his responsibility to truth. In Rosmersholm, the naively idealistic Rosmer takes on the impossible responsibility of ennobling the minds of his community. Unprepared for the dirty, rough and tumble world of politics--whether it be liberal or conservative --Rosmer's will is crushed with hardly a fight.

There is a question that hangs over the play's title, which should now be addressed: Why did Ibsen name the play after a

character who dies in the first act? Why didn't he choose Alfred or one of the other major characters for the play's title? The answer is plain. This is not a play about a character. This is a play about a theme, a mood, a condition. "Eyolf" is a state of mind, much like "Rosmersholm" was a state of mind. As Rebecca explains it, "The Rosmer way of life . . . It's infected my will" (575). Likewise, the "Eyolf" way of life has infected the will of Alfred, Asta, and, indirectly, even Rita.

Rita may be the most interesting character in the play-- certainly she is the most vibrant and most human. She is a woman of immense passions who has the misfortune of being in love with a man-child. Her intense desires and sexual needs frighten Alfred. For an actress to portray Rita's sexuality honestly, without turning her into a nymphomaniacal caricature, would be challenging enough today, let alone at the turn of the century. One woman who did understand Rita's hunger for love was the Russian actress, Nazimova. A devoted Ibsen interpreter of the early twentieth century, she brought to American audiences a simmering passion to Ibsen's female roles. In Nazimova's famous 1910 production of Little Eyolf, her portrayal of Rita was especially memorable. In a scene where she is lying on a couch, The New York Times (April 19, 1910) described her as follows: "With her figure quivering, her nostrils dilating, her fingers twitching, and nervous twinges playing about her mouth, [she] was a picture of desire not soon to be forgotten."³³

Rita's anger and frustration, while at times frightening, are understandable. Asta replaced Rita in the role of spouse and mother-figure. With only a sexual role left for her, Rita was forced to act the part of a jealous mistress. At her worse, Rita does come across as a neurotic, devouring bitch. Conversely, Asta eagerly plays the role of the maternal and supportive companion to Alfred, since the part of sexual mate is socially closed to her. The dynamics of this triangle are richly complex; they portray characters struggling not only against the restrictions of their culture, but against the barriers within their own psychic landscape.

But Rita is no predictable stereotype. She can be brutally honest, as when she tells Alfred, "I'm a warm-blooded human being! I don't go around here half asleep--with fish blood in my veins" (913). Continuing, she says, "And then to be locked up for a lifetime--in miseries and regrets! Locked up with someone who's no longer mine, mine, mine!" As if in a moment of metatheatre, Rita may be referring to the lonely locked-in lives of other Ibsen women, wives who have been emotionally and sexually shunned by their dynamic husbands. For example, Beata Rosmer may have been led by Rebecca to jump into the millrace, but Rosmer's continual rejections of Beata's sexual advances must have contributed to her fatal leap. Aline Solness, another high-strung woman, has been emotionally locked away by her ambitious husband. Her new house that Solness has completed will only be a better built prison to keep Aline safely inside. Helene Alving

is a different case. Her imprisonment with a philandering husband was due partly to her inability to share in his "joy of life." Her marriage became a lonely, joyless hell. Gunhild Borkman is the wife of another overly ambitious husband. When John Borkman returned from prison, her cold, unforgiving heart forced them both into a life of solitary confinement. Rita Allmers is one of the few Ibsen women who refuses to be cheated of a satisfying life.

Rita's uninhibited spirit could make her the prototypal model for another love-starved heroine of the stage--the tormented Maggie of Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. There is a strong affinity between them, especially in the confrontations they have with their husbands. Maggie's following dark warning to Brick is comparable to Rita's taunts to Alfred.

You know, if I thought you would never, never, never, make love to me again--I would go downstairs to the kitchen and pick out the longest and sharpest knife I could find and stick it straight into my heart, I swear that I would! But one thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win!³⁴

In both women, there is a similar cry of desperation, coupled with a steely strength of will. Similarities touch upon their husbands as well. Each man is trying, unsuccessfully, to hide a secret desire from his wife. Whereas Brick's alcoholism becomes

a way to mask a past homoerotic attraction, Alfred's missions-- first to write his tome and then to devote himself to Eyolf-- shield his incestuous desire for Asta. And like Maggie, Rita has an intuitive grasp of the truth: "See! The moment you mention Eyolf's name, you get weak and your voice trembles" (892).

The forbidden secrets of Alfred and Brick are like crimes committed in psychological mystery stories, with their wives playing detectives who are attempting to solve these psychic puzzles. While it may be apparent that each woman is half aware of the truth, it is also clear that each is half afraid to speak its name. In the end, the revelations of these mysteries remain mysterious. Again, we are back in Ibsen's wilderness of the human soul where there can never be clear answers. Arguably, no American playwright journeyed as far and as often into this Ibsenic wilderness as Williams. It is no coincidence that, like Ibsen, Williams was a supreme poet of the stage.

There is a climatic moment (sexual and otherwise) toward the end of act 2, when Rita hotly cross-examines Alfred about Asta: "So it was Asta, really, who brought us together" (914). Alfred vehemently denies it, but Rita bores in: "But it was Asta, nevertheless! . . . Or, no--it was little Eyolf. Little Eyolf, right?" Alfred, by now almost speechless, weakly repeats, "Eyolf?" But Rita has saved the most devastating piece of evidence for last: "Yes, didn't you use to call her Eyolf? It seems to me you confessed that once--in a private moment. (Coming closer.) Do you remember, Alfred--that wildly beautiful hour?"

(Fjelde, 914). Meyer's more time-specific translation of Rita's last line--"Do you remember that terrifyingly beautiful moment, Alfred?"³⁵--comes closer to the spirit of Ibsen's original--
"Minnes du den--den fortaerende deilige stund, Alfred?" A more literal alternative would be the following: "Do you remember it --that consumingly wonderful time?" What Rita seems to be reminding Alfred is that during the peak of their lovemaking, he was thinking of his Asta. If Ibsen is saying, as Billington suggests, that "we give ourselves away in moments of orgasmic intimacy,"³⁶ then Rita's disclosure suggests that she knew (for eight long years!) of her husband's incestuous desire for his sister.

But Alfred refuses to face the shameful truth. He is a man, as John Northam observes, "so obsessed by his strange attachment to his half-sister that he is incapable of entering into the mature responsibilities of marriage."³⁷ All he can do is run away like a guilty little boy and deny: "I remember nothing! I won't remember!" (914). His words are both childlike and childish; yet his actions echo those of a guilt-ridden Raskolnikov (from Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment) and Rita becomes his doggedly pursuing detective Porfiry. Part of the play's intrigue for the audience is whether Rita will trap her suspect. Even here, in one of his last works, Ibsen retains elements of the well-made play to heighten psychological suspense.

Our analysis of Alfred may sound harsh, compared to other critical assessments; however, his "romanticism" or "sensitivity" can be no excuse for his irresponsibility and egocentricity to others. Even a perceptive Ibsen scholar such as Northam, for example, can make sentimental slips when judging Alfred's actions. In Ibsen: A Critical Study, Northam tells us how "Alfred has tried to conceal, from himself as much from others, of a crippling immaturity created by that abnormal, precocious intimacy between the two young orphans."³⁸ By describing this sibling relationship as the "precocious intimacy" of "two young orphans," Northam unwittingly echoes Asta's lie to Borghejm in act 3: "I was a child then. And he was hardly more" (921).

Northam then makes an assessment of Alfred's character--in the context of incest--that, unfortunately, suffers from being overly sympathetic. In other words, Northam lets him off the hook of responsibility. Responding to what he views as Alfred's weak, sensitive nature, compared to Ibsen's more "tough-minded" characters, Northam explains that "Alfred is different from Mrs. Alving and Rebekka West. They can bring themselves to talk of incest." But where does Rebecca talk of incest?! Northam continues: "Alfred does not have that kind of toughness. When they confront, he tries to evade. . . . Mrs. Alving talks of incest as a possibility for other people, not for herself." Surely her son is not just "other people." He goes on: "Rebekka West faces it as an act already performed in ignorance." Freud would disagree. Finally, Northam maintains that Alfred must cope

with his attraction to Asta as a "potentially real relationship involving himself. It is the inspiration of his life, yet by its very nature it cannot be acknowledged, still less responded to in any way that would lead to fulfillment."³⁹ Again, Northam is being too generous. It is Alfred, after all, who used Asta in the past and continues to use Asta, Rita, and little Eyolf in the present. When Alfred and Rita implore Asta to remain with them, to take Eyolf's place, Asta is tempted. Then Alfred lets slip out exactly how he envisions this relationship: "Stay--and share life with us, Asta. With Rita. With me. Me--your brother" (925). Only then does Asta realize that she must leave. Without Eyolf around, and Rita unable to assert her rights as wife, one can imagine the kind of strange roles Alfred would have Asta play: if not from a Genet play, then perhaps something more absurd and grotesque--like a role from Ionesco.

Ironically, it will be other child-victims that save Alfred and Rita in the end. This is a play that is full of the sounds of children, and their voices are heard in the past, the present, and the future. Other Ibsen plays also use this aural image. One envisions the crowd of schoolgirls cheering Solness on in The Master Builder; in When We Dead Awaken, act 2 opens with the curious image of singing and dancing children, "their happy laughter" (1056) heard as background music during the scene. Little Eyolf is another late play (there seem to be more children in Ibsen's later plays) where a large group of youngsters draw the characters' (and the audience's) attention.

At the end of Little Eyolf, Alfred learns to look upon the "boys down at the shore" in a sympathetic light. We sense real compassion when he observes that the "men are back home--drunk naturally. Battering their children. Can you hear the boys crying! And the women howling for someone to help them" (932). For the first time, we see Alfred genuinely feel for these children. Indeed, it could be the first time he feels for anyone or anything other than himself. With Rita taking the lead, they will become foster parents to many abused and unwanted boys. Instead of Asta replacing Eyolf, it will be "all those mistreated children" (934) who will be brought inside to replace him.

A void has been left by the death of Eyolf--physically by their son's death and emotionally by Asta's exit. The state of "Eyolf" is no more. To fill this void real children who need real love and understanding will be embraced in one of Ibsen's most life-confirming endings. The voracious hunger that has permeated this play and plagued its characters is finally fed. It is fed with the nourishment of unselfish love and, for now, appeased with the promise of future fulfillment.

1. Claude Levi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 17.
2. All quotes from Ibsen's plays will be from Rolf Fjelde's translation in The Complete Major Prose Plays (New York: New American Library, 1978), unless otherwise indicated.
3. Jane Ellert Tammany, Henrik Ibsen's Theatre Aesthetic and Dramatic Art: a Reflection of Kierkegaardian Consciousness -- its significance for Modern Dramatic Interpretation and the American Theatre (New York: Philosophical Library, 1980), xxvi.
4. Tammany, 219.
5. Rolf Fjelde, introduction to Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays, Vol. 1 (New York: New American Library, 1965), xvii.
6. Michael Meyer, introduction to Little Eyolf in Plays: Three, by Henrik Ibsen, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1988), 219.
7. Errol Durbach, "The Geschwister-Komplex: Romantic Attitudes to Brother-Sister Incest in Ibsen, Byron, and Emily Bronte," Mosaic 12, No. 4 (Summer 1979), 62.
8. Ibid.
9. Errol Durbach, Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 4.
10. Durbach, 63.
11. Henrik Ibsen, Little Eyolf in The Complete Major Prose Plays, trans. Rolf Fjelde (New York: New American Library, 1978), 870. All subsequent quotes from this play and other Ibsen plays in this collection will be indicated by the page number.
12. Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or in A Kierkegaard Anthology, trans. David and Lillian Swenson, and Walter Lowrie, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 88.
13. Henrik Ibsen, Ibsen: Letters and Speeches, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 118.
14. Cain, act 1, sc. 1, lines 360-62.
15. Cain, act 1, sc. 1, lines 376-79.

16. Errol Durbach, Ibsen the Romantic, 104-5.
17. My thanks to Harry Carlson for supplying the literal translations from Ibsen's original text.
18. Ibsen, Little Eyolf, trans. Meyer, 246-47.
19. James Hurt, Catiline's Dream: An Essay on Ibsen's Plays (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 171.
20. Durbach, Ibsen the Romantic, 2.
21. Ibid.
22. Durbach, Ibsen the Romantic, 6.
23. See Barry Jacobs, "Ibsen's Little Eyolf: Family Tragedy and Human Responsibility," Modern Drama 27, No. 4 (December 1984), 604-15.
24. Ibsen, Little Eyolf, trans. Meyer, 256.
25. Jacobs, 609.
26. Lucien Goldmann, "The Theatre of Genet: A Sociological Study," in Genet/Ionesco, edited by Kelly Morris (New York: Bantam, n.d.), 97.
27. Michael Billington, review of Little Eyolf, Guardian, February 14, 1985 in London Theatre Record 5, Issue 4, 1985, p. 148.
28. Ibid.
29. James E. Kerans, "Kindermord and Will in Little Eyolf," in Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism, ed. Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 193.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. William Wordsworth, "Composed in the Valley Near Dover, On the day of Landing," in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 160.
33. Robert A. Schanke, Ibsen in America: A Century of Change (Metuchen, NJ, London: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 58.
34. Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: New American Library, 1955), 25.
35. Ibsen, Little Eyolf, trans. Meyer, 268.

36. Billington, 148.

37. John Northam, Ibsen: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 202.

38. Ibid.

39. Northam, 216.

CHAPTER THREE

ROSMERSHOLM: INCEST AND ANARCHY

The father gives his daughter his law and protects himself from her desire for his body, protects himself from his body. For it is only the law--and not the body--which constitutes him as patriarch. Paternity is corporeally uncertain, without evidence. But patriarchy compensates for that with the law which marks each child with the father's name as his exclusive property.

--JANE GALLUP
The Daughter's Seduction

Incest, by its nature, is a revolt against law and order. In fact, "revolt" may be the ideal word to describe incest, a verb that can either mean to rise up or to disgust. Something that has the capacity to both rebel and repel would certainly be of interest to a revolutionary artist like Ibsen. The focus of this discussion will be on Ibsen's brilliant application of this double nature of incest in drama, best encapsulated in possibly his darkest play, Rosmersholm, and in his most enigmatic character, Rebecca West.

Rosmersholm also offers us the opportunity to explore the obstacles of staging the traumatic experience of incest when the word can never be spoken and the act never implied. How do the playwright, the director, and the actors get around and past the taboo barriers of that subject and bring it to life in a performance? It is a problem that we will examine with particular attention in this chapter.

One of the most dramatic developments in Ibsen's cycle of twelve major prose plays is the evolving theme of revolution. Perhaps the true drama in this remarkable body of work--beneath the complex characters and the heavy plot lines--is in the characters' struggle for spiritual freedom, and then the ascending and descending course of their struggle. Each successive play charts the progression of these individual rebellions. The fact that Ibsen's rebels weaken or fail merely reveals how difficult it is to resist the watchful keepers of the old order. As Mayor Stockmann warns his impulsive brother, "In a well-ordered society . . . [t]he individual has to learn to subordinate himself to the whole--or, I should say, to those authorities charged with the common good."¹

In Rosmersholm, the incest theme becomes a powerful metaphor for the subversion of this "well-ordered society." Let loose into the open, this taboo desire threatens the "common good" of the Establishment. Ibsen was not advocating that parents sleep with their children or that siblings make love to each other, but he recognized how this explosive issue could be employed for his own dramatic purposes. In the hands of Ibsen, that old anarchist, incestuous desire becomes a ticking time bomb, hidden in one of his cozy domestic settings. The sexual dynamite just under the surface creates remarkable tension, akin to watching an Alfred Hitchcock movie: we know that a bomb is there; we just don't know when it will go off.

Equally significant in Rosmersholm is that incest acts as a powerful psychological emblem of (or signifier for) desired chaos. Rebecca West opens a window to the underworld--a world of total freedom, of unrestricted desire, of forbidden passion consummated--and the effect is like an electric charge bursting in the darkness. During these moments of intense light, the stage becomes Artaud's theatre as Double--in, of all places, the bourgeois living room of an Ibsen play. We will discuss how these moments reveal, as Artaud vividly puts it, "another archetypal and dangerous reality, a reality of which the Principles, like dolphins, once they have shown their heads, hurry to dive back into the obscurity of the deep."²

The shadow of incest adds to the already foreboding feeling in and around the Rosmer home. In reviewing a 1981 production of the play for the Sunday Times, James Fenton described Ibsen's world "as dangerous as that of the Shakespeare court or that terrifying atmosphere of the classical Spanish play. . . . What we see is a life-and-death struggle conducted on the psychological plane."³ Rosmer's living room is as menacing and disturbing a world as any that Ibsen has created, and we are made uncomfortably insecure from the first beat of the play. In an absorbing 1988 production at the La Mama Theatre (which we will talk more of later), the director, Sarah Pia Anderson, used an extremely raked stage; while it forced the actors' movements to look unnatural and otherworldly, it was psychologically right.

As written, and if well-performed, there is rarely a moment in Rosmersholm for the characters (and audience) to relax. The play opens with five lines of small talk between the housekeeper and Rebecca before the first small bomb is landed.

MRS. HELSETH: . . . But isn't that the pastor coming now?

REBECCA: (quickly). Where? (Rises.) Yes, that's him.

(Behind the curtain.) Stand back. Don't let him see us.

(498)

These people act as spies, agents, and double agents; there are secret messages, eavesdroppers behind closed doors, threats of incriminating evidence, clandestine meetings. As the sides shift back and forth, the audience must soon wonder who is the enemy and who is the friend.

In this multi-front, psycho-social war, the most subversive and dangerous outpost is sexuality. Clearly, the dominant character there is Rebecca West. She is unique among all of Ibsen's characters because only she has crossed that fatal line --from incestuous desire to the incest act itself. This makes Rebecca an even more complex and problematic character, which Ibsen was well aware of. In a letter dated Feb. 13, 1887, Ibsen gave the following advice to the actress, Sofie Reimers, who was to play the role at the Christiana Theater:

Read closely the whole play over and over again and carefully observe what the other persons say about Rebecca. . . . Furthermore, you should bring to your assistance your studies and observations of real life. . . . Give each mood credible, true-to-life expression. But stick to the life that is going on around you, and give us a true, living character. . . . There are difficulties in rendering and representing the character because it is so concentrated.⁴

This sounds like a paradox. How can a character be played "true-to-life," while at the same time she appears as a concentrated body of possibly enigmatic contradictions? Is this character playable? British actress Janet Suzman said, "You cannot act concepts or abstractions or theories. Freud may have been right about Rebecca West's Oedipus complex, but you can't act an Oedipus complex."⁵ True, but Ibsen gives his actors a strong subtext and intense emotional drives to play off one another; though, where those drives originate from he leaves for others to figure out. Little is ever clear cut in Rosmersholm because of Ibsen's unique blend of poetic mystery, romanticism, and realism.

One way to try to understand the layers and contradictions in the character of Rebecca is to compare Rosmersholm with one of those 1950s science fiction movies like Invasion of the Body-Snatchers, It Came from Another Planet, or The Day the Earth Stood Still. Rebecca could be the alien from another planet--

she looks like everyone else, but she behaves strangely. This alluring alien would have supernatural powers, along with bewitching beauty and bizarre ideas. In this movie, she would first take over the mind of the hero-scientist's wife. After leading his wife to suicide, our alien would take control of the scientist's heart. And though she would succeed in luring him to love her, she would never tell him of her true galactic origins. In the end, they would perish together just as the earthly authorities close in on her trail.

Rebecca may be Ibsen's finest example of the classic outsider. Despite her single-minded (even frightful) efforts to adapt and be accepted into this new world, she cannot change who she is or where she came from. To continue her charade, Rebecca must pay a price. By the end of the play, she tells Rosmer, "Now I'm worn down by an alien law" (571). The strict social conventions have crushed "the fearless free will I was born with" (573).

There are also supernatural and mythic layers--one might say clusters of myths--stuck to this strange being, which push her further into the outsider caste. The most familiar myth is the Oedipus legend. It is particularly germane to note the number of striking parallels she has with this archetypal figure.

As in the Sophocles version, the past eventually catches up with Rebecca. Like Oedipus, she has committed incest unwittingly. Like Oedipus, she is blind to any morality that restricts her freedom. And like Oedipus (but more consciously),

she has killed to get close to the one she loves. We also see parallels in the general plots of both plays. Oedipus came and conquered Thebes to rule it. Can anyone question that it is Rebecca who rules Rosmersholm? A plague is sent down upon Thebes from the gods. While there is no God in Rosmersholm, there is a plague that hangs over this kingdom: inside, the forces of guilt and suppressed desires have already killed one victim and are at work on the two others; outside, social and political unrest are tearing apart the community. In Thebes, the case of Laius's unsolved murder returns to trap Oedipus. (In Seneca's version, Laius literally rises from the grave to accuse Oedipus:

"Murderer! / Whose blood-stained hand now grasps the sceptre, thee / I shall pursue, thy father unavenged."⁶) In Rosmersholm, Rosmer's dead wife, Beata, figuratively returns to haunt the man she loved and the woman who has replaced her. Let us also not forget that at approximately the same point in each play, Oedipus and Rebecca both discover (to their horror) their acts of incest.

Friedrich Nietzsche, in The Birth of Tragedy, describes the magical power of incest as a dark supernatural force that could even defy natural law.

There is a tremendously old popular belief . . . that a wise magus can be born only from incest. With . . . Oedipus in mind, we must immediately interpret this to mean that where prophetic and magical powers have broken the spell of . . . the rigid law of individuation, and the real magic of

nature, some enormously unnatural event--such as incest--must have occurred earlier, as a cause.⁷

The grim "rigid law of individuation," as it existed in the House of Rosmer for generations, is precisely what Rebecca's powers do break. In addition to the classic Oedipus myth, Rebecca embodies the strange myths of folklore. Ibsen was attracted to Nordic folklore and incorporated them into his realistic works. Early in his career, he wrote an essay about the old ballads titled, "On the Folk Ballad and its Significance for the Literary Arts" (1857). In it Ibsen said that the artist "must take the raw materials from the people itself, then he can forge from it what he desires."⁸ The young playwright could have been voicing his own aspirations to speak to a wide general audience, not just to an elite of academics, intellectuals, and liberals (whom he distrusted). Ibsen goes on to say that "since the people are the source of the ballads there is a greater intensity in the art of appropriation."⁹ From this last statement one might read a calculated (and pre-Jungian) design by the twenty-nine-year-old artist to tap into the Nordic consciousness of his country.

It is possible that Ibsen was thinking of places like Rebecca West's far-off and isolated Finmark when he said that the "worshippers of the Nordic Gods . . . construed a world in which the laws of common sense were totally abolished. In this world all--and thus nothing--was supernatural."¹⁰ Orley Holtan points

out that Finmark, "in the extreme north of Norway, was commonly held to be the home of demons, trolls, and witches."¹¹ This is the world where Rebecca came from. In trying to explain her "wild, uncontrollable desire" for Rosmer, Rebecca tells him it was "like one of those storms we have sometimes up north in the winters. It takes you--and sweeps you along with it--for as long as it lasts. You don't think of resisting" (573).

Per Jacobson and Barbara Leavy, in their valuable book, Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays, suggest that, in Rosmersholm, Ibsen appropriated aspects of the Rosmer ballads from Nordic folk tales. In this particular tale, Rosmer has stolen Svanelille to woo her. Svanelille, it seems, has not only had sexual relations with her younger brother, but has had children by him as well. They both eventually escape from Rosmer.¹² Jacobson and Leavy further suggest that the incest theme in this story, if interpreted along pagan-Christian lines, presents a good example of exogamy--meaning, marrying outside one's tribe or community. By marrying outside, it exposes the entire tribe or religious community to the dangers of external forces and influences. Thus, incest becomes a symbolic representation of marrying within the group, or endogamy.¹³ They conclude by stating that in Rosmersholm (specifically in the character of Rebecca), Ibsen combined "the folkloristic taboo motif with what today would be understood as the ultimate psychological taboo: incest."¹⁴ (In the plays of Sam Shepard, we will see this idea of tribal endogamy stressed even further.)

Since we began by using the metaphor of warfare to characterize the intensity of the play's conflicts, one may ask where and when this battle began? For Ibsen, it inevitably begins in childhood. Has there ever been a dramatist before Freud (and, arguably, until O'Neill) who revealed so much of the pain and damage in the parent-child relationship? It haunts his characters. Sometimes their pain slips out in bits and pieces, or it comes out in harsh, full confessions. In The Wild Duck, Gregers says in anguish to his father, "When I look back on all you've done, it's as if I looked out over a battlefield with broken human beings on every side" (409). Rosmer, in recalling that his father used a horsewhip to drive out his beloved tutor, bitterly concludes: "Even in his own home, Father had to play the major" (511).

In Little Eyolf, we observed how the acute childhood memories of Alfred and Asta raised the value of subtext to that of text. The same is true in Rosmersholm. All the political infighting and (all-male) adversarial shouting in the play become overwhelmed by the intensity of Rebecca's memories--and the audience's fantasies--of the lover/daughter relationship she had with Doctor West.

Ingmar Bergman made this revelatory discovery about Ibsen while directing Hedda Gabler:

While I was working on it, the face of its weary supreme architect was unmasked and I realized Ibsen lived

desperately entangled in his furnishings, his explanations, his artistic but pedantically constructed scenes, his curtain lines, his arias and duets. All this bulky external lumber hid an obsession for self-exposure far more profound than Strindberg's.¹⁵

"Bulky external lumber" is also what Ibsen's characters build around them to keep their dark secrets and desires hidden from society and themselves. It may be the lumber of bourgeois respectability: In A Doll House, it is a highly regarded reputation; in Ghosts, it is the perception of a good marriage--despite how dysfunctional it may be; in Hedda Gabler, it is money and a fine home. It can also be the lumber of ideas, philosophies, and dreams: In Brand, it is Brand's lofty vision that obstructs him from acting on his feelings; in The Wild Duck, the dreams of child-men lure a real child to suicide. But the question that Ibsen ultimately seems to ask is this: Can any of this socio-political lumber protect children from the cruelties and dark desires of adults? And judging from almost every one of his plays, the answer is clearly no.

Thus, whether they be dreamers or workaholics, left-wing radicals or right-wing reactionaries, Ibsen's protagonists are all in search of happiness and fulfillment; and, to varying degrees, they all fail because they lack the courage, the maturity, the knowledge, or the wisdom to look for the truth about themselves and their motives. In Ibsen's world, there is

no possibility for change or individual freedom until people recognize who they are.

Eugene O'Neill took that idea as the basis for The Iceman Cometh, where self-recognition is the most terrifying reality of all. As Hickey reminds us, "I know how damned yellow a man can be when it comes to making himself face the truth."¹⁶ William Blake charted a similar internal hell in his visionary poems. Blake could be commenting on Rosmersholm in the following lines:

In places yet unvisited by the voyager. And in worlds
Over another kind of seas, and in atmospheres unknown:
Ah! are there wars beside the wars of sword and fire!¹⁷

Blake also had words for the representatives of the old order like Kroll, Mayor Stockmann, and Pastor Manders when he wrote, "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be / restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the un-/willing."¹⁸

"Restrainer" characters like Kroll served an important function in the early to middle part of Ibsen's play cycle. In Pillars of Society, Rorlund, the upright and uptight school master and a kind of Kroll-character as young man, is the perfect spokesman for the status quo. Speaking to a gathering of civic-minded ladies, he says, "We have to stand firm against all this experimentation that a restless age would like to foist on us" (17). In A Doll House, it is Helmer who inhibits Nora from

growing up, encouraging her to remain his "sweet little lark" (128). Paster Manders, in Ghosts, bent Helene's "will to duty and obedience," as he put it, to return her to a disastrous marriage. In Ibsen's later plays, the restrainer element becomes increasingly more internal and such characters are dropped.

The interference of Kroll and, coming from the other end of the political spectrum, Mortensgaard illustrates how difficult it is for well-meaning, but ingenuous, men like Rosmer to fully change themselves, let alone transform society into some higher, nobler order.

A major, but overlooked, figure in this moral and political class war is the house. As James Hurt, in Catiline's Dream: An Essay on Ibsen's Plays, points out, Rosmersholm is one of Ibsen's plays where the house itself is the central symbol. Hurt states that the Rosmersholm home, like the "Helmer doll's house and Mrs. Alving's Rosenvold, is a powerful symbol of the spiritual 'ghosts' of heredity, childhood experiences, and decaying social conventions."¹⁵ Eugene O'Neill, no doubt influenced by Ibsen (as we will discover in Desire Under the Elms), is another playwright who recognized and exploited not only the symbolic power of the house, but its spooky symbiotic relationship with the characters who inhabit it.

Regarding this symbiotic relationship, it is ironic that at the onset of Rosmersholm, as in An Enemy of the People, the protagonist begins by talking about his "safe and cozy" home. As if for confirmation, Rosmer asks Kroll, "We have it nice and

comfortable here, don't you think?" (517). Dr. Stockman remarks, in a toast to his friends, "Ah, it's a lot better sitting here, snug and warm" (293). The irony in the lines of these plays (as well as in his diptych Ghosts and A Doll House) becomes clear as these "comfortable" houses grow ever more oppressive, suffocating, and menacing. These deceptively safe dwellings are a setup, to lull Ibsen's protagonists into a false sense of security. Their ties of dependence to these solid bourgeois homes become an addiction. Hjalmar, in The Wild Duck, sounds like a junkie, as he contemplates quitting his ruined home life: "I wasn't made to be unhappy, Gregers. I've got to have it snug and secure and peaceful around me" (484). One is reminded of the droll voice of Moran, in Samuel Beckett's comic novel, Molloy, as he shares his anxiety in having to go "cold turkey."

"Does this mean I shall one day be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, which it was my life's work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep? I am too old to lose all this, and begin again, I am too old! Quiet, Moran, quiet. No emotion, please."²⁰

Rosmer naively assumes that because his personal evolution developed in his own house, he is now equipped to spread this private revolution to the public: "To elevate all our countrymen

into noblemen," and to create a "true democracy in this land" (518). His declaration, however, rings as laughably absurd as if said from a Beckettian hero. Rosmer's attempts to change the old order are at best feeble. Furthermore, he is incapable of keeping their insidious influence outside; indeed, there is something comical in the spontaneous ease with which such polarizing characters as Kroll, Brendel, and Mortensgaard enter Rosmer's home. And of course, there is the uninvited presence of Beata's ghost; although unseen, she seems to be persistently hovering in the background.

In effect, all of these characters who enter Rosmer's house are homeless. At one point Kroll tells Rosmer, "You've made yourself a home here. And I've lost mine" (517). This echoes an exchange in Ibsen's preceding play, The Wild Duck, when Gregers informs Hjalmar that he has left his father's home for good. Kroll comes to Rosmer feeling "homeless" and, like Gregers, he will be the agent who destroys his friend's "happy" home. Brendel enters as a truly displaced figure, penniless and clothed in rags. Mortensgaard's state of homelessness exists in the community of respectability. Because of his affair with a married woman, Mortensgaard was branded (by Rosmer) and feels marked "for life" (537).

Rebecca, too, shares in the homelessness of all these characters. She lost her home in Finmark when she went away with Dr. West. Due to her incestuous past, she will forever feel like a social outcast in the community. And because of Rebecca's link

to the supernatural, she is a rival-sister to Beata's homeless ghost. By the play's last act, Rebecca's powers have become so weakened that she is like a mermaid out of water; it will, in fact, be the swirling waters of the millrace that becomes her final home.

Having discussed Rebecca's dark past, we should be reminded that her uncertain status with the community initially stemmed from her radical opinions. As represented by Kroll, the Establishment mistrusts Rebecca more for her freethinking ways than for her questionable background. In act 3, after confronting Rebecca with his knowledge of her illegitimacy, Kroll immediately returns to a subject he considers more menacing--her ideas:

You've read your way through a whole slew of new . . . theories that seem to overturn certain axioms that we've always taken to be hard and fast. But it's all remained on an intellectual plan with you, Miss West. It's never entered your blood. (561)

By using the character of Rebecca to fuse the stigma of incest with the stamp of amoral freethinking, Kroll suggests a correlation between the two. In this linkage, the sin of freethinking becomes magnified to a degree where its so-called threat is effectively (and satirically) undercut. As Arens suggests, "When human beings in any place or form, which

may include the printed word in our time, reflected upon the incest taboo, they are confronting a theme commonly believed to represent a baseline in the definition of human morality."²¹

One senses that Ibsen is testing the tension between freedom and morality to a degree untried in his earlier plays. In Pillars of Society, Dina is a budding free spirit who feels trapped by the town's condescending kindness toward her. At one point she complains, "I'd rather they wouldn't be so respectable and moral. . . . I want them to be natural" (53). Nine years later, as if taking Dina (and himself) up on that challenge, Ibsen creates Rebecca West: a woman whose fiercely natural instincts become a threat to the community.

While the battleground in Rosmersholm is familiar Ibsen terrain--freethinking characters caught in society's strict and rigid moral code--there is a marked difference. This time the playwright invented a worthy opponent to this system. Ibsen literally goes outside of society to find a radical-minded being, whose entire life has been shaped by amoral values; a being who is driven by mysterious primal emotions; and a being who has violated the most definitive moral law of all. At the risk of sounding perverse, one could say that incest acted as Rebecca's inoculation from the disease of society's suffocating righteousness.

But the strength of her immunity does not last in this alien land. Eventually she is infected by Rosmersholm's morality. Rebecca, like Oedipus, can no longer live with the awful memory

of her transgression. Conforming to Rosmersholm's honorable principles has weakened her resolve to fight on. She broods about the "stain of my sin," seeing herself as "no better than a sea-troll" (583).

As Claude Levi-Strauss suggests, the incest taboo is the ultimate rule in our Western culture: "The fact of it being a rule, independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence of the incest prohibition."²² Particularly pertinent to Rosmersholm is the following quote from Levi-Strauss: "Like exogamy, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity, for I will give up my daughter or my sister only on condition that my neighbor does the same. The violent reaction of the community towards incest is the reaction of a community outraged."²³ Levi-Strauss's comments illuminate three related points about Kroll: first, that he did "give up" his sister to Rosmer; second, that he was (and probably still is) sexually attracted to Rebecca; and third, that he then becomes convinced that she and Rosmer are engaged in an illicit relationship. Is it any wonder Kroll is "outraged" as both a brother and symbol of the solid community?

Despite Ibsen's cautionary note about a "character . . . so concentrated," Rebecca hardly displays confused purposes. In fact, Rebecca West is a superb creation of constructed thematic fusion. Her connection to the "world of the supernatural"²⁴ beautifully links the psychological and mythical aspects of the play with the folklore motif. A striking illustration is

Rebecca's mysterious refusal to explain to Rosmer why she cannot marry him: "For your sake and mine--don't ask why" (546). Her reproach is a pattern straight out of the world of fairy tales.²⁵ This threat to her suitor is born from the mystical forces of both the psychic and mythic; it is Rebecca's way of signaling to Rosmer that she can no longer be responsible for the catastrophic consequences that will follow. This deepens the impression of a character not bad or evil, but one who is completely amoral: a woman touched by culture, but never ruled by its restrictions. Her aura of mystery and mysticism has equal footing with psychic forces. One could say that Rebecca, like Peer Gynt, has troll-like qualities: she is free spirited, paganistic, and a sensualist. But by the time we see Rebecca, she clearly lacks (or has lost) Peer's sense of mischievousness and fun, the result, no doubt, of living in a house that traditionally suppresses all spontaneous joy. And since the suicide of Beata, Rosmersholm has plainly become a house of death. It explains why Durbach called this work "perhaps the bleakest of Ibsen's plays."²⁶

Rebecca's downfall begins (or rather, accelerates) when the rules of culture catch up to her unfathomable past like a pack of hounds cornering a tired fox. This chase reaches its climax in the great confrontation scene between her and Kroll in act 3. The action of this tense duologue centers around questions of morality, guilt, and crime. As Kroll moves closer to the truth, the stage becomes as chilling a place as when Teiresias closes in

on Oedipus with those prophetic words, "This day will show your birth and will destroy you."²⁷

Kroll begins his interrogation by focusing on Rebecca's "moral background" (559); he suspects (at first) that her unfitness is due to her illegitimacy, a social indiscretion, not of incest, a social crime. But it will be Kroll, like Oedipus's unwitting messenger, who will supply the dreadful circumstances of Rebecca's birth. Rebecca's initial reaction is pure hysteria: "(walks about, clenching and wringing her hands). It's impossible. You must want me to believe this. It's simply not true, that's all. It can't be! No, never--!" (561). Kroll, shocked by Rebecca's extreme agitation, suspects there is more to it: "But my dear Miss West--why in heaven's name are you so upset? Really, you frighten me! What do you expect me to think--?" There is nothing calculated by Rebecca's moment of naked terror. Yet note how quickly she recovers: "(composing herself). It's simple enough, Dr. Kroll. I have no desire that people think of me as illegitimate." While Kroll "accepts that explanation--for the time being," (561) he clearly remains suspicious, and he will probably remain a threat to her freedom. In Hedda Gabler, Judge Brack, another figure of patriarchal authority, gains damaging knowledge over a similarly headstrong woman. Hedda's words could also be Rebecca's words: "I'm in your power. Tied to your will and desire. Not free. Not free, then!" (776).

The revelation of Rebecca's incest requires a stage to rightly sear it into the minds of an audience. On the written page it lacks the needed emotional force to jolt the reader. Even a good production must be keenly in tune to all the ramifications in that moment to make it work. How could Ibsen, the master builder of the theatrical climax, fall short on this one? The problem stems from the play's intentional confusion. Many readers and spectators are still left baffled by Rebecca's motives for hiding her past, the perplexing timing of her refusal to marry Rosmer, and the real truth to her illicit relationship with Dr. West. The only reasonable explanation is that Ibsen felt he had to shroud certain facts about Rebecca in mystery. Since his earlier Ghosts was banned and vilified for, among other things, suggesting incest between a half brother and half sister, imagine how the public would react to consummated incest between a father and daughter. Nevertheless, the psychological truth about her, if not easily clear, is still distinctly implied. Freud, in his landmark essay, "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work," was the first to untangle Rebecca's motivation with dazzling clarity.

Rebecca's feeling of guilt has its source in the reproach of incest, even before Kroll, with analytical perspicacity, has made her conscious of it. If we construct her past,

expanding and filling in the author's hints, we may feel sure that she cannot have been without some inkling of the intimate relation between her mother and Dr. West.²⁸

This "inkling" of her true past explains Rebecca's mysterious but adamant refusal to be Rosmer's wife prior to Kroll's revelations. Unknowingly she was driven by the Oedipus complex.

When she came to Rosmersholm, the inner force of this first experience drove her into bringing about . . . the same situation which had been realized in the original instance . . . getting rid of the wife and mother, so that she might take her place with her husband and father.²⁹

One way to test whether Rebecca truly has prior knowledge of her incestuous past (even if it is unconscious) is in performance. Fortunately, there is testimony from two legendary actresses of the American stage that give persuasive evidence to the accuracy of Freud's Oedipal theory. Minnie Madden Fiske, a stage star and producer in the early part of this century, was especially noted for her realistic productions of such Ibsen plays as Pillars of Society, A Doll House, Hedda Gabler, and Rosmersholm.³⁰ In an interview with Alexander Woolcott (1917), Mrs. Fiske reflects on "how crucially important it is that Rebecca should have thought out all her past with Dr. West" before "the illumination of that past . . . by the unconscious

Kroll." Then with plain-spoken eloquence, Fiske describes how, for an actor, this awareness is critical to this scene's emotional and dramaturgical effect.

Now, unless an actress be one of those rare artists who can put on and take off their emotions like so many bonnets, I do not see how she could make this scene intelligible unless she had perceived and felt its hidden meaning; nor how, having perceived and felt it, she could help playing it well.³¹

Eva Le Gallienne was another early champion of Ibsen in this country. As an actress, director, translator, and founder of the notable Civic Repertory Theatre (1926-1933), she also staged productions of Chekhov, Schnitzler, Goldoni, and other lesser known foreign dramatists.³² In an interview with Helen Armsbee of the New York Herald Tribune (Dec. 8, 1935), Le Gallienne discussed Rosmersholm's "suggestion on incest."³³ When studying the play, she had to know "if there were any way of finding out whether Ibsen intended that implication in regard to Dr. West and Rebecca." Le Gallienne found what she needed from Scandinavian actress Betty Nansen, who had once talked with Johanne Dybwad, from the original production of Rosmersholm. Dybwad "told Betty Nansen that Ibsen told her he had made the point as clear as he dared. So that is getting pretty directly at his meaning. It intensifies Rebecca West's tragic situation."³⁴

Despite Ibsen's veil over Rebecca's familial history, two gifted actresses intuitively grasped the character's, and one may say the play's, most intense field of inner emotion. As Diderot once said, even "an actress of . . . ordinary understanding but of great sensibility, understands without difficulty a situation of the soul, and finds without thinking, the accent which leads to the different sentiments that constitute the situation, which all the sagacity of the philosophers is unable to unravel."³⁵

Having mentioned two actresses' approaches, let us examine the impact of Rebecca's incest in performance. The 1988 La Mama production, mentioned earlier, played to generally favorable reviews. What distinguished it from past productions was the distinctly Freudian interpretation of the play. As Michael Feingold of The Village Voice put it, the director "clearly built her view of the play on Freud's essay."³⁶ Mel Gussow of The New York Times said, "Watching Sarah Pia Anderson's compelling revival . . . one can readily see why Sigmund Freud and August Strindberg were so drawn to the play." Gussow, in citing "the Oedipal nature of [Rebecca's] early family life," thought the production revealed "its psychological undercurrents, so essential if we are to understand one of Ibsen's most difficult and problematic works." He felt the key was the role of Rebecca, "as powerfully delineated by Suzanne Bertish."³⁷ Feingold is somewhat more explicit as to what physically happens on stage. In the scene "when Rebekka gets her revelation . . . Anderson's

crisp, matter-of-fact production explodes into its one moment of passion."³⁸ Unfortunately Feingold stops there.

Having seen the production, I can say that the audience did not witness an actress walking about, "clenching and wringing her hands," as translated by Rolf Fjelde; or "twisting and untwisting her hands,"³⁹ as translated by Michael Meyer (both alternatives, incidently, closely follow Ibsen's original, knuger og vrir hendene). What we saw that evening was a woman staggering back as if struck by a violent blow; she then bent forward, with both fists clutching at her lower stomach trying to claw into her womb, and moaned like a wounded animal. To watch (and feel) her agony was terrifying, repelling, and fascinating. It was an image straight out of Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty." And it was a moment that directed us to only one logical conclusion.

We have spoken of how Freud first brought to light the psychological forces that led to Rebecca's misdeeds. But what is usually neglected, when weighing the guilt and innocence of Rebecca's "crimes," is the most serious crime in the play--Dr. West's incest with his daughter. Theatre critics, for the most part, have been silent on the social and political implications of incest in modern drama--Rosmersholm is no exception. In Feingold's fine review of the above production, he perceptively takes both issues into account.

Rebekka, though genuinely guilty in the current case
[Beata's suicide], is the innocent victim of the earlier

one: She came to Dr. West as a child, believing someone else was her father. What can we think of a man (a doctor, yet) who knew better, but took advantage of her innocence? It was also Dr. West, the freethinker, who gave Rebekka her "liberal" ideas; her past as a child-victim is mirrored . . . in the play's future by the right-wing Kroll plans for his rebellious son, whose conservatism will be beaten into him with a stick. That's politics: the left fucks you over and the right knocks you down.⁴⁰

When it comes to the abuse of children, Ibsen takes no political sides. One group can be just as bad as the other. His dramas force us to see parallels between the way parents treat their children and their roles as social beings in their communities. In Rebecca's case, we again note another young life, exploited, violated, and ultimately destroyed by a bad father. Ibsen's exploration into the psychological inferno of childhood sexual abuse (a scandalous social problem that even Freud was afraid to touch⁴¹) was, to say the least, a daring act of artful truth-seeking. As a parent, Dr. West sounds like a monster; he wielded total control over his daughter. As Kroll reminds Rebecca, "And then, just after your mother died --he takes you in with him. He treats you harshly. And yet you stay on" (559). What is most disturbing is the cunning way Dr. West betrayed and exploited the trust of a young girl. In this

light it is hardly surprising that Rebecca will also use subterfuge to take advantage of the emotionally delicate Beata.

The last image we have of Rosmer and Rebecca are their backs as they walk out hand in hand to their death. It is an image of escape and defeat, of another failed revolution, of another paradise lost. Neither the liberals nor the conservatives have shown the least capacity to be ennobled of mind or spirit, as Rosmer had hoped. Rebecca and Rosmer end up becoming outlaws of both sides of the political spectrum. These two sinners unite in an illicit marriage before their illicit death. Since there no longer seems any human law (or higher Law) that can marry them, they marry themselves. And since they feel there is no community that will accept them, they seek Death, a place that democratically accepts all. It is both sorrowful and disturbing to see poor Rosmer left without laws; he now acts only upon pure desire, or Freud's "pleasure principle." As Holtan observes, "There is something sick and sadistic about a man who deliberately taunts another person to her death."⁴² Indeed, Rosmer's admitted "fascination" (582) for Rebecca's sacrifice, ironically, echoes Rebecca's confession of her complicity with Beata's suicide.

Despite the piteous collapse of their will to live, we are still moved by their wish to die together. Perhaps it can best be explained by stating that it is not the strength of Ibsen's characters that make them memorable--on the contrary, they are quite fragile--but that their desires are powerful, at times

overwhelming. Ibsen compels us to witness and feel the great depths they go to reach their decisions. Inga-Stina Ewbank says that, dramatically, Ibsen's characters "should affect us not so much by the kind of choice they make as by the intensity with which they commit themselves to their chosen way--'den ubetvingelige kallelse inneni meg' ('an irresistible calling inside me'), as Borkman [put] it."⁴³

Together, Rosmer and Rebecca take their final plunge into humankind's darkest mystery--death. Metaphysically, they both have been pulled progressively deeper and deeper into their most inner depths "where motivations and explanations dissolve into mysteries."⁴⁴ Like merman and mermaid they return to the sea, where Ibsen will try again with perhaps a more mature, more advanced form of hero and heroine to wage war on man's little laws and confined world.

In The Lady from the Sea, his next play, Ibsen has Rebecca return in another form, rising from the depths of the briny sea, as Ellida. This time she will embrace life. Given the opportunity to choose, she will be satisfied to temper her freedom with responsibility and return to the fold of her marriage. Would this conclusion finally signal a victory for the "transforming power of truth and freedom"?⁴⁵ Or is it that Ibsen, always restless in choosing different destinies, decided on the "happy" closure of a fairy tale? Arguably, even this hopeful ending is tinged with dread: that of a dying artist who blindly thinks he will recover, and a young woman who agrees to

marry an older man that she does not love. However one views it, this note of victory in his work was a brief one, because the following play that Ibsen wrote was Hedda Gabler.

1. Henrik Ibsen, An Enemy of the People in The Complete Major Prose Plays, trans. Rolf Fjelde (New York: New American Library, 1978), 291. All subsequent quotes from this collection will be indicated by the page number.
2. Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 48.
3. James Fenton, review of Rosmersholm, Sunday Times, Feb. 8, 1981, p. 42.
4. Henrik Ibsen, Ibsen: Letters and Speeches, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 265-66.
5. Janet Suzman, "Hedda Gabler: The Play in Performance," in Ibsen and Theatre, ed. Errol Durbach (London: Macmillan, 1980), 83.
6. Seneca, Oedipus in Four Tragedies and Octavia, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin Books, 1966) 234.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy in The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 68.
8. Per Schelde Jacobson and Barbara Fass Leavy, Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 298.
9. Jacobson, 299.
10. Jacobson, 303.
11. Orley Holtan, Mythic Patterns in Ibsen's Last Plays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), 56.
12. Jacobson, 89.
13. Jacobson, 90.
14. Jacobson, 186-87.
15. Ingmar Bergman, The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography, trans. Joan Tate (New York: Viking, 1988), 194.
16. Eugene O'Neill, The Iceman Cometh (New York: Vintage, 1957), 189.

17. William Blake, "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 47.
18. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Poetry and Prose, 34.
19. James Hurt, Catiline's Dream: An Essay on Ibsen's Plays (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 134.
20. Samuel Beckett, Molloy in Three Novels (New York: Grove Press, Black Cat Edition, 1965), 132.
21. W. Arens, The Original Sin: Incest and Its Meaning (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix.
22. Claude Levi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 32.
23. Levi-Strauss, 62.
24. Holtan, 56.
25. Jacobson, 187.
26. Errol Durbach, Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1982), 171.
27. Sophocles, Oedipus the King in Sophocles: I, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 29.
28. Sigmund Freud, "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work," in The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 14, 1914-1916, trans. James Strachey (1957; reprint, London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), 329-30.
29. Freud, 330.
30. Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay, Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 228.
31. Robert A. Schanke, Ibsen in America: A Century of Change (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1988), 179.
32. Brockett, 493-94.
33. Schanke, 233-34.
34. Ibid.

35. Denis Diderot, quoted by Lee Strasberg in his introduction to The Paradox of Acting by Denis Diderot and Masks or Faces? by William Archer (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), xi.
36. Michael Feingold, "Passionate Ibsen Heights," The Village Voice Dec. 20, 1988, p. 121.
37. Mel Gussow, "An Enemy of the People, With Personal Problems," The New York Times, Dec. 14, 1988, p. C21.
38. Feingold, 121.
39. Henrik Ibsen, Rosmersholm in Plays: Three, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1988) 88.
40. Feingold, 121.
41. Freud's "work with hysterical women patients led him to develop his seduction theory . . . which postulated that the symptoms exhibited by his patients were caused by sexual contacts with their fathers. His publication of this theory created quite a stir in Victorian Viennese society. This furor, coupled with his profound personal discomfort with the high prevalence of incestuous abuse reported by these women, led him to abandon his theory. Eventually, he replaced it with the oedipal theory, which in effect negated the reality of incest." (Christine Courtois, Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy [New York: W. W. Norton, 1988] 7).
42. Holtan, 61.
43. Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Ibsen on the English Stage," in Ibsen and the Theatre, ed. by Errol Durbach (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), 35.
44. Ewbank, 36.
45. Rolf Fjelde, introduction to Pillars of Society in The Complete Prose Plays, 12.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DESTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCES IN GHOSTS

I am completely in agreement with you when you say that I dare not go further than Ghosts. I myself have felt that the general conscience in our countries will not permit it.

--HENRIK IBSEN

(Letter to Sophie Aldersparse of June 24, 1882)

For we are visitors and investigators in a strange universe, indeed, indeed.

--VLADIMIR NABOKOV, Ada

Ghosts may be one of the most terrifying comedies ever written for the modern stage, or one of the funniest tragedies in drama. It may even be both. In his introduction to Ghosts, in The Complete Prose Plays, Fjelde writes that the "characters have been virtuosically conceived to range a genre spectrum from near-farce to an intensity of tragic suffering and awareness scarcely equaled in dramatic art."¹ In this discussion, we will pay particular attention to Ibsen's handling of incest as a comic device. To speak of incest's comic force may sound strange, but we are referring to that element of chaos found in all comedies. Niall Slater, in his excellent study of Plautus, states that "comedy is the critic and opponent of [a] rigid social order."² George Duckworth, speaking also of Roman comedy, describes the misapprehension and confusion that are produced by either

mistaken identity or the working of chance.³ The capacity to unleash anarchy is precisely what bonds incest and comedy. A playwright like Ibsen would not only recognize that bond, but maximize it. There is a further result that occurs from the disruption caused by incest, which we will call "nondifference."

The idea of nondifference comes from Rene Girard's provocative book, Violence and the Sacred. In it, Girard links the Oedipal myth to sacrificial ritual. In the words of Teresa de Lauretis, Girard presents Oedipus's role "as that of surrogate victim."⁴ This link shows that Oedipus was sacrificed to "reestablish an order" that he violated with an "eruption of violent reciprocity."⁵ By slaying the Sphinx, Oedipus became a hero, but by committing patricide and incest, he became the "slayer of distinctions."⁶ Girard explains that incest is a "form of violence, an extreme role in the destruction of differences. . . . Between patricide and incest, the violent abolition of all family differences is achieved."⁷

If, as Girard's thesis argues, incest is the most violent destroyer of differences in the human family, then a revolutionary artist could use incest as a weapon against the hierarchic foundations of his or her society. Henrik Ibsen was such an artist. In Ghosts, he most effectively subverts the concept of differences, while presenting a setting that was comfortably familiar to his audience. As one critic observed, after seeing a production of Ghosts by Norway's National Theatre: "No matter how many torpedoes Ibsen may plant under the ark in

Ghosts--society, marriage, the family, ideals, sexual and ethical codes, all of these are blown to bits!--this entire play is still placed within the framework of the naturalistic parlour."⁸ Incest is not the only missile in this play. Illicit desire in Ghosts takes on other forms, involving every character on stage, and producing varying amounts of havoc.

For the moment, let us recall the shattering revelation that ends act 1; Mrs. Alving realizes that Oswald and Regina are unwittingly headed toward an incestuous affair. Then, early in act 2, she appears to condone such a union to Pastor Manders: "If I weren't such a wretched coward, then I'd say to him: 'Marry her or live any way you like--but just be honest together.'"⁹ Manders, of course, is horrified by the idea. For him, such a union is doubly illicit and illegitimate--an incestuous arrangement without marriage. Yet, in the name of honesty and happiness, "difference" becomes meaningless, even moot, for this mother. Moreover, Mrs. Alving's theoretical acceptance of incest is, in the words of Christine Gomez, "a protest against the double standards of society which allow or wink at or shield adulterous relationships outside marriage but recoil in horror from the possibility of incest among the offspring of such adulterous unions."¹⁰

If it was in Ibsen's mind to call into question the whole corrupted order of a decaying bourgeois society, then there could be no better laboratory than the domestic setting of Ghosts: property, economics, religious codes, family roles, marriage

contracts, the whole bric-a-brac of a repressive patriarchal system is hauled up, presented, and then torn apart by the hurricane violence of Ibsen's anarchic art.

But how does incest play such a key role in Ibsen's attack? A clue may lie in Nietzsche's commentary on Richard Wagner's handling of the Siegfried myth.

"Whence comes all misfortune in the world?" Wagner asked himself. From "old contracts," . . . In plain: from customs, laws, moralities, institutions, from everything on which the old world, the old society rests. . . . How can one abolish the old society?" Only by declaring war against "contracts" (tradition, morality) That is what Siegfried does. . . . his very genesis is a declaration of war against morality--he comes into this world through adultery, through incest.¹¹

Wagner's war is comparable to Ibsen's, because they are both attacking similar "old contracts." Nietzsche suggests that Wagner's hero-warrior, Siegfried, is kept unblemished from society's "moralities," because his incestuous birth left him amorally pure. Ibsen, like Wagner (and other revolutionary artists), rejected the old ideas of morality, viewing them as a drag on the human experience. In Ghosts, we will see how Ibsen inverts the conventional meaning of "virtue," "morality," and "familial love." A possible germ to this kind of inversion can

be seen in his poem, "Abraham Lincoln's Murder" (1965). Notice how Ibsen slyly reverses the positive and negative connotations in the following lines:

Old Europe, so ordered, so patently right,
 with laws for each rung on the scale,
 with honor unblemished, clean and bright,
 with proper scorn for all black-not-white,--
 you turn quite remarkably pale!¹²

Ibsen's dramas are populated by people full of unruly passions, who find themselves trapped by a hierarchy of rigid moral codes. Theirs is a volatile situation, hardly conducive to socially accepted conduct. The desires inside Ibsen's protagonists, much like the Rat-Wife's baby rats, gnaw away at their cages quietly but persistently through the night. The effect from all this restless gnawing are entangled affairs, destructive acts, and erratic familial boundaries. It is why socially unacceptable desires, to quote the Rat-Wife on rats, "are hated and hunted down so cruelly" (875).

If the preservation of strictly defined familial distances is the ideal system in a patriarchal hierarchy, then the quickest way to that system's undoing is the spread of Oedipal desire. As Freud first postulated, Oedipal desire is a normal and necessary function that all children go through. But when the child (or parent) continues to hold on to that desire, it becomes harmful

and destabilizing. The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim provides us with a simple, but wise, explanation to the Oedipal situation: "The myth of Oedipus can never be experienced as warning us not to get caught in an oedipal constellation. If one is born and raised as a child of two parents, oedipal conflicts are inescapable."¹³ Ibsen's plays clearly anticipated Freud's discovery that the "oedipal complex is the crucial problem of childhood";¹⁴ moreover, this problem is the central instrument for the annihilation of differences.

Turning our attention to the text, we observe that this act of annihilation begins at the very top of the play. The first image we see, in fact, is the struggle between a child and a parent at the doorway of a home. Regina, the maid, is trying to prevent her stepfather, Engstrand, from entering Mrs. Alving's house. If this opening gesture--along with Engstrand's mangy appearance and coarse manner--evokes the tale of the pigs who tried to keep the wolf outside, it would not be an inappropriate analogy. Bettelheim says that in the tale of "The Three Little Pigs," the "wild and destructive wolf stands for all asocial, unconscious, devouring powers against which one must learn to protect oneself, and which one can defeat through one's ego."¹⁵ Another well-known fairy tale relates even more directly to our play. In "Little Red Riding Hood," the wolf (like Engstrand) enters a house of women. But the wolf "is not just the male seducer, he also represents all the asocial, animalistic tendencies within ourselves,"¹⁶ and within society.

Returning to our scene, Regina, while trying to push Engstrand outside, says, "All right now, get out of here. I'm not going to stand around, having a rendezvous with you" (204, emphasis mine). The line is funny ("Jeg vil ikke sta her og ha' rendez-vous'er med dig,"¹⁷ in the original text) because Engstrand doesn't understand French, and because of Regina's seemingly illogical use of "rendezvous," a word that in Norwegian--as in English-- connotes the language of lovers. But Regina's choice of words does make psychological sense when interpreted as a sign of her Oedipal feelings for this earthy man. This argument may sound tenuous, but her utterance of other French words gives support to this Freudian interpretation. After defending her mother's honor from Engstrand's insults, Regina comments, in an undertone of disgust, on his deformity: "Ugh--! And that leg" (206). When Engstrand asks what she said, Regina replies in French: "Pied de mouton" (the line is identical in the original text). Though Regina acts repelled, her repulsion is equal to her fascination with his phallic leg. This is indicated by Regina's use of French; it is a language her stepfather cannot comprehend, thus one that can reveal her subconscious desires without his detection. (When we come to Shepard's elaborate use of phallus imagery in Buried Child, we may appreciate Ibsen's sly subtlety all the more.)

Once Regina's stepfather enters inside the house, their relationship grows more suggestive and complex. We detect that incestuous desire runs both ways when Engstrand asks Regina to be

hostess at his projected sailors' inn. Such a plan would prevent Regina from working in Mrs. Alving's new orphanage, thus eliminating her opportunity to be a mother figure with the children. Engstrand wants Regina all for himself, and we get a chilling preview of how he would control her psychologically. Engstrand calls Regina "wench" and "slut," to insinuate that she is not only his property, but she is a fitting hostess to a bawdy house. (In A Moon for the Misbegotten, O'Neill might have modeled the rough, but more "lovable," character of Phil Hogan after Engstrand. As we shall later discover, Hogan's lusty language with Josie is not the only thing these two fathers have in common.) But if he cannot persuade her alone, Engstrand is clever enough to know that the state and church authorities are on his side. As he warns Regina, "[Pastor Manders's] the one who'll tell you what a child owes her father. Because, after all, I am your father, you know. I can prove it in the parish register" (209).

In this comic scene, Ibsen subverts the father-daughter relationship to that of a pimp seducing and browbeating one of his whores. Moreover, it satirizes the custom of parents who sell their children as profitable commodities in the marriage market. This is precisely what Mrs. Alving's parents did when they matched their daughter to the wealthy Captain Alving.

An even more comic, but critical, early scene is the one between Regina and Pastor Manders. Manders attempts to act as a moral guide and a spiritual father to Regina. But his sober,

little chat, advising Regina to return to her stepfather, turns into sexual (and incestuous) confusion.

REGINA: But I don't know if it would do for me, at my age, to keep house for a single man.

MANDERS: What! But, my dear Miss Engstrand, this is your own father we're speaking of! (211)

The scene becomes more sexually entangled and hilarious when Regina hints that Manders himself should take her in.

REGINA: . . . you see, if it were a good house, with a real gentleman--

MANDERS: But my dear Regina--

REGINA: One I could care for and look up to, almost like a daughter--

MANDERS: Yes, but my dear child--

REGINA: . . . Out here it's terribly lonely--and you know . . . what it is to stand alone in the world. (211)

On the surface, it appears that Regina, like Engstrand, wants to use Manders as a means to improve her lot. But, psychologically, Regina is seeking a father figure to look up to and love, both in the conventional and in the Oedipal sense. Still, why would she choose Manders? There are several reasons. One is that he is educated and refined, qualities which Regina

finds attractive. Secondly, besides being an older man, Manders is a longtime friend of Mrs. Alving, Regina's surrogate mother. Thirdly, as Captain Alving's friend and rival for Helene, Manders was the only man who was his sexual equal; of course, Regina has no way of knowing this, as it happened before she was born. But as Marvin Carlson points out, heredity in Ibsen's world works as much on a psychic level as it does on a physical level.¹⁸ Thus, in such a world, how could Regina not be psychically influenced from living in the house of her natural father where she was conceived?

Manders appears truly shocked by Regina's proposition. But notice how at first he addresses her as "my dear Regina," then follows by calling her "my dear child." As much as he outwardly seems to resist the idea, Paster Manders may be, at least subliminally, thinking of being a father to this ripely voluptuous young woman.

The above scene demonstrates the importance of perceptive casting. Manders should be played by an actor who is relatively attractive and young enough to make his and Regina's desires both believable and erotic. When Manders later remarks to Mrs. Alving that Regina, in his opinion, "was unusually well developed physically when I was preparing her for confirmation," (240) the moment should be rich in resonance. This minister, who now harbors erotic feelings for this girl, is the same man who had harbored (and possibly consummated) his desire for the young Helene. One of the forgotten tragic figures in Ghosts is this

gentle clergyman, a man who was once full of life's passion, but was too cowardly to act upon, or even trust, the truth of those feelings.

One can laugh at Manders's nervous, bumbling responses in his scene with Regina, but one should not miss the serious intent beneath the humor. Ibsen challenges the concept of difference by erasing it. In the following inner dialogue, triggered by Oswald's entrance, the uncertainty of lineage is again foregrounded.

MANDERS: . . . there's a look around the corners of the mouth, something about the lips, that's the very picture of Alving--especially now that he's smoking.

MRS. ALVING: . . . To me, Oswald has more of a minister's look about the mouth. (221)

Manders focuses on the shape of Oswald's lips because it connotes the sensuous nature of Captain Alving. Staring at the same mouth, Helene sees the son of Manders, the man she truly loved and who should have been the father of her child.

Following Oswald's entrance, the two men become engaged in a heated discussion over the morality of free love. When Oswald warmly praises the "normal home life" of the unmarried families he stayed with in Paris and Rome, Manders is naturally appalled: "But you're talking about illicit relations! About plain, irresponsible free love!" (223). Helene, however, approves of

her son's convictions. Oswald, sounding like an Ibsen spokesman, condemns the false morality of the middle class. What subverts relationships, he says, are the prevailing "eyes of the world," which Manders speaks of so highly. Oswald explains that the artistic community's "monstrous immorality," (223) so feared by the bourgeoisie, is caused by the "exemplary husbands and fathers" who foul the "beautiful freedom of that life" (224). Ironically, Oswald is unaware that he is describing his own father.

Irony aside, Oswald's experience can be seen as a metaphor that illustrates the plight of the human spirit: Once the individual spirit is outside the confines of bourgeois society, it can attain a sturdy freedom; but by remaining inside, it will near a slow, suffocating extinction. Similar sentiments are shared by Ibsen in an angry letter to Bjornstjerne Bjornson (July 12, 1879). In it, he argues against removing the ensign of Sweden from the Norwegian flag, professing that he would rather see in Norway the removal of the "sign of prejudice, of narrow-mindedness and wrongheadedness and slavishness and the groundless belief in authority, so the individual human being can sail under his own flag."¹⁹

Social theorist Georg Lukacs recognized Ghosts as a powerful indictment of the "hypocrisy of bourgeois society," pointing out how the "proclaimed ideals of the ascendent bourgeois class had now become hypocritical lies."²⁰ Lukacs saw Ghosts as particularly uncompromising in exposing those "irresolvably

tragic contradictions of love, marriage and family in bourgeois society."²¹ What enables the play's themes to move beyond mere political commentary to high dramatic art is mainly due to the compelling character of Mrs. Alving. It is her life that gives those "tragic contradictions," Lukacs speaks of, a human face. And it is her closing heartrending scream that exposes the play's human soul.

Helene Alving is both characteristic and unique among Ibsen's early female protagonists. She is a woman of passion and zest; yet, she has exhibited extraordinary discipline and sacrifice (contrary to Manders's reference to her "incorrigible spirit of willfulness" [226]) by wresting control of her home from a dissolute husband. What makes her sympathetic, even heroic, is that she has managed to keep her rebellious spirit alive and burning, despite the cold exterior world outside, signified by the dreary fjord landscape seen through the glass walls of the greenhouse. There is a line in a poem by Adrienne Rich that could well summarize Helene's intense private struggle. The line is from a woman who is sitting alone, reflecting over her life: "I have been the weir where disintegration stopped."²²

Mrs. Alving's inner passion is yet another critical element in Ghosts that needs a stage to set it free. Sadly, passion has too often been the one element missing in past British and American productions of Ibsen's plays. One notable exception (which proves the rule) was the 1986 production of Ghosts, starring Vanessa Redgrave, at The Young Vic Theatre. One gets a

keen sense of how long passion has been missing and missed from Nicholas de Jongh's review in the Guardian: "Ibsen with sex-appeal? Yes, at last. How strange, how thrilling after all these years to come upon a revival of Ghosts which gives physical expression to those currents of desire swirling through the most sex-possessed of Ibsen's plays."²³ The key that unlocked this "swirling" desire was the memorable performance of Ms. Redgrave. The Daily Mail vividly describes the emotional compression in Redgrave's Mrs. Alving: "So confidential is her tone that she only has to reach out a finger and touch the hand of Pastor Manders for it to have all the theatrical shock of attempted rape."²⁴ Remarkably, it seems that the sexual danger inherent in Ibsen's dramas must still be rediscovered, even in our (post-)modern times.

More remarkable and tragic is how Mrs. Alving was able to contain her passion for so many years. Hence, the irony is hardly lost when Manders, after accusing Mrs. Alving of being "instinctively . . . drawn to all that's undisciplined and lawless," (226) shows small regard for the law after the orphanage burns down.

Of all the characters in Ghosts, Pastor Manders may be the play's most intriguing creation. He can be both sympathetic and infuriating. On one level, he is a believable and vulnerable figure; while on another level, he functions as a beacon of social anxiety. The source of his (and society's) deepest anxiety is fear of the breakdown of patriarchal authority. One

highly effective way to subvert that authority (as Ibsen must have discovered) is to question its paternal rights. Once paternal authority is undermined, then everything else breaks loose. If, for example, the father should also happen to be a king, as in Shakespeare's A Winter's Tale, then the foundations of an entire nation are shaken. As Leontes complains to Hermione:

You have mistook, my lady,
Polixenes for Leontes. O thou thing,
Which I'll not call a creature of thy place,
Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,
Should a like language use to all degrees,
And mannerly distinguishment leave out
Betwixt the prince and beggar. . .²⁵

Leontes's rage and horror can be heard echoing in the living rooms of Ibsen's plays.

When it becomes clear that Regina must be permanently separated from her half brother, Manders is thoroughly bewildered as to where she should go.

MANDERS: Where? Home to her father, of course.

MRS. ALVING: To whom did you say?

MANDERS: To her--ah, but of course, Engstrand isn't--!

Good Lord, Mrs. Alving, how is this possible? (234)

Manders feels helpless because difference in this patriarchal hierarchy has dissolved. Without paternal certainty there can be no paternal authority. As it stands, the only one who can be certain is the woman, and even the woman cannot be absolutely secure if she has had intercourse with more than one man in roughly the same period of time. Strindberg used this theme of paternal uncertainty with psychological deadliness in several of his plays. Who can forget Captain Auolph's confused terror and appalling impotence in The Father (1887)? The Captain literally regresses into a blubbering baby, as he pleads for some reassurance from Laura that he is his daughter's true sire.

I beg you in token of the past, I beg you as someone wounded who wants to be put out of his misery--tell me everything. Can't you see that I'm as helpless as a child crying out to its mother. Won't you forget that I'm a man, that I'm a soldier who gives orders? I ask only the pity you'd show a sick person. I surrender my weapon and beg for mercy.¹⁶

The negation of difference also plays an important role in the work of that ardent Ibsen admirer, Bernard Shaw. In Shaw's Mrs. Warren's Profession (1894), Crofts, the ruthless businessman, is in love with Mrs. Warren's daughter. There is one small problem: He may also be her father. That doubt reduces this capitalistic bully into a skittish milksop, as he nervously confides to Praed: "But it's very awkward to be uncertain about

it now that we shall be meeting the girl every day. We don't exactly know how we ought to feel towards her."²⁷

In Ghosts, the concept of fathers and fatherhood (and Fatherland) are reduced to utter ridicule. "Yes, Father-- Father! I never knew a father," Oswald impatiently retorts, after Helene prods her son for some bit of familial feeling. "My only memory of him," he continues, "is that he once got me to vomit" (269-70). Oswald is a son made sick by an older generation. This young man's nausea evokes Nietzsche's comparison of the Dionysian man with Hamlet:

Both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint.²⁸

Nausea is the condition of Oswald from his newly "gained knowledge." He is sickened by the absurdity and horror of his situation, of a world that cannot be fixed, and of a world that cannot cure him of his father's syphilitic disease. Is it any wonder that he feels no love for his father or mother?

Oswald's situation is especially poignant, in regard to the present AIDS epidemic. Today we read and hear of mothers and fathers who become the unintentional executioners of their own

babies, born with this incurable disease. Addressing this current social tragedy, Ghosts's theme of hereditary neglect is especially meaningful. Oswald described the instinctive love for one's parents as that "old superstition." It is a line that would strongly resonate today.

Meanwhile, the inversion of morality in Ghosts continues; aghast, we watch Manders and Engstrand merrily "go off to become co-founders of a bawdy-house with a respectable name."²⁹ Conversely, Oswald and Regina would find it impossible to go off to an incestuous relationship with a respectable name--marriage. As Northam astutely points out, "Regina hurries off after Engstrand to claim her place in 'Chamberlain Alving's Home.' . . . Mrs. Alving's attempt to bury Alving's evil influence under a monument of hypocrisy has merely diverted its power. She has unwittingly ensured that the ghost of Alving shall walk in his second child too."³⁰ Regina, saved from the stigma of incest, is being led to a life of prostitution. The irony of Regina's fate may be obvious, but it is still cruel. Thus we see another child-victim manipulated by a false father, exploited in the name of the "false ideal of relationships demanded by society."³¹ Furthermore, incestuous desire is not checked. As Regina follows these two father figures, who is to say that one or both "fathers" may fulfill Regina's Oedipal fantasy? Escaping from one incestuous situation, she falls into another that is potentially more harmful.

As we enter the final duologue between mother and son, we are presented with yet another taboo. Oswald asks Helene to be his executioner, the one who will administer the morphine the moment he loses his mind. Andrew Kennedy suggests that this "dialogue clearly breaks a long-held social and personal taboo; the son is allowed to demand from his mother a sacrifice for which there seems no precedent in drama before Ibsen."³² While Kennedy rightly points out the rare significance of this additional taboo, it is not unique in theatre history. Going back to Sophocles's Women of Trachis, we find a parallel situation. At the conclusion of the play, Heracles, writhing in agony from his poisoned tunic, demands that his son, Hyllos, place his still living body on top of a great fiery pyre. Hyllos refuses out of love for him but his father is adamant.

HERACLES: It is what must be done. Refuse,
And be the son of some man else, not mine!

HYLLOS: It is too much. How can you ask me, father,
To take your life--your blood upon my hands?³³

More startling is when Heracles then orders Hyllos to marry his young mistress, Iole, following his death. This is utterly intolerable to his distraught son, but Heracles commands Hyllos to commit both patricide and "incest" to prove his paternal love! (That the dramatist, whose play inspired the Oedipus theory,

wrote another play which, arguably, turns that theory around, makes a priceless footnote in the history of drama.³⁴)

Returning to that climatic duologue, Kennedy elegantly describes the words of Helene and Oswald as "taboo-breaking utterances . . . so extreme and so compressed that it takes the speakers beyond the personal [and] what mother and son say to one another moves toward the elemental."³⁵ The symbolic Mother-son relationship is transformed into a "profane pieta, as in a de-mythological morality play."³⁶ The mythology being debunked is the most basic (if not most cherished) institutional belief about the Mother-son relationship: one gives life, the other receives life. But as Oswald complains to Helene, "I never asked you for life. And what is this life you gave me? I don't want it! You can take it back!" (274). And that is his unspeakable (and for a mother, unthinkable) plea: He is asking for the gift of death. Oswald (and Ibsen) have turned the meaning of mother love inside out.

If we take a moment to examine Oswald's request objectively, then doesn't it begin to seem natural, as well as moral? If Helene was willing to seriously consider, for the sake of her son's happiness, the "unnatural" course of an incestuous union, then might we believe that she could take the unnatural act of killing her own son for the same reason? These arguments become more plausible when we consider that differences have been eliminated in this play. The old social laws are no longer there to guide one's actions. Ibsen has returned us to the beginning,

a return to the primal ways before man's laws came into being. As if to underscore this remarkable genesis, we see a new dawn shining through Mrs. Alving's greenhouse.

Perhaps Ibsen said it best when he wrote that the tragedy of the Alving household is the "tragedy of nineteenth-century Europe."³⁷ The so-called pillars of society are, indeed, cracked and decayed. Alex Balchman, in "Group Interaction in Ibsen's play Ghosts," makes pungent observations on Western civilization's oldest and most honored custom, marriage.

The bourgeois institution of holy wedlock . . . shows nothing but disaster: Alving's marriage is a white sepulchre--Helene selling herself for a fortune, Alving becoming a debauchee and Oswald being a human wreck. Engstrand's marriage to Johanne is based on fraud and perjury, Johanne is bullied to death, Regine [sic] is an "amoral" being. Any marriage of Oswald and Regine would be an incestuous alliance. The man and woman relationship, based upon love and spiritual human attraction--the bond between Helene and Manders--is never realized.³⁸

Considering the dubious depiction of marriage in Ghosts, Christine Gomez's remarks are particularly germane. Her view is that incest is "used as a device to focus attention and criticism on the debasement of the marriage-relationship by social conventions."³⁹ By having Mrs. Alving contrast incest with

marriage and seem to "prefer an incestuous relationship, when it is pursued with sincerity and passion, to a debased bourgeois marriage whose profit motive and hypocrisy are condemned," the audience is forced to confront and "examine its mores and value and purify its institutions."⁴⁰

It is pitiable but right that the play's official moral spokesman is Pastor Manders. His parting words of counsel to the devastated Helene are, "May the spirit of law and order soon dwell again in this house" (264). What is left of that ruined home can be seen as the perfect metaphor for the play: a haunted house where natural desires, instead of being sheltered, were constricted and killed.

On August 2, 1883, Ibsen wrote a letter to the actor/manager, August Lindberg, whose company first performed Ghosts in Europe. To him he gave the following advice on staging this work: "The effect of the play depends a great deal on making the spectator feel as if he were actually sitting, listening, and looking at events happening in real life."⁴¹ But even Ibsen could not have known that his version (and vision) of "real life" in Ghosts, stripped of those comforting layers of differences, would become one of the most chaotic, comical, and terrifying sights in modern drama.

1. Rolf Fjelde, introduction to Ghosts in The Complete Prose Plays by Henrik Ibsen, trans. Rolf Fjelde (New York: New American Library, 1978), 198.
2. Niall Slater, Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 15.
3. George Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 175.
4. Teresa de Lauretis, Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 119.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 74.
8. Lise-Lone Marker and Frederick J. Marker, "Ibsen and the Scandinavian Theatre," in Ibsen and the Theatre, ed. Errol Durbach (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 66.
9. Henrik Ibsen, Ghosts in The Complete Major Prose Plays, trans. Rolf Fjelde, 237. All subsequent quotes from this play and other plays in this collection will be indicated by the page number.
10. Christine Gomez, "Profaning the Sacred: The Juxtaposition of Incest and Marriage in Ford, Ibsen and Osborne," The Aligarh Critical Miscellany 2, No. 1 (1989), 79.
11. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Case of Wagner in The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 163.
12. Henrik Ibsen, "Abraham Lincoln's Murder," Ibsen's Poems, trans. John Northam (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 93.
13. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Knopf, 1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 38.
14. Ibid.
15. Bettelheim, 173.
16. Bettelheim, 172.

17. Henrik Ibsen, Gengangere (Kobenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1881), 9.
18. Marvin Carlson, "Ibsen, Strindberg, and Telegony," PMLA 100, No. 1 (January 1985), 779.
19. Henrik Ibsen, Ibsen: Letters and Speeches, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 178.
20. Georg Lukacs, "Marx and the Problem of Ideological Decay," Essays on Realism, ed. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 160.
21. Ibid.
22. Adrienne Rich, "She," Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 29.
23. Nicholas de Jongh, review of Ghosts, Guardian Oct. 9, 1986 in London Theatre Record 6 (1986), 1093.
24. Jack Tinker, review of Ghosts, Daily Mail Oct. 8, 1986 in London Theatre Record 6 (1986), 1093.
25. The Winter's Tale, act 2, sc. 1, lines 82-87.
26. August Strindberg, The Father in Strindberg: Five Plays, trans. Harry G. Carlson (New York: New American Library, 1983), 33.
27. George Bernard Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession in Plays by George Bernard Shaw (New York: New American Library, 1960), 63.
28. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 60.
29. John Northam, Ibsen: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 96.
30. Northam, 100.
31. Ibid.
32. Andrew Kennedy, "The Confessional Duologue in Ibsen," Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen 4, ed. Daniel Haakonsen (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978), 40.
33. Sophocles, Women in Trachis in Electra and Other Plays, trans. E. F. Watling (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1953), 159, lines 1205-1210.

34. See Rene Girard's Violence and the Sacred, pp. 190-192, for his comments on Women of Trachis, where he states that "it is the true relationship between the father's desire and the son's desire that is being challenged."

35. Kennedy, 40.

36. Ibid.

37. Jane Ellert Tammany, Henrik Ibsen's Theatre Aesthetic and Dramatic Art: A Reflection of Kierkegaardian Consciousness -- its Significance for Modern Dramatic Interpretation and the American Theatre (New York: Philosophical Library, 1980), 219.

38. Alex Balchman, "Group Interaction in Ibsen's Play Ghosts," Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen, 81.

39. Gomez, 81.

40. Gomez, 74.

41. Ibsen, Letters and Speeches, 222.

CHAPTER FIVE

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS: SEEKING THE GREAT MOTHER

In Egypt the word 'mother' was written with the sign of the vulture, which is the symbol of the goddess Mut, the original 'Great Mother.' As a devourer of corpses, the vulture is also the Terrible Mother, who takes the dead back into herself.

--ERICH NEUMANN

Art and the Creative Unconscious

In the first scene of Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, we are presented with two thirds of the Oedipal triangle. We have the hated father, and we have the rival son, who wishes for the old man's death. In this case, three sons are hoping for his death; the youngest one, Eben, even boasts that he prayed for it. What is missing from completing the Oedipal union is the mother.

Not only is there no mother in this initial picture, there are no women at all. This female absence is foregrounded by one of the opening gestures in the play. Staring "dumbly" at the vivid summer sky, are the two older brothers, Simeon and Peter. Simeon suddenly recalls, "Eighteen years ago. . . . My woman. She died."¹ His brother's only reply is to say that he had forgotten. But Simeon gamely holds on to that memory a little longer: "She'd hair long's a hoss' tail--an' yaller like gold!" (4). The other's flat and final response, "Waal--she's gone," is enough to extinguish that tenuous female image. Simeon and Peter are men who have existed, if not endured, in a world without the

comfort of a woman for a long time (save the town prostitute). From their sexless situation, their isolated environment, and their minimal but droll conversations, they could be brothers to Beckett's latter lonesome pair, Estragon and Vladimir. Because there is no real, literal mother-figure to love and desire, or even to hate, these siblings have had to find a substitute--the farm. For Eben, the farm is Maw. O'Neill's handling of the farm's role in Desire is of special importance, and it will be fully explored in our discussion.

The most impressive development in Desire is that O'Neill, for the first time in his career, successfully transferred Greek myth constructions onto American soil; and in so doing, he created our first great American tragedy. O'Neill wanted his dramas to have the same primal drives, desires, demons, and taboos found in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The taboo he found most meaningful was incest. O'Neill told Walter Huston, the original Ephraim Cabot, that the whole play came to him in a dream.² Because he felt "that the tragedy of man lay in his Oedipal nature," he saw the characters in the play as "those of the primal family." He wanted the father and son's battle for possession of the mother-figure to be a "struggle of mythic proportions."³

There is a much larger construct that envelops this work, containing not only this play but most of the plays that he would later write. That construct is the son's desire for the Great Mother. While O'Neill was conscious of this theme in his work,

it is doubtful that he was aware of how large and encompassing a canvas it would cover. In no other body of drama, and possibly in all of modern literature, does the theme of mother worship (and mother loss) dominate as deeply as it does in the dramas of Eugene O'Neill. And in no other O'Neill play does mother worship subjugate all other themes as it does in Desire Under the Elms. We will see it manifest with "Mother as female principle, Mother as the demands of the past, Mother as avenging spirit, Mother as lover."⁴

An important study of this mother theme is found in Judith Barlow's splendid book, Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays. She states that in thirteen of seventeen plays O'Neill wrote after 1922, "there is either a male character closely involved with his mother or a male-female relationship with parent-child overtones."⁵ Barlow also points out that in five of those plays, "a son's powerful love for his mother is central."⁶ Besides Eben in Desire, she includes Orin Mannon in Mourning Becomes Electra, Simon Harford in More Stately Mansion, Reuben Light in Dynamo, the two sons in Long Day's Journey into Night, Parritt's love-hate mother relationship in The Iceman Cometh, and James Tyrone in A Moon for the Misbegotten.⁷ One could also include the mother-fixated Charles Marsden in Strange Interlude.

A particularly revealing statement by O'Neill is found in a letter he wrote to Theatre Guild's Robert Sisk, complaining about the critics unfavorable reception of Dynamo:

It certainly seems damn queer to me . . . that no one seems to have gotten the real human relationship story, what his mother does to the boy and what that leads to in his sacrifice of the girl to a maternal deity in the end--the girl his mother hated and was jealous of--that all that was the boy's real God struggle, or prompted it. This all fits in with the general theme of American life in back of the play, America being the land of the mother complex.⁸

(emphasis mine)

Barlow states that this "mother complex" is "more than just an individual's lifelong attachment to a parent. There is in the recurrent mother-child pattern a larger implication that links together most of the O'Neill canon."⁹ Barlow is impressed by a note O'Neill made while working on A Touch of a Poet. Reading about Henry David Thoreau, in Genevieve Taggard's The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson (Knopf, 1930), O'Neill found Thoreau to be a son who was pushed out into the world by his mother, and who then sought nature as a mother substitute. The following quote is from O'Neill's note on Thoreau's death: "[Thoreau] wished that his sister could place his bed and its covers in [the] form of a shell so he could curl up in it--his last attempt to make a nest of life."¹⁰ While O'Neill may have sympathized with Thoreau's search for a mother's protective love in nature, his note implies that "nature itself is only a substitute for the mother."¹¹ The typical O'Neill male hero, Barlow convincingly argues, "wander[s]

through life in search of a place, a faith or a person to replace the mother, to be at least a temporary haven from the loneliness and fear that mark his dramatic world."¹² (Tyrone, in A Moon for the Misbegotten, may be the definitive example of such a protagonist.)

All the men in Desire long for a mother, or at least that maternal, womblike environment that is obviously lacking in their bleak lives. When Eben decides to visit the town prostitute, Min (probably his first sexual experience), he looks up into the starry sky and says, "She's like t'night, she's soft 'n' wa'm, her eyes kin wink like a star, her mouth's wa'm, her arms're wa'm, she smells like a wa'm plowed field, she's purty" (10). In this speech, Min's womanly virtues are fervently enlarged, extending across heaven and earth. More significant are the varying connotations Eben gives to the word "wa'm": first as something sensual, then as something sexual, and finally as something maternal. Returning home after having had Min, he brags to his brothers, "What do I care fur her--'ceptin' she's round an' wa'm?" (12). Eben has now shifted Min from the role of mother-figure to that of Whore; and he has changed from an innocent boy who yearns for physical love, to the figure of a male braggart, boasting of his first sexual conquest. Feeling triumphant over the Old Man, Eben points out that "she was his'n --an' now she b'longs t' me!" (12). The once celestial Min has been reduced to a piece of property, once owned by the father, and now possessed by the son.

Eben often seems confused by differing mother-figures because he sees, or seeks, the Great Mother everywhere, particularly in nature. Moreover, he continually views his father as his rival for the love and possession of not only Maw, but of various mother substitutes: Min, Abbie, and the farm. When Eben buys out his brothers' share of the farm, he reacts with a strange excitement: "It's Maw's farm agen! It's my farm! Them's my cows! I'll milk my durn fingers off fur cows o' mine!" (14). There is something peculiar about Eben's lustful longing to grab hold of every cow's teat. O'Neill's specific stage directions inform us that the very sky (perhaps from embarrassment, sexual excitement, or even shame) "is beginning to grow flushed with sunrise," as Eben "takes in the whole farm with his embracing glance of desire" (14). Undoubtedly, his desire for the farm is connected to a desire for revenge against the father, and "both desires are darkly tied to his sexual desire-- for Min, for Abbie, and for Mother."¹³

The image of cows as warm, maternal creatures is frequently presented, most notably by Cabot. Being milk-givers, cows are a natural mother symbol. James Preston, in Mother Worship: Theme and Variations, states that in Sinhalese culture, for example, "milk bridges many dimensions of mother symbolism: the nurturant quality of the mother, . . . the matrilineal kinship links, [and] bodily health."¹⁴ For Cabot, the cows' company is the very embodiment of mothering shelter. Even Eben is unconsciously attracted to both their maternal and sexual motherness. Earlier,

when Eben tells his brothers about the news of Cabot's new bride, he cracks, "Wait'll we see this cow the Old Man's hitched't! She'll beat Min, I got a notion!" (12).

While the cows may be rich in metaphoric meaning, they are still part of the farm, and it is the farm that becomes a principal figure in Desire. This is made clear from the Cabots' interaction with the farm: sometimes they treat it as a being to be despised, sometimes to be loved, and sometimes (as we have seen) to be lusted for. Remarkably, the audience is soon drawn in to this act of personification; as we view the farm through the eyes of the characters, we too may give it the characteristics of adversary, parent, and lover. Still, one is frequently reminded of the farm's equally powerful influence on the characters in this uneasy cohabitation of man and nature. As Mikael Mikos and David Mulroy perceptively point out:

In every respect, setting and character penetrate each other. Prominent natural elements are personified explicitly, while the protagonists, in turn, seem to have absorbed their personalities from the setting. . . . Like the Cabot house beneath the elms, O'Neill's characters seem on the verge of being absorbed into their setting."¹⁵

Leonard Chabrowe views the farm in a more Freudian role. He states that the "fate the farm embodies is Oedipal. The hard past of stones is the Oedipal father, the fertile past of earth

and elms the Oedipal mother."¹⁶ It is true that the farm's stones signify an unmerciful, isolating, and regimented life of imprisonment that could be called patriarchal. Peter and Simeon even speak of being "slaves t' stone walls here" (15). At the same time, they also feel a warm, strong, emotional attachment to the animals--"The cows knows us," "An' likes us" (15)--that embodies a matriarchal bond.

But the characters' relationship with the farm (and with nature), in regard to their emotional and psychological entanglements, go beyond Chabrowe's simple dichotomy. This complexity is displayed whenever the characters speak directly to the farm. During moments of emotional stress, they seem to talk to it as if addressing a parent. A vivid example of this close relationship is early in the play. Simeon, stamping his foot on the ground, fervidly confronts the earth: "Waal--ye've thirty year o'me buried in ye--spread out over ye--blood an' bone an' sweat--rotted away--fertilizin' ye--richin' yer soul--prime manure, by God, that's what I been t' ye!" (15). Here we see the farm as a possessive mother, selfishly keeping her sons tied down, to serve her, feed her, and love her, at whatever cost to them. It is a devastating picture of a son wasting away his life for the love of his mother. O'Neill most fully develops this theme in the haunting character of Jamie Tyrone.

The desire for the Great Mother is not exclusively a male need in the play. Abbie Putnam is another character who desires a Great Mother. It was Carl Jung (taking an opposite approach

from Freud's Electra scheme) who felt that women are subject to the same desires as men, which includes taking the male view toward the mother.¹⁷ Immediately upon her arrival, Abbie simply, yet feelingly, speaks of a strong yearning for a home: "A woman's got t' hev a hum!" (18). It is the same desire for a real home that Mary Tyrone later echoes, with a mixture of bitterness and frustration, in Long Day's Journey into Night: "I've never felt it was my home."¹⁸ Cabot and Tyrone share similar feelings concerning the importance of a woman in the house: Cabot says, "A hum's got t's hev a woman," (10) upon his arrival with his new wife. Tyrone makes a comparable remark--"This home has been a home again"¹⁹--when he thinks that the recovered, or new Mary (before her addiction), is the same woman that has returned home. Ironically, both fathers mistakenly believe that their "new" wives will bring homeness to their homes.

For Abbie, the Great Mother manifests in the idea of home. Her confession to Eben of being a motherless child reveals genuine hunger for the comfort, security, and roots of a real home: "I was a orphan early an' had t' wuk fur others in other folks' hums" (21). After the death of her baby and first husband, she found herself alone, "t' wuk agen in other folks' hums, doin' other folks' wuk" (22). Abbie's desire to possess her own home comes from a need for the warmth and sustenance of the mother she never had.

It is more than just quaint that Cabot, Eben, and Abbie all pronounce home as "hum." When comparing "home" with "hum," one

cannot help but notice that the latter sounds more melodious and chantlike. One might think of the Eastern prayer-chant, "Um," or relate it to the expression, "Mum," as in Mother. A relevant footnote on this very point is Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological discussion of Baudelaire's use of the word, "vast." It is worth quoting:

For Baudelaire, the word vast is a vocal valve. It is a word that is pronounced, never only read . . . the word vast evokes calm, peace and serenity. It expresses a vital, intimate conviction. It transmits to our ears the echo of the secret recesses of our being. . . . It is a word that brings calm and unity; it opens up unlimited space. . . . In the word vast, the vowel a retains all the virtues of an enlarging vocal agent.²⁰

For all the criticism (some of it fair, much of it undue) of O'Neill's tin ear, this is a splendid example of the complex musicality of his best work.

Thus far we have seen how Eben has divided women into either Mothers (Maw and Min) or Whores (Min). After the arrival of the buxom and vibrant Abbie, Eben will link both in the same woman.

Abbie is a figure who could stand as a descendant to such heroines of antiquity as Medea, Clytemnestra, and Phaedra. They were all women who "gave vent to their lust and hate, baring their passions that few humans like to recognize in

themselves."²¹ Her more modern sisters could be Ibsen's Rita Allmers and Rebecca West, or with any number of Tennessee Williams's fiery and feverish females. As Virginia Floyd succinctly put it, "Perhaps the most sensuous woman in the [O'Neill] canon is Abbie Putnam."²² Michael Manheim calls Abbie the first of many O'Neill Earth Mothers--"a woman who can fulfill a man's need for both sexual satisfaction and mothering without feeling or evoking guilt in the process."²³

As a character, Abbie enriches the play with her powerful sexual presence. In her verbal duels with Eben, Abbie easily flusters him with her provocative demeanor and the frankly seductive form of her discourse. Eben's dogged attempts to distance himself from her erotic pull only inflame her desire. In Abbie's most sexually charged speech, in which she describes the force of nature to Eben, she fills the stage with (one might say gives birth to) sexual and fertile imagery. It is a deliriously profuse and carnal vision only a Great Mother and Great Whore could produce.

(Her body squirms desirously--she murmurs languorously)
 Hain't the sun strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it burnin' into
 the earth--Nature--makin' thin's grow--bigger 'n' bigger--
 burnin' inside ye--making' ye want t' grow--into somethin'
 else--till ye've jined with it--an' it's your'n--but it owns
 ye, too--an' makes ye grow bigger--like a tree--like them
 elms--(she laughs again softly, holding his eyes. He takes

a step toward her, compelled against his will) Nature'll
beat ye, Eben. Ye might's well own up t'it fust's last. (25)

Abbie joins forces with nature. She takes nature's imagery, heats it up, then transforms it not only with the sexuality of her words but of her very being. Word and gesture are fused by O'Neill (through Abbie) to create a powerful theatrical moment on stage.

This brings us to a third literary sister to Abbie, an Irish sister, who became known only two years before O'Neill began this work: She is James Joyce's Molly Bloom, one of the supreme Earth Mothers of fiction. It is not certain whether O'Neill read Ulysses before he started Desire. Louis Sheaffer mentions that O'Neill read the American-banned book while living in Bermuda in 1926, two years after he wrote Desire. Sheaffer only says that O'Neill was "greatly impressed" by the work, and that he would borrow Joyce's stream-of-consciousness in writing Strange Interlude.²⁴

Still, one hears echoes of Molly's voice in Abbie. In Molly's unforgettable soliloquy that concludes Ulysses, her interior monologue takes us from the lush landscape of nature's beauty--

I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in
roses God of heaven there's nothing like nature the wild

mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the
 beautiful country with the fields of oats and wheat . . .²⁵

--to titillating accounts where her attention shifts to the
 stirring, sensuous landscape of her own body:

They were so plump and tempting in my short petticoat he
 couldn't resist they excite myself sometimes its well for
 men all the amount of pleasure they get off a womans body
 were so round and white for them always . . .²⁶

Whereas Molly switches back and forth from the sexuality of
 Nature to the nature of sexuality, Abbie unites them in one
 brief, but vividly seductive speech. Abbie's words are an
 uninhibited challenge and sexual come-on to her male prey that
 would do justice to Mae West. These passages also reveal the
 difference between a genius of prose fiction and a genius of
 dramatic speech.

Following Abbie's luring invitation to "grow bigger" with
 nature, Eben accuses her of "aimin' t' swaller up everythin' an
 make it your'n" (25). Eben's image of monstrous ingestion
 reflects the son's deep-rooted fear of being devoured by, what
 Erich Neumann calls, the "terrible mother."²⁷ This is the other
 side, or dark side, of the Great Mother archetype, one that can
 smother as well as nurture. Eben extends this metaphor when he
 warns Abbie that "you'll find I'm a heap right bigger hunk nor

yew kin chew!" (25); which suggests, from Eben, an unconscious sexual dare.

Beyond the various Oedipal drives and conflicts between and within the characters, O'Neill has created a primitive world where the Mother Goddess and the traditional patriarchal God clash for the souls of these pitiable beings. O'Neill may have been familiar with certain mythic tales that parallel this battle. One that O'Neill may not have known, but which is an excellent illustration of this model, originates from Mexico. According to Mexican folklore, the loving pre-Christian goddess, Tonanti, continued to defend her children against the wrath of the newly arrived Judeo-Christian God. In one folk tale, Tonanti challenges

God, her son, to produce mother's milk (as she had done), to prove that his benevolence equaled his disciplinary harshness. It is God's role to punish; it is her role to nurture and intercede: "Not the milk of cows, not the milk of goats, but my own [human] milk," states the Aztec legend describing the encounter between Tonanti and God.²⁸

We see a similar battle going on in the terrain of Desire. The farm and Maw represent attributes of the Great Mother. The intimacy and closeness the characters feel for the female god is clearly missing in their relationship with the Biblical One. This is the God that is symbolized by the farm's rocky harshness:

"God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones!" (31) says the old man. Cabot is the only character who does pray fervently to this hard Father; yet, He does not (or cannot) fulfill the deep needs of the old man. The spiritual parent desired by these characters is one that is soft, warm, protective, sensual, pure, maternal, and finally, forgiving. Only the Great Mother contains all of these qualities. When Cabot prays, he calls Him "God o' the old! God o' the lonesome!" (23). That is hardly a comforting image.

This picture of gods clashing and vying for the devotion of mortals, and of deities springing from nature, is O'Neill's attempt to recapture the powerful spirit of Greek myth; Zeus and other gods and goddesses tantalized, interceded, seduced, and sometimes begot with mortals. In this spirit, the cows become a vital link to the maternal world of the Mother Goddess: "It's warm down t' the barn," Cabot tells Abbie, "I kin talk t' the cows. . . . They'll give me peace" (32). Cabot's unusual love for cows reveals his own need for warm mothering protection. While he is hard as flint, "old Ephraim Cabot, like the young Stephen Dedalus and like all men, must meet a 'moocow' on the road of life."²⁹

Despite Cabot's seemingly rigid allegiance to his Judeo-Christian God, he sees no paradox in depicting his farm with certain, what one might call, polytheistic powers. When Abbie tells him she wants a son, Cabot exalts:

CABOT: The farm needs a son.

ABBIE: I need a son.

CABOT: Ay-eh. Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t'ye in my lonesomeness. (A pause. He pounds his knee with his fist) Me an' the farm has got t' beget a son!

ABBIE: Ye'd best go t' sleep. Ye're gittin' thin's all mixed. (30)

It is both a comic and cosmic exchange, suggesting a world populated by gods of fertility and nurturance, two attributes associated with Mother Goddesses. There are other qualities of the Mother Goddess that are displayed in Desire; namely, the expression of human ambivalence, justice, healing, spiritual purity, and, of special note, punishment.³⁰

But it is the more intimate (and darker) characteristics of the Mother Goddess that set up the climatic seduction scene in Maw's parlor. Part 2, scene 3 is among the most mysterious, erotic, and certainly one of the most riveting scenes in the O'Neill canon. It is a love scene of interiors within interiors within interiors. It is a scene of penetration that is vividly theatrical, sexual, and psychological. Moreover, the set's use of removable interiors is effectively highlighted. What we see are people cramped inside a manmade structure. These characters may call it "hum," but home appears more like a prison than a place of comfort: The men flee outdoors during moments of

anxiety; Eben paces inside the rooms like a caged animal. It is the earth that is really "hum" for these people.

But one should be careful not to reduce interiors and exteriors in Desire as simply opposites of each other. This would miss the play's rich ambiguity. For example, one could view the house as a symbol of the Mother--different spaces in the house representing differing aspects of the Great Mother, some rooms being more inviting, more threatening, or more intimate than other rooms. One might ask whether these small interior spaces are crowding the inhabitants or, womblike, enclosing and protecting them. The specific set design of a particular production would naturally influence one's interpretation. The most interesting and innovative point, in regard to Desire's design concept, is that O'Neill is stressing a psycho-sexual personification of theatrical space. Looking ahead for a moment, we will examine how Shepard carries this idea even further in Fool for Love, where the interaction of character and interior space becomes even more theatrically overt, and more sexually explicit.

In Part 2, scene 2, Abbie and Eben are in their bedrooms. We know it is a hot night, because Eben has stripped down to his undershirt. Each room is dimly lit by candlelight. While Cabot gives a long, rambling speech about his God of stones, Abbie stares at the wall that separates her from Eben. Eben becomes aware of her searching gaze and stares back: "Their hot glances seem to meet through the wall" (30). In addition, the

spectators' own voyeuristic desire has penetrated into the interior of the house--into the privacy of the bedrooms--to witness as Abbie's trancelike gaze melts down another, more interior barrier. The gestures of Abbie and Eben, simple yet unusually concentrated, create a primal, even primordial, atmosphere. Michael Hinden states it well: "As in a dream, forbidden barriers dissolve, walls disappear, and we are made to peer into bedrooms and the emotionally charged parlor to observe the lovers. What we see is explosive; the walls and windows in Desire have things to hide."³¹

By the end of scene 2, Abbie's strange behavior drives Cabot out of the house. She is now free to penetrate deeper into the bedroom and the heart of her stepson. Before leaving, Cabot shares his ominous feelings with Abbie, "Ye give me the chills sometimes. (He shivers) It's cold in this house. It's oneasy. They's thin's pokin' about in the dark--in the corners" (32). What Cabot might be sensing is the nearness of the Great Mother. It is as if Abbie's fervent desire is bringing forth the female goddess. When Cabot is outside, he calls upon God to show Himself with a sign. Like Job, Cabot "stretches up his hands in a pleading gesture"; but his God does not answer his desperate cry--"God A'mighty, call from the dark!" (33).

This pivotal moment suggests that the Great Mother(ing) spirit has, for the moment, overpowered the patriarchal deity. Abbie easily breaks down every barrier in her path, while Eben's defense is, at best, passive resistance. When Abbie throws

herself upon him in his room, he freezes, then responds hungrily before pushing her away. Once more, Eben betrays his fear of being devoured by a strong woman: "I knowed well it was on'y part o'yer plan t' swaller everythin'!" (34).

Once our lovers arrive at Maw's parlor, the scene takes on the character of a highly ritualistic ceremony. The room itself is described as "grim" and "repressed," and "a tomb in which the family has been interred alive" (34-35). On stage, the atmosphere should be permeated with the dangerous aroma of sex and death the moment we see Abbie in Maw's sanctuary. A further supernatural touch is added by the light of the glimmering candles, lit by Abbie just before Eben's entrance. O'Neill is tapping into a core of forbidden and taboo archetypes, fantasies, and sublimated desires. "An atmosphere of lust and incest and Oedipal desire and the natural love of man and woman for each other"³² is how Norman Berlin describes the scene. Ronald Wainscott feels the "parlor's importance to production was paramount. . . . It conjures up visions of rites, libations, and classical as well as New England sacrifice. The room was like a center of ceremony of both death and lust."³³

O'Neill's highly charged combination of spectacle and melodrama produces an otherworldly dimension. Even his carefully worded stage directions are calculated to reinforce a forbidding mood: Abbie and Eben, with "nervous, formal politeness," sit together on the edge of the sofa,

remaining "rigid, looking straight ahead with eyes full of fear" (35). Such ritualistic behavior prepares us for what comes next, not mere adultery, but something rarer and deeper than the common emotions and surface consciousness of a sordid liaison. Once Abbie and Eben's sexual union is sealed with a brutal kiss, "a dark psychological moment has been given dramatic life; an unnatural union seems naturally consummated."³⁴

The unseen presence in the tiny room is introduced straightaway by Eben's simple declaration, "Maw" (35). At this point, we should sense Maw's spirit hovering closely around the two intruders.

ABBIE: At fust I was feered o' it. I wanted t' yell an' run. Now--since yew come--seems like it's growin' soft an' kind t' me. . .

EBEN: Maw allus loved me. (35)

This room could be the predecessor of another upstairs room, the one where Norman Bates kept the rotting corpse of his mother in Alfred Hitchcock's movie, Psycho. In fact, both O'Neill's play and Hitchcock's film share several of the same sinister ingredients: the dead of night, the eerie light, the forbidden room, the dead mother and her ominous spirit, the sensitive and obsessive son. But unlike Norman Bates (or O'Neill's later protagonist, Reuben Light, in Dynamo), Eben does not become a psychotic killer. Still, what we observe is a rather bizarre

Oedipal ménage à trois. Through Abbie, Eben can now have sex with his mother (as well as touch the dead, an equally serious taboo) without feeling destructive guilt. In O'Neill's first working notes, he writes that Abbie "keeps kissing him getting him all confused as to her identity and his"; Eben "feels through her, he gets his mother back."³⁵

The most difficult quest for the Oedipal son is to make love with his mother after she is dead. To fulfill his obsession, the son has only two choices: either he finds a mother-substitute to love (as Eben does and as James Tyrone will), or he joins his mother in death. In O'Neill's other "Greek" play, Mourning Becomes Electra, Orin tries, unsuccessfully, to get close to his dead mother through an incestuous relationship with his sister Lavinia. Just before his suicide, Orin tells Lavinia, "It's the way to peace--to find her again . . . Mother will be waiting for me there."³⁶

Since we are speaking of quests, the parlor scene poses a formidable performance challenge that can be easily overlooked on the page. As written in O'Neill's impossible stage directions, the poor actress who plays Abbie must show "sincere maternal love in her manner and voice," while, at the same time, projecting a "horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love" (36). It means that she must be the good mother and the terrible mother at the same time. Equally tricky (if not paradoxical) is that Abbie's motivation is fueled, simultaneously, by both a "desire for a child and lust for" Eben.³⁷ O'Neill solves this acting problem

by having Eben break down into a sobbing fit. This makes it simpler, if not more natural, for Abbie (and the actress) to convincingly play her maternal role. As Floyd points out, "Not until Abbie demonstrates sincere maternal love and promises to kiss him 'pure as a Maw' does Eben respond to her passion."³⁸

Abbie is the first of the great prototypal O'Neill females: handsome, healthy, strong, and cunning. These women manipulate and overpower men with their bodies and outmaneuver them with their minds. This battle of the sexes was learned from a dramatist who O'Neill acknowledged as his most important teacher: August Strindberg. In fact, it was The Dance of Death, Strindberg's chilling account of a married couple trapped in a relationship of loving hate, that O'Neill claimed would be the modern play he would most like to have written.³⁹

In part 3, the Oedipal construct that we began with suddenly switches in reverse. With the birth of Abbie's son, Eben is now a proud father. But the moment he feels that his patriarchal rights are threatened, he wants his son dead--wants to annihilate even the memory of him: "I wish he never was born! I wish he'd die this minit! I wish I'd never set eyes on him!" (48). Eben, the jealous Oedipal-son, has now become the fearful, murderous Oedipal-father.

Consequently, we are presented with multiple images of the avenging mother. For a short time, it appears that Abbie is able to play the role of good mother to both her baby and her man. But the moment Eben feels betrayed, he views her, once again, as

the castrating terrible mother. Abbie's desperate desire to return to Eben as his good mother (and lover), drives her into becoming a murderous mother to her own child. The tragic paradox of Abbie's plight may be a universal dilemma for all mothers: that of a woman caught between the forces of maternal love and sexual desire.

There is another terrible mother figure who enters in this scene--Maw. She will rise to avenge the wrongs done to her favorite son. As Eben vows to Abbie, "I'll leave ye here t' pizen each other--with Maw comin' out of her grave at nights--" (48). It is the son's belief (or wish) that Maw is always close by, ready to protect him. Though dead, she is, to Eben, as real and concrete as if she were still alive.

But the senseless violence of this tragedy is caused not by gods or ghosts, but by human beings. Abbie is transformed into every young child's most deeply hidden nightmare: the cruel, vengeful mother--"Then I hate him, too, even if I be his Maw!" (49). Her act of infanticide links her with the child-killing stepmothers who populate the tales of the Brothers Grimm.

The killing of the baby is done offstage. The scene opens just before dawn of the next day, after Abbie has done the deed. O'Neill, following the conventions of classic Greek tragedy, does not show the violence onstage. Here one may question whether O'Neill bends too closely to convention. It may even strike one as surprising that O'Neill, who dared to confront other taboo subjects in American drama, would shy away from such a

theatrically potent moment. Actually, there are several legitimate reasons why O'Neill would refrain from showing the act of infanticide on stage: (1) that it would completely overwhelm the rest of the play; (2) it would be too unsparing to Abbie's character, making it impossible for the audience to feel any empathy for her by the play's end; and (3) Desire would run into enough censorship problems with law and moral-abiding authorities;⁴⁰ there was no need to push it any further.⁴¹

No scene in Desire is as painful to behold in its unfolding as Abbie's confession. Here O'Neill exhibits a merciless irony that is blackly Euripidean in its pitiless probe of the human condition. Note how the playwright deeply underscores the murderous desires of fathers and sons.

ABBIE: I--I killed him, Eben.

EBEN: (amazed) Ye killed him?

ABBIE: (dully) Ay-eh.

EBEN: (recovering from his astonishment--savagely) An' serves him right! But we got t' do somethin' quick t' make it look's if the old skunk killed himself when he was drunk. We kin prove by 'em all how drunk he got.

ABBIE: (wildly) No! No! Not him! (Laughing distractedly) But that's what I ought t' done, hain't it? I oughter killed him instead! Why didn't ye tell me? (51)

This disturbing exchange suggests that Abbie was a mere tool of Eben's rage. Or more precisely, she was a weapon who could destroy either of Eben's rivals--father or son--with equal capacity. When Abbie confirms that it was the son, and not the father, she had killed, Eben "falls to his knees" and pleads to the patriarchal God, using almost the same phrases Cabot used to address Him: "Oh, God A'mighty! A'mighty God!" In a sense, Eben has become like his hardhearted father; which is why he turns to the paternal deity. Then, reflexively, Eben shifts his address to the Great Mother: "Maw, whar was ye, why didn't ye stop her?" (51). To his horror, Eben discovers that both spiritual parents have abandoned both the guilty son (Eben) and the innocent son (his child).

The ending presents a resolution of sorts, with some ambiguity. After Eben informs the Sheriff of the murder, he runs back to Abbie to beg for her forgiveness. Abbie does forgive him, and, by this act of loving compassion, she is transformed into a combination Earth Mother-Mary figure. This is made quite clear as Abbie "kisses him and pulls his head over against her breast," (55) the gesture forming a Pieta. In that moment, for the first time, we feel that there is nothing more important for Abbie and Eben than the love they have for each other. It is a powerful image that radiates a kind of purifying innocence over the fallen lovers.

Chabrowe is one who strongly accepts this cleansing idea, because it falls neatly into his Jungian concept of Abbie and

Eben's relationship. He suggests that Eben's incestuous love for Abbie is "psychological rather than physical," and he notes the irony in Abbie's "attempt to prove her love for Eben by killing"⁴² his child. Only then "does she become the benevolent and life-giving mother," and Eben can finally deliver "himself from his incest and his desire for the farm."⁴³ Chabrowe concludes that the child's death causes the death of the child in Eben, and "he is psychologically reborn out of the womb." Chabrowe sees Eben as a "Jungian hero," who has overcome the "demonic mother not by overpowering her but through renunciation or sacrifice of the incest wish."⁴⁴

Chabrowe's insightful analysis, while psychologically satisfying, ultimately remains too pat. Even if we accept the idea that Abbie and Eben's relationship has been purified, the Pietà configuration of the lovers informs us that their relationship remains one of mother and son.

The Pietà is a motif that O'Neill will repeat in future works, most powerfully in A Moon for the Misbegotten. In Desire, the Pietà illustrates the (miraculous?) transformation of a bad mother into the most virtuous, loving, and maternal of women. When holding Eben's head and tenderly "caressing his hair," Abbie says, "My boy, hain't he?" (56). And in that moment, he is! Eben is finally content and at one with the Great Mother. In the purified figure of Abbie, he has now found a woman who will love him fully and unconditionally.

In the end, everything merges. Nature envelops the lovers in her beatific and maternal embrace.

EBEN: I love ye, Abbie. (. . . points to the sunrise sky)
Sun's a-rizen'. Purty, hain't it?

ABBIE: Ay-eh. (They both stand for a moment looking up raptly in attitudes strangely aloof and devout).

SHERIFF: (looking around at the farm enviously--to his companion) It's a jim-dandy farm, no denyin'. Wished I owned it! (58)

The scene develops into more of a religious than psychic experience. In their "enlightenment," Abbie and Eben merge with the farm, Maw, nature, and the Great Mother. Love is now purified, and the baby's death can be seen as a sacrifice to the avenging Mother. The baby, who never had a name, remains an abstract child. Ultimately, he belonged not only to Eben and Abbie, but, as Cabot had claimed, to the farm as well.

One could say that a mystical ending befits a mythic tale. We know that O'Neill, like Strindberg, was deeply interested in the culture and religions of the East. It may well be an Eastern ending that O'Neill is striving for here: man's mystical unity with an impersonal spiritual force.⁴⁵ According to the Buddhist meaning of enlightenment, it is the moment that the "mind is freed of the veil of ignorance and illusion that comes between the mind and the truth, [and when] life and death are only

opposite sides of the same coin."⁴⁶ That moment is vividly caught in the death poem of the seventeenth-century Haiku poet, Saimu: "Dawn breaks / and blossoms open / gates of paradise."⁴⁷

Despite the influence of the East, O'Neill still finds comfort in certain aspects of his rejected Catholicism. Our lovers appear closer to the humble state of Christian grace than the soaring heights of Nirvana. As to signs of O'Neill's Western pessimism, we need only take another look at the Sheriff's (and the play's) last lines. What we unmistakably hear, as we have heard from the beginning of this drama, is man's greedy desire for material property. In the mind of the Sheriff, he sees only the earning capital laying upon the earthen ground, completely oblivious to the splendor of the natural beauty above. This last image could encapsulate a major theme in almost all of O'Neill's plays: the dilemma of people caught between the lure of materialism and their search for some spiritual meaning in a meaningless universe.

1. Eugene O'Neill, Desire Under the Elms in Three Plays (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), 4. All subsequent quotes from this play will be indicated by the page number.
2. Leonard Chabrowe, Ritual and Pathos--The Theater of O'Neill (Lewisburg, KY: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1976), 129.
3. Ibid.
4. Norman Berlin, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 73.
5. Judith Barlow, Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 134.
6. Barlow, 135.
7. Barlow, 136.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Barlow, 137.
12. Ibid.
13. Berlin, 74.
14. James J. Preston, ed., Mother Worship: Theme and Variations (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), xxii.
15. Michael Mikos and David Mulroy, "Reyont's The Peasants: A Probable Influence on Desire Under the Elms," The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter (Spring 1986), 5.
16. Chabrowe, 132.
17. Chabrowe, 111.
18. Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey into Night (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1956), 44.
19. O'Neill, Journey, 36.

20. Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 196-97.
21. Anna Kisselgoff, "Martha Graham, 96, Revolutionary in the Dance World, Dies," The New York Times, April 2, 1991, p. B7. Kisselgoff's obituary states that Graham saw dance as "a collective memory that could communicate the emotions universal to all civilizations"; and that "mythology . . . was the psychology of the ancients." How closely Graham's philosophy paralleled O'Neill's thoughts on the power of theatre, and its use of myth.
22. Virginia Floyd, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 287.
23. Michael Manheim, Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 37.
24. Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Son and Artist (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 199.
25. James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 781.
26. Joyce, 776.
27. Erich Neumann, The Great Earth Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 331.
28. Eva Campbell, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Female Self-Image: A Mexican Case History," Mother Worship: Theme and Variations, 12.
29. Berlin, 79.
30. Preston, "Conclusion: New Perspectives on Mother Worship," Mother Worship, 335-36.
31. Michael Hinden, "Desire and Forgiveness: O'Neill's Diptych," Creative Drama 14, No. 3 (Fall 1980), 244.
32. Berlin, 76.
33. Ronald H. Wainscott, Staging O'Neill: The Experimental Years, 1920-1934 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 163.
34. Berlin, 76.
35. Virginia Floyd, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985), 280.

36. Eugene O'Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra in Three Plays, 365-66.
37. Floyd, 280.
38. Ibid.
39. Sheaffer, 558.
40. See Sheaffer's O'Neill: Son and Artist for a history of Desire's censorship problems with New York City District Attorney Joab H. Banton, who tried to close the play down, pp. 164-66.
41. Approximately forty years after Desire opened, another scene of infanticide would occur. In November of 1965, at the Royal Court Theatre, British playwright Edward Bond astonished and infuriated the English public by presenting the onstage stoning of an infant in Saved. In scene 6 of the play, a group of young men join in the casual killing of a baby in a park. Clearly, the "shock of one image in one scene became the focus for most of the rage directed against the whole play" (Malcolm Hayt and Philip Roberts, Bond: A Study of His Plays [London: Eyre Methuen, 1980], 42). It was this scene, no doubt, that also earned Saved the dubious honor of being the last play banned by the Lord Chamberlain.
42. Chabrowe, 132.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. See John A. Robinson's Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 3.
46. Yoel Hoffmann, ed. and trans., Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death (Rutland, VT and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1986), 105.
47. Hoffmann, 276.

CHAPTER SIX

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN: ENTERING THE GREAT MOTHER

The basis for the "incestuous" desire is not co-habitation, but, as every sun myth shows, the strange idea of becoming a child again, of returning to the parental shelter, and of entering into the mother in order to be reborn through her.

--CARL JUNG
Symbols of Transformation

STREGA: My child: I am a hard, strong, independent, muscular woman. How can you with your delicate soft nature, see anything to love in me? I should hurt you, shock you, perhaps--yes . . . even . . . beat you.

REGINALD: Oh do, do. Don't laugh at this ridiculous confession; but ever since I was a child I have had only one secret longing, and that was to be mercilessly beaten by a splendid, strong, and beautiful woman.

--BERNARD SHAW
The Music Cure

A Moon for the Misbegotten is one of O'Neill's most deeply complex and subtle works. It is also his most underrated. When compared to other O'Neill plays, such as Long Day's Journey Into Night, The Iceman Cometh, even Mourning Becomes Electra, Moon is usually dismissed as a secondary work. The interest it does arouse is too often tied to its biographical references or as the follow-up to his masterpiece, Long Day's Journey. This is a mistake. In this chapter we will not only explore the significance of Moon's incest theme, but, more importantly, we

shall demonstrate why this play too deserves recognition as a masterpiece of drama.

As the subtitle of this chapter suggests, Moon is where O'Neill's search for the Great Mother finally ends. The play is full of strange surprises and eerie shocks, but the miracle of this work is in watching how a flesh and blood woman is transformed into a spiritual goddess. But before entering O'Neill's Great Mother, let us first examine why this play has been underrated and misunderstood for so long.

The main difficulty for critics may lie in Moon's seemingly crude structure: "It suffers from a certain awkward juxtaposition of serious and comic elements and from an inability to portray minor roles convincingly,"¹ is how Horst Frenz put it. Travis Bogard, who admired Moon, felt that the play was "doomed to failure without superb acting." He called it "long, totally simplified and stripped of theatrical devices, a lyric drama, concentrated on character more than narrative."² Brooks Atkinson, who normally found something good in any O'Neill play, had almost nothing positive to say about the New York, 1957 production, starring Wendy Hiller: "Except for a humorous first act, the vitality is low . . . The dialogue is rambling. The incidents minor. The drinking maudlin." Attempting to be kind, Atkinson added that "O'Neill was not in sufficiently good health to do his best work"³ when he wrote Moon in 1943. Doris Falk, the respected O'Neillian scholar, may have summed up best the perceived flaws and problems of the play.

Pathos cannot save A Moon for the Misbegotten . . . from the weakness of its outward situation--the theatrical cliché of clichés, for which there is no other word but corn. . . . The skeletal story concerns the attempt of the farmer and the farmer's daughter to save the old homestead from the clutches of a supposedly villainous landlord. To this antiquity . . . O'Neill has added another: the vaudeville team of the big strong woman who chases a puny man around the stage with (a) a broom and (b) the threat of a smothering embrace in a pair of enormous arms and an appalling bosom.⁴

The apparent rudimentary plot, theatrical clichés, and broad physical comedy (which have alarmed these and other critics) actually function as features on a Janus mask that, on the surface, has only two faces: comic and tragic. Beneath that mask, however, lie other faces that reveal passions that are both darkly mythic and elemental. Our purpose will be to uncover the play's mask in order to unveil the strange paradoxes, fearful mysteries, and hidden desires within the work.

It is clear that the character of James Tyrone has a serious mother complex. There has been ample critical discussion on that fixation, and this study will attempt to add further insights. There are, however, other forbidden bonds which have largely been ignored. To be precise, Josie is the object of not one but two incestuous desires: Jim Tyrone's explicit desire for his mother,

and Phil Hogan's implicit desire for his daughter. Our examination of the latter passion will help us solve some perplexing puzzles in the play: such as, why does Josie act the slut when she is a virgin? And if Hogan is aware of Josie's innocence (which Jim later points out), why does he play along with her charade? There is also the question of Josie's suspicious eagerness (if not impatience) to help her brothers escape the farm. Conventional readings of the plot have given us answers to these and other questions that are simply too neat and sentimental, and they do harm to the darkly complex vision of O'Neill. Uncovering Hogan's desire for Josie is only part of the solution to these puzzles; there is one more unspoken desire that must be exposed and discussed: Josie's Electra complex for Hogan.

What we have then is a rather "unholy" triangle of illicit love between Hogan, Josie, and Tyrone. By the play's end, through the sacrifice of Josie's love, we will witness a transformation in which all three figures will (to varying degrees) be cleansed, if not cured of an impossible love. Lifting the masks of the characters and the play, gives us a clearer understanding (and appreciation) of how those transformations came to be.

The mask of act 1 is, primarily, its crude comedy. It is a long act, the longest in the play. Its comic mask accomplishes two things, one thematic, the other structural: It disguises Moon's dark, forbidden desires, and it effectively sets up the

tragic framework of act 3. Note that O'Neill keeps James Tyrone offstage until midway of the opening act. This gives the playwright time to present the play's themes, motifs, and leitmotifs within the familiar structure of, what appears to be, an "old-fashioned melodrama--with tricks, deceptions, outbursts, and revelations of supposed villainy."⁵ Thus, the audience is put at ease. The delayed entrance of our troubled hero is necessary, as Michael Manheim suggests, because the expressions on his face and oddly-timed, sardonic comments will soon clue us that "something is haunting Jim . . . which may ultimately make Phil's intrigue and Josie's revenge seem insignificant."⁶ But that will come much later. Only then will the characters be emotionally prepared, and psychically determined "to give full expression to their until now unspoken pain."⁷ O'Neill neatly solves the problem of Jim's long absence by having Josie's brother Mike introduce him, figuratively, at the top of the play. Later, Hogan will take up the subject of James Tyrone with his daughter.

Mike's function is also to initiate the framework of the play's central plot device. It is he who first informs us of Josie's reputation as a woman without virtue, her "brazen as brass"⁸ pride, and general disgrace. And it is Mike who first talks about Hogan's plan to trap Jim into marrying Josie. Josie's warning to her brother--to not "strain my brains anymore" (6)--could also be read as a warning (from O'Neill) to the audience; meaning, don't take these schemes too seriously,

because it may distract you from what is really going on in the play.

Mike's other role (brief, though, it may be) is to play the rival brother to Jim, which he does with relish. Mike expresses his feelings toward Jim with blunt clarity: "I hate Jim Tyrone's guts" (6). Mike disparages Jim for the way he "puts on airs." He sees him as "nothing but a drunken bum who never done a tap of work in his life, except acting on the stage while his father was alive to get him the jobs" (6). Most of all, Mike despises Jim for being a rival-son to his own father, who, in effect, has already replaced him in Hogan's heart. Mike's reference to Jim's father underscores the jealousy and emotional pain he apparently feels. Unlike James Tyrone, Sr.'s show of support for his son, Jim, Hogan never helped Mike in any way.

Reinforcing their symbolic kinship, Mike shares several significant character traits with his rival-brother. Neither he nor Jim care for hard work. Both detest their fathers. Mike also appears to have a love/hate relationship with his motherly-sister; Mike leaves only when she decides it is time for him to go. As Josie informs us, "It was the little boy [he] used to be" that she loved (7). She is sending Mike away for good, just as she will send Jim away at the play's end.

The scene with the siblings has two major functions. First, it acts as a framing device: Mike, the natural son, who escapes before the father catches him idling with his sister Josie is an implicit variation of Hogan's later scheme to catch Jim, the

surrogate son, in bed with his daughter. Secondly, it introduces the first hint of Josie's Oedipal feelings. When Mike spitefully derides Hogan as the "old hog," (2) Josie immediately knocks him down with one hand. Her swift and violent response (which startles even Mike) demonstrates not only the physical power of her strength, but, more importantly, the ferocious nature of her daughterly love. "You're two of a kind, and a bad kind," (3) is how Mike characterizes this father-daughter team. Despite the obvious scorn in Mike's remark, we will begin to see its subtext once Hogan enters the scene.

Phil Hogan is a more complex character than that of the "buffoon with a shrewd, coarse sense of humor but a soft heart,"⁹ as most critics have viewed him. To begin with, there is his link with two of O'Neill's other lonely old men and troubled fathers: Ephraim Cabot from Desire Under the Elms, and Ezra Mannon from Mourning Becomes Electra. Wifeless and hated by his sons, Cabot sought the love and comfort of a voluptuous woman, young enough to be his daughter; while Mannon, rejected by his beautiful wife, found in Lavinia a fiercely devoted daughter. Furthermore, while Hogan is as clever, manipulative, and strong as Cabot, he is (if less apparent) as possessively jealous as Mannon. What distances Hogan from O'Neill's earlier New England patriarchs is a comic veneer that deceptively tempers him as a more humorous, harmless, and appealing character. But if one looks through his droll mask, there emerges a character that is not so harmless or appealing.

When told by Josie of Mike's escape, Hogan is delighted by the news. It means that he and Josie are at last alone. Being the Oedipal father that he is, Hogan saw his sons as rivals. His final word on Mike, and his other sons, is succinctly clear: "I never liked him. And I never liked Thomas and John either" (11). To which Josie adds, as if to cement their inclusive bond, "You've the same bad luck in sons I have in brothers." Hogan then responds, "Thank God, you're like me and your mother" (11). The subtext of that line could be, "You're like your mother, when your mother was with me." Plainly, Hogan saw his sons as interlopers to his relationship with Josie. What obscures us from reading the implicit meaning in Hogan's actions are the schemes that he cooks up to bring Jim and Josie together. Despite Josie's warning not to "strain our brains," we tend to focus too much attention on these intrigues.

Also diverting us from digging deeper into Hogan's motives is the play's emotional ending; its stirring (and sentimental) impact leaves the sincerity of Hogan's "unselfish" act go unchallenged. But it should be challenged. Early on in Moon, we suspect that Hogan is hardly unhappy that Josie, at twenty-eight, is still unmarried. He tells her, "If you was the decent kind, you'd married some fool long ago, and I'd have lost your company and your help on the farm" (13). Hogan shortly reveals more clues to his true paternal feelings when he plays the role of Jim's surrogate. By acting as Jim's voice, Hogan leaves himself free to speak from his own heart without betraying to

Josie (and possibly himself) his taboo desires: "Maybe he'd like a fine strong handsome figure of a woman for a change, with beautiful eyes and hair and teeth and a smile" (18). Except for the missing part about Josie's large, beautiful breasts, Hogan orates a phrase that we will hear Jim sing repeatedly to Josie.

Let us now examine the crucial question of Hogan's knowledge of Josie's virginity. If, as Jim tells Josie, "Phil is wise to you," (87) then why does Hogan humor a gross deception, acting the bemused but resigned father of a scandalous daughter? "He's afraid of hurting you," Jim claims (87). That may be so, but a deeper reason for Hogan's silence about Josie's virginity could stem from a genuine fear of losing her; that is, to betray his knowledge (or suspicions) to Josie would mean that she would immediately leave him for good, out of shame and humiliation.

But this raises another, more perplexing, question. Why does Josie play the slut? Is it to attract her father's attentions or to repel them? Put another way, is it to dampen her father's desires or is it to inflame them? It may be equal parts of both. The suggestion that Josie may have a split personality is not inconsistent with past O'Neillian protagonists at war with their divided selves. It is likely that O'Neill may have read of Jung's theories about "dissociated personalities" in repressed individuals, "any of which could temporarily"¹⁰ take full control. The purpose behind O'Neill's use of masks (both literal and figurative) in such plays as The Great God Brown, Strange Interlude, and Mourning Becomes Electra was to reveal the

striking and clashing psychic dualities of his characters.

The battle of masks will be seen most dramatically in the character of Jim; but even in Josie, we will observe conflicting aspects of her personality that will surge and retreat.

Let us examine, for the moment, Josie's relationship with her three brothers. On the surface, her initiative to help them leave the farm can be interpreted as simple virtue. In fact, we are told by Josie that it was for their best interests, because none of them could "stand up to the Old Man," and that the "old devil" would keep them as slaves (4). But what becomes transparently clear is that Josie has moved to eliminate all competition for her father's love.

Barlow's study of the development of Moon indicates that Josie grew into the "play's most complex figure,"¹¹ as well as presenting O'Neill with the most difficulties. "She is both the logical culmination of and an important variation on the loving, maternal, earthy woman who figures prominently in numerous O'Neill dramas."¹² But let us not overlook another side to Josie: the troubled, confused, and sensitive daughter who craves the love and approval of her father. It is Stephen Black who points this out, noting that Jim "chooses Josie for the innocence and vulnerability he sees in her."¹³ More to the point, Jim has cast Josie to star in his play, a play about his past. As Black observes, "For a single night he will recreate the past in which he was a small child who believed he had exclusive possession of

an adoring mother. That Josie is larger than life fosters the illusion he wants to create."¹⁴

James Tyrone is the artist in this play, a poet and a man of the theatre, who sets the stage, writes the lines, and transforms ordinary scenery and characters into things of great value and beauty. A striking example of this is when Jim and Hogan play their cagey game of the stingy landlord and scornful tenant. After greeting Hogan in Latin, Jim translates it into "Irish English," imitating Hogan's brogue: "Ain't you the lucky old bastard to have this beautiful farm, if it is full of nude rocks" (25). With his romantic vision, Jim transforms the farm's common stones into unusual images of sensuality. In similar fashion, he will transfigure Josie into an erotic Mother-Mary figure. In Jim's eyes she will become Earth Mother, Mary, and Virgin-Whore.

A Moon for the Misbegotten is a story that exploits both the imagery of Catholicism and the mythology of Ireland. On both levels, the presence of the Great Mother dominates the stage. As Preston states, "Most goddesses . . . are connected in some way to motherhood, the bearing of children, and in many cases, a principle of purity symbolized by virginity." The Hogans' rocky farm represents the motherland that is Ireland. Jim underlines this by calling Josie "my Virgin Queen of Ireland" (27). When Josie brandishes her sawed-off broom handle like a club, she appears as a true descendent of the "fabled warrior women of the Celtic race."¹⁵ John Henry Raleigh informs us that in one phase of Irish mythology, women were given a central role in the cult

of rebirth: "It was the woman, not the man, who . . . conveys the soul of the dead to rebirth in a later generation." Indeed, it is in the role of Jim's spiritual vehicle for rebirth that Josie meets her most difficult test. As Raleigh observes, it is a test she passes, but "in vain as it turns out, to bring to rebirth the soul of the 'dead' Jamie Tyrone."¹⁶ Clearly, O'Neill has created (in this Connecticut farm) a landscape that is as purely Irish as anything he ever wrote. It should not surprise us to learn that in the 1947 premiere production of Moon, O'Neill made a point to select "as many people as possible connected with [the] play to be Irish."¹⁷

In this Irish terrain, O'Neill has applied an Oedipal structure that has both a Greek and a Freudian application. In this Oedipal family, we have Hogan as the father-figure, Josie as both mother and daughter, and in the role of the son, we have three characters: Mike, Tyrone, and Harder. (Harder plays an important role which we will discuss.) As we deconstruct these Oedipal units, marginal details in the text--as well as in performance--emerge as profound clues to help us clarify these twisted Oedipal relationships.

A striking example of such a detail is Jim's story, told to Hogan, about his ejection from college. This is not just another variation of a scheme gone wrong, but, on closer analysis, it is a plot (within a plot) that is entangled in a web of illicit love. As Jim tells it, he made a wager at his Jesuit college that "I could get a tart from the Haymarket to visit me,

introduce her to the Jebbs as my sister" (25). Let us examine the implications of this marvelous masquerade. In this intrigue, a whore, by the name of Dutch Maisie, is presented not only as a virgin, but as Jim's innocent sister (with whom he, most likely, has had sexual relations). For Jim, this richly perverse joke contains delicious erotic overtones, a savory blend of the sacred and profane. It is insightful to note how Hogan responds to this virgin-whore tale: "God bless Dutch Maisie! I'd like to have known her" (26). Again, we have a coupling of the sacred and profane. First Hogan blesses her, then, using a sexual innuendo ("known"), desires intercourse with her. In Hogan and Jim's father-son relationship, they indeed have much in common.

Jim's anecdote of Dutch Maisie also hints at something that will be made more clear in act 3: Jim is incapable of having a normal sexual relationship with a woman. This may be the most disturbing and tragic element in the story of this relatively young man who is dying inside.

There is still a darker side to Jim. Looking at this man, with all his charm, his flaws, and a life ruined by decadent habits, Jim seems like a throwback to the protagonists found in certain literature of the late nineteenth century. Quoting second-rate romantic poets, he appears as a self-destructive, drunken, whoring gentleman obsessed with his mother. One poet he is most fond of quoting (as we know from Long Day's Journey) is Algernon Charles Swinburne. This passage from that notorious Victorian sensualist could have been written expressly for Jim:

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
 Mother and lover of men, the sea.
 I will go down to her, I and none other,
 Close with her, kiss her, and mix with me¹⁸

At his best behavior, Jim is a charming, tippling Irish wit; yet, he is capable of turning almost instantly, especially when drunk, into a cynical, self-loathing demon. His uncontrollable switching of personalities reminds one of the protagonist in Robert Louis Stevenson's popular nineteenth-century novel, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. By the play's third act, under a full moon, and faced with an eager lover, James Tyrone will transform into both a monster and an innocent child. These abrupt shifts into different, and warring, personalities become moments that are chilling, ghoulish, and incredibly gripping. We will speak more on this later.

After Jim relates his sister Maisie story, Josie appears in the doorway. With unobtrusive brilliance, O'Neill juxtaposes Jim's tale of a whore playing the part of a virgin with the immediate entrance of a virgin playing the part of a whore; and play the whore Josie does, to Jim's obvious discomfort. Though she may be doing it to attract Jim, it only succeeds in repelling him: "Who told you I fall for dainty dolls?" (28). (We know from Jim's experience with Fat Violet, in Long Day's Journey, that it is quite the opposite.) As if to change the subject, Jim tells her, "I like them tall and strong and voluptuous, now, with

beautiful big breasts" (28). Josie blushes. But Hogan, rather than take any offense, is delighted by the frankly sexual talk aimed at his daughter: "There you are, Josie, darlin'. Sure he couldn't speak fairer than that" (28).

Hogan and Jim seem to grow more alike. They both love Josie to an unusual degree. As far as we know, there is no other woman in either man's life. The one other woman that each man seriously and sincerely speaks about is of a departed mother (Hogan's memory of Josie's mother, and Jim's memory of his own). And both Jim's attraction for Josie and Hogan's love for his daughter is "onnateral."

In this first act, O'Neill is building the intense, and unusual, mother-son bond between Josie and Jim. The way in which he has drawn their relationship is fairly fetishistic, akin to matching a giantess to a child-sized man. We see an excellent illustration of this when Josie tells Jim to hide before Harder sees him. When Jim balks, she "puts her hands under his arms and lifts him to his feet as easily as if he were a child"; then she orders him to go into her bedroom: "It's a nice place for you" (34).

Gestures like the one described above, which fuse the maternal with the sexual, are reminiscent of the erotic drawings of the Polish writer-artist, Bruno Schulz (1892-1942). Schulz often depicted men (whose features resembled his own) with oversized heads and puny bodies, who groveled before the feet of large sensual women. For Jim, it is the breast that weakens his

will and fires his deepest desire. For Schulz, as Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz states, "The instrument of oppression of men by woman is the leg. . . . It is with their legs that Schulz's women tease, trample, drive to sullen, helpless madness his dwarfish men-freaks, cowed as they are by erotic torture, degraded and finding supreme painful relish in their degradation."¹⁹

Jim's mammillary obsession may not seem as intense as Witkiewicz's description of Schulz's leg fetish, but he is clearly fixated on Josie's breasts: "You have the most beautiful breasts in the world," (44) he reminds her at the end of act 1. Josie's response is to behave maternally--"Promise me you'll eat something, Jim"--which is exactly what Jim desires, despite his sardonic tone: "That's right. Mother me, Josie. I love it." She replies, "I will, then. You need one to take care of you" (45). End of act 1. This leitmotif of Josie's breasts will be sung again and again by Jim, because it is the only thing that will give him salvation. Jim tells her as much when, finally arriving for their moonlight date, he confesses that he came "just to lie with my head on your breast" (68).

Mary McGavran, who reviewed the premiere of that first and unsuccessful production of Moon (1947), perceptively saw and imagined, in this "great hulk of a girl" (as one must imagine her, since no actress can literally match O'Neill's vision), how the "play's meaning is linked to her stature and size. For Josie's ample bosom is symbolic to Jim Tyrone of the comfort and forgiveness he had once received in his mother's arms."²⁰

This image of warm, motherly breasts is enlarged (pun intended) by the numerous times that Josie is described as cow-like, usually by her father, and sometimes by herself. Hogan calls her an "overgrown cow" (8); "big and strong as a bull" (10); "lazy cow" (22); "big as a cow" (48); and he remarks how she rolled her "big, beautiful cow's eyes" at Jim (54). Josie has willingly accepted this self-portrait, referring to herself as "a big, rough, ugly cow of a woman," (76) and "I'm a great ugly cow" (87). But the universal qualities of this animal are exactly what Jim desires. For him, this "great cow" conjures women as sensual, maternal, good, gentle, wise, and (most of all) forgiving beings. This comforting image is the very antithesis of the "blonde pig," who conjures everything in women that are lustful, coarse, greedy, stupid, selfish, and cruel.

Our reference to pigs brings us to the "comical" Harder scene towards the end of act 1. It opens with the exit of one man-child (Jim), and the entrance of another (Harder). T. Stedman Harder is described as baby faced, "beginning to take on fat . . . immature, naturally lethargic, a bit stupid. Coddled from birth" (36). Harder is actually Jim's double, seen through a somewhat distorted mirror. Harder is a mama's boy and a dandy in his beautifully made clothes. His jockey pants, which Josie ridicules, must surely make him appear like a large, chubby adolescent. The critics who have disparaged this scene as tired burlesque have simply failed to see its importance and meaning to the rest of the play.

As Harder finally makes his escape from the Hogans, Josie "leers at him idiotically," and whispers, "Meet me tonight, as usual, down by the pigpen" (42). Of course it will be Jim who will meet her that night; the "pigpen" reference foreshadows the episode of the "blonde pig," the pig of all pigs in Jim's life. Hogan's ludicrous question to Harder--"Tell, me now, if it isn't a secret, whatever made you take such a savage grudge against pigs?" (41)--if seen as implicitly directed to Jim, becomes one of the most serious questions of the play. The major climax and crisis for Jim, after all, is whether tonight will turn out to be one more date at the "pigpen" or a night that will finally be different from all other nights.

An interesting footnote to the play's history is that when Moon was to be published (1952), O'Neill's wife, Carlotta, begged him to delete the "blonde pig" reference from the script. She believed it to be too offensive. But O'Neill "resisted his wife's importunities to make it more palatable, in her view, for the public."²¹

As Harder runs off, enraged, rejected, and humiliated, the other man-child, his sides aching from laughter, re-enters from Josie's bedroom. Then Jim points out to the puzzled Hogan the miracle that has just occurred: "Don't you notice the change, Phil? Every boulder on the place has turned to solid gold" (43). The culmination of this comic act is that, as if in a fairy tale, an ugly, rocky farm has been transformed into a golden kingdom by Jim's whimsical vision. This lays the groundwork to the play's

final achievement, when Josie will no longer be a shameless cow, but be transformed into a beautiful, virginal goddess by Jim's suffering vision.

Harder's shame and humiliation in act 1 will also serve as comic prelude to Josie's more serious rejections of Hogan and Jim in act 2. The advances of Josie's father and her suitor mirror each other because both stem from incestuous desire, and both are fiercely repulsed by Josie when each makes an "onnateral" gesture toward her. O'Neill's comic scenes (like those of his master, Ibsen) often reverberate with dark tones beneath the light surface.

Act 2 opens with Josie "sitting on the front steps," (46) having waited two hours for her moonlight date with Jim. O'Neill informs us that there is an "expression on her face . . . of sadness and loneliness and humiliation." We are told how she "sighs and gets slowly to her feet, her body stiff from sitting long in the same position" (46). In this trial, O'Neill is preparing Josie for her more difficult ordeal later on, when she must sit still for many more hours, holding a sleeping man-child to her breast.

For the first time in the play, Josie bares her loneliness and acute vulnerability. We sense that at this moment, on a night in which she has attempted to look attractive and enticing, she has never felt more lonely and insecure--just as her drunken father shows up.

In her shame and anger, Josie shuts the door on her father. While the door is not locked, it is as if Josie has barred Hogan from her heart. "He pounds on the door with his fist," (48) demanding to be let in. One detects that this is not one of their typical teasing battles. This may be the first real crisis in their relationship. Jim, after all, is Hogan's first true rival for Josie's love. As Hogan's anger rises, he threatens to physically humiliate her: "Be Jaysus, I'll take you over me knee and spank your tail, if you are as big as a cow!" Then he "makes a lunge to grab her" (48). Josie quickly dispatches him by rapping him on the head with the "end of her broom handle." It may be physical comedy, but beneath the buffoonery there are dark forces at work.

This is the first time that we see Hogan physically grab at his daughter, and it shocks us. Observe how and where Josie wards her father off: with a hard, phallic-shaped weapon that she strikes on the baby-pink "bald spot of his head" (48); it is an image that connotes both his faded youth (and virility) and the smooth, bare bottom of an infant. This latter image becomes a running metaphor when Josie treats her father like a naughty child: "Go in your room, and go to bed, or I'll take you by the scruff of your neck and the seat of your pants and throw you in and lock the door on you" (49). The language is not only physical and rough, it is also lusty. Whenever one of them plays the role of the angry parent, there is often the threat to grab at the "bad child's" posterior, to turn the bottom over. What is

suggested, beneath their verbal threats, is a desire (understandably suppressed) to sexually humiliate each other.

Josie's violent behavior, in addition to masking forbidden emotions, reveals an opposite side to her gentleness and vulnerability. Preston says that "another universal characteristic of mother worship is ambivalence. Female deities are fraught with paradoxes, combining such opposites as love and anger, trust and terror, forgiveness and vengeance."²² Josie offers herself as a female who could both protect and crush members of the opposite sex. Her father is one man who is aware of her power. Ironically, Josie is as fearful of normal sex as Jim, though for different reasons. At twenty-eight she is still a virgin, not because no man will have her, but because she has rejected all their advances. She could not love any man but her father--until James Tyrone arrived.

After Hogan's burst of anger is spent, he gets back at Josie with his greatest weapon--his barbed tongue--and begins to verbally humiliate her.

Be Christ, you have me stumped, a great proud slut who's played games with half the men around here, and now you act like a numbskull virgin that can't believe a man would tell her a lie! (52, emphasis mine)

Notice Hogan's cunning use of language: a virgin is a "numbskull," and a slut is "great" and "proud." No wonder Josie

plays the great arrogant whore--to make her father proud! But as Hogan continues, he mocks her for brazenly using those same womanly charms that a moment earlier he seemed to praise: "You . . . wiggled your backside, and stuck out your beautiful breasts you know he admires" (54). By repressing his true feelings for Josie, Hogan, at times, appears confused about the proper way a daughter (and father) should behave.

After his stream of sarcasm softens Josie up, Hogan shifts into a drunken, sentimental mood. When he "tries to kiss her" good night, "she wards him off and steers him back to the chair" (53). Again his desires are masked by physical comedy. Then Hogan tries wooing Josie with flattery. On the surface, his purpose is to make her go through with his scheme, but the subtext is something else entirely. Hogan entreats Josie by being Tyrone, a role we saw him play briefly in act 1. We know from Hogan's many successful schemes that he is an experienced and flexible performer. Just like his surrogate son, Jim (and Jim's natural father), Hogan is a born actor and a deft wearer of masks, with "always a trick hidden behind [his] tricks," (17) and always another mask hidden behind his mask.

Hogan tells Josie (borrowing Tyrone's language) how Jim admires her great inner beauty: her "great strength," "great pride," "great goodness" (57-58). But when Hogan whispers in her ear that Jim believes she is a virgin, Josie shudders. As his language becomes increasingly ardent, Josie becomes more agitated: "You're a pure virgin to him, but all the same there's

things besides your beautiful soul he's drawn to, like your beautiful hair and eyes, and--" (59). Before he can add "breasts" Josie cuts him off, understandably stricken. Her father is stepping from behind the Tyrone mask. "Och, don't Father! You know I'm only a big--" (59). Before she can say "cow," Hogan cuts her off, because he is now thinking about Jim's desire for his daughter: "So he'll keep away from temptation because he can't trust himself, and it'd be a sin on his conscience if he was to seduce you" (59). Although Hogan is referring to Jim, he may as easily be talking of himself.

Jim's return in act 3 brings us to the evocative image of the Pietà, perhaps the crucial leitmotif in this work. Among Moon's themes and motifs, this is a play about the movement and conflict of human inner states. More precisely, it is a play about sexual frustration, physical sacrifice, and spiritual fulfillment. Although O'Neill works the Pietà in Moon more intensely and more profoundly than in any of his other plays, the effect never seems overworked or forced, because the gesture appears to spring organically from the concerns of the characters and the play.

Primarily, when we think of Moon, we picture the famous long Pietà that ends act 3 and opens act 4. Barlow--whose comments on Moon's Pietà are both sensitive and insightful--astutely observes that "Moon is not a play that generally calls for extensive movement on stage, but the continued immobility of Josie and Jim is still extraordinary. Obviously O'Neill wanted this picture

strongly impressed on the audience's mind."²³ But O'Neill is rarely satisfied to use a good image, either visually or orally, just once.

In act 1, we see the first trace of the Pietà when Jim is eyeing Josie's breasts, desiring them for--what? We do not yet know. It could merely be a sexual gesture. In O'Neill's first working draft of Moon, Jim "is not repelled by sex as in the published text. On the contrary, he displays definite physical desire for Josie, making the fulfillment of it a precondition"²⁴ for the Hogans' to keep their farm. At the end of act 2, the Pietà theme takes on more force when Jim confesses to Josie that "I remember I had some pretty nutty idea I'd get in bed with you --just to lie with my head on your breast" (68). Josie, boldly drawing his head back until it is resting on her breast, says "Here's for a starter" (68). This gesture marks the end of the Pietà's first movement and acts as a preview to its grand finale in act 4.

The Pietà image is one that O'Neill has used several times before. In The Great God Brown, Cybel, the earth-mother whore, cradles Billy Brown as he lays dying. Barlow, again, is keen to note how their two bodies form a "tableau not unlike the Pietà O'Neill used in Moon [and] a Pietà virtually identical to that in Moon appears in the Epilogue to More Stately Mansions."²⁵ At that play's end, the bewildered and dazed Simon calls his wife Sara, "Mother." The last line of the play belongs to Sara, who says, "Yes, I'll be your Mother, too, now, and your peace and

happiness and all you'll ever need in life! Come!"²⁶ Sara's closing command to "Come!" connotes a sexual climax within the play's maternal climax at the end. (It is a shame that O'Neill never finished this play--he actually wanted it destroyed at his death--because no other work moves as assuredly toward that O'Neillian ideal Woman, one who can be both mother and lover.) In Dynamo, Reuben leans his head against the massive body of the motherly cowlike May. Half-closing his eyes, he says, "Yes. You're like her--Dynamo--the Great Mother--big and warm."²⁷

The seeds for Moon's ending may have begun even earlier. Part of O'Neill's apprenticeship as a playwright was studying the works of the two great Scandinavian dramatists. Two of their plays O'Neill may have read with interest were Strindberg's The Father, and Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Each play ends in a striking Pietà. In The Father, we are moved to pity the figure of Captain Adolf, despite his foolishness, as he dies in the lap of his old nurse and cries, "Oh it's so sweet to sleep at a woman's breast, be she mother, or mistress. But sweetest of all a mother's!"²⁸ In Peer Gynt, the turbulent life of Peer finally comes to a peaceful rest, as he clings to his extraordinarily faithful Solveig. After she forgives him, Peer's last words are, "My Mother! My Wife! You holy woman! / Oh hide me, hide me within your love."²⁹

Josie is no passive participant in the Pietà scheme. At times she will speak to Jim as if addressing a dying man: "I thought when I left you really were dying on me" (73); and

earlier, after rewarding him with a kiss, she pulls away, both startled and stirred, "Och, there's no spirit in you! It's like kissing a corpse" (33). While Jim is creating a Virgin Mary figure out of Josie, she is creating a dead Christ-figure out of Jim.

The Pietà motif also illustrates why O'Neill's characters attain unusual resonance; they are magnified to a mythic level. In this elevated landscape, Jim and Josie become archetypes locked in a timeless struggle. From this vantage point, O'Neill leads his characters (and audience) through a mystical experience. Incest, with its mythical and primal implications, plays a core role in Jim and Josie's journey; in effect, incest functions like one of the dynamos in O'Neill's Dynamo: a thing of power, mystery, and fascination that can generate fearsome energy.

Act 3 is one of the most ritualistic and elemental scenes O'Neill ever wrote, comparable to the last act of Long Day's Journey Into Night. In his ceremonial scenes, the realistic American settings and characters begin to shed all specificity of time and place. As Jim explains, "There is no present or future --only the past happening over and over again--now" (82-83). Jim could be quoting his mother; in Long Day's Journey, Mary Tyrone says, "The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too."³⁰ Jim and Josie are like two mythical beings that must go through an excruciating rite. In this rite, Josie's mask is torn

away to reveal her true self, and Jim's poisonous curse is finally lifted. In the end, they will both be transformed.

A crucial element of this ritual is liquor. In O'Neill's last three major plays, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten, liquor is a determining factor in setting, character, mood, and plot. Bennett Simon, in his psychological study, Tragic Drama and the Family, focuses on the booze factor and its involvement in O'Neill's work. His comments on Long Day's Journey are worth noting.

There is an atmosphere of deep need, of deep yearning to be fed and nurtured. . . . All are needy, and all are deprived and kept hungry. . . . Alcohol--its allure, its dangers, its ability to soothe, its potency . . . seem[s] to be the only way to satisfy, even briefly, these cravings and the sense of deprivation.³¹

In Moon, there are recurrent negotiations between Jim and Hogan --as there were between Jim and his father in Long Day's Journey --over booze: its quantity, quality, and aftereffects. Like Tyrone, Sr., Hogan miserly keeps the good bonded bourbon locked away, dispensing it only when he feels it is appropriate. Because Josie (the mother-figure) recognizes that Jim's emotional needs are greater than Hogan's, she takes the former's side in

their boys' game: "I know you must be perishing" (29). And she's right, Jim is.

In addition, there is a pagan aspect to liquor's role in Moon. This, of course, is the Dionysian celebration, where participants become drunken, frenzied, and orgiastic. The most notable example of this is told by Jim, when describing his nights of sex and booze with the "blonde pig" on the train. This kind of reckless, intoxicated behavior is almost repeated by Jim with Josie, before his midnight trip to her bedroom is aborted at the last minute.

An early Christian myth, with paganistic overtones (which O'Neill may not have been aware of) is worth telling, as it pertains to Josie and booze. It is the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This Virgin "relates to the private needs of individuals suffering from the terrors of death. She "soothes Mexican villagers who drink a milky sap (of the Maguey) called 'Virgin's milk.'"³² The most pertinent part of this myth is that this "liquor is placed in the coffins of dead children believed to be nursed on the Virgin's milk in the heavenly garden of Flowers until they can be weaned."³³ The "Virgin's milk" in Moon is the bonded bourbon that Josie generously offers to Jim. As Josie says, "There's only tonight, and the moon, and us--and the bonded Bourbon" (73). When Jim half-suspiciously asks her if it is to get him drunk, Josie tells him (in the spirit of the Mexican goddess), it is "only to get you feeling happy, so you'll forget all sadness" (76).

Ironically, it will be the combination of liquor, moonlight, and Josie's loving kisses upon Jim (after she realizes he isn't selling the farm) that leads to the unmasking of Josie's innocence. It is absolutely necessary for Jim's redemption that Josie unveil her virginity, and thus her purity, to the world.

Josie struggles to maintain her mask because, up to now, it has acted as a defense from her father. When Jim tells Josie that Hogan is also aware of her virginity, she becomes nearly hysterical: "For the love of God, can't you shut up about him!" (87). Her mask of wantonness had been her armor and shield. She used it as a shelter from her father's dark passion, while still retaining his love and admiration. Now that her innocence is exposed, she feels vulnerable to both his desire and his scorn.

After Josie's unmasking, there ensue a series of breathtaking, dance-like dramaturgical turns by the two leads. Stripped of her veil by Jim's declaration of love, Josie gives her sorrowful "I am a virgin" confession. This is merely a fleeting introduction to her fiery seduction speech, where she bids, woos, and finally leads Jim to her bedroom. In this speech, Josie turns from chaste maiden to aggressive seductress -- "I want you to . . . I'll make you! . . . Come. Come with me" (88). In a sense, she becomes, consecutively, two Marys: the Virgin and Magdalene. By compressing two differing (and extreme) emotional states within one speech, O'Neill places extraordinary technical demands on the actress. As Harold Clurman wrote, describing Colleen Dewhurst's triumph as Josie (in the 1973

Broadway production, directed by Jose Quintero), "She looks and sounds like a person . . . who possesses the vast sexuality she boasts of, as well as a woman chaste through the very force of that sexuality."³⁴

Following Josie's invitation arises another reversal, with a climax as terrifying as in any gothic melodrama. Josie's offering of consummated love is not only rejected, but defiled by Jim--"Love, nuts! I'll show you what love is" (89). Josie can only look at him with "frightened horror," as Jim roughly kisses her--"Come on, Baby Doll, let's hit the hay" (89). Jim turns into a Jekyll and Hyde figure. He no longer has control of either side of his personality and, like Dr. Jekyll, he cannot remember what his Hyde-self had said or done.

It is notable that in an earlier draft, this shocking deviation in Jim is not as sudden and complete. O'Neill's written autograph manuscript of Moon contain some lines, cut in the published version, that alter the meaning, intention, and impact of this scene. In both versions, Josie is pulling Jim to her bedroom, when she remembers, "I'll have to make you leave before sunrise. I mustn't forget that" (88). In the manuscript's text, Jim responds by saying, "Yep. I wouldn't want that with you. I've witnessed too damn many dawns--(abruptly he turns and . . . puts his arm around her) You're beautiful, Josie! I've wanted you all along."³⁵ Those lines of Jim were cut. In the published text, Jim has already changed into a drunken slob who looks Josie over "with a sneering cynical lust," and says,

"Sure thing, Kiddo. What the hell else do you suppose I came for?" (88-89). The published version of this scene makes the character of Tyrone more repellent; had O'Neill kept the manuscript's lines in, it would have made Jim's attraction to Josie more sexual and, thus, more ambiguous. O'Neill apparently wished to stress that the overriding desire of Jim is to return to his mother through Josie.

Our virgin is understandably frightened by this crude change in Jim. Innocent of sex, Josie is unprepared for the ugly side of love, which is lust. "On the verge of collapse," this Beauty pleads to her Beast, "I'm not a whore!" (89). This shattering moment on stage is graphically physicalized during their struggle: "She pulls his arms away so violently that he staggers back and would fall down the steps if she didn't grab his arm in time" (89). Suddenly the entrance to Josie's humble bedroom is like the gates of hell or of heaven; either way, our would-be lovers are thrown backwards, as if by angry gods.

But neither Josie nor the gods are the real obstacle that forces Jim from Josie's bedroom; it is the "poison" Jim feels inside him. "You don't know me," he tells her, "I'd poison it for myself and for you. I've poisoned it already, haven't I, but it would be a million times worse after" (90). Later he says, "Believe me, Kid, when I poison them, they stay poisoned!" (91). (We will hear of this infectious poison again from the men in Shepard's plays.) Jim's repeated warnings magnify the danger of this poison, suggesting a kind of primitive curse. Its source

could be a damnation that began with his parents, his grandparents, or ancestors from a thousand years ago. (Note the many references to "poison" in Long Day's Journey: Mary's addiction; the men's booze; Tyrone's father's probable suicide by rat poison; and Tyrone's warning to Edmund about Jamie--"He'll poison life for you with his damned sneering serpent's tongue!"³⁶) One recalls that cursed family from the House of Atreus. In Aeschylus's The Eumenides, after Athena lets Orestes return home, the Furies cry out,

You, you younger gods! -- you have ridden down
the ancient laws, wrenched them from my grasp--
and I, robbed of my birthright, suffering, great with wrath,
I loose my poison over the soil, aieeee!--
poison to match my grief comes pouring out of my heart.³⁷

O'Neill has, essentially, stripped Moon of plot and set to approach the bare, elemental nature of Greek tragedy. The stairs to Josie's bedroom, for example, could be the steps from an ancient Greek skene. The entire play, following Greek tradition, takes place outdoors. O'Neill even scrupulously keeps to the maximum of three characters on stage (which may explain why Josie adamantly pushes Jim offstage when Harder arrives). Closely following the unities, the action covers less than twenty-four hours. This last work by O'Neill, while clearly his most spare, is also his most classical.

There are other archetypal elements in the play. For example, in Jim's climatic story of his mother's death, we will hear echoes of themes and motifs from Greek legends. The long journey to the West, undertaken by Jim and his mother to visit the dead father's land, sounds like the beginning of a mythic tale. Jim's abstinence from alcohol, during this trip, equates a son's holy vow of denial and renunciation for the sake of his mother. By breaking this vow, as the mother lays dying, Jim unleashes the family curse. After her death, the son must return home with his mother's corpse. Then in the train, he partakes in a dark Dionysian celebration that includes copulating with a "blonde pig." Hinden suggests that Jim's action on the train can be attributed not only to an "Oedipal dilemma," but to "sex as ritual, a wild irrational effort intended somehow to bring the dead mother back to life--but not for love."³⁸ This time it is an attempt to debase her memory as deeply as she had hurt him. For Hinden, this is a "most terrible desecration, worse than that of Oedipus, for it is malign rather than unknowing and reaches beyond the grave."³⁹

To add to the archetypalness of Jim's story, we never hear specific names, only the "Old Man" and "Mama." Furthermore, the seduction of the "blonde pig" suggests the stories of Greek gods, who transformed themselves into animals to fornicate with the mortals they lusted. Jim's unhealthy attachment to his mother is the real curse; the consummation of the curse is that he will make love with a pig, because it will remind him of the mother he

hates, not the mother he worships. What makes Jim's sexual act revolting is that he did it not from sorrow and love, but from base unchristian motives of revenge. As Hinden states, it is "an attack against the parent by the child . . . to punish his mother for dying."⁴⁰

As was Orestes in The Eumenides, Jim is chased by furies, except that his tormentors spring from his guilty conscience. The mark of a mother's curse, echoing Aeschylus's play, is suggested in O'Neill's play as well. Jim recalls how his mother recognized him just before she died: "She saw I was drunk. Then she closed her eyes so she couldn't see, and was glad to die!" (95). This image of averted, or unseeing, eyes reminds us of the fate of another Greek son--the blinding of Oedipus for sleeping with his mother. Perhaps Jim's mother saw (and understood) more than his drunkenness. In Wendy Lesser's His Other Half: Men Looking at Women Through Art, a study of the way male artists represent women, Lesser states that the "relationship between mother and son, if it becomes too intimate, is necessarily one of averted eyes--averted because to stare directly, to acknowledge the connection, would be too painful."⁴¹ It is that terrifying look of recognition that Jim can't forget. Like his Greek counterpart, Jim seeks a goddess to free him from a mother's curse. It is well to recall Orestes's plea to Apollo: "Lord Apollo, you know the rules of justice, / know them well. Now learn compassion, too."⁴² The goddess that Jim finds is in the person of Josie. As Athena intervened for Orestes, Josie will do

the same for Jim; but, more importantly, she will forgive him; and, finally, she must also bring back his mother who will forgive him as well. By fulfilling all these mothering roles, Josie becomes the Great Mother herself. The role works because O'Neill has finally created a female character who, in her prodigious physical proportions and heroic strength, looks like a Great Mother!

One role Josie can never play again is the wanton woman. After this night she must (and we sense that she will) forever be herself. In effect, the transformations of these lovers are variations from the fairy tale, "The Beauty and the Beast." The beast in Jim is subdued, if not destroyed, and from Josie's compassionate act of love, she is revealed as a pure and noble beauty.

Josie must now go through her most difficult test. She must transform her love for Jim from one that is, initially, sexual, to one that is, necessarily, maternal. Moreover, this conversion, despite its concluding spiritual nature, is one that is demandingly physical. It is also uncommonly cruel; unlike a sexual bond, there can be no climax and release in this love. The result is that Josie's act of maternal passion becomes a physical as well as emotional sacrifice.

Mary McCarthy, despite a general antagonism toward O'Neill, astutely writes of the play's primitive power in an article for Sights and Spectacles.

This moment, in which the bootlegger's daughter discovers that this middle-aged man is really "dead," emotionally speaking--an exhausted mummified child--is a moment of considerable poignancy. The defeat of all human plans and contrivances is suddenly shaped in the picture of the titaness sitting staring at a stage moon with a shriveled male infant drunkenly asleep at her side. The image of the survivors takes on a certain grotesque epic form; the woman, stage center, like a gentle beached whale, appears for an instant as the last survivor of the world.⁴³

In O'Neill's earlier Dynamo, there is a moment in which Mrs. Fife "is staring dreamily at the front dynamo, humming to herself, her big body relaxed as if she had given herself up completely to the spell of its hypnotic, metallic purr."⁴⁴ It is likely that O'Neill saw something maternally sublime in the image of an extremely large woman, physically immobile, and yet, radiating mysterious power.

The act of Josie's forgiveness is presented in the same mood of Christian and mythic ritualism as Jim's confession. Note that Josie forgives him not once, but three times: "And I do forgive! . . . As she forgives, do you hear me! As she loves and understands and forgives" (99). Often in folk and mythic tales, the magic words that can break the curse must be said three times. Still, it is not enough for Josie to tell Jim that his mother forgives him; she must feel his mother forgiving him and

loving him, as if her great body and generous soul were able to absorb his mother's spirit. As Josie bends over Jim "with a brooding maternal tenderness," she tells this sobbing man-child, "She hears. I feel her in the moonlight, her soul wrapped in it" (99). Since Josie, in essence, has become the Great Mother, she is able to hold Jim, his mother's spirit, and the moonlight, all within her great womb-like embrace.

Josie's scene of forgiveness should evoke for us elements of the parlor scene in Desire Under the Elms. But instead of forgiving the son, Abbie, the mother-figure, is seducing him: "She's tellin' ye t' love me. . . . Can't you feel it? Don't ye know? She's tellin' ye t' love me, Eben" (Desire, p. 36). As Hinden perceptively notes, "In Moon . . . certain unconscious fantasies dramatized in Desire are exorcised and self-forgiven."⁴⁵ Hinden points out other striking similarities between these two plays: the fact that both are set on "stark, rock-strewn New England farms . . . where solitude, compounded by sexual repression, looms as emotional threat"; that there is a "scheming father"; that each has a "buxom earth mother . . . who attracts the male protagonist but who combines seduction with the threat of incest"; that each has "an anguished male protagonist . . . haunted by his mother's ghost, confused by sexual impulses and worried about ownership of farm."⁴⁶

But, as Hinden adds, the differences between these two plays are as intriguing as their similarities, and perhaps more revealing about each. Eben, "seduced by Abbie in his mother's

parlor," succeeds in penetrating the "forbidden chamber."⁴⁷ His sexual embrace with Abbie is an embrace with his mother as well. And "from this act of incest stems infanticide and endless guilt."⁴⁸ While Jim does not reach the bed of his "maternal surrogate," he does enter, rocked "in the arms of the extraordinary Josie,"⁴⁹ a state of innocent grace. He has managed to attain that lost primal connection to his mother's womb without sex. In the end, Jim experiences a mother-love that is consummated, pure, and whole.

The distinctions between these two plays, in the areas of desire and eroticism, are worth pursuing. In Desire, eroticism permeates the play's atmosphere like a heavy fog. Clearly, the catalyst for this hothouse environment is Abbie. The moment she enters the stage, her lusty presence sets off an erotic charge to the entire surroundings. The gesture that, perhaps, best signifies her sexual nature is her frankly direct gaze, first leveled at the farm, and then at Eben. While Josie talks the part of a brazen bawd, her shy glances at Jim speak the language of simple love. Yes, there is desire in Moon, but it is fearful and confused desire. There is also eroticism, but it is an unselfconscious eroticism. The term, "unselfconscious eroticism," is taken from Lesser's His Other Half. She uses it in her compelling interpretation of Degas's late nude paintings. Her meaning of this term could not be more apt to explain the nature of Moon's sexuality.

There is an eroticism in Degas's bathers, certainly, but it is a kind of unselfconscious eroticism, unmediated by mind, that we don't normally find in men's paintings of female nudes. . . . It is an eroticism of pure desire that has no hope or need of fulfillment and yet receives fulfillment through the eyes alone. It is, in some sense, the desire of a small infant for its mother, or a mother for her small infant, at a phase when sexuality has not yet become conscious and gendered, and when the two beings are so close together that they barely have room to want each other.⁵⁰

This brings us back to the Pietà scene at the end of act 3. The scene is an excellent illustration of what Lesser means by "unselfconscious eroticism"; that is, the movements, gestures, and stillness of Josie and Jim, which lead to the culmination of their embrace. After all, isn't the consummation of these lovers akin to the fulfilled "desire of a small infant for its mother, or a mother for her small infant?" Now contrast this scene with the steamy parlor scene in Desire, where even the spectators are participating voyeurs, peeking through the walls of the room. Even the lovers are aware of being watched by a presence; and though they call it "Maw," their observer includes the audience's steady gaze.

As in Desire, O'Neill gives Moon a strongly mystical setting at the end. Act 4 opens with a spectacular sunrise, just as it did in the final scene of Desire.

Desire: "The sky is brilliant with the sunrise." (53)

Moon: "The sky is now glowing with all the colors of an exceptionally beautiful sunrise." (111)

Desire: Eben and Abbie "both stand for a moment looking up raptly in attitudes strangely aloof and devout." (58)

Moon: Jim "stares, drawing a deep breath. He is profoundly moved." (111)

Because of Josie's extraordinary (and climatic) act of forgiveness, the mysticism in Moon resonates with more of an Irish-Catholic essence than in Desire. But Moon does attain an Eastern element in terms of enlightenment, and it is Josie who reaches the highest level of realization. Josie tells her father that a "great miracle" has occurred: "A virgin . . . bears a dead child in the night, and the dawn finds her still a virgin. If that isn't a miracle, what is?" (103). The juxtaposition (if not synthesis) of Eastern thought and Christianity is underscored by Jim when he says, "I've got a nice, dreamy peaceful hangover for once--as if I'd had a sound sleep without nightmares" (108). Later he tries to describe this new change in himself: "Sort of at peace with myself and this lousy life--as if all my sins had been forgiven" (110).

The healing of Jim's soul and conscience is as much a Jungian journey as a Catholic one. And with Jung, there is always the influence of an Eastern viewpoint. John Robinson's book, O'Neill and Oriental Thought, gives an excellent overview

on the subject of O'Neill's strong interest, knowledge, and application of Eastern philosophy and religion to his work. In addition, it expands the concept--within a Jungian psychoanalytical context--of the child's desire to enter the Great Mother.

Robinson compares Jung's theory of the libido with the various stages of enlightenment. This comparison can also be applied, as an analysis, to Jim's psychic (and mystical) journey while sleeping on Josie's warm, beautiful breasts. In Jungian terms, Jim has descended into the "depths of the libido to derive strength" from his mother--she being the prime representative of the libido, a "force that both nourishes and threatens our identity."⁵¹ (The Great Mother herself!) Jung describes this desire to remain in the libido as a "deadly longing for the depths within." This "death," in Jung's words, "is no external enemy, but a deep personal longing for quiet and for the profound peace of non-existence, for a dreamless sleep in the ebb and flow of the sea of life"⁵² (emphasis mine because it sounds remarkably O'Neillian). Robinson notes that this longing for "profound peace" duplicates the "goal of the Oriental mystic," while also stressing its Jungian "desire to return to the womb."⁵³

In other words, Jim's descent into the libido is a dangerous but necessary journey. To stay in the libido means psychological paralysis--that death-sleep of Jim's that frightens Hogan and worries Josie--while to re-enter the upper world means re-birth and nourishment to the individual ego. (This fits right into

Jung's death/rebirth cycle process.) For Jim to re-enter, Josie must forcibly pull him from a peaceful death: "I hate to bring you back to life, Jim, darling. If you could have died in your sleep, that's what you would have liked, isn't it?" (106).

Unfortunately, Jim is past the ability--in Jungian terms--to "fight and sacrifice his longing for the past, in order to rise to his own heights."⁵⁴ All that Josie can hope for is that God will "let him remember that one thing and forget the rest" (107).

Of all O'Neill's mother-obsessed heroes, only James Tyrone has managed to find the peace of mother-love. Yet, one is saddened by the realization that this love has come too late to save him.

More problematic at the play's end is the relationship of Josie and Hogan. After Josie threatens to leave her father, it appears that, after some struggle, they have managed to preserve their bond. As if to set Hogan (and the audience) at ease, Josie tells her father, "Don't be afraid I'm going to leave you. I only said it to punish you" (114). O'Neill gives a twist to the Oedipal structure (perhaps to retain its comic frame) by allowing the father to keep the well-endowed, powerful mother-goddess; but consistent with Oedipus's fate, Jim is left to wander away in a state between death and life.

Hogan indicates, in his joking manner, how much he relies on Josie for nourishment: "I was thinking after you'd gone I'd drown myself in Harder's ice pond" (114). But beneath the humor lies quiet desperation. Earlier, Hogan seemed to physically shrink

before our eyes when he thought that Josie was going to abandon him. His pleading became more tormented and miserable under Josie's scathing bitterness.

One wonders how this father-daughter relationship will change after Josie makes her final exit into the house. We know that surely it must change, because Josie herself has changed. She has unconditionally loved and deeply suffered. In O'Neill's world, that is the price one pays to have any chance of growth and fulfillment. In this strange and deeply tragic comedy, Josie may yet find some happiness.

There is a final footnote to the ending. As we know, Josie delivers the play's last lines, which are expressed as a blessing: "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim darling. May you rest in forgiveness and peace" (115). But in O'Neill's autograph manuscript, it is Hogan who has the final say. In that earlier version, Josie, after calling her father an "old tick," goes into the house to make him breakfast. Hogan, looking sorrowful, gives an expanded version of his "cursing life" speech: "What are you cursing. You old loon? Is it Jim? No. . . . Is it myself? . . . Is it life? Sure. That's a fair waste of breath."⁵⁵ It is not a bad ending, but it clearly lacks the emotional and spiritual weight that O'Neill surely wanted. In the published text, he wisely keeps Josie on the steps. Having attained the stature of a Great Mother, she now has the compassion to give loving forgiveness and peaceful death

to her child. And with "her face sad, tender and pitying," that is what she does.

1. Horst Frenz, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1971), 90.
2. Travis Bogard, Contour of Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 446.
3. Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre: O'Neill's Last," New York Times, May 4, 1957, n.p.
4. Doris Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension: An Interpretive Study of His Plays (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 172.
5. Michael Manheim, "O'Neill's Transcendence of Melodrama in A Touch of the Poet and A Moon for the Misbegotten," in Critical Approaches to O'Neill, ed. John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1988), 154.
6. Ibid.
7. Manheim, 155.
8. Eugene O'Neill, A Moon for the Misbegotten (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 6. All subsequent quotes from this play will be indicated by page numbers.
9. Falk, 173.
10. Anthony Storr, an introduction in The Essential Jung by Carl Jung (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 14.
11. Judith Barlow, Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 120.
12. Ibid.
13. Stephen Black, "Letting the Dead Be Dead: A Reinterpretation of A Moon for the Misbegotten," Modern Drama 29, No. 4 (December, 1986), 546.
14. Ibid.
15. John Henry Raleigh, "The Irish Atavism of A Moon for the Misbegotten" in Eugene O'Neill: A World View, ed. Virginia Floyd (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979), 234.
16. Raleigh, 235.

17. Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill: Artist and Son (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 592.
18. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Triumph of Time," The Norton Anthology of English Literature Vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams, et al (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 1201.
19. Bruno Schulz, Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz, trans. Walter Arndt with Victoria Nelson, ed. Jerzy Ficowski (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 109.
20. Mary McGavran, "O'Neill Lifts Curtain On Sympathetic Drama," Columbus Journal Feb. 21, 1947, p. 10.
21. Sheaffer, 660-61.
22. James Preston, ed., "Conclusion: New Perspectives on Mother Worship," Mother Worship: Theme and Variations (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 331.
23. Barlow, 139.
24. Virginia Floyd, ed, Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly released Ideas for Plays (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981), 373.
25. Barlow, 140.
26. Eugene O'Neill, More Stately Mansions (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 194.
27. Eugene O'Neill, Dynamo in Complete Plays 1920-1931 Vol. 2 (New York: The Library of America, 1988), 874.
28. August Strindberg, The Father in Five Plays, trans. Harry G. Carlson (New York: New American Library, 1983), 48.
29. Henrik Ibsen, Peer Gynt in Masters of Modern Drama, trans. Norman Ginsbury, ed. Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd (New York: Random House, 1962), 66. My thanks to Harry G. Carlson for pointing out the significance of the Pieta in Peer Gynt and in Strindberg's The Father.
30. Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), 87.
31. Bennett Simon, Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies from Aeschylus to Beckett (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 181.
32. Preston, Mother Worship, 336.
33. Ibid.

34. Harold Clurman, review of A Moon for the Misbegotten, The Nation Jan 19, 1974, p. 92.
35. Eugene O'Neill, "A Moon for the Misbegotten," the only extant autograph manuscript copy of the play," Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, p. 17.
36. O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night, 109.
37. Aeschylus, The Eumenides in The Oresteia, lines 792-796, trans. Robert Fagles (New York, Viking Press, 1975; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977), 266.
38. Michael Hinden, "Desire and Forgiveness: O'Neill's Diptych," Creative Drama 14, No. 3 (Fall 1980), 245.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Wendy Lesser, His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 35.
42. The Eumenides, lines 88-89.
43. Mary McCarthy, "A Moon for the Misbegotten," for Sights and Spectacles (copyright 1946, 1956) in O'Neill and His Plays, ed. Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 210.
44. O'Neill, Dynamo, 882.
45. Hinden, 240.
46. Hinden, 243.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Lesser, 79.
51. John Robinson, Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 69.
52. Robinson, 70.
53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.
55. O'Neill, "A Moon for the Misbegotten," manuscript, 114.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BURIED CHILD: DEATH OF THE GREAT FATHER

He would doubtless at that moment with pleasure have cut my throat . . . But he was still a little on the young side, my son, a little on the soft side, for the great deeds of vengeance. But time was on his side and he consoled himself with that thought, foolish though he was.

--SAMUEL BECKETT
Molloy

"Ansel would've stopped him! . . . He was a hero! A man! A whole man! What's happened to the men in this family! Where are the men!"¹ So challenges Halie: wife, mother, grandmother, and bitter matriarch of this estranged family of unhappy fathers and sons in Sam Shepard's Buried Child.

"What's happened to the men" is a question that not only rings throughout this play, but echoes across Shepard's entire canon. If Eugene O'Neill is our preeminent modern dramatist, who went in search of the Great Mother in play after play, then Sam Shepard is our great post-modern playwright, who has been on a quest of the Great Father. Their artistic journeys have produced not only some of the most original and haunting theatrical works in American drama, but they were drawing upon the same Oedipal triangle, only from different sides. While O'Neill fixed upon the powerful bond between son and mother, Shepard fastened upon the inherent fear, hatred, and violence between father and son.

Hence, with Shepard the incest theme takes on a new twist; his vision of the father-son relationship is one in which repressed emotional states build up until they break out into intensely violent shocks. The epicenter of this domestic earthquake can usually be traced to incestuous desire. Its presence is most strongly felt in Buried Child (1978), Fool for Love (1983), A Lie of the Mind (1985), and, less explicitly, Curse of the Starving Class (1977).

To better understand Shepard's preoccupation with the father-figure, one needs to look at where it came from, or at least briefly analyze the social forces that possibly shaped it. As Jonathan Cott perceptively notes, when Shepard writes about the family, "one ineluctably senses the social world," and when he writes "about the social world, one feels the personal"²

Shepard, in the 1950s, grew up "on an avocado ranch in California, was in the 4-H Club in high school, and for his one year in college, majored in agriculture."³ The fifties in America were (at least on the socio-political surface) an era of popular patriarchal Republicanism, and Eisenhower was the country's popular president, comforting father-figure, and beloved war hero. Then in the sixties, this comfortable sense of well-being blew apart: Vietnam, assassinations, rock music, drugs, student anti-war protests, and the black power movement were the major causes of this fundamental (some believed revolutionary) change. The most basic American codes were exploding, such as respect and trust in patriarchal authority.

After World War II, our American Fathers were credited with saving democracy and the free world. During the Vietnam war, they were perceived as betrayers for sending their sons to a bad war in order to save capitalism. The sixties was also a period that had, as one radical called it, "breakaway experiences": moments when "political and cultural . . . boundaries melted away and it seemed as if anything could happen."⁴ Euphoric freedom may be another way to describe a feeling or a moment when the Establishment can no longer tell you what to do.

By the mid-seventies--after ten years of writing in a spontaneous, gestural, performance-oriented style about cowboys, rock stars, movie moguls, jazz musicians, detectives, bimbos, criminals, wanderers, and various American losers, dreamers, and lost children--Shepard decided that he was ready to address another kind of theme. It is a theme that became the "dominant American obsession"⁵ for other American playwrights, and one that clearly identifies O'Neill, Williams, Miller, and Albee: the "disintegration of the American family."⁶ The prominent tradition of this theme, Shepard explained, was one of the factors why he waited: "I felt it was exploited in the past by writers who didn't have anything else to write about. But then I felt that, rather than try to avoid it, I might as well try to meet it head on. The other thing is, my family is so idiosyncratic it verges on the bizarre."⁷

Another reason why this post-modern, pop-performance playwright would shy away from this theme was to avoid the

trappings of American realism; meaning, the domestic living room and kitchen sink turmoil that have dominated mainstream American drama for over sixty years. But Shepard successfully eluded the trap, as William Demastes explains, by using "realism as an ironic means to illustrate the disintegration of causal threads espoused by the old realism (or naturalism), which simultaneously illustrates the disintegration of the family foundation."⁸ This use of "ironic realism" will become clearer in our discussion.

Shepard's shift to the family theme was not an abrupt change that came from out of the blue. We can begin to see it even in his earliest work. As a point of departure we might paraphrase Halie's question--"What's happened to the men?"--to simply, "What is a man?"

During the social upheaval of the sixties, the old reassuring concepts of manhood, masculinity, and heroism became suspect. The ideal of the "strong, quiet American male" was no longer working, and, clearly, no longer reassuring. Ralph Cook, after directing Shepard's Chicago (1965), said that the play was about the "universal problems of Man's being civilized to the suffocating point of losing his balls."⁹ In Shepard's The Tooth of Crime (1972), the leather-clad, violent, punk rock-criminal, Hoss, becomes disturbed when his status as number one killer begins to slip. The uncertainty of his public identity shakes his primitive sense of personal masculinity. In his stunning duel with Crow, the hottest new punk challenger, Hoss eventually

becomes so unnerved that he begs Crow to "show me how to be a man."¹⁰

In our discussion of Buried Child, the myths associated with masculinity and heroism will be compared and contrasted with similar patterns and motifs in other Shepard plays. However, the focus of this chapter will be on the play's father-son relationship, examining the fears, distrust, cruelty, and violence on both sides. While Shepard's riotous comic flair remains intact in this drama, there have been few plays that portray the American male as darkly and grimly as Buried Child.

There is a secondary theme in the play that will also be explored. It is only hinted at first, but as the action unfolds this theme becomes more defined. By the end of the play, its sheer significance should become as disturbing as the revelations of incest and infanticide; in fact, these unsolved crimes work as melodramatic devices that bring this theme to full realization. The theme is this: These characters, who are related by blood, are not really a family at all, but a primitive tribe. They are a tribe that lives by its own set of laws that are different, and at variance, with the laws of the surrounding community. In essence, all of Shepard's families are tribes which, in the eyes of society, would be deemed quite lawless. It is only when these families come into contact (meaning conflict) with outside intruders--aspects of the law-abiding morality--that their lawlessness is reckoned with. Halie may espouse a line of strict Christian morality, but then she immediately undercuts it

with her own personal, amoral code. The ineffectual Father Dewis symbolizes a Church that is powerless in the face of a clan whose customs and sacrificial rites mark it as pre-Christian. This family lives by the brutal law of earth, blood, and myth; in contrast, Judeo-Christian law seems clean, bloodless, petty, and, ultimately, powerless.

When the play opens, we first see the familiar, realistic set of an American living room. But on closer inspection, there appears to be something a little disturbing and uncomfortably wrong with this prosaic picture. Everything in it suggests death. The sofa is losing its stuffing, "coming out in spots" (11) like running sores. Almost all of the furnishings are shades of faded browns and yellows, including Dodge, the one occupant on the stage; he wears khaki work pants, brown slippers, covered in an "old brown blanket." He faces the television that has "no image, no sound," but emanates a "flickering blue light," like a small, steady dose of radiation. The elements of realism are here, the physical structure is set, but the feeling one gets is that it's something else; as when one recognizes those few, small, surreal touches in the beginning of a nightmare.

One also notices in these opening stage directions an acknowledgement to another (and realistic) family drama: Desire Under the Elms. They note that beyond the "screen door up left . . . are the shapes of dark elm trees" (11). Are these elm trees transplanted from O'Neill's play? The reference hardly seems a coincidence, as both Buried Child and Desire Under the

Elms deal with incestuous desire, illicit love, sin, guilt, and infanticide. Other parallels are equally striking: a mean-spirited father that produced three sons; a wife that had an illegitimate child with his son; a battle for possession of the farm; the lure of the West; and each play's handling of myth and ritual in performance. As a final point, Shepard has spoken of his high regard for O'Neill and his work.

Despite the implicit tribute to an American stage classic, we are soon informed that Shepard has not attempted to write Desire Under the Elms revisited. Indeed, the first one to inform us of this is the brown, solitary figure on stage. Dodge, rather than emulating one of the proud patriarchs from O'Neill, looks and sounds like one of those elderly clowns from Beckett. We perceive this by his stony silence, broken by his sarcastic comments, his blackly comic cynicism, his sense of the absurd, and his decayed, decrepit physical being, with one foot perched on the grave, the other precariously toeing life. Confined to his "old, dark green sofa," (11) Dodge's world is as narrowly limited as any of Beckett's crusty old men. Like Krapp, he sneaks a drink and wouldn't mind "a little contact" (52) from a warm-blooded female. Like Nagg, he is oppressed and tortured by a cruel and crippled son. No, we are not in naturalistic terrain after all, we are in dangerous "taboo territory," (68) as Vince rightly calls it. When Halie asks Dodge, "What's it like down there?" his tersely sour comment (and his first line in the play) is, "Catastrophic" (12). It is a line that could be straight out

of Beckett (who, incidently, titled one of his short plays Catastrophe); its humor comes from Dodge's inappropriate sarcasm and his gloomily exaggerated assessment of the outside world, but the line's resonance comes from its apocalyptic message. Death is the inevitable end of the line--for Dodge, as it is for the rest of us.

Dodge appears as a character from the theatre of the absurd, who has wandered onto the set of a naturalistic play. This may help explain why Shelly can't believe Dodge belongs in this setting, let alone lives there: "You're here, but it doesn't seem like you're supposed to be" (53). This incompatibility between people and the places they inhabit is an essential part of Shepard's vision. His characters tend to imagine habitations and communities that do not fit the places they live in. In Action (1975), Shooter expresses a kind of self-conscious confusion of these inner and outer worlds:

Then you go inside. It's a shock. It's not like how you expected. You lose what you had outside. You forget that there even is an outside. The inside is all you know. You hunt for a way of being with everyone. A way of finding how to behave. You find out what's expected of you. You act yourself out.¹¹

Disorientation from interior and exterior states produces a kind of vertigo in these characters. They experience the world they

live in as not real, but artificial. Feeling that they cannot live in this artificial world, they feel compelled to perform in it. This exhibition of their internal anxiety produces a psychic tension to the action on stage. Shepard's characters (and actors) are performers who must persistently perform. Rather than turning to traditional realism (as some critics foresaw), Shepard's family plays are no more realistic than his earlier experimentation.

The perception of Shepard shifting to realism may have more to do with his writing's change of tone than with a change in its form. This change can be likened to a painter who switches to darker colors, a more simplified expression, and less decorative brush strokes. In 1974, Shepard said he wanted to try "a whole different way of writing now, which is very stark and not so flashy . . . it could be called realism, but not the kind where husbands and wives squabble and that kind of stuff."¹²

Ironically, Buried Child opens with nothing less than a domestic squabble, if not a row, between Dodge and his wife, Halie. What makes the scene unusually unnerving is that the offstage voice of Halie dominates the stage, while the frail, faded presence of Dodge seems to disappear right into the furniture. "I'm an invisible man!" Dodge shouts up to Halie (16), and indeed he is. In Shepard's Fourteen Hundred Thousand (1966), Donna warns her boyfriend, Tom, that he will end up as an invalid, where the "bed will be your house and home."¹³ She then clinically describes his body's putrefaction until the "bed and

you become one thing. . . . You smell the same, you look the same, you are the same."¹⁴ That nightmarish image of a man melding into, and becoming permanently fixed to, the furniture is fulfilled in the suffering figure of Dodge.

When Halie finally does make her entrance, it is a visually stunning arrival, and its contrast to Dodge's inert body couldn't be more startling. Halie drops down from the sky as a mother goddess. Below her are the men, her men. One is her grown son, the other her husband, both reduced (one emotionally, the other physically) to the feeble state of babies. This portrait of infantilism is visually expressed. Just prior to Halie's appearance, the father refuses to share his bottle (of whisky), and the son happily brings in a favored milking stool to sit on.

In the mother's entrance, Shepard sets up a densely, and dazzling, visual metaphor. Moreover, the precise staging of her arrival works on a number of levels: sexual, psychological, and mythical. When Halie appears, she "enters slowly from the top of the staircase as she continues talking. Just her feet are seen at first as she makes her way down the stairs, a step at a time" (20). Having the mother enter, in effect, legs first, initiates a sexual encounter with the men on stage (not to mention the audience in the theatre). The action foregrounds both the mother's sexual parts and reproductive organs: she's had sex with both men; she's had children with both men; and she gave birth to one of them. Freud believed that "stairs, and going up and down them, are dream symbols of the sexual act."¹⁵ He based this

interpretation on how the rhythm of intercourse is reproduced in the act of climbing or descending stairs. He also noted that the colloquial term for "mounting" (stairs) is a "substitute designation for the sexual act."¹⁶ This Freudian coloring was particularly emphasized in Baltimore's 1986 Center Stage production (available on video at Lincoln Center). Their extremely tall staircase, in addition to towering above the rest of the set, looked foreboding, strangely isolated, and surreal. Moreover, by prolonging the mother's descent, the high staircase visually underscored her power over the men.

If Halie descends from the sky as some female deity from Olympus, it is not as a source of love, nourishment, and trust, but as a goddess of anger, vengeance, and terror. She is the terrible mother. For the crime of murdering her child, she has punished all the men involved; each has been crippled in some way, and each one has died in her eyes.

The most appalling outcome of Halie's revenge is her present relationship with Dodge, which has been reduced to regularly tormenting him in his helpless condition. This is her sweet vindication. Of all the female figures of myth, the one she brings most to mind is Clytemnestra, who exacted revenge upon Agamemnon for sacrificing her child, Iphigeneia. As Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford put it, Iphigeneia's sacrifice did calm the "spirits of the dead," but it consequently brought the "dead to life"; for Iphigeneia remained a "still life, the knife still

poised at her throat, the fountainhead of Agamemnon still about to burst."¹⁷

In Buried Child, the still life of the dead is matched by the still life of the living. For years, Dodge's farmland, like the soil of Oedipus's Thebes, "have lain fallow," and this American family has "shared a monotonous still-life from which there seems no escape."¹⁸ Not only the land, but the lives of these characters have become a wasteland, not unlike the one in T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Wasteland." In the words of mythologist Joseph Campbell, a wasteland is "where everybody is living an unauthentic life . . . doing as you're told, with no courage for your own life."¹⁹ This is a family that has given up life, or at least a desire for life with some meaning; except that on this particular morning, out in the backyard, in the rain, desire is moving through the soil, bursting through the surface. This desire will soon fill the stage with corn, carrots, and acts of courage and compassion.

In Halie's first appearance, she is "dressed completely in black, as though in mourning" (20). Indeed, she is mourning still the death of her son, Ansel: "Course then when Ansel died that left us all alone. . . . Same as if they'd all died. He was the smartest . . . He would've took care of us, too. . . . He was a hero. . . . A genuine hero. Brave. Strong. . . . Ansel could've been a great man" (20). If Halie continuously mourns Ansel's death, she, at the same time, repetitively gives birth to him, dreaming, remembering, and celebrating her doomed son. It

is through her that Ansel lives and dies, again and again. She is like Mother Earth, who enacts the cycle of life. In marked contrast to Halie is Dodge, who, by his stony silence, condemns Ansel to everlasting death. (In the Shepard world, a father's silence is a deadly killer of sons.) Joining him, with their own silence and jealousy, are his two sons, Tilden and Bradley; together, they have tried to bury Ansel as thoroughly as the buried child in the backyard. But it is Halie who persistently brings him forth.

As Halie descends the stairs, she chronicles Ansel's downfall (gesture matching word) and death. She enlarges his story into the stuff of myth and legend, borrowing elements from the occult and supernatural--devils, witches, curses, and living corpses. Deftly, she weaves a tale of pure good versus pure evil. Through Halie, Ansel has been transformed into an immortal hero, a combination Hercules, Ulysses, and Samson--a figure of strength, courage, and intelligence that was lured to his destruction by a wicked woman. At the same time, Halie re-creates herself into both the mother and lover of her hero-son: "I kissed him and he felt like a corpse. All white. Cold. Icy blue lips. He never used to kiss like that. Never before" (21). The image of a corpse could also be Halie's way of referring to the drowned remains of her other murdered son. By recalling the death of Ansel, she can also prick the heart of the child's killer.

While the sexual overtones in Halie's description intensifies the incest motif--the erotic depiction of a woman kissing her young lover/son good bye to a marriage of death--it also reinforces her Clytemnestra semblance. When Iphigeneia was sacrificed, she was lured "to Aulis on the pretense of marriage."²⁰ Sacrifice is exactly how Halie perceives Ansel's death (similarly, the buried child was sacrificed to maintain legitimacy to the patriarchal hierarchy of the home). She describes his Catholic-Italian bride as one practiced in the art of black magic: "I knew then that she'd cursed him. Taken his soul. I saw it in her eyes" (21). The death of Ansel brought death to all her sons: "When Ansel died that left us all alone. . . . Same as if they'd all died" (20). In Halie's voice, we hear another mythic mother; we hear a mourning Hecuba who wailed "for my dead world, my burning town / My sons, my husband, gone, all gone!"²¹

Understanding Shepard's handling of myth and ritual is crucial to understanding his dramas. Although he has been using the mythology of American pop culture since the sixties, it was not until Shepard was living in England, during the early seventies, that he first became interested in the Greek classics: "I read most of the Greek guys--Aeschylus, Sophocles . . . I was amazed by the simplicity . . . Nothing complex or tricky. . . . They're all about destiny. That's the most powerful thing."²² Shepard realized how the myths behind the story simplified the motivations of the characters and eliminated unnecessary

complexities. It made the plays human for him: "That's why I dig the Greek myths, like Oedipus Rex. This devastating harm coming down from the heavens. No Jung, no Freud, any of that. No 'language' or trappings at all. Now that's a story."²³

Thomas Nash, in "Sam Shepard's Buried Child: The Ironic Use of Folklore," writes that those who misunderstood Buried Child when it opened, described it as "an American gothic comedy," or "a poor impression of a play by Pinter."²⁴ It was the Soho Weekly News who noted that the "parallels in structure with Pinter's Homecoming are obvious."²⁵ The New York Post wrote that Buried Child clarified "more than any other of Shepard's plays" his "undoubted debt . . . to the British playwrights, Harold Pinter and Edward Bond."²⁶ One could cite other similar reviews, but Nash suggests that the critics were not entirely at fault. The directors were also confused at times, "interpreting as comedy several scenes . . . which were clearly intended as ritual."²⁷

As already discussed, and underlined by Nash, the importance of mythic motifs in Buried Child cannot be overstated. The possible danger, however, is to see the myths, but miss what lies behind them, or to understand the symbolism, but misunderstand what fuels them. In other words, to better understand the essence of Shepard's theatre, one should understand the essence of Shepard, the artist. Emphatically correcting an interviewer in 1980, Shepard flatly said, "I was never interested in the mythological cowboy. I was interested in the real thing."²⁸

What is the real thing? And how does a writer find it? Finding the answers to those questions has been the heart of Shepard's creative quest. One gets clues to the nature of this quest from his own words. Speaking about his writing, Shepard defined it as something

you do to the degree you're able, you know. You can only face so much, and then you turn away. . . . But when it comes right down to it, what you're really listening to in a writer is that: his ability to face himself.²⁹

The phrase, "his ability to face himself," tells us something about the basic themes in Shepard's plays. The one most germane to this play is the playwright's concern (if not obsession) with the male psyche: its heroes, fears, turn-ons, and contradictions.

Speaking like one of his own cowboy characters, Shepard stated, "In order to do something worthwhile, you have to suffer. There has to be an edge to it. That's what I've been trying to do in my life--put himself right up against the edge."³⁰ Shepard makes writing--at least his kind of writing--sound like an act of physical courage. This is a very male concern, indeed. This may explain why his female characters have not fared nearly as well as their male counterparts at being dynamic protagonists. Their usual roles have been as sexy support groups for the leading men, as, for example, the girl wannabes and groupies in Angel City, Melodrama Play, Tooth of Crime, and the gold-digging show girls

in Seduced.³¹ Only since Curse of the Starving Class has Shepard begun to create forceful female characters that appear more as subjects than objects.

In regard to this theme of male courage, a key work is The Tooth of Crime. Robert Coe called it "one of the most extraordinary plays of the '70s."³² Within the milieu of its violence, bloodshed, and punk rock music, the concept and illusions of maleness are examined, deconstructed, debunked, turned inside out, and, inevitably, mourned. In his duel with Crow, Hoss tries on different styles of American tough guys: cowboy, gangster, and black soul hipster. But Crow plays dirty, going directly for Hoss's manhood: "Finally got his chance and sucks the warden's dinger."³³ It is the male code literally played to the death. At the end of Tooth, the beaten Hoss attempts to redeem himself by carrying off one last act of "blind fucking courage."³⁴ In a grand Hemingwayesque gesture, he "puts the gun in his mouth"³⁵ and blows himself away.

Shepard's stage directions for Hoss's suicide are of special interest: "This gesture should not be in slow motion or use any jive theatrical gimmicks other than the actor's own courage on stage"³⁶ (emphasis mine). Even as Shepard seemingly mocks the concept of Hoss's machismo, he challenges the actor who plays him to be fearless on stage. The irony here is similar to the ironies found in all of Shepard's male heroes. As these men attempt to "make a home in the contemporary wilderness,"³⁷ they

are stuck with a self-image of the American male that no longer works.

One of Shepard's most self-revealing statements on this subject of machismo was in response to a question about his own supposed "macho" image: "I know what this thing is about because I was a victim of it, it was a part of my life, my old man tried to force on me a notion of what it was to be a 'man.' And it destroyed my dad. But you can't avoid facing it."³⁸ The key theme in Shepard's answer is this: While the father couldn't escape the old notions of masculinity before they destroyed him, the son still can. These notions are what the father in Curse of the Starving Class calls his "poison."

In Buried Child, the debris of manhood fills the stage, much like the empty cornhusks in the first act (which Halie scornfully kicks around). It is a farm house inhabited by impotent fathers and sons. These men have become de-sexed, neutered. They bear around phallic objects as symbols of their previous (or unfulfilled) lives as whole men. Dodge, the dying patriarch, always wears his baseball cap to cover his shaved, mutilated, and "castrated" head. Tilden, an emotional cripple, carries around carrots, corn, and a three-legged stool. Bradley, a physical cripple, wears a wooden leg that is also his third leg; but the sound of its creaking informs us how artificial and, ultimately, dead it is. The closest any of these men come to sex is when Bradley symbolically rapes Shelly by putting his fingers inside her mouth. The last (grand)son is Vince. He carries his phallus

around in a horn case; but we never see him take the horn out, let alone play it. His phallic container is all for show. Even a dead son cannot escape the fate of forever displaying his manhood. We learn from Halie that plans are being made to build a statue of Ansel: holding a basketball in one hand, a rifle in the other. The symbolism is obvious.

What does incest, consummated or not, have to do with these castrated men? In respect to fathers and sons, it plays a powerful role. When a son sexually attains the bed of his mother (or sister), he undermines the father's authority and power. It is the father's knowledge of the mysteries of sex, and his ability to regenerate, that sets him (from his son's perspective) at such an elevated position. In the beginning of the male child's life, the father's advantage comes from his massive size, strength, and frightening hostility. The child sees him as a colossus, a titan. As in the folk tales about young Jack fighting his giants, psychologically, the early stage of a boy initiates his "dangerous encounters with the ogre, as the Oedipal father."³⁹ When the son grows older and bigger, it will still be the father's knowledge of sex that preserves his superiority. The most Freudian aspect of the father's authority comes from his ability to shut the son out of the mother's bedroom, away from the bed. By closing the door, the father keeps the son outside, in the dark and in ignorance. It is no wonder that the Freudians say that "the first enemy is the father, if you are a man."⁴⁰

When, in Curse, Wesley informs his father that Emma's "got her first period," Weston is shocked. He is not disturbed because his daughter has begun menstruating, but that he is the last to know: "What happens when I'm gone, you all sit around and talk about periods? You're not supposed to know when your sister has her period! That's confidential between women."⁴¹ Weston is shaken because he feels that his authority is slipping, and realizes that his son knows too much, especially of those things he once had total dominion of, sex and reproduction. But Weston's deepest anxiety comes from a father's fear of being replaced, of being sexually destroyed by his son.

Shepard's earliest extant play, The Rock Garden (1964), illustrates, in plotless, starkly visual, almost Noh-like fashion, the Oedipal tension between a mother, her son, and his father. (In a recent interview, Shepard said that "The Rock Garden was sort of the beginning of something that reverberated from there, which I didn't realize at the time."⁴²) In the play's first speaking scene, there is a Woman lying in bed, and a Boy seated in a rocking chair; he wears only underwear. Their banal dialogue is dominated by the Woman's fond memories of her Pop. Whenever the Woman points out a physical likeness between her Pop and the Boy--"Your legs are a lot like Pop's,"⁴³--he wordlessly puts on an article of clothing to cover it up. The Boy's repressed desire for his mother is acted out by his jealous attempt to cancel Pop out.

In the second scene, we see the Boy and a Man, both sitting in their underwear. The Man drones on about his rock garden until the Boy, in his longest speech, symbolically kills him. He destroys his father by virtue of the imaginative description of his own virility: "When I come it's like a river" is his opening metaphor. From there his narrative becomes more graphically precise: "I mean if a girl has a really small vagina it's really better to go in from behind. . . . [S]he goes down . . . until she's almost sitting on your dick. . . . She'll come a hundred times and you just stand there holding onto it."⁴⁴ He concludes by figuratively "coming all over the place, and then the father falls off the chair."⁴⁵ The Boy's lusty speech overwhelms the Man who only talks of plans to build another rock garden. In the end, the sterility and impotence of the father's present is simply overpowered by the rich prolificacy of the son's future.

Another example of this Oedipal triangle is in Shepard's Motel Chronicles, a collection of loosely autobiographical stories and poems. One of the stories recalls Shepard's phase of sleepwalking as a child. On one particular night, the boy decides to pretend that he is sleepwalking. As he moves down the hallway, he hears the sounds of his parents' foreplay. When the giggling stops, he says, "My heart crashed. . . . This was it!"⁴⁶ Reaching the end of the hallway, the son is blocked by a barrier as formidable as a fortress gate: his parents' bedroom door. At that point, the game is up, and he is swiftly swept back to bed by his unamused parents. But, as the narrator explains, "It

wasn't to make them laugh. It was only for the thrill of having a relationship with them outside the ordinary. A different kind of encounter."⁴⁷

The son's sleepwalking suggests an unconscious desire to get back to his mother, a way to return to his mother's bed without threatening his father. However, when he consciously attempts it, he becomes confused and scared by the sight of their door. This wryly amusing story implicitly expresses the impossible desire of every young boy to return to his mother's bosom (i.e. the security of the womb) without awakening the dangerous father. In Buried Child, Tilden had managed to get past that door, made easier because Halie and Dodge had not slept together for six years. Tilden succeeded in experiencing a relationship with his parents "outside the ordinary." His mother became his lover, and his father became his equal (and dethroned) rival. Perhaps this is the unstated thrill of a "different kind of encounter" the story speaks.

The sole member of this crippled family who is still intact, still full of vitality, is Halie. To bring this point home, she enjoys reminding Dodge of his incapacitated condition--"Smelling up the house with your putrid body!" (23)--and her womanly needs. Horse racing becomes her handy metaphor in which to taunt him: "I went once. With a man. . . . A wonderful man. . . . A breeder! A horse breeder! Thoroughbreds" (13). Her not so subtle hint is that this breeder was a virile man whose offspring would have

been "thoroughbreds," as opposed to the weak, crippled, half-witted sons Dodge has left her.

The play's most independent character turns out to be the other female figure: Shelly. In fact, it is one of the play's perverse ironies that the character with the most "balls" is this young woman. "That's a man's name, isn't it?" (35) queries Dodge when introduced to her. Shelly's aggressive action, contrasted with these passive resistant men, further illuminates the play's masculine wasteland. Note that it is to her that Tilden earnestly hands over the carrots. In act 3, when Shelly assures Dodge that Vince will return because he had left behind his horn, the old man laughs and shyly asks, "You're his horn?" (52). But she is. By the third act, Shelly has begun to take over the house because, as she tells Dodge, she "had the feeling" that the house was hers, the "feeling that nobody lives here but me. I mean everybody's gone . . . Like I know my way around here" (53). In essence, she is the only living person in the house.

Many critics (as well as spectators and readers) would reasonably point to Vince as the character who best embodies the figure of the hero-son: the prodigal son who comes back to restore the kingdom of his family. When Vince returns and does his drunken John Wayne commando act, the basic elements are there to make that analogy, despite his disturbingly adolescent performance. But there is a stronger candidate to fill those heroic shoes: his girlfriend, Shelly. The significance of her character has usually been overlooked, but if one searches for

valiant qualities, she is the true hero of this play. Vince bolts from the house in confusion and dread, gets drunk, then attempts an escape across the state border. Meanwhile, Shelly remains to face down the entire family: She sleeps in the inner sanctum of the mother's bedroom; she defeats the monster-son; and she forces the family secret out into the open. The Shelly character is not a completely new development for Shepard. She can be seen as a more mature and developed model of an earlier female warrior by the playwright.

In Curse of the Starving Class, the companion piece to Buried Child, the most lively and reckless character is another young woman--a girl, really--Emma. She is the daughter of another family of disabled men. She is also having her first period. This fact, when mentioned by Emma's family, is usually regarded as something worrisome or alarming. Proving their concern is justified, Emma pulls a number of crazy stunts. First, she is thrown and dragged by a crazy male horse when she tries to leave home; and later she is arrested for shooting up a nightclub, whose owner cheated her father of their home. In the beginning, we see her working on a 4-H project, only dreaming of adventures. Later, she leaves these adolescent activities behind to experience real danger and adventures in a corrupted adult world. In the end, this world destroys her.

Emma's quests are the very ones that should be dreamed of by her older brother Wesley; but he, like other Shepard sons, suffers from an infantile dependency of family and home, however

bizarre that home life may be. As Campbell puts it, "Primitive initiation ceremonies are all mythologically grounded and have to do with killing the infantile ego and bringing forth an adult . . . It's harder for the boy than for the girl, because . . . [a]t the first menstruation, the girl is a woman."⁴⁸ Wesley desperately wants to grow up, to be the man of the house. As a way to become like his father, he walks around in Weston's filthy, discarded clothes. While this gesture frightens his father and fools his mother, Wesley doesn't feel he has changed. Consequently, he asks his sister before her final escape, "How come I'm going backwards?"⁴⁹

Shelly, like Emma, enters the play as a girl-woman. She initially impresses us as a giggling bimbo, similar to the kittenish, female sex objects that Shepard has presented in earlier plays. But as she learns to stand up to these brutish men, our view of Shelly must be revised. Even when she is most fearful, she tells Vince, "I'll do whatever I have to do to survive" (39). By the play's end, she has grown into a serious, courageous young woman. The key to Shelly's heroism lies not in her courage, but in her compassion, a quality utterly lacking in this family. (Campbell points out that an important change in the hero-figure evolved from the medieval myth, with the "awakening of the heart to compassion." As he eloquently writes, the story of the suffering Christ echoed the "one thing that turns the human heart of prey into a valid human being. That one thing is compassion."⁵⁰) Shelly makes beef bouillon for Dodge, offers her

rabbit jacket to Tilden, and empathizes with the fate of young Halie in the photographs. Shelly changes from a silly sex object to a strong, attractive subject who can actively gaze upon these strangers and ask, "What's happened to this family, anyway?" (54).

If, as Shepard's plays suggest, phallo-centrism is where a man's power lies, then without his phallus he is reduced to a helpless, ranting child. In the Shepardesque landscape, man's macho swagger, confidence, and arrogance are all part of the guise of masculinity. It is a garb, worn to hide from the world (and himself) his naked terror of castration, impotence, and death. Women are not burdened by such cumbersome baggage. Shelly's power comes from an inner, or spiritual, heroism. As Campbell states, the "spiritual birth of Jesus" meant that heroes could be "beings motivated by compassion and not mastery, sexuality, or self-preservation."⁵¹

In addition to Greek mythology, Shepard discovered another ancient myth that became important in his work. This myth, which he saw as a fitting metaphor for his wounded American males, is the Egyptian legend of Isis and Osiris. Shepard was particularly excited by the story's metaphysical mysticism:

"That Egyptian myth is fantastic . . . Isis finding one piece of Osiris's dismembered body here, another piece there and slowly rejoining them. . . . And beyond the actual physical restoration of Osiris is the bringing together of

the emotional, psychological, and intellectual aspects--not just the arms and legs but the whole works!"⁵²

Shelly does, in fact, become an Isis figure. We see her continually collecting the pieces of these shattered men: She picks up Dodge's baseball cap; guards Vince's horn; holds on to Tilden's carrots; and, in an ironic reversal, she takes away Bradley's leg as a kind of hostage.

These two Egyptian deities may have inspired (or simply enlarged) other themes in Shepard's work. For example, Isis was a nature goddess who was both sister and wife to Osiris; thus, we have the romantic yearning of the earth and the taboo of incestuous desire fused into one figure. The worshipers of these pagan gods--like Buried Child's family of primitives--stubbornly resisted the rise of Christianity. Furthermore, Osiris is a Promethean figure, a god who, like Prometheus, was a benefactor to mankind. The bodily dismemberment of Osiris is a variation of Prometheus's fate; Zeus chained Prometheus to a mountain where an eagle fed upon his liver. Shepard would borrow this bird for Curse, using it as a running anecdote about a great eagle who preys on the testes of young rams. Curse, in particular, exploits (if not exhausts) the dismemberment element of Osiris. The play positively brims with the imagery of human and animal blood, mutilation, and waste.

Shepard playfully employs this myth in a story from Motel Chronicles. The narrator is a young man of nineteen, who relates

his sexual encounter with a fifteen-year-old "Tuesday Weld-type-of-blonde"⁵³ on a train trip. After the girl gets off at Salt Lake City, the narrator has a panic attack that she'll confess her ruination to her daddy. He pictures a grim Utah Mormon in black Old Western garb, seated in a buggy, and holding a whip. In his fevered imagination, a door bursts open, and he sees that

HER DADDY HAS TAKEN ON A STERLING HAYDEN FACE NOW. I'M TERRIFIED . . . I'LL BE CARRIED ONTO THE DESERT AND BEHEADED. I'LL BE MUTILATED LIKE OSIRIS AND THIS BLONDE LITTLE ISIS WILL COME SEARCHING FOR MY PARTS. PIECING ME BACK TOGETHER. IT WILL TAKE HER YEARS TO FIND ALL MY MEMBERS AND STILL MY MOST PRIVATE ORGANS WILL HAVE ESCAPED HER, FLOATING DOWN THE COLORADO RIVER DEEP INTO MEXICO.⁵⁴

In this story, one hears two male voices. One is that of a young "stud," who, on the surface, is cool and detached, "a man in control of things"; the other is that of a nervous boy, who is "given to hysteria, even paranoia"⁵⁵ when his sexual identity is threatened. That these two diverse personalities come from the same individual is Shepard's point exactly: the human male is a fragmented creature.

There is another division within the Shepard male character, which we have not yet discussed. It is the psychic split that occurs when the son must choose (if a choice is possible) whether to emulate or reject the father. The repercussions of that

decision may be the crux of the underlying tension in his family plays.

A memory scene from Motel Chronicles suggests that this choice is an unconscious one, as it begins at the earliest point of childhood. Shepard might call it a blood choice. In the narrator's dreamlike reverie, he recalls his own birth in surreal detail, including the traumatic separation from his mother: "I lurched off the bed and dragged my pudgy body toward . . . two windows. . . . I knew I was away from her body now. Separate." Then he hears a "humming," which turns out to be warplanes. This is the father. (Shepard's father was a pilot during World War II, as was the father in Curse, and Jake's father in A Lie of the Mind.) At that moment, this newborn son feels enormous dread: "I was between two worlds. The world I'd left behind and this new one. I had no idea where to turn."⁵⁶ The narrator's dilemma of whether to go back to the mother's womb, or to follow the sound of the father's rumble is, perhaps, the psychic dilemma of man, and one that Shepard has been wrestling with on the stage.

Because of Tilden's simplicity, we see the result of this split most clearly, and movingly, in him. He was the son who had turned away from his father, and the incest he committed "reveals the longing for a reunion with the mother-figure."⁵⁷ The gulf that now exists between this father and son is, sadly, insurmountable.

When Tilden brings in the corn, Dodge can't accept his word that it came from the back lot. To get his son to tell the truth, Dodge reminds him that, "I'm still your father" (17). Tilden's answer--"I know you're my father"--underlines the uselessness (if not handicap) of their blood relationship. The dialogue that follows illustrates their total inability to communicate, to be understood, and to emotionally interact. They relate as two strangers who are strange to each other.

DODGE: . . . I'm wondering what you're gonna do.

TILDEN: You're not worried about me, are you?

DODGE: I'm not worried about you.

TILDEN: You weren't worried about me when . . . I was in New Mexico.

DODGE: No, I wasn't worried about you then either.

TILDEN: You shoulda worried about me then.

DODGE: You didn't do anything down there, did you?

TILDEN: I didn't do anything.

DODGE: Then why should I have worried about you?

TILDEN: Because I was lonely.

DODGE: Because you were lonely?

TILDEN: . . . more lonely then I've ever been before.

DODGE: Why was that?

TILDEN: (pause) Could I have some of that whiskey . . . ?

DODGE: What whiskey? I haven't got any whiskey.

TILDEN: You got some under the sofa.

DODGE: I haven't got anything under the sofa! Now mind your own business! (18-19)

The pattern of dialogue between them is as follows: They exchange accusations and denials; son exposes father's secret; father explodes into rage and lies. The result is that the father pushes the son away, and the son's tentative attempt to make some emotional bridge is crushed. The repetitiveness of their language suggests two foreigners from different countries trying to communicate in a third language.

In Curse, there is a father-son scene that could have been Dodge and Tilden twenty-five years earlier. The father is warning the son, indirectly, not to follow in his path.

WESTON: My poison scares you.

WESLEY: Doesn't scare me.

WESTON: No?

WESLEY: No.

WESTON: Good. You're growing up. I never saw my old man's poison until I was much older than you. Much older. And then you know how I recognized it?

WESLEY: How?

WESTON: Because I saw myself infected with it. . . . His poison in my body. You think that's fair?"⁵⁸

In the Shepard world, every father is infected with this poison, or, as Weston also calls it, "my outlook." This outlook is one that is isolating, distrustful, secretive, unforgiving, narrow-minded, violent, paranoid, cynical, unloving and lonely. In other words, the Shepard father acts like a perpetual child. He also seems to have little understanding or appreciation of women: "What does a woman do?"⁵⁹ Weston asks in exasperation.

If Tilden is the son who returns to the mother's womb through the act of incest, then Bradley is the son who went in the opposite direction. He has emulated his father to such a degree (inheriting that poisonous outlook), that his desire to replace him as patriarch has turned him into a violent, dangerous, and visually grotesque figure. Bradley is the monster-son that all fathers fear, and he now rules the house. Gloating, Bradley informs Shelly of this fact: "There was a time when I had to take that tone a' voice from pretty near everyone. (motioning to DODGE) Him, for one! . . . Everything's turned around now. Full circle. Isn't that funny?" (50).

Dodge, like other fathers in Shepard's family plays, has relied on a simple theory of survival: make his sons fear him, and he will be protected from their instinctual inclination to destroy the father--hopefully right through to his physical decline. Rarely, if ever, do we see a Shepard father show some demonstration of love, affection, or kindness to his son. Even in the midst of one of Tyrone's many tirades with Jamie over his wasted life, in Long Day's Journey Into Night, this

father could still reach out: "You're young yet. You could still make your mark. You had the talent to become a fine actor! You have it still. You're my son--!"⁶⁰

In this stark Shepard landscape, a father can murder his son not only with his bare hands, but with his cold heart. The son's best revenge is to wait. By simply outliving his father, the son will defeat him, as he coolly observes his elder's gradual breakdown. Surely, if man's first enemy is his father, then his second enemy is his son.

Shepard tends to portray the divided man by juxtaposing two, often blood-related, male characters. On one side is the primitive, aggressive, macho male, who has chosen his father's path. This is Bradley. Other examples of this type are Weston in Curse, Hoss in Tooth, Lee in True West, Eddie in Fool for Love, and Jake and Mike in A Lie of the Mind. In marked contrast to this brute is the male who has gravitated toward the mother; he is child-like, sensitive, and passive. This is Tilden. Other such characters are Wesley in Curse, Austin in True West, Martin in Fool, and Frankie in Lie.

In performance, these male pairings can be exhilaratingly dangerous and memorably theatrical. In depicting these men, specifically the more aggressive ones, Shepard demonstrates that he is not bound by the constraints of realism; rather, he moves toward super-realism as he enlarges these characters into figures of immense animal power, size, and menace. They are like descendants of the Titans; those "sons of Earth begotten by gods

were a race of gigantic size and strength, and no intelligence."⁶¹ One of those Titans was that notable exception, Prometheus, who helped Zeus overthrow his father and the "older dynasty."⁶²

The most impressive example of this kind of pairing is in True West (1980). Lee is the brother who sides with the "older dynasty," in the name of the old man. Shepard gives titanic qualities to Lee, great strength along with a psychotic temper. When his younger brother Austin mildly offers him some money, "Lee suddenly lunges at Austin . . . and shakes him with tremendous power."⁶³ Later in the play, as their relationship is reduced to a more primitive stage, Lee's movements literally take on those of a colossus. One moment he is circling Austin "in a slow predatory way, crushing pieces of toast in his wake"; another moment he slowly raises a slice of toast "to his mouth and takes a huge crushing bite."⁶⁴

True West is Shepard's most direct and concentrated effort to depict the American male's deepest conflict: whether to seek total freedom or create a home within one's family and community. The battle between Lee and Austin is, according to Shepard, the psychic war within one individual man. Shepard's aim was "to write a play about double nature . . . to give a taste of what it feels like to be two-sided."⁶⁵ The brothers' dominant struggle is "against their shared paternal demons,"⁶⁶ which eventually enacts a ritualized exchange of their identities. By the last two scenes, the demon-spirit of their father has taken over their

personalities, and has transformed the entire house into a devastated desert landscape.

In this male-dominant setting, it is hardly surprising that the role of the woman is pushed back to virtual insignificance. Underscoring this womanless habitat is Lee's single and unsuccessful attempt to hear a friendly female voice. His desire to call an old girlfriend in Bakersfield results in his having a desperate and hilarious long-distance rant with an aloof operator. The physical humor escalates when Lee rips out all the kitchen drawers while searching for a pen to take down her phone number. Lee is unaware that all forms of culture and civilization have been wiped out, replaced by a primordial paternal wilderness. Finally, Lee bellows, "Who lives in his house anyway!"⁶⁷ The answer is their mother, but she has long been forgotten. Even when their mother unexpectedly shows up from Alaska, the brothers quickly forget her again in their life and death struggle.

In Buried Child, the titanic figure is Bradley, described as a "big man dressed in a grey sweat shirt, black suspenders, baggy dark blue pants and black janitor's shoes" (28). His upper body is "extremely powerful" and well-muscled. He has a wooden leg from the knee down that makes him move "with an exaggerated, almost mechanical limp." Accompanying his unnatural movements are the sounds of squeaking leather and metal "from the harness and hinges of the false leg" (28). The way Bradley lost his leg --he chopped it off with a chain saw--adds an incestuous twist to

the phallic symbolism in the play. Otto Rank (referring to the Greek fable of Lycurgus, who desired his mother and mistakenly cut off one of his own feet believing it was a grapevine) tells us that because of the foot's "ancient and generally known phallic significance . . . we can consider [the] severing of the foot to signify self-castration for desiring the mother."⁶⁸

When Bradley enters from out of the rain, his first spoken line is "Sonuvabitch! Sonuvagoddamnbitch!" (28). What we see before us is Frankenstein's monster. He could be the embodiment of every father's nightmare; paternal hatred oozes out of every pore. Paradoxically, he is also the son who has drunk most generously from the poisonous well of his father's "outlook." There is a poem by Sharon Olds ("The Guild") that expresses this idea beautifully:

And he drank when the old man drank, and he learned
the craft of oblivion--that young man
not yet cruel, his hair dark as the
soil that feeds the tree's roots,
that son who would come to be in his turn
better at this than the teacher, the apprentice
who would pass his master in cruelty and oblivion,
drinking steadily by the flames in the blackness
that young man my father.⁶⁹

In Curse, it is the father who is still able to terrorize the son: "My heart was pounding. Just from my Dad coming back."⁷⁰ In the following speech by Wesley, language is used like a cinematic close-up to magnify the son's panic. From the audience's perspective, it almost sounds like King Kong approaching Fay Wray.

Feet walking toward the door. Feet stopping. Heart pounding. Sound of door not opening. Foot kicking door. Man's voice. Dad's voice. Dad calling Mom. No answer. Foot kicking. Foot kicking harder. Wood splitting. . . . One foot right through door. . . . Fist through door. Man cursing. Man going insane. Feet and hands tearing. Head smashing. Man yelling. Shoulder smashing. Whole body crashing. Woman screaming. . . . Dad crashing away. . . . Heart still pounding.⁷¹

Though this monster is referred to as "Dad," based on the above description, he could be a crazed criminal on the loose.

In opposition to these violent, macho males are characters like Tilden, who project sadness, gentleness, timidity, sensitivity, and childlike innocence. The American archetype for this kind of character can be found among the great silent film comedians, specifically: Buster Keaton, Harry Langdon, and Stan Laurel. Their appeal, to quote Shepard, is in the element of "tragedy about them" where the "humor lies in their incredible

innocence in the face of life that doesn't make sense."⁷² Of the family members in Buried Child, Tilden is the one who has been most affected and damaged by his own transgression, and by the family's past crimes. Seeking to escape this horror led him (to borrow Shepard's quote about Buster Keaton) into "another world, an innocent world,"⁷³ and, one could add, a sorrowful world. In an odd way, this innocence has led Tilden back to his buried son, to recover that part of himself which he lost many years before.

And yet, there is no conclusive evidence in the text that Tilden is the father of this child, and that incest or infanticide was committed. The play contains too many contradictions to present any one clear resolution. But then, one would be hard pressed to find a clear resolution in any of Shepard's plays: "I think it's a cheap trick to resolve things."⁷⁴ By that, Shepard apparently means that life does not have neat resolutions (which, ironically, make his plays more like real life than realism). In play after play, Shepard has resisted the temptation to, as he has expressed it, "wrap it up . . . culminate it in something fruitful."⁷⁵ For Shepard, such fruitful culminations are not only dishonest, they are unimaginative. To quote the playwright again: "A resolution isn't an ending, it's a strangulation."⁷⁶

The issue of non-endings should also be seen as part of Shepard's whole approach to performance, which is to avoid those dramatic conventions that, he feels, result in theatrical and emotional diminishment (as in the neatly wrapped ending).

Michael Smith's insights into Shepard's technique are worth repeating. Smith, who directed Shepard's Icarus's Mother (1965), noted the central importance of projected images in his plays, and that these images "do not relate to the spectator by reflecting outside reality . . . rather, they relate to reality by operating directly on the spectator's mind and nerves."⁷⁷ Thus, even during Shepard's shift to the family drama, it seems clear that Shepard has basically remained true to that method.

Despite Shepard's public unconcern for resolutions and psychological verity, Buried Child's incest myth has had an interesting evolution. As Robert Woodruff, the play's original director, relates, part of that history came in rehearsals, where they started "with quite a different third act which, after two readings, was taken away."⁷⁸ In those rehearsals, Woodruff continues, "[Buried Child] was more of a mystery play with the murderer being unveiled." But after the changes, there wasn't "much new knowledge in the third act . . . everything but the possibility of incest had already been introduced in Tilden's speech in the second act."⁷⁹ Despite the many revisions made in the third act, few changes were made in the first two acts. This is significant because it accounts for many of the contradictions in the play. But as Woodruff explains, "The idea of contradictions was built into the play from the beginning." The differing versions of past crimes gave the play "almost a Rashomon effect."⁸⁰

Charles Whiting, in looking through the play's rehearsal notebook and the manuscript, found that there were actually three different versions of the play before the fourth definitive one was published in Seven Plays.⁸¹ Especially notable is Whiting's account of how Shepard kept changing the history of the family myth. In the first and second versions, Dodge murders "their first-born infant." The idea of infanticide apparently preceded the concept of incest. In the third version, however, there is a radical change: "Here the child Bradley killed his brother Ansel by crushing his head when Ansel was at least 4 or 5 years old." The final version returned Dodge as the murderer of Halie's illegitimate last baby.⁸² Whiting suggests that Bradley as murderer made it too unworkable (in Shepard's mind) to provide sufficient motive. The choice of illegitimacy provided the murder's motive and the incest maintained the focus on the family.⁸³

Just as in an oil painting, where one can often see faint traces of figures beneath the translucent surface of the finished work, Buried Child is a play where one can perceive fragments of other stories within the final text. One such story fragment is the "Bradley version" of the murder, which is more than hinted at by Dodge's apoplectic hatred of Bradley--"He was born in a goddamn hog wallow!" (23); and "He's not my flesh and blood! My flesh and blood's buried in the back yard!" (24). Moreover, once we meet Bradley, he certainly seems capable of such a criminal deed. Glaring down at his father, he jokingly proposes to

Shelly, "We could shoot him. . . . We could drown him! What about drowning him?" (50). During Dodge's confession of the murder, it is Bradley who howls, "We made a pact! We made a pact between us! You can't break that now!" (64). Hence, the feeling that Bradley is, somehow, either directly or indirectly involved in the child's murder never entirely leaves us. He is the son who became his father's specter.

The dark secret of incest and murder is now the only thing that binds this family together, as well as what fortifies their seclusion. This point is driven home by Dodge: "I haven't had trouble with neighbors here for fifty-seven years. I don't even know who the neighbors are! And I don't wanna know!" (17). They are a tribe who, in their isolation, were compelled to inbreed. In Shepard's La Turista (1967), Kent gives a lecture on the breakdown of America:

Then the next step is inbreeding in a culture . . . where there's no one coming in and no one getting out. Incest! Yes siree! The land will fall apart. . . . The population shrinks. The people die away. Extinction! Destruction! Rot and Ruin!⁸⁴

In contrast to the play's depiction of male impotence and death inside the house, is the picture of female fertility outside, with its imagery of water, growth, birth, and rebirth. Let us first look at the image of birth. In his key speech at

the end of the play, Vince describes a vision he had while driving in the rain:

I could see myself in the windshield. . . . I studied my face. . . . As though I was looking at another man. As though I could see his whole race behind him. Like a mummy's face. I saw him dead and alive at the same time. . . In the same breath. In the windshield, I watched him breathe as though he were frozen in time. (70)

This description echoes an image from the play's opening scene, when Halie, recalling Ansel's face through the limo's windows, envisions him as a living corpse (21); or, in Vince's words, as "dead and alive at the same time." There is an odd fetuslike quality about these two young men, both sitting inside cars, behind glass windows, who are neither dead nor alive. This fetal image is one the playwright has used before.

In Shepard's Icarus's Mother (1965), the title's Icarus is the unseen jet pilot (that the characters on stage imagine), and his mother is the powerful machine he is crouched inside. As Howard describes it to the others, "It's something about being in the cockpit surrounded by glass and knowing that glass is solid, yet it's something you can see through at the same time."⁸⁵ Just as in the myth, this Icarus falls to earth. One is reminded of the pilot in Randell Jarrell's famous World War II poem, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner." The entire poem goes:

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
 And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
 Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
 I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
 When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.⁸⁶

Jarrell wrote that a "ball turret was a plexiglass sphere," set in the bomber's belly, inhabited by the gunner "hunched upside-down . . . he looked like the foetus in the womb."⁸⁷

One can imagine how Vince, inside the belly of his car, driving all night in rain, might look like a "foetus in the womb." Vince, who had been dead to his family when he left, is reborn when he returns; joining him in his rebirth are other dead sons. Nash suggests that Vince is not only the "reincarnation of the buried child . . . signaled by the sudden and startling growth of corn," but that he is "also the lost brother Ansel"⁸⁸ (that renowned hero-son). In Terry Curtis Fox's perceptive review, he also concludes that "at the play's end, it is fairly clear that Vince is the buried child of the title." The plight of a son who is both dead and alive, Shepard seems to suggest, "is what families are about."⁸⁹

If, as Callens suggests, the play's titled child is buried inside all of these Shepard sons,⁹⁰ then he is also the child in all the children who have "died" from the cold hearts of their fathers. Callens places special emphasis on the spiritual symbolism of this martyred child. The soil that covers his

buried bones evokes the mystery, holiness, and concentrated power of an Indian burial ground. Shepard's longtime interest in Indian culture (see his earlier plays, La Turista and Operation Sidewinder) is evident from the play's ritualized handling of earth, water, and corn.

Since we are talking of the power and mystery of nature's elements, we should note the play's handling of rain. No other symbol evokes as clearly the "feminine and organic bond between man and nature."⁹¹ For example, the rain can arouse the child's water memory of floating in the mother's womb. This watery wombness is vividly evoked by Louis in Suicide in B^b (1976):

A boy hears sound. He hears sound before he has a name. He hears gurgling, pounding under water. He hears an ocean of blood swimming around him. Through his veins. Through his mother. He breaks into the light of day.⁹²

In Curse, Weston experiences a rebirth following his enacted return to the watery womb. This renewal begins when he removes all his clothes and strolls through the house naked: "Then I walked straight in and made myself a hot bath. Hot as I could stand it. Just sank down into it and let it sink deep into the skin. Let it fog up all the windows and the glass on the medicine cabinet."⁹³

In Buried Child, it is illuminating to observe how each character responds to the environment. Dodge hates the outdoors

(let alone the rain) and won't even consider going outside. Bradley first appears slipping, falling, and cursing as he crashes inside, soaked from the rain. The one character most sensitive and receptive to nature is Tilden:

And the rain was coming down. . . . I didn't mind the wet.
 . . . I was muddy but I didn't mind the mud so much.
 And I looked up. And I saw this stand of corn. In fact I
 was standing in it. So, I was standing in it. (23)

Tilden's attraction to the rain, and his simple pleasure in being immersed in the mud, suggests a desire "for the comfort of a prenatal condition"⁹⁴ that had earlier led him to an incestuous reunion with his mother. Tilden's innocent response signifies an openness to nature, a feeling of awe by earth's bounty, that has been long absent in this family. Thornton Wilder once wrote the following: "Nature failed Thoreau, as it will ultimately fail anyone who wishes to divide it up, to pick and choose only limited congenial aspects of it to confound another."⁹⁵

The ending, despite the morning sunshine outside, is as gloomy and spooky as the Rene Magritte painting of a midnight street scene surmounted with the blue sky of noon. Vince may have inherited his grandfather's farm, but he has also inherited his grandfather's cold heart. The conclusion marks the beginning of another cycle. Curiously, Vince remains the most mysterious figure in the play. We know absolutely nothing about his past,

except that he may be a musician. For example, no one mentions his mother. Why? Is she dead or alive? Does she even exist? Perhaps Vince is actually the illegitimate son of Tilden and Halie. The play, at least, suggests that this is yet another possible story. Vince mentions that it has been six years since he saw his family, but he doesn't know where or when that was. Later, Dodge confesses that he and Halie haven't slept in the same bed in six years when Halie got pregnant. Is this just another built-in contradiction? In the end, Vince remains less a character than a symbol; he is the Everyson who, according to Ruby Cohn, is "buried by the American family--incestuous, idiotic, sadistic, and moribund."⁹⁶ Rather than being the victor, Vince becomes another victim of a father's poison.

There is still one more son: the buried child. His delivery by Tilden from Mother Earth is also the last birth (or rebirth) in the play. As Tilden moves "slowly downstage toward the staircase," (72) he and Vince ignore each other. This child, made of "bones wrapped in muddy, rotten cloth," is the "mummy's face" that Vince saw in the windshield. Tilden holds it in his arms like a sacred artifact. And it is an artifact, the holy bones of a wild tribe, and its recovery implies that this tribe will continue to remain on their land for another generation.

The play's last haunting gesture proclaims that this buried child has at last found his father. But for all the gesture's moving mysticism, we are left with a horrifying image of death. On stage are four figures: a father and a son who are corpses,

and a father and son who do not (or cannot) see each other and, consequently, are dead to each other. Amidst this debris of male progeny, the only living (and unseen) voice that is heard emanates from the mother, who speaks of both the mystery and the power of life: "You can't interfere with it. It's all hidden. It's all unseen" (72).

Halie might be speaking for the playwright. At the end of Buried Child, there are no characters who seize our sympathy, compassion, or even our pity. What we feel, if anything, is shock by what life has done to this family; terror and recognition by what they have done to themselves; and finally, a sense of grudging respect, even awe, that they have survived and that they will continue.

1. Sam Shepard, Buried Child in Buried Child & Seduced & Suicide In B^b (New York: Urizen Books, 1979) 65. All subsequent quotes from this play will be indicated by the page number.
2. Jonathan Cott, "Sam Shepard," Visions and Voices (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 154.
3. Blanche McCrary Boyd, "On the Trail of the True West," The Face, No. 59 (March 1985), 23.
4. James Miller, "Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 317.
5. William W. Demastes, "Understanding Sam Shepard's Realism," Comparative Drama 21, No. 3 (Fall 1987), 230.
6. Ibid.
7. Robert Coe, "Saga of Sam Shepard," The New York Times Magazine, November 23, 1980, p. 58.
8. Ibid.
9. Ralph Cook, notes on Chicago in Five Plays by Sam Shepard (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 2.
10. Sam Shepard, The Tooth of Crime in Sam Shepard: Seven Plays (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 245.
11. Sam Shepard, Action in Angel City and Other Plays (New York: Urizen Books, 1976), 133.
12. Toby Silverman Zinman, "Sam Shepard and Super-Realism," Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986), 423.
13. Sam Shepard, Five Plays, 85.
14. Ibid.
15. Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, trans. and edited by Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), 372.
16. Ibid.
17. Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford, "A Reading of 'The Oresteia': The Eagle and the Serpent," an introduction in The Oresteia by Aeschylus, trans. Robert Fagles (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1985), 27.

18. Johan Callens, "Memories of the Sea in Shepard's Illinois," Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986), 406.
19. Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 196.
20. Fagles, 26.
21. Euripides, The Women of Troy in The Bacchae and Other Plays, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1984), 93.
22. Cott, 145.
23. Coe, 122.
24. Thomas Nash, "Sam Shepard's Buried Child: The Ironic Use of Folklore," Modern Drama 26, No. 4 (December 1983), 486.
25. Gerald Rabkin, "The Bones Underneath," Soho Weekly News, October 26, 1978, p. 74.
26. Clive Barnes, "Menace, mystery in Shepard's 'Buried Child,'" New York Post, December 6, 1978, p. 25.
27. Nash, 486.
28. Coe, 58.
29. Charles Whiting, "Inverted Chronology in Sam Shepard's La Turista," Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986), 421.
30. Boyd, 26.
31. Florence Falk, "Men Without Women: The Shepard Landscape," American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981), 96.
32. Robert Coe, "Image Shots are Blown," American Dreams, 59.
33. Sam Shepard, Tooth of Crime in Seven Plays, 238.
34. Shepard, Tooth of Crime, 217.
35. Shepard, Tooth of Crime, 251.
36. Ibid.
37. Coe, "Image Shots are Blown," 57.
38. Cott, 153.

39. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Knopf, 1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 190.
40. Campbell, 74.
41. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 87.
42. Carol Rosen, "Silent Tongues: Sam Shepard's Explorations of Emotional Territory," The Village Voice, August 4, 1992, p. 41.
43. Shepard, The Rock Garden in Angel City & Other Plays, 220.
44. Shepard, The Rock Garden, 226.
45. Kenneth Chubb and the Editors of Theatre Quarterly: "Metaphors, Mad Dogs, and Old-Time Cowboys," Theatre Quarterly 4, No. 15 (1974), 8.
46. Sam Shepard, Motel Chronicles (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), 18.
47. Shepard, Motel Chronicles, 19.
48. Campbell, 138.
49. Sam Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class in Angel City & Other Plays, 114.
50. Campbell, 116.
51. Campbell, 176.
52. Cott, 150.
53. Shepard, Hotel Chronicles, 43.
54. Shepard, Hotel Chronicles, 44-45.
55. Bonnie Marranca, "Alphabetical Shepard: The Play of Words," American Dreams, 22.
56. Shepard, Motel Chronicles, 52-53.
57. Callens, 407.
58. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 87.
59. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 86.
60. Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 33.

61. Philip Vellacott, introduction to Prometheus Bound, The Suppliants, Seven Against Thebes, The Persians by Aeschylus, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1984.), 8.
62. Vellacott, 9.
63. Sam Shepard, True West in Seven Plays, 8.
64. Shepard, True West, 49-50.
65. Demastes, 237.
66. Coe, "Saga of Sam Shepard," 58.
67. Shepard, True West, 47.
68. Otto Rank, The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation, trans. Gregory C. Richter (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 232.
69. Sharon Olds, "The Guild," The Dead and the Living: Poems (New York: Knopf, 1990), 17.
70. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 59.
71. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 60.
72. Cott, 158.
73. Ibid.
74. Amy Lippman, "An Interview with Playwright Sam Shepard," Dialogue (April 1985), 59.
75. Rosen, 36.
76. Ibid.
77. Michael Smith, notes on Icarus's Mother in Five Plays, 26.
78. Robert Coe, "Interview with Robert Woodruff," American Dreams, 157.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Charles Whiting, "Digging Up Buried Child," Modern Drama 31, No. 4 (December 1988), 548.

82. Whiting, "Digging Up Buried Child, 550.
83. Whiting, "Digging Up Buried Child," 555.
84. Sam Shepard, La Turista in Four Two-Act Plays (New York: Urizen, 1981), 28.
85. Shepard, Icarus's Mother in Five Plays, 42.
86. Randell Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 879-80.
87. Jarrell, in footnote, Norton Anthology, 879.
88. Nash, 488.
89. Terry Curtis Fox, "Many Deaths in the Family," The Village Voice, October 30, 1978, p. 119.
90. Callens, 411.
91. Callens, 404.
92. Shepard, Suicide In B^b in Buried Child & Seduced & Suicide In B^b, 122.
93. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 104.
94. Callens, 407.
95. Thornton Wilder, "The American Loneliness," American Characteristics: And Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 45.
96. Ruby Cohn, New American Dramatists 1960-1980 (London: Macmillan, 1982), 184-85.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FOOL FOR LOVE: INCEST AND THE FAMILY MYTH

One also serves an invisible family, as if an archetypal force. With the passing of time a sense of its power grows within one's psyche, like the movements of its skeleton inside one's flesh, which keeps one in servitude to patterns entombed in our closest attitudes and habits. From this interior family we are never free.

--JAMES HILLMAN
A Blue Fire

Oh, sister, when I come to lie in your arms
You should not treat me like a stranger.
Our Father would not like the way that you act
And you must realize the danger.

--BOB DYLAN
"Oh, Sister"

Sam Shepard's Fool for Love is a fairy tale for adults. While its Southwest setting is as gritty as in any regional, realistic drama, the story that takes place is one that is mythic, psychic, personal, romantic, and supernatural. It has journeys, quests, prisons, a witch, a kind woodsman, a knight, a fair maiden, and pure love. This unusual play mixes the supernaturalism of the Brothers Grimm with the violent realism of a Sam Peckinpah film. It is, in fact, the motifs of fairy tales, movies, and the Old West that heighten the mythic

resonances of this work; for of all Shepard's family plays, it is Fool for Love that is most concerned with the myth of the family.

There are actually two mythic structures working in Fool. There is Eddie's personal myth about his family's history, which is contributed to and contradicted by May and the Old Man. The second one is the playwright's own family myth; this construct has been part of Shepard's ongoing play-cycle that began with Curse of the Starving Class (1977), and it has continued right through to A Lie of the Mind (1985). The purpose of our discussion is to explore both of these myths, to see how they relate and conflict with each other, and to understand how the incest theme expands the impact of both.

What is meant by personal myth? In a sense, we all personalize popular myths in attempting to relate to them, as well as to bring some meaning into our lives. As Mircea Eliade put it, "Characters in myth are brought forth and made present; one becomes their contemporary. One no longer lives in chronological time but in primordial Time, the Time when the event took place for the first time" (emphasis in original).¹ This is precisely what Eddie is doing: He is assimilating the myths of the Old West to events in his own life; then, to re-experience (and fully mythicize) those events, he performs in their "ritual repetition"; or, to quote Eliade again, to "relive that time, to reintegrate it as often as possible, to be Supernatural Beings and to relearn their lesson of creation."²

James Hillman, one of the most creative thinkers in the field of analytical psychology, adds further insight into the concept of personal mythology. He talks about the importance of recognizing one's private myth within the family itself, and that it is this myth that forms one's identity:

By identity . . . I mean identifiable reactions, habits, styles. One finds oneself inside a myth, which is neither true nor false, but simply the precondition for fitting one into the family drama as a recognizable character.³

Hillman adds that "if there are no pronounced family fantasies, the drama doesn't work, and we flounder about in that strangely loveless limbo that psychology calls an 'identity crisis'."⁴ The point Hillman makes that is particularly pertinent to Fool is this: "Whether a person lives into the myth or rebels against it, there must first be a myth"⁵ (emphasis mine).

Clearly, Eddie does live into the myth; it is what drives him in his pursuit of dangerous stunt work, rodeo thrills, wild women, open spaces, and, most importantly, his half sister May. The mythology of their extraordinary conception, blood-tie, and union is one that, for Eddie, can never be told enough, let alone forgotten. Therefore, the ongoing story of this myth is one that must be narrated in extraordinary terms. "You know how many miles I went outa' my way just to come here and see you?" Eddie rhetorically asks May in the opening scene, "Two thousand, four

hundred and eighty."⁶ Eddie enjoys repeating this grand figure, as it displays the magnitude of both his journey and his devotion. Eddie's tall feat is also reminiscent of the stories of that legendary cowboy, Pecos Bill. (Interestingly, Shepard wrote a comic operetta about Pecos and his sweetheart, Slue Foot Sue.) Among his mighty deeds, Pecos is credited with digging out the Badlands and "the whole damn Rio Grande"⁷ by hand.

In opposition to Eddie's myth is May, who is trying to establish a normal life: "I got a job. I'm a regular citizen here now" (23). May yearns to be an ordinary person. But Eddie won't let her. They are both driven by the myth, but it pushes them in opposite directions. It is why their struggle with each other is so violent and psychically intense; and, as we will discover, the internal forces that drive these characters unrelentingly forward also propels the external action of this play.

The heroic role that Eddie has fashioned for himself is one that ideally fits into his family myth. He is a knight, who is continually on a quest to save May, the fair maiden. And as a proper knight, he brings his steeds and, at the proper time, fits himself into a suit of armor--in this case, lasso, spurs, and shotgun. Jungian analyst Guy Corneau, in Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity, has written of such men with hero-type personalities. According to Corneau, a man like Eddie "isn't aware that he is constantly repeating the same role . . . it is as though the hero script chose him and has kept him

prisoner in itself."⁸ What defines Eddie is the fact that he must do these things: that he has no choice, that there are hereditary forces beyond him and May, and that to fight against these forces is foolish, if not downright futile.

What kind of myth has Eddie embraced? It is romantic, ruggedly appealing, and one that he cannot let go, despite May's savage attack on it: "You keep comin' up here with this lame country dream life with chickens and vegetables and I can't stand any of it. It makes me puke to even think about it" (23). But May's mockery doesn't stop Eddie, doesn't even slow him down: "You'll get used to it," (24) is his grim reply. Their battle is not actually about their relationship; it is about the meaning of this myth, Eddie's myth. May calls it a "dumb little fantasy," which, she claims, Eddie keeps suckering her into believing. "It's no fantasy," counters Eddie. "It's all a fantasy," blasts May (24).

They are both right. For Eddie, the myth is reality; for May, it is nothing but dreams, wishes, and lies. An example that typifies, and helps explain, their conflict is when May doesn't act the role of the pure, helpless maiden. Eddie's confusion is vividly exposed when May, in her first physical gesture of the play, "suddenly grabs [Eddie's] closest leg with both arms . . . burying her head between his knees" (17). Suddenly, Eddie is the one who is caught. While May physicalizes her emotional needs, pushing her face against his crotch, Eddie stands uneasily in the grip of her fierce desire. His anxiety may stem from the fact

that his sexual parts are now vulnerable to this enraged and anguished woman (who will later confirm his fear by surprising him with a quick knee in his groin). The tables are reversed, and Eddie nervously looks for a way out of his defenseless position:

May? Let go, Okay? Honey? I'll put you back to bed.
 Okay? (She grabs his other leg and holds on tight to both.)
 Come on. I'll put you in bed and make you some hot tea or somethin'. You want some tea? . . . May, you gotta' let go of me now, okay? (17)

It is clear that Eddie would feel more comfortable if May would play the compliant child-woman. To that end, he tries to convince her that she is a sick girl who needs the care of a man. But May is fighting for her independence not only from Eddie, but from the passive and helpless role that she has been assigned.

Another factor that makes their battle relatively balanced is that it takes place in the woman's personal space. No matter how grim, desolate, and pathetic May's room may look, it is still her home, as she insistently reminds Eddie: "This is my place!" (48) and "I'm not gonna hide in my own house!" (50). May desperately wants a normal home, despite being impractical about how to make one; note her penchant for keeping glasses in the medicine cabinet to protect them from germs. Meanwhile, Eddie constantly leaves the room to escape its domestic setting (gritty

as it may be). Though not powerless, he is certainly out of his element--that being "rarely off a horse" (16). May's source of strength lies in the clutter of female articles inside the bathroom; whereas Eddie finds any excuse to bolt outside, only to return with elements from his male world: rope, bucking gear, gun, spurs, tequila.

All of their maneuvering is part of a territorial power struggle. Eddie, attempting to take over the woman's home, forces May to retreat into the corners, until her only safety zone is the bathroom. As Carol Rosen notes, "Shepard's plays are often about power, its sources, its manifestations, its styles. His characters fight for power, they usurp others' territory, steal their turf, stake their claims and they fight."⁹ Eddie is successful in taking over May's space--except for the bathroom. That is the one area Eddie won't, or cannot, enter; the one place where May finds refuge: "I keep everything in the bathroom," she explains, "It's safer" (30). One senses that May lives in fear, not only of Eddie, but of a world she views as dangerous and hostile.

While Eddie fights for more male space, he eludes any direct confrontation with May about problems in their relationship or of his own past transgressions. As Corneau states, "Face to face contact often brings about the death of the hero."¹⁰ Eddie would rather speak in "heroic couplets," as opposed to the mundane speech of everyday life. At one point, he sounds like a western Cyrano de Bergerac: "I'm not leavin'. I'm stayin' right here. I

don't care if a hundred 'dates' walk through that door--I'll take every one of 'em on" (49). Eddie's boast echoes Cyrano's feat, who (hopelessly in love with his cousin, Roxanne) challenged and defeated one hundred swordsmen. Cyrano was a superb poet and dramatist; he could create a new poem while fencing with a hapless rival. We will observe Eddie perform a similar feat with his overmatched rival, Martin.

The most germane correlation between Eddie and Cyrano may be in the role of the hero. According to Stephen Stanton, what makes the role of Cyrano special is "his ability to contemplate himself as a Romantic figure."¹¹ In the character of Cyrano, dramatist Edmond Rostand was able to duplicate the "swagger and the preciousness of seventeenth-century rhetoric--its bombast and grandiloquence, its flourish and gallantry--and, through it all" reveal the "sadness and devotion of the sensitive lover and poet masquerading as a clown."¹² Similarly, Shepard, in the character of Eddie, duplicates the swagger, machismo, romanticism, and rhetoric of the American cowboy. By setting his play in a western context, Shepard further heightens the mythology of Eddie's story, and, to some fashion, justifies its violence. To quote cultural critic J. Hoberman, "Like baseball, the western is a sacred part of America's post-Civil War national mythology--a shared language, a unifying set of symbols and metaphors, and a source of (mainly male) identity."¹³

We commented earlier on the strong fairy tale quality in Fool for Love. An obvious parallel to the folktale structure are in the number of adversaries; Eddie must vanquish or evade three--the vengeful witch-like Countess; Martin, his male rival; and the Old Man--to reach his holy grail, the pure love of May's embrace. Harry Carlson points out that in "numerous fairy tales a hero has the opportunity to win a princess by performing a series of feats or by undergoing a series of trials. Not infrequently, the trials number three."¹⁴

In addition to the three adversaries, Eddie, like Oedipus, must answer a riddle. Early in the play, the Old Man tests Eddie with a series of questions on the subject of reality:

THE OLD MAN: Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. . . . Ya' see it?

EDDIE: (staring at wall) Yeah.

THE OLD MAN: Ya' know who that is?

EDDIE: I'm not sure.

THE OLD MAN: . . . Barbara Mandrell. You heard a' her?

EDDIE: Sure.

THE OLD MAN: Well, would you believe me if I told ya' I was married to her?

EDDIE: (pause) No.

THE OLD MAN: . . . that's the difference right there.

That's realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that?

EDDIE: Sure.

THE OLD MAN: Good. I'm glad we have an understanding. (27)

There is a comparable conversation in Curse of the Starving Class. After Weston describes the poison he unjustly inherited from his father, he asks his son to answer the following riddle:

WESTON: How do you poison coyotes?

WESLEY: Strychnine.

WESTON: How! Not what!

WESLEY: You put it in the belly of a dead lamb.

WESTON: Right. Now do you see?

WESLEY: (after pause) No.

WESTON: You're thick. You're really thick.¹⁵

Wesley correctly answers the question, but he fails to understand the riddle within the question: that a father, in order to strike back at life's brutality, would willingly destroy his son's innocence. This is the key to Weston's relationship with his father, his son, and hence, his family's fate.

A striking (and appealing) characteristic of Eddie is that he lives on a fine line between reality and fantasy. A "fantasist" (26) is what the Old Man calls him. As a Hollywood stuntman, Eddie takes part in the fantasy of movies. He is the hero's replacement during the most dangerous scenes. He is, in fact, the hero's double; but he may also be the villain's double,

(which makes a splendid metaphor for Shepard's "double nature" of man). In other words, Eddie is both sheriff and outlaw, good guy and bad guy in this myth within the myth. While Eddie can accept his role in this fantasy world, he has a difficult time doing the same in the real world. As Hoberman writes, "The cowboy movie was typically the way Americans used to explain itself to itself. Who made the law? What is the order? Where is the frontier? Which ones are the good guys?"¹⁶ But with Eddie, one is never quite sure whether he should be wearing a white hat or a black hat; sometimes, even Eddie doesn't seem to know.

When May tells Eddie that she has a "man" coming to take her out, Eddie goes berserk and raucously throws himself into the role of the larger-than-life cowboy. He occupies himself with the role's major props: spurs, ropes, shotgun, tequila. He brings together all the elements of the dangerous, heavy-drinking, hard-riding, fast-shooting, short-fused cowpoke. Eddie's guise is in compliance with the law of the western, which "argued a form of natural morality . . . an instinctive awareness of right and wrong, and granted the freedom to act, often violently, even kill upon that awareness."¹⁷

Despite Eddie's elaborate preparations, it is not May's man that he fears; indeed, he doesn't seem to fear any external adversary (unless it be in the form of a crazy, pursuing female). There is, however, one cruel antagonist that does scare Eddie--middle age. "What is he, a 'younger man' or something?" (40) is the first thing he wants to know about May's date. "There's kids

out there ropin' calves in six seconds dead," (38) he declares, as he practices roping the bedposts. Eddie, now nearing forty, continues to act the eternal youth, as he must. Critic William Kleb described Eddie (played by the excellent Ed Harris, who originated the role) as someone who "looks like an All-American boy gone bad."¹⁸

As we suggested earlier, Eddie's myth is enacted within the encompassing, ongoing personal mythology of the playwright's; thus Fool for Love is one more episode in a continuing family saga. It is time to examine where Eddie and May fit in this cycle. There are several patterns and motifs that tie Fool for Love with Shepard's other family plays. One pattern that he gives particular prominence to is the sibling relationship. In Curse, Fool for Love, and A Lie of the Mind, the brother-sister bond is presented as the closest and most vital relationship.

Shepard can be seen within a larger literary context regarding brother-sister pairings. As Hillman persuasively argues, the old model of family ended with the novels of Galsworthy, Proust, and Mann at the turn of the century. Then with J. D. Salinger's stories of the Glass family, we see "an indication of the new model of family."¹⁹ There the "brother-sister relations are primary, and the passionate interest and devotion to each other's psychic life provide an example . . . of soul-making through the constellation of eros and psyche in the home."²⁰ One should add that even earlier writers--such as Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century and the Jacobean and

Spanish dramatists in the seventeenth century--focused extreme, if not obsessive, attention around the love-bond of the brother-sister relationship.

And by drawing from the fairy tale form, Shepard has created some of his most striking sibling-motifs. In Fool for Love, we have the classic example of a brother and sister who become stranded in the wilderness (the desert); who were once abandoned by a weak, passive father (the Old Man); who are being chased by a vengeful witch (the Countess); and who are later joined by a gentle woodsman (Martin, the gardener).

Looking at Shepard's other family plays, one observes variations of these same motifs. In Curse of the Starving Class, we have another brother and sister, Emma and Wesley, who must band together against hostile forces inside and outside their family. In that play, the siblings attempt to protect their home from a corrupt and dissolute world: a crooked lawyer; sadistic gangsters; a greedy, thoughtless mother; and a boozing, irresponsible father. At the same time, Emma and Wesley are struggling with their own internal stresses. Emma, experiencing her first menstruation, is making the difficult transition from childhood to (sexual) womanhood. Wesley's inner conflict is twofold: He is trying to contain his feelings of desire for his maturing sister; and he is resisting the powerful bond with his mother, Ella.

Emma and Wesley's inner conflicts are openly displayed in the play's first scene. Emma, dressed in a girl's 4-H Club

uniform, enters as her mother, Ella, lectures her about a young woman's changing life; but the lesson goes no further than explaining how Emma could bleed to death in a pool, and why people call sanitary napkins "napkins." Moments later, Wesley takes "out his pecker and starts pissing all over"²¹ Emma's 4-H charts. Beyond the gesture's easy shock value in performance, its real impact stems from the psycho-sexual information that it imparts. Wesley does his wetting inside the maternal territory of the kitchen, directly in front of his unfazed mother. Naturally, this raises the specter of the Oedipus complex. Moments later, in fact, Wesley's mother admires a particular physical similarity between her father and her son: "You're circumcised just like him. It's almost identical in fact." When Wesley suspiciously asks Ella how she knows, she casually replies, "I looked. . . . When he was alive is when I looked. . . . It was a small house."²² Besides the disturbing Oedipal gaze of his mother, Wesley is also made uneasy from erotic feelings for Emma. Because the incest taboo prevents him from directing his penis toward his own sister, he, instead, takes it out to violate her personal property--a transgression of manners, but not of morality.

True West offers another variation on this theme of endangered siblings. The protagonists are also stranded in a wilderness full of monsters; but in this instance, the siblings are two brothers who become lost in their own house. The monsters are a Hollywood producer who is nothing less than a

slimy ogre; a mother who enters as a "bizarre creature"²³ in a hideous get-up; and a father who returns as a ghostly, murderous presence.

In A Lie of the Mind, there are even more sibling pairs doing battle against their blood-related beasts. In one family home, there is the ailing, wife-beating son, Jake. He wants to keep his sister Sally in his bedroom (he claims) as an ally against his smothering mother. The mother wants the daughter out of the house so she can have Jake to herself. The daughter just wants a home. Meanwhile, Jake's brother Frankie journeys into the dark interior of America to seek out his sister-in-law Beth, who was almost beaten to death by Jake. Instead, he is shot and captured by Beth's equally weird family. While Frankie is being held prisoner, Beth falls in love with him, making him the unwitting rival to another brother(-in-law), Mike. Mike regards himself as Beth's protector and white knight, while Beth perceives him as a dangerous oppressor, even her executioner.

A Lie of the Mind is Shepard's most ambitious play, and the primacy of the brother-sister relationship is intensely complex. In each of the play's two families, there is a sister who is oppressed and desired by an older brother. This is revealed more explicitly by the interaction of Jake and Sally. We also hear of a secret "promise" between them that suggests the concealment of father-daughter incest and patricide. "I'm not going to give you away,"²⁴ Sally tells Jake. Their dark promise echoes other pacts in Shepard families: the one in Buried Child that was supposed to

keep incest and infanticide a private matter; and in Fool, Eddie twice reminds May, "We made a pact" (33).

In Lie's other family home, Mike's watchful protectiveness of Beth is exposed as something more insidious than big-brother affection. This revelation is largely due to Beth's primal articulation of her fears ("He wants me out"²⁵) and her perception of the turbulent passion behind Mike's good will. Unlike Jake, Mike is totally unconscious of his desires, which makes his behavior seem more menacing and cruel to the sister he wants to protect.

If we turn to Shepard's earliest produced play, we can see the first stage of his mythicized family. In The Rock Garden, the banal action of a family scene conveys the sexual tension within the Oedipal triangle. One may even see a glimpse of Fool for Love in The Rock Garden's opening tableau. In this entirely wordless scene, a man sits at the head of a dinner table looking at a magazine. Seated at opposite ends are a boy and girl in their teens, drinking milk.

They take turns sipping the milk and exchanging glances.

The MAN is completely involved in his magazine. . . . The only action is that of the BOY and GIRL drinking milk. The GIRL drops her glass and spills the milk. Blackout.²⁶

Those teenagers could be Eddie and May staring at each other with hot desire right under the nose of their absent father.

If Fool for Love is Shepard's most romantic myth--spun, as it is, from the lurid web of incest, suicide, and obsession--the consequence of such mythmaking is that the playwright (like Eddie) can avoid the complications of real life. Shepard dodges everyday problems by lifting his characters above them. Because their situation makes it impossible for Eddie and May to settle down as husband and wife or to live apart as brother and sister, they are constantly searching for a permanent home. Moving across vast stretches of sparsely populated territory, they are like Cain and his sister-wife, that Biblical pair who were banished from Eden to wander the earth. One doesn't expect such mythological creations to sit down and discuss the issues of interrelating, trust, and cooperation.

One unspoken, but rude, reality that is never spoken by either Eddie or May is the word "pregnancy." While the danger of incestuous pregnancy is a legitimate social concern, that discussion would simply be out of place within the mythic and romantic realms of this play. Furthermore, Shepard makes his lovers only half siblings in true Byronic tradition. As an historical note, it was the discovery of Byron's incestuous (and scandalous) relationship with his half sister, Augusta Leigh, that became the final blow for his quite proper (some say priggish) wife, Annabella Milbanke. One other intriguing detail that bonds these pair of siblings is that Byron and Augusta were raised apart and "were almost strangers when they met as adults."²⁷

The Byronic connection is certainly germane, but it hardly reveals the dramaturgic design (and purpose) of Shepard's incest theme, especially within the context of his own time. Fortunately, two contemporary playwrights of Shepard have also written dramas that center on a brother-sister incestuous relationship. Comparing their plays with Shepard's may help us illuminate not only Fool's particular mythology and romanticism, but point out how other dramatists have handled the incest theme in the context of reality, fantasy, family, and myth.

In Stephen Poliakoff's Hitting Town (1975), Ralph, a twenty-year-old college dropout from the University of Birmingham, unexpectedly visits his older sister Clare, in Leicester. Clare, like May, lives alone and is lonely in her squalid, depressing apartment that she calls a "wooden cell."²⁸ Leicester is presented as an urban wasteland, and the sense of isolation in this city is comparable to the vast desert that surrounds May's motel room. We learn that Ralph and Clare rarely see each other, but we immediately feel a strong tension between them. Ralph is a rebellious, hyperenergetic young man, full of mocking wit and charm. Clare gets aroused by her brother's aggressive humor and sexual innuendoes. Despite some verbal sparring, Ralph and Clare are clearly attracted to each other. Their night on the town will lead them to consummate those feelings.

Hitting Town, like Fool, uses music for a specific purpose. Shepard's music is composed of sad country western songs that frame the action, as well as enhance the romantic Old West mood.

Poliakoff's Muzak becomes a cruel counterpoint to Ralph and Clare's desire for each other, reminding them of the depressing, realistic banality of their lives. The mundane sound of Muzak follows them wherever they go: "To keep the people 'happy'!" as Ralph tells Clare, "Contaminating the whole place."²⁹

Ralph is a maker of stories. He is continually lying and exaggerating to Clare. Like Eddie, he has a non-stop imagination; and, similarly to Shepard's hero, he is restless, rebellious, and lonely. But while Ralph nervously, and naughtily, insinuates his lust to Clare, it is always the big sister who initiates anything sexually concrete, like a kiss. As their night on the town progresses, Clare's kisses gradually become more passionate. In the background is the mild threat of their mother; however, she is never seen, only occasionally mentioned by Clare when she reminds Ralph to "ring mother." But the mere mention of the mother cues Ralph and Clare (and the audience) of their blood relationship and the incest taboo.

During their night out, Ralph and Clare meet up with Nicole, an eighteen-year-old waitress at a Wimpy bar. Nicole is like a female-double of Fool's Martin: She has a menial job, and becomes witness and audience to Ralph and Clare's incestuous involvement. At one point, Nicole asks, more fascinated than shocked, "Are you really brother and sister?"³⁰ Clare, like May, lies and says no.

In addition, the two plays share a strong elemental image: fire. In Hitting Town, the flames of revolution are evoked by Ralph and Clare's memories of urban bombings. When they are on

the verge of consummating their desire, the sister warns her brother, "You've already done enough to get us burnt, you realize, if this were another century."³¹ In Fool, fire is a more physical presence, from the blinding headlights of the Countess's Mercedes to the flames of Eddie's burning truck. In both plays, fire signifies not only the heat of an illicit passion, but (as Clare suggests) a metaphorical burning at the stake.

After they conclude their adventurous evening with a night of lovemaking, Ralph brings up a subject that Eddie and May (and Shepard) never touch: "It'd have an enormous head probably,"³² is how he drolly raises the possibility of pregnancy to Clare. While Clare ends the conversation there, it does demonstrate that he and his sister are still stuck in the real world; whereas Shepard's characters never really inhabit it. Ralph and Clare's journey to "taboo territory" is partially a way to forget their dreary surroundings (the kind of "place that sorta' kills ya' inside,"³³ as Lee in True West would describe it).

In one speech, Ralph imagines a romantic Hollywood-type destiny that could describe Eddie and May's real-life situation: "We'd get into a car, with a gun maybe, and some music, and set off, just like any film . . . then get cornered, and caught, and shot several hundred times, very slowly."³⁴

While Hitting Town shares some striking similarities with Fool for Love, there is a crucial difference: Ralph and Clare have no family mythology, whereas Eddie and May do. These

confused British siblings are groping for fulfilling roles in their relationship, as well as in their milieu. They are lost souls. Their American counterparts, however, know exactly what their roles are, and they play their parts with self-possessed abandonment. Like seasoned actors, Eddie and May are uninhibited to go over the top with ferocious freedom. Once again, this demonstrates another considerable difference between knowing and not knowing one's family myth.

In Landford Wilson's one-act Home Free! (1964), the playwright handles the impact of brother-sister incest rather differently. Lawrence and Joanna, the sibling lovers, have decided to retreat into a childlike (and childish) fantasy world of their own making. The one big, unmistakable reality that intrudes into their world is the sister's condition of advanced pregnancy. No matter how deeply they regress, they cannot avoid this inescapable fact. To keep them company in their self-imposed isolation, they have invented two imaginary characters: Edna and Claypone. Lawrence and Joanna's fantasy may remind us of a comparable game in The Killing of Sister George (1965), by Frank Marcus. In that play the two main characters, June and Alice, invent imaginary names, identities, and roles for each other to mask the social taboo of their lesbian relationship.

Similar to the siblings in Hitting Town, Lawrence and Joanna can't help imagining, with black humor, dire consequences to the child's birth:

LAWRENCE: . . . I don't see how Miss Brown can help being deformed a little.

JOANNA: Mmmm. Maybe no arms.

LAWRENCE: Very well: no arms. At least she won't go around breaking things. You should concentrate on no voice box too.³⁵

Looming before them is incest's ugly specter: Inbreeding will produce freaks (or "muted mutates,"³⁶ as Vladimir Nabokov called them in his novel of sibling love, Ada).

In all three plays, there is the confusion of familial identities. "I'm not your wife, I'm your sister,"³⁷ Joanna reminds Lawrence. "Introduce me as your brother . . . maybe not your brother," (42) reflects Eddie. How to introduce each other to outsiders becomes a touchy problem, indeed. Perhaps it is better to revert to the state of children, like Joanna and Lawrence. At one point, Clare tells Ralph, "We're regressing the whole time, falling backwards, soon we'll be aged three . . . and have wetted our beds."³⁸

But regression clearly has its dangers. At the end of Home Free!, while running away from Lawrence's tickling, Joanna begins to miscarriage. Because Lawrence is too terrified of the real world to run for a doctor, he is unable to save his sister's life. Joanna's death screams remind us of the screams from Eddie's horses at the end of Fool.

Despite some thematic and structural similarities, what truly sets Shepard's play apart from the other two works is his handling of the past and of fate. Compared to Poliakoff and Wilson (who focus on the present), Shepard's preoccupation with past events in the lives of his characters seems Sophoclean. Shepard's concerns are simply different from theirs. Unlike Poliakoff and Wilson, Shepard shows little interest in navigating through the sensitive social problems of incest, or in debating moral or political issues. What he is investigating is something more primal and unconscious. This internal and mythic exploration comes across most clearly, dramatically, and viscerally in performance.

Of all the critical commentary that has been written about Fool for Love, it is the aspect of performance, due to Shepard's strong directorial hand, that has provoked the sharpest attention from reviewers and critics. Quoting Steven Putzel, "This play, with its solid, kettle-drum walls, refuses to allow the audience to remain in safety. . . . The raw emotions, the primal passion, the constant . . . physical violence momentarily shock spectators out of their comfort and force a more than aesthetic involvement."³⁹ John Beaufort, of the Christian Science Monitor, declares that the "repeated door slamming not only creates a horrendous percussion effect but punctuates the hateful struggle that occupies . . . Fool for Love." Continuing, he complains that "it assaults the characters and assails the audience."⁴⁰ On the other hand, Dan Isaac, of Other Stages, describes the staging

as "a ballet of fear and symphony of violence." For him the booming aural effects "establish a shattering staccato machine gun rhythm."⁴¹ Robert Brustein, in The New Republic, also picks up this dance metaphor by saying, "Fool for Love is not so much . . . play as a scenario for stage choreography."⁴²

Especially illuminating is William Kleb's article on the premiere production at the Magic Theater in San Francisco. Describing the set, he called it a

tight Skinnerian box of a room. . . . The side walls angle sharply inward, towards the back, creating a forced perspective that increases the sense of claustrophobia and isolation. . . . Within it the actors seem huge, as if projected, larger than life against the blank, green walls. Because of the size of the theatre, we see them closeup, and the harsh, flat lighting emphasizes their raw physicality.⁴³

It appears that Shepard, as director, was attempting to achieve a cinematic look on stage by stylizing the acting, and by creating unusual lighting and aural effects which would assault the audience. From what we know of Shepard's attraction to movies, that seems like a reasonable inference. In fact, shortly after Fool was produced, Shepard expressed that attraction in a letter (August 3, 1983) to Joseph Chaikin:

I just feel that with film you can go very quickly into many different states, almost like composing a piece of music, whereas sometimes theatre seems stuck in language and the physical body of the actor. It's those very limitations which also excite me about theatre, but sometimes it seems there's another kind of world that remains out of reach.⁴⁴

But attraction alone is not enough to explain why Shepard wanted to borrow elements from the cinema in Fool. The answer, as his letter suggests, is that Shepard was attempting to enter several "different states" as quickly and abruptly as possible. As Artaud had attempted in his theatre fifty years earlier, Shepard was "searching for every technical and practical means of bringing the theater close to the high . . . vital and violent idea"⁴⁵ that he had for himself.

One idea that Shepard has long shared with Artaud is the desire to intensify the audience's involvement. To quote Artaud, "A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it."⁴⁶ While Shepard doesn't abolish the convention of a stage and auditorium as Artaud advocated, he does find ways to shorten the distance between the spectators, the actors, and the action. As Jacques Levy put it, Shepard was always "more interested in doing something to audiences than in saying something to them."⁴⁷ In

his Fool for Love production, Shepard amplified the bathroom door and stage doors with microphones, besides hiding a bass drum in their frames. Thus, every time the actors slammed a door (which is the only way they ever did close them) it produced a loud, long "boom!" sound. Shepard also installed four speakers "under the seats so that every slam of the door physically involved the audience."⁴⁸

Two results are achieved by Shepard's manipulation of the audience's sensorial perspective to the performance space. One is that it enlarges both the actors and the action on stage. The characters seem bigger than life (yes, even mythic). The second effect on the spectator is more internal. It is almost as if the spectators were inside the characters; that whatever the characters hear, see, and feel is what the spectators hear, see, and feel with nearly the same magnitude as the performers. This intensification of sound, space, and image is the kind of extensivity of theatre language that Artaud aimed for; that is, "adding another language to the spoken language."⁴⁹

Phenomenologically, the audience's experience of seeing Fool becomes an acute and thoroughly physical event for the senses; consequently, the mythology of Fool becomes more immense, disturbing, and mysterious.

There is more to Fool's other language than a lot of booming sounds and flashy, searing lighting effects. Equally significant are the wordless movements and unusual gestures of the actors themselves. It is as if verbal language has become inadequate to

express the primal emotions of these characters. What we see instead are extended, and remarkable, intervals of mime that suggest a regression not into childhood, but into a time and period much earlier.

The play opens with a forbidding tableau. May "sits on edge of bed facing audience," (15) her body limp and still as she stares at the floor. The Old Man sits at the lip of the downstage area, sipping whiskey from a styrofoam cup, more or less in his own world. Eddie is seated in an upstage chair, watching May, as he slowly twists with his gloved hand the leather handle of a bucking strap. The image of this leather strap, being methodically pulled and contorted by Eddie's clenched fist, makes a suitable metaphor for the tortured and violent relationship of these sibling-lovers. (We have seen Shepard use this twisting gesture in two other family plays: At the end of True West, Austin wraps the phone cord around his brother's neck; in A Lie of the Mind, Mike drives his brother-in-law Jake like a draft horse, with the American flag in Jake's teeth and the twisted ends held by Mike as a driving reins.) Enlarging this troubling visual image is the "weird stretching sound" (16) caused by the friction of leather rubbing against leather. William Kleb was moved to call it "an eerie, sensual sound--an objectification of the tension that clearly exists between the two, even without words."⁵⁰ This tension, clearly felt in that opening gesture, is what Kleb feels is the "dramatic core of the play."⁵¹ As a final note, this spooky, opening image

(as directed by Shepard) suggests the picture of a ghostly cowboy flawlessly poised to ride a bucking horse--but the cowboy never moves.

Such gestures magnify the mythic dimensions of these characters, just as masks and stylized movements did for the Greeks, and as they still do for Kabuki, Noh, and other types of Eastern theatre. For that reason, this aspect of Fool deserves more of our attention. Critics have already pointed out the dancelike, primal, and ritualistic quality of Eddie and May's "duets"; other adjectives that might describe their movements are "animalistic" and "biomorphic."

Eddie and May's most striking and evocative gestures are performed along the walls. Sometimes singly, but often together, Eddie and May brush, touch, and push against the walls during or following intense confrontations. Some examples of this are when both "press the walls as they move" during May's threat to ritually kill Eddie and the Countess with "sharp knives" (20); followed by Eddie, moving "slowly down left, sticking close to the wall" as he tells her, "I missed you" (21); and when May thinks Eddie has left for good, her "arms reach out and hug the walls . . . embracing the walls as she moves and weeps" (35-36).

These gestures provide insights not only into the nature of Eddie and May's relationship, but into the nature of Shepard's theatre. For instance, when Eddie and May rub themselves along the walls, they heighten the sexually charged atmosphere. More specifically, the movement suggests a kind of violent foreplay,

as if Eddie and May wanted (or needed) to arouse not only each other, but themselves, like an enlarged form of masturbation. But it goes further than that; it is foreplay meant to excite the desire of the spectators. The gesture is often done with the actors facing the audience; to watch them, they seem to be performing not just at us, but for us, for our pleasure (or discomfort). One senses that the performers are in collusion with the playwright--who is also the director--to manipulate the spectators' voyeuristic desire, which is to witness the illicit sexual union of Eddie and May. The voyeuristic nature of Fool will be discussed later.

There are other psycho-sexual levels that one may draw from the choreography of our lovers' dance. A key element in Eddie and May's tango concerns space. We get a sense that these two passionate characters are too large, their emotions too dangerous, inside May's tiny room. Thus feeling constrained, Eddie and May seem to literally press the walls back, as if the stage is enclosed by skin. It is a weird gesture that arouses the image of people trapped inside their own heads, crawling around in their skulls (or perhaps their father's skull). One could add a biomorphic element to this picture; at times, the movements of Eddie and May suggest a sperm and an egg swimming inside the lining of a womb. It is the way they keep missing each other, occasionally colliding, in their chase. It is only at the end of the play that they finally come together as one, and the births of Eddie and May are recreated; that is,

the simplicity of their first embrace as lovers is reenacted. These gestures are as important and necessary to the play as is the text, for they both enrich and reinforce the timeless "ritual repetition" of the myth.

Earlier, we mentioned the audience's voyeuristic involvement with the two lovers. But the true object of the spectators' gaze in Fool is May. We watch May lock herself in the bathroom (three times), and imagine what she does in there; we witness her shocking breakdowns each time she thinks Eddie has left for good; and we (along with Eddie) are expressly invited to admire her body during her costume change. This is when May slips into a sexy red dress, panty hose, and heels. Under the pretext of preparing for her date, May dresses on stage, in front of Eddie, instead of in the bathroom; thus she willingly "participates in her objectification for him"⁵² (and the audience).

But this picture of "female sexuality, or, more precisely, the objectification of male sexual fantasy"⁵³ is also part of Shepard's myth. In his earlier plays, (Tooth of Crime, Seduced, La Turista, Operation Sidewinder) there are a number of instances where a woman wears, or strips down to, underwear or less for the gratification of the male gaze. Even in Shepard's relatively recent A Lie of the Mind, Beth takes off her shirt in order to seduce the wounded Frankie, who is unable to move.

Perhaps it is true that the reason "man has always been fascinated with the female body" is simply because the "woman's sexual parts are where he came from."⁵⁴ We have already noted

how Shepard stressed Halie's sexual parts in Buried Child. But the voyeurism of spectators, performers, and playwright take a startling turn in the film version of Fool for Love (1985), directed by Robert Altman, written and starring Sam Shepard. In this movie, there is a scene where Eddie (Shepard) is standing outside May's motel room peeking in through the window. May (Kim Basinger), preparing for her date, is sitting on her bed, wearing only a slip. When the camera shifts to Eddie's perspective, suddenly character, playwright, and spectators are fused into a single voyeur, boldly gazing upon an unsuspecting May. It is a stunning moment. With her slip hiked up and her legs apart, the camera--along with Shepard and the rest of us--stares straight into May's crotch. While one could argue that the shot was unnecessarily excessive, if not crude, it did underscore the target of Eddie's desire. It also exposed, quite frankly, the fascination, fear, and awe Shepard has for female sexuality.

The violent progression of Eddie and May's duets are interrupted by Martin's dramatic entrance. In the style of a movie hero, Martin crashes on stage (ironically, the kind of stunt Eddie is paid to do) during one of Eddie and May's fights. Although Martin is May's gentleman caller, his presence is more important for Eddie's needs; because every hero requires an adversary. Before the appearance of the male rival, Eddie is seen as hard pressed to demonstrate his heroism. Real men don't push women around, but Eddie does just that, at times appearing

close to doing harm to May. It may explain why Eddie, until Martin's arrival, seems flustered and frustrated in how he should act. Eddie keeps asking May to tell him what she wants him to do. In this claustrophobic room, full of May's feminine things, he is clearly unsure of himself.

What Eddie likes is competing against other men who enjoy "horsing around, provoking each other, playing rough."⁵⁵ Shepard has stated his own fascination with, what he calls, the "internal violence each man secretly holds within him."⁵⁶ In another quote, he reflects that

there's some hidden, deeply-rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always, continually having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent.⁵⁷

In True West, Lee wistfully speaks of a Pit Bull he owned in the desert: "God that little dog could bear down. Lota' money in dog fightin'. Big money."⁵⁸ The image of this warrior dog, raised to fight and kill other dogs for profit and pleasure, is a marvelous metaphor for men who are psychically forced to do violent acts. An example of this kind of violent man is Weston, in Curse. When Weston finds out that his wife is running around with a slick lawyer, he says, "I'll . . . slit his throat. I was in the war. I know how to kill. . . . It's no big deal. You just make an adjustment. . . . You just slaughter them."⁵⁹ After

Martin's entrance, Eddie can now test himself against another man. As he boasts to May, "I'm gonna nail his ass to the floor. Directly" (41).

But Eddie never does; it isn't necessary. With his more aggressive personality and superior imagination, Eddie toys with Martin. This match-up is never a contest. If the Martin character suggests the brave, gentle woodsman in fairy tales, he is also bland, unimaginative, and contently rooted in the real world. Eddie may be living out some fantasy myth, but, as Kleb notes, he is also "sexy, funny and tough," and "he's an artist-- a performer and storyteller of wit."⁶⁰ Martin is clearly no match for Eddie as a sexual rival. Shepard also stacks the cards against Martin by making him "unattractive, meek, earthbound, not-quite-there."⁶¹ And where Martin is cautious, fastidious, and slow, Eddie is impulsive, reckless, and brash. Eddie is, in essence, a pure performer.

Corneau says that when the "hero idealizes his absent father this gives the heroic son a taste for performance that knows no limits."⁶² But Eddie is not the only Shepard son-figure who has a taste for performance. Lee in True West is a performer; Jake in A Lie of the Mind is a performer; and Hoss in Tooth of Crime is literally a performer. In many mythologies the "gods provide severe punishments for heroes who go beyond the established limits or who commit the supreme crime of thinking themselves immortal."⁶³ Because Eddie loves his sister "beyond the established limits," the gods have apparently decided to punish

him. To carry out the divinities' sentence is the fiercely pursuing Countess. Though never seen, the Countess is presented as a mysterious and dangerous figure. She displays her power with blinding lights, gunshots, fire, and explosions. From the terror she instills in Eddie, the Countess is evidently more than just "pretty crazy" (47); she is part witch and part fury, who's been able to track our hero for over 2,400 miles!

The Countess is also a terrible mother figure sent down to take vengeance on a betraying son. There is a curse that hangs over this family, one that is not revealed until the end of the play, which is that Eddie's mother killed herself with the Old Man's shotgun. This family curse is the subtext behind the Countess's blinding high beams and the explosions from her magnum pistol. In addition, there is the constant, loud percussive sound of the slamming doors, which suggests the bang! of the shotgun that destroyed Eddie's mother. One wonders if Eddie still hears that shot go off in his brain, or whether he has repressed that traumatic experience. May is the one who bluntly reminds Eddie of his mother's suicide: "Eddie's mother blew her brains out. Didn't she, Eddie? Blew her brains right out" (73). One senses that Eddie must have blocked it out of his mind, because for him to recall it would mean that he would have to hate the Old Man. (Shepard would reuse that scenario in A Lie of the Mind. In that play, Sally recalls how her father was killed, and, particularly, of Jake's involvement; but Jake cannot remember any of it.)

May's memory of the mother's suicide clarifies another moment in the play that could be overlooked or misinterpreted by spectators. After Eddie learns of May's date, he brings in his shotgun to "clean it," (30) as he puts it. May stares at the shotgun, then intensely watches Eddie dismantle it. Her response seems like that of a woman who is either frightened or turned on by Eddie's violent display of jealousy. What makes more psychological sense, however, is that May is staring at the shotgun because it reminds her of the mother's suicide; in fact, it could be the very same Browning shotgun that Eddie's mother used on herself.

Perhaps Fool's most illuminating and haunting section is the account of Eddie's "long night walk" with his father. As Eddie tells the story, it becomes both a journey and an initiation into manhood for the teen-aged son. The storyteller transforms the walk into a pilgrimage by romanticizing it, enlarging it, making it cinematic. In their trek, Eddie and the Old Man pass wild beasts--"these white owls kept swooping down out of nowhere, hunting for jackrabbits. Diving right past our heads" (65). They pass Hollywood gods emanating above from the drive-in movie screen--"It was Spencer Tracy . . . moving his mouth. Speaking without words. Speaking to a woman in a red dress" (65). They pass Mexican migrant workers who look like extras from a John Ford western--"They were drinking beer and laughing and I remember being jealous of them and I didn't know why" (65). And they walk past the devastation man has wrought on the frontier

landscape--the "donut shop, past the miniature golf course, past the Chevron station" (66). Then Eddie magnifies the father-son bond, enriching it even as he sentimentalizes it, through the repetitious rite of sharing the bottle of whiskey: "Before he even took a drink, he offered it to me first. . . . And we just kept passing it back and forth like that as we walked until we drank the whole thing dry. And we never said a word the whole time" (66).

The end of this journey leads to a remarkable event: Eddie watches his father break down and cry in the arms of May's mother--"just crying like a baby" (66). This description echoes Eddie's earlier confession that he wept like "a little baby" (21) when he thought of May's neck. In the former instance, a man appears to be weeping on a woman's neck; in the latter, it is the remembrance of a womanly neck that makes a strong man cry. It may be that for Eddie (and the playwright as well) a woman's neck is a maternally and, even, erotically charged zone. In A Lie of the Mind, Jake asks Sally if she remembers how their father "used to try to dance with you when he was drunk? How he'd pull you right up tight against his chest and breathe into your neck."⁶⁴ (In Nabokov's Ada, Van is also aroused by this particular area of his sister's body: "Her neck had been, and remained, his most delicate, most poignant delight, especially when she let her hair flow freely, and the warm, white, adorable skin showed through in chance separation of glossy black strands."⁶⁵)

It is ironic that, though it failed cinematically, the slow-moving film version of Fool for Love succeeds in clarifying the play's myth. The way the film does this is through flashbacks. While one of the characters tells a story about his or her past, the picture cuts to that past event. In these flashback scenes, we see May's young mother; May, as both a little girl and an adolescent; Eddie's mother; a younger, middle-aged Old Man; and Eddie as a teenager. In every instance, the visual flashback is significantly different from the storyteller's narration.

In the flashback of Eddie's story, we see the Old Man babbling non-stop to his teen-aged son during their entire walk, not at all in wordless silence as Eddie describes it. Another critical difference is that the Old Man never offers the bottle of whiskey to Eddie. Hence, what we see is that the Old Man, even during their long night walk, remains an absent father, hardly listening or looking at his son as he nervously hurries to his rendezvous with May's mother. What we hear, though, is the son's verbal transformation of that episode, mythologizing it into something deeply experiential as he adds and substitutes details that never happened. In the play, we can only vaguely perceive this from listening to May's rather different version of Eddie and May's first meeting.

Eddie is not the only character given to mythologizing. For example, the Old Man tells a story about his attempt to comfort his crying daughter while standing in the middle of a cattle herd. The crucial difference that we see in the flashback is

this: May is not crying at all, and the Old Man is not comforting her. Later in the film, May narrates how her mother finally found the Old Man's other family. In this story, May describes her long walk through "that stupid hick town," and how her mother "kept squeezing my hand to the point where I thought she'd crush the bones in my fingers" (71). But in the flashback, her mother is walking quickly ahead, while the teen-aged May follows a few steps behind.

It is striking that Shepard did not change the words in the characters' stories (faithful to the play) to suit the film's flashbacks. One can only assume that the director, Altman, and the screenwriter, Shepard, wanted to show this contradiction. Since people tend to believe their eyes more than their ears, an audience would conclude that it is the storyteller who is wrong. But it is not simply a question of the story being right or wrong, truthful or untruthful, accurate or inaccurate. The intention of each character's version (or revision) of the past is to depict the loving bond between parent and child that, sadly, never existed.

While it is true that Eddie, May, and the Old Man can alter, ignore, or repress their family myth, they cannot run away from it. For Shepard, these myths originate from the very blood-knot that ties family members together--willingly or unwillingly. Speaking about his family dramas, Shepard said this:

The interesting thing about taking real blood relationships is that the more you start to investigate those things as external characters, the more you see they're internal characters. The mythology has to come out of real life, not the other way around. Mythology . . . came out of the guts of man.⁶⁶

As the Mummy says in Strindberg's The Ghost Sonata, "Crimes and secrets and guilt bind us together!--We've broken up and gone our separate ways an endless number of times, but we're always drawn back together again."⁶⁷ Like Strindberg, Shepard recognizes the magnetic, erotic pull of the blood-bond in family relationships. In Curse of the Starving Class, Emma, experiencing her first menstruation, startles Ellie's slick lawyer by asking him if her mother bleeds: "You know. Does she have blood coming out of her?"⁶⁸ While the question successfully unnerves the lawyer, in a deeper sense, Emma is seriously asking whether the blood-bond still flows in her mother.

Shepard is also intrigued by what he sees as the innate violence of the blood-tie: "What kinda' people kill each other the most. . . . Family people,"⁶⁹ says Lee in True West. Hillman underscores Lee's theory by stating that the "place where one is most likely to be killed is at home, both perpetrator and victim, family members."⁷⁰ Austin graphically demonstrates this principle to his alarmed mother as he twists the telephone cord

around Lee's neck: "I can kill him, I can easily kill him . . . don't tell me I can't kill him because I can."⁷¹

In addition to an emphasis on violence, True West shares other themes with Fool. In both plays there is the symbiotic love/hate relationship of two siblings, including the insidious influence of the father. While all the action of True West and Fool occur inside one room, it is the imagery of the American Southwest that dominates these works. In noting the importance of stories and the storyteller in these plays, we need to point out a distinction. In Fool, Eddie's stories are aimed to promote his personal family myth. Because Eddie tells his tales for the sake of telling them, there is a purity about his performance. In True West, Austin and Lee also tell stories; but because their stories are aimed for the commercial market, the brothers become corrupted, and their narrative skills are, ultimately, cursed.

Elaborating on True West and Fool's mythical kinship, Peter Podol says that in both works the siblings "find themselves trapped in relationships of mutual interdependence that are destructive, intense and ultimately mythic. Their confrontation becomes larger than life, due in part to Shepard's use of the myth of the American West as the setting where they must play out their irresolvable conflicts and desires."⁷² Benedict Nightingale, in his review of the London production of True West, writes of the play's "power of blood-ties to undermine and overwhelm, plunder and destroy even those who fancy themselves collected and mature."⁷³

In Hawk Moon (1973), Shepard's first collection of poems, short stories, and monologues, there is a story called "Blood Milk." It is about a goat who begins to give milk mixed with blood. The goat's owner, the Captain, keeps "drinking it just the same," even as, each day, her milk gets redder and redder with blood. The Captain feels "himself getting closer to the animal."⁷⁴ Soon he can even "baa" back to her. It becomes clear that for Shepard, blood is an element that is mystical, magical, and hazardous. Indeed, as is evident "throughout his works, Shepard insists on the blood-bond as a powerful, primal connective force."⁷⁵

Toward the end of Fool, the myth told by the hero, and the myth created by the playwright, move closer together until they actually intersect. The point of convergence occurs during the revelation of a mother's violent death and the subsequent (unspoken) agreement by the guilty parties to remain silent. At that point, the Old Man climbs up on center stage to demand from Eddie (and perhaps the playwright as well) that he live up to his end: "We've got a pact. Don't forget" (73).

In Shepard's myth, blood relations commit unspeakable crimes and transgressions against each other. In Buried Child, A Lie of the Mind, and Fool for Love these wrongs include infanticide, patricide, suicide, and they all involve, in one form or another, incest or incestuous desire. Following their crimes, the involved parties make pacts of silence with each other to cover

up their guilt, and, if possible, induce themselves to forget their shameful acts.

Always in the eye of this domestic storm is the father and his restless dissatisfaction within the nuclear family. In Fool, the Old Man tells his son, "Everything went on just the same as though I'd never left" (74). Weston, in Curse, tells his son, "I couldn't stand the idea that . . . every morning it would be the same."⁷⁶ Shepard's men, particularly the fathers, are unable to adjust to a normal life; it is a world that Wesley describes as a zombie world, where "more zombies are on the way."⁷⁷ The bitter wives of these men, who are somewhat better at adjusting to their environments, have a difficult time understanding why their husbands flounder and decline. In A Lie of the Mind, Lorraine rhetorically asks her daughter, "Is there any good reason in this Christless world why men leave women?"⁷⁸ Later, the other mother, Meg, explains that the "male one goes off by himself. Leave. He needs something else. But he doesn't know what it is. . . . So he ends up dead. By himself."⁷⁹

Perhaps the central question posed by these plays is this: What does the myth mean to the lives of the children? To this end, the incest theme becomes a means of illustrating (and intensifying) this question to the audience. In an interview, Shepard describes "certain things that occur inside the family" that leave "deep marks"⁸⁰ in the emotional and psychological landscape of blood relations:

Sometimes in someone's gestures you can notice how a parent is somehow inhabiting that person without there being any awareness of that. How often are you aware that a gesture is coming from your old man? Sometimes you can look at your hand and see your father.⁸¹

Or, as Vince did in Buried Child, you can look at the reflection of your face and see all your fathers. And in Fool for Love, you can leave your lover again and again, disappearing and then returning, just as your father did.

The biggest test for Eddie is not, primarily, to win May-- he has done that countless times in the past, and, we feel, will continue to win (and lose) her countless times in the future-- but to finally, and directly, defy the Old Man. The blow is struck when Eddie blames his father for his mother's death. The Old Man becomes livid. Then, as Eddie and May slowly draw closer toward each other, the Old Man rails against them; then he rails against their mothers; and finally, he appeals to his son's loyalty: "You two can't come together! You gotta hold up my end of this deal. I got nobody now! Nobody! You can't betray me! You gotta' represent me now! You're my son!" (75). It is the only time in the play that the Old Man refers to Eddie as his son. By then, it is too late.

From the Old Man's point of view, there is extreme danger in the union of Eddie and May. As Shepard explains, "Once they become whole, it shatters [the Old Man's] entire existence, which

depends on being split."⁸² But that is precisely what incest does to the family: it unifies two people (if it is consensual), while it shatters the existence of others. It shattered Dodge in Buried Child. It shattered Jake in A Lie of the Mind, who suspected his father of being intimate with Sally. And now it is shattering the Old Man's last, lingering hold on his son.

In Fool for Love's blazing, apocalyptic conclusion, we find a number of compelling metaphors. The Countess's fiery strike at Eddie's horses is, symbolically, an attack on his manhood, which is why Eddie must chase after his steeds. The image of fire also leads us to the source of this Oedipal triangle: May's mother. It was she who relentlessly followed the Old Man, and "was on fire" (71) when she closed in on his trail. As in Ibsen's Ghosts, another play haunted by illicit passion and dead parents, Fool implies that there are fires that can never be put out. The inflammatory nature of Eddie and May's relationship is one that neither party can contain nor control; Shepard underscores this eruptive element in his physically (and violently) stylized staging. As the playwright, however, Shepard seems to be saying, through the torturous tango of Eddie and May, that we can never tear away from the "ghosts of parents and stepparents past":⁸³ They will follow us, call us, pursue us, even try to destroy us (how Ibsenic a thought!); and, at the least, they will remain inside us. To quote the elegant words of Rainer Maria Rilke: "But inside: who could ward off, / who could divert, the floods of origin inside him?"⁸⁴

Corneau suggests that "our love stories are battlefields on which we wage our insidious struggle for power, as if one side must succumb to the fantasies of the other side."⁸⁵ That could certainly describe May and Eddie's relationship. At the end of the film version of Fool for Love, there is a dramatic overhead shot of the entire motel complex in flames. It appears as a burning garrison after an armed battle. The image is an appropriate metaphor for the intense battle that has just been fought, and one that has left no clear winners or losers.

As in any myth-cycle, the gods and heroes of one story turn up in later stories. In Fool for Love, the characters in this family unit reverberate in A Lie of the Mind. In one particular exchange in Lie, Sally tells her brother Jake how she "started thinkin' about this whole thing. This family. How everything's kinda--shattered now." Jake's response is to bleakly ask, "What d'ya mean 'now'? When wasn't it shattered?"⁸⁶

1. Mircea Eliade, Mythologies 2 Vols., trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan, ed. Yves Bonnefoy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5.
2. Ibid.
3. James Hillman, A Blue Fire: Selected Writings by James Hillman (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 198.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Sam Shepard, Fool for Love in Fool for Love and The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983), 21. All subsequent quotes from this play will be indicated by the page number.
7. Shepard, The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife, 111.
8. Guy Corneau, Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity (Boston and London: Shambhala: 1991), 41.
9. Carol Rosen. "Sam Shepard's Angel City: A Movie for the Stage," Modern Drama 22, No. 1 (March 1979), 39.
10. Corneau, 50.
11. Stephen Stanton, The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama, ed. John Gassner and Edward Quinn (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 159.
12. Ibid.
13. J. Hoberman, "How the West Was Lost. Tracking the Decline of an American Genre: From Appomattox to Vietnam to Disney World," The Village Voice, August 27, 1991, p. 50.
14. Harry G. Carlson, Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 71.
15. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class in Angel City and Other Plays (New York: Urizen Books, 1976), 88.
16. Hoberman, 49.
17. Hoberman, 53.

18. William Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre," Theater 14, No. 3 (Summer/Fall 1983), 77.
19. Hillman, 205.
20. Ibid.
21. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 63.
22. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 65.
23. William Kleb, "Worse Than Being Homeless: True West and The Divided Self," American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981), 119.
24. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind (New York: New American Library, 1986), 61.
25. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, 74.
26. Shepard, The Rock Garden, 218.
27. The Norton Anthology of English Literature Vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 289-90.
28. Stephen Poliakoff, Hitting Town in Hitting Town and City Sugar (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), 35.
29. Poliakoff, 14.
30. Poliakoff, 24.
31. Poliakoff, 38.
32. Poliakoff, 46.
33. Shepard, True West in Sam Shepard: Seven Plays (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 12.
34. Poliakoff, 39.
35. Landford Wilson, Home Free! in Balm in Gilead and Other Plays (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), 103.
36. Vladimir Nabokov, Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.), 133.
37. Wilson, 104.
38. Poliakoff, 30.

39. Steven Putzel, "Expectation, Confutation, Revelation: Audience Complicity in the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 30, No. 2 (June 1987), 155.
40. John Beaufort, "Sam Shepard Drama Assaults Audience, Actors --and Scenery," Christian Science Monitor, June 9, 1983, p. 16.
41. Dan Isaac, "True Shepard: Fool for Love," Other Stages, June 2, 1983, p. 3.
42. Robert Brustein, "Fool for Love," The New Republic, June 27, 1983, p. 25.
43. William Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre," 79.
44. Sam Shepard, Joseph Chaikin & Sam Shepard: Letters and Texts, 1972-1984, ed. Barry Daniels (New York: New American Library, 1989), 120.
45. Antonin Artaud, The Theater and its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 114.
46. Artaud, 96.
47. Jacques Levy, notes on Red Cross in Five Plays by Sam Shepard (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 96.
48. Toby Silverman Zinman, "Sam Shepard and Super-Realism," Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986), 424.
49. Artaud, 111.
50. Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre, 77.
51. Ibid.
52. Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre," 81.
53. Ibid.
54. Corneau, 108.
55. Corneau, 118.
56. Corneau, 119.
57. Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, Reality--Sam Shepard's America," The New York Times, January 29, 1984, Sec. 2, p. 26.

58. Shepard, True West, 25.
59. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 90.
60. Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre," 80.
61. Ibid.
62. Corneau, 46.
63. Corneau, 47.
64. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, 64.
65. Nabokov, 216.
66. Samuel Freedman, "Sam Shepard's Mythic Vision of the Family," The New York Times, December, 1, 1985, Section 2, p. 20.
67. August Strindberg, The Ghost Sonata in Strindberg: Five Plays, trans. Harry G. Carlson (New York: New American Library, 1983), 294.
68. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 74.
69. Shepard, True West, 23.
70. Hillman, 196.
71. Shepard, True West, 58.
72. Peter Podol, "Dimensions of Violence in the Theater of Sam Shepard: True West and Fool for Love," Essays In Theatre 7, No. 2 (May 1989), 157.
73. Benedict Nightingale, review of True West, New Statesman, December 13, 1981, n. p.
74. Sam Shepard, Hawk Moon: A Book of Short Stories, Poems, and Monologues (1973; New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981), 16.
75. Kleb, "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre," 82.
76. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 112.
77. Shepard, Curse of the Starving Class, 83.
78. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, 86.
79. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, 105.

80. Cott, 155.
81. Ibid.
82. Cott, 149.
83. Isaac, 3.
84. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Third Elegy," The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. and ed. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1989), 165.
85. Corneau, 101.
86. Shepard, A Lie of the Mind, 61.

CHAPTER NINE

EPILOGUE

And my mother is standing in front of me . . . NAKED. Uh-HUH. NAKED. And glistening. Bigger than life, shining from the inside out . . . And she's smelling of salt, and she's promising me grease, something to suck on, and she's asking me in, oh, she's asking me in. And my legs are trembling, just like a diver's legs, because I'm high above that sweet pink ocean, that body of water that is a body, the body we call Mother, and I'm about to go in. Oh, I'm about to go in.

--HOLLY HUGHES
World Without End

As explained in the introduction, this dissertation is not an overview of the incest theme in modern drama. Too many worthy dramatists have been left out.¹ Concentrating instead on a specific body of work by Ibsen, O'Neill, and Shepard--three of the most dominant playwrights of their eras--represents an effort to illuminate the complex nature and far-reaching influence of a theme that usually has been kept in the dark. Indeed, if we have understood anything about the nature of the incest theme and the playwrights who use it, then perhaps it was to discover how deeply and organically rooted incestuous desire is to the dramatic action of a play. A second, and no lesser, discovery was learning that while the aims and impulses of playwrights who use the incest theme can vary--not only from playwright to playwright, but from play to play--it is possible to discern common elements that these modern artists may share and depart from.

Having explained the necessary, and unavoidable, constraints of this study, I felt that an epilogue would be an appropriate place to listen to an entirely different (and relatively recent) perspective on the incest theme in theatre: the female voice. I have chosen to focus on two notable women performance artists. My comments on female artists, in this relatively short space, cannot (nor is it meant to) approach any kind of balance with the viewpoints of male artists in the previous chapters; but it does offer us an opportunity to examine a new direction this theme has taken in recent years, and where it may yet go.

In the last twenty years, we have seen the emergence of the women's liberation movement, as well as a gradual public awareness of the problem of child sexual abuse in this country. The convergence of these two activities has resulted in foregrounding the political nature of incest (along with other sexual themes) on the American stage. This has been especially true in the feminist theatre. The reasons for this are clear, and they go to the core of this comparatively young theatrical movement.

If there is one factor that has set feminist theatre apart from the other genres of non-mainstream theatre since the 1960s, it would be its politically militant agenda. Much more overtly than the rest of the avant-garde, feminist theatre has been committed to subverting the rigid foundations of society. This is particularly true of women's performance art. Since the early 1970s, female performance has been changing the traditional roles

assigned to women as sexual objects in our patriarchal culture.² To achieve this, female performers have been experimenting with traditional male forms of power such as desire and sexual fantasy. The fantasy of incest is one that has figured prominently.

But it is from the voices of solo female performers that the subject of sexuality and politics has been most radically presented. As Lenora Champagne (herself a performance artist) suggests, their work is "based on the direct expression of the unspeakable--what is left unsaid in the culture--the author/performer becomes a mediator between (or medium for) this knowledge and the spectator."³ Performance often combines autobiography, violence, nudity, and social commentary. Because many of the performers began in the art world, and not in theatre, they bring arresting visual styles to their work, using slides, recordings, music, and unusual props.⁴

Two of the most distinctive and notorious voices from today's group of female performing artists are Karen Finley and Holly Hughes. Each performer has used the theme of incest and incestuous desire in her work, in addition to embracing other "unspeakable" subjects. In discussing Hughes and Finley's handling of this topic, we will find not only a striking difference from the male voices we have heard, but observe how these two women diverge from each other.

An important strategy in Finley's theatre is to disorient her audience through shock, rage, and disgust; and with disgust,

she links desire. Finley, who has an attractive body, purposely debases herself both verbally and physically. She will spew out a stream of foul, sexually explicit language, as she dumps food and garbage over her nude body. This kind of unbridled rage effectively blocks the male audience members from objectifying her into the usual passive female. To further confuse her audience, Finley employs rapid gender switching. As described by Elinor Fuchs, "Finley creates a mass of characters who erupt in jerky schizoid fragments. . . . The mutating 'I' is in turn woman, man, parent, child, all finding their level in the subterranean miasma of sexual abuse and numbing excess that begins virtually in utero."⁵

In her solo performance work, A Constant State of Desire (1986), Finley handles the subject, and issue, of incest as no male writer would (or could) likely dare. In the third act, Finley "evolves into two deep incest trances,"⁶ beginning with the following sequence:

"My first sexual experience was at the time of my birth, passing through the vaginal canal. That red pulsing tunnel, that alley of love. I'm nothing but a human penis. And at the time of my birth I had an erection. I'm fucking my own mama. It's the smell, it's the sight of my mama that keeps me going. Keeps me kicking."⁷

Finley then shifts into the character of a grown son, who forcibly fornicates his inert, tv-comatose mother. Switching gender again, she is the five-year-old daughter of a child-molesting father: "Then he starts working my little hole. Starts working my little hole. 'Showing me what it's like to be a mama'"⁸

In her one-woman shows, Finley performs a kind of anarchic pornography. Politically, her intent is to re-create the cycles of victimization. In the piece described, incest becomes a forceful metaphor that vividly illustrates the cycle of victimization and degradation from a number of angles. Looking at her performance phenomenologically, it is helpful to refer to States's quote in our introduction. Finley compresses, even further, the already close relationship of "image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content." In other words, in the moments that Finley is describing the act of incest, she is convincingly experiencing it as both victim and perpetrator. The eroticism of illicit desire is overwhelmed by the grotesque imagery of Finley's graphic language and the sacrificial image of her splattered, half-naked body. For a spectator, watching Finley perform can be an unnerving and unforgettable event.

In contrast to Finley's persona and performance style is performer/writer Holly Hughes. Whereas Finley projects a furious, sexual anarchy, Hughes strikes a cool, seductive pose. Though small in stature, Hughes conveys a powerful presence on

stage that is ironically intelligent and sensually secure.⁹ It is her lesbian-bisexual stage persona, however, that has attracted the most controversy. In 1990, both Hughes and Finley were denied fellowships by NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer and the National Council on the Arts, after being recommended for funding by a panel of peers. The NEA's reasons for rescinding their awards can only be interpreted as political.¹⁰

In World Without End (1989), Hughes describes her uncommonly close relationship with her mother. Through the eyes of the daughter (Hughes), the mother appears as an extremely sexual and mysterious force: "I can smell the memory of ocean drifting from between her legs. Oh there is power in my mother's hips."¹¹ In her stage directions, Hughes specifically instructs the readers (and future performers of this work) precisely how they should interpret the daughter's attitude: "Her tone should be one of an initiate witnessing a sacred ritual, a mystery revealed. The tone is awe, which can be misinterpreted as fear and lead to a reading of this passage as an incestual event."¹²

Hughes, by asking us to view the daughter's desire as something other than incest, is suggesting that the girl doesn't want to, literally, make love with her mother, but to metaphysically enter inside her; that is, not to enter into her mother, but the Mother. Still, it is difficult for us not to be stirred, if not startled, by the mother's boldly sexual behavior with the daughter. At one point, the mother puts her hand inside her vagina. The daring eroticism of this gesture is intensified

by the daughter's delirious feelings, as expressed in Hughes's exuberant language.

Mama says: "Holly, if something's bothering you, and you want to know the answer to it, just remember the answer is inside you." And with that she reached inside herself and then she took her hand out and oh! I could see how wet she was! And that smell! Let me tell you about that smell! That smell made me want to do the mashed potato! Just me and my mother, my naked mother dancing in the split-level.¹³

As if anticipating a "wrong" audience response, Hughes describes the disapproving reaction of her best friend, Jo-deen, while telling her this story: "And all of a sudden, she's looking at me funny, like I'm bleeding or something. Like seeing my mother's pussy is some sort of crime. . . . To me it was a gift. It was the best thing she ever did for me. It was my inheritance."¹⁴

For Hughes, sexuality possesses strong nurturing qualities, even if it does border on mother-daughter incest. Discussing her work, Hughes says, "I am interested in talking about sexual pleasure and what it could mean for women. . . . I'm interested in talking about sexuality as a return, and a way of re-creating your life as a powerful thing, as a positive force. I'm interested in trying to invent new images for women sexually."¹⁵ Hughes's affirmative stance on women's sexuality is in opposition to Finley's violent expression of sex. In the latter's work,

sexual relationships inevitably result in oppression, rape, and death.

Finley and Hughes are not the only artists in women's performance that speak about female sexuality--including incest --in frankly intimate and personalized terms. But what gives their voices such unique force is the language. Finley and Hughes articulate a language that is intensely emotional, shockingly obscene, richly metaphorical, but bare of any sentimentality that would cushion the (male) spectators' discomfort. One might say that the audience, if not exactly invited, is dared to enter into Finley and Hughes's sexual zone of experience.

To sum up, while these two female performers depart fundamentally from the male playwrights' handling of incest, something essential has not changed. Neither Finley nor Hughes has disrupted the inherent attraction/repulsion nature of incest. The forbidden roads that they explore, though widely divergent, begin at the same point. One road leads to brutality and force, the other to fulfillment and love. If we (the audience) follow them, we may either be blasted back with hate, or met with erotic desire. Incest, it seems, can never be neutral or normal. At least it hasn't been in over 5000 years of Western culture.

As we reach the end of this discussion, it may be fair to say that the incest theme in drama is one that has been overlooked, underestimated, and misunderstood for too long. It was in light of the paucity of criticism on this theme that

initially provoked this study. Even today, there seems to be a resistance to thoughtful and perceptive discussion on this topic. It may well be that critics and the public are still uncomfortable discussing, seeing, or understanding the significance of the incest theme in theatre and performance. If that is the case, then perhaps this study may help initiate further and broader discussions on this richly and intrinsically human subject.

1. To cite just one significant omission, there is the Austrian playwright and novelist, Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989). One finds incest or suggestions of it in many of his plays and novels. The most recurring motif is of the man stuck in a perversely suffocating relationship with one or more sisters. See his plays, Eve of Retirement in The President & Eve of Retirement (New York: PAJ, 1982) and Ritter, Dene, Voss in Histrionics: Three Plays (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
2. See Jill Dolan, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," Theatre Journal 39, No. 2 (May, 1987), 156-74.
3. Lenora Champagne, ed., introduction to Out From Under: Texts by Women Performance Artists (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990), xi.
4. Champagne, x-xi.
5. Elinor Fuchs, "Staging the Obscene Body," TDR 33, No. 1 (Spring 1989), 48.
6. Fuchs, 49.
7. Karen Finley, The Constant State of Desire in TDR 32, No. 1 (Spring 1988), 147.
8. Finley, 148.
9. Champagne, 6.
10. Ibid.
11. Holly Hughes, World Without End in Out From Under, 18.
12. Hughes, 19.
13. Hughes, 20.
14. Hughes, 20-21.
15. Rebecca Schneider, "Holly Hughes: Polymorphous Perversity and the Lesbian Scientist," TDR 33, No. 1 (Spring 1989), 182.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Archer, William. William Archer on Ibsen: The Major Essays, 1889-1919. Edited by Thomas Postlewait. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984.
- Arens, W. The Original Sin: Incest and Its Meaning. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Armstrong, Louise. Kiss Daddy Goodnight: Ten Years Later. New York: Pocket Books, 1987.
- Artaud, Antonin. The Theater and Its Double. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Barlow, Judith. Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1985.
- Beckett, Samuel. Three Novels. New York: Grove Press, 1958; Black Cat Edition, 1965.
- Bentley, Eric. The Life of the Drama. New York: Atheneum, 1967.
- Bergman, Ingmar. The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography. Translated by Joan Tate. New York: Viking, 1988.
- Berlin, Norman. Eugene O'Neill. New York: Grove Press, 1982.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Knopf, 1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Blake, William. The Poetry and Prose of William Blake. Edited by David V. Erdman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. Eugene O'Neill's "Long's Day Journey into Night". New York: Chelsea House, 1987.
- Bogart, Travis. Contour of Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

- Bonnefoy, Yves, ed. Mythologies 2 Vols. Translated by Gerald Honigsblum, et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Brockett, Oscar and Robert Findlay, ed. Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre Since 1870. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.
- Buss, Robin. Cocteau: Les Enfants Terribles. London: Grant and Cutler, 1986.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Power of Myth. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Cargill, Oscar. O'Neill and His Plays. New York: New York University Press, 1970.
- Carlson, Harry G. Strindberg and The Poetry of Myth. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Carlson, Marvin. Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Chabrowe, Leonard. Ritual and Pathos--The Theater of O'Neill. Lewisburg, KY: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1976.
- Chothia, Jean. Forging a New Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Cohn, Rudy. New American Dramatists 1960-1980. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Corneau, Guy. Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity. Boston and London: Shambhala: 1991.
- Cory, Donald Webster and R. E. L. Masters. Violation of Taboo: Incest in the Great Literature of the Past and Present. New York: The Julian Press, 1963.
- Courtois, Christine. Healing the Incest Wound: Adult Survivors in Therapy. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988.
- Curran, Stuart. Shelley's "Cenci": Scorpions Ringed With Fire. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- DeSalvo, Louise. Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

- Duckworth, George E. The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment. Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Durbach, Errol, ed. Ibsen and the Theatre. New York: New York University Press, 1980.
- _____. Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1982.
- Eliade, Mircea. Mythologies 2 Vols. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Edited by Yves Bonnefoy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Falk, Doris V. Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958.
- Felman, Shoshana, ed. Literature and Psychoanalysis The Question of Reading: Otherwise. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- Fjelde, Rolf, ed. Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965.
- Floyd, Virginia, ed. Eugene O'Neill: A World View. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979.
- _____, ed. Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly Released Ideas for Plays. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981.
- _____. The Plays of Eugene O'Neill. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985.
- Frenz, Horst. Eugene O'Neill. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1971.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud. Translated and edited by A. A. Brill. New York: The Modern Library, 1938.
- _____. "Some Character-Types Met With in Psycho-Analytic Work." In The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 14, 1914-1916. Translated by James Strachey. 1957. Reprint. London: Hogarth Press, 1968.
- _____. The Origins of Psychoanalysis. Translated by E. Mosbacher and J. Strachy. New York: Basic Books, 1954.
- Gallop, Jane. The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Girard, Rene. Violence and the Sacred. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977.

- Goldfarb, Russell M. Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1970.
- Gray, Ronald. Ibsen -- A Dissenting View. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Haakonsen, Daniel, ed. Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen 4. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978.
- Hillman, James. A Blue Fire: Selected Writings by James Hillman. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.
- Hoffmann, Yoel, trans. and ed. Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1986.
- Holtan, Orley. Mythic Patterns in Ibsen's Last Plays. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970.
- Hurt, James. Catiline's Dream: An Essay on Ibsen's Plays. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Ibsen, Henrik. Ibsen: Letters and Speeches. Edited by Evert Sprinchorn. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- _____. Ibsen's Poems. Translated by John Northam. Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986.
- Jacobson, Per Schelde and Barbara Fass Leavy. Ibsen's Forsaken Merman: Folklore in the Late Plays. New York and London: New York University Press, 1988.
- Joyce, James. Ulysses. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
- Jung, Carl G. The Essential Jung. Edited by Anthony Storr. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- _____. Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia. In The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Vol. 5. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Justice, Blair, and Rita Justice. The Broken Taboo: Sex in the Family. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1979.
- Keyssar, Helene. Feminist Theatre. New York: Grove Press, 1985.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. A Kierkegaard Anthology. Translated by David and Lillian Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Edited by Robert Bretall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

- Kristeva, Julia. Tales of Love. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Lesser, Wendy. His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. The Elementary Structures of Kinship. Translated by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham, ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Lukacs, Georg. Essays on Realism. Edited by Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.
- Manheim, Michael. Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship. Syracuse University Press, 1982.
- Marranca, Bonnie, ed. American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff. The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Geroux, 1984.
- _____, ed. and trans. The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985.
- MacAndrew, Elizabeth. The Gothic Tradition in Fiction. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- McFarlane, James. Ibsen and Meaning: Studies, Essays and Prefaces 1953-87. Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1989.
- Miles, Henry. Forbidden Fruit: A Study of the Incest Theme in Erotic Literature. London: Luxor Press, 1973.
- Miller, James. "Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Seige of Chicago. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
- Nabakov, Vladimir. Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.
- Neumann, Erich. Art and the Creative Unconscious: Four Essays. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- _____. The Great Earth Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype. Translated by Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Northam, John. Ibsen: A Critical Study. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- Olds, Sharon. The Dead and the Living: Poems. New York: Knopf, 1990.
- Preston, James J., ed. Mother Worship: Theme and Variations. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Railo, Eino. The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism. New York: Humanities Press, 1964.
- Raleigh, John Henry. The Plays of Eugene O'Neill. London: Feffer and Simons, 1972.
- Rank, Otto. The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation. Translated by Gregory C. Richter. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992. Originally published as Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage. Leipzig and Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1912.
- Robinson, John A. Eugene O'Neill and Oriental Thought: A Divided Vision. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982.
- Salome, Lou. Ibsen's Heroines. Translated and edited by Siegfried Mandel. Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1985.
- Sanderson, James L. and Everett Zimmerman, eds. Oedipus: Myth and Dramatic Form. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.
- Schanke, Robert A. Ibsen in America: A Century of Change. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988.
- Schulz, Bruno. Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz. Translated by Walter Arndt with Victoria Nelson. Edited by Jerzy Ficowski. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Sheaffer, Louis. O'Neill: Son and Artist. New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- Shepard, Sam. Hawkmoon: A Book of Short Stories, Poems, and Monologues. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981.

- _____. Motel Chronicles. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982.
- _____. Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard: Letters and Texts, 1972-1984. Edited by Barry Daniels. New York: New American Library, 1989.
- Simon, Bennett. Tragic Drama and the Family: Psychoanalytic Studies from Aeschylus to Beckett. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Slater, Niall W. Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- States, Bert O. Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Stroupe, John H., ed. Critical Approaches to O'Neill. New York: AMS Press, 1988.
- Styan, J. L. Drama, Stage and Audience. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Tammany, Jane Ellert. Henrik Ibsen's Theatre Aesthetic and Dramatic Art: a Reflection of Kierkegaardian Consciousness -- its significance for Modern Dramatic Interpretation and the American Theatre. New York: Philosophical Library, 1980.
- Taylor, Mark. Shakespeare's Darker Purpose: A Question of Incest. New York: AMS Press, 1982.
- Tornqvist, Egil. A Drama of Souls: Studies in O'Neill's Super Naturalistic Technique. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.
- Twitchell, James B. Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Waincott, Ronald H. Staging O'Neill: The Experimental Years, 1920-1934. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Wandor, Michelene. Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama. London: Methuen, 1987.
- Wilder, Thornton. American Characteristics: And Other Essays. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

Wisenthal, J. L., ed. Shaw and Ibsen: Bernard Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism and Other Writings. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Young, Robin. Time's Disinherited Children: Childhood, Regression and Sacrifice in the Plays of Henrik Ibsen. Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1989.

Plays

Aeschylus. Prometheus Bound. In Prometheus Bound, The Suppliants, Seven Against Thebes, The Persians. Translated by Philip Vellacott. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1961.

Aeschylus. The Oresteia. Translated by Robert Fagles. New York: Viking Press, 1975; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977.

Artaud, Antonin. The Cenci. Translated by Simon Watson Taylor. New York: Grove Press, 1970.

Bernhard, Thomas. The President & Eve of Retirement. Translated by Gitta Honegger. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982.

_____. Histrionics: Three Plays. Translated by Peter Jansen and Kenneth Northcott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Bond, Edward. Saved. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Byron, George Gordon. Cain. In The Genius of the Later English Theatre. Edited by Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto. New York: New American Library, 1962.

Claus, Hugo. Friday. In Four Works for the Theatre. Translated by David Willinger and Lucas Truyts. Edited by David Willinger. New York: CASTA, 1990.

Euripides. The Women of Troy. In the Bacchae and Other Plays. Translated by Philip Vellacott. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Press, 1973.

Finley, Karen. The Constant State of Desire. In TDR 32, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 139-51.

Ford, John. 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

- Gerould, Daniel, ed. Doubles, Demons and Dreamers: An International Collection of Symbolist Drama. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1985.
- Gombrowicz, Witold. The Marriage. Translated by Louis Iribarne. New York: Grove Press, 1969.
- Hughes, Holly. World Without End. In Out From Under: Texts by Women Performance Artists. Edited by Lenora Champagne. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990.
- Ibsen, Henrik. The Complete Major Prose Plays. Translated by Rolf Fjelde. New York: New American Library, 1978.
- _____. Ghosts. In Plays: One. Translated by Michael Meyer. London: Methuen, 1980.
- _____. Little Eyolf and Rosmersholm. In Plays: Three. Translated by Michael Meyer. London: Methuen, 1980.
- _____. Peer Gynt. In Masters of Modern Drama. Translated by Norman Ginsbury. Edited by Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd. New York: Random House, 1962.
- Miller, Arthur. A View from the Bridge. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1986; rpt. Viking, 1960.
- Muller, Heiner. Hamlet-Machine and other texts for the Stage. Translated by Carl Weber. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1984.
- O'Neill, Eugene. Complete Plays 1920-1931 Vol. 2. New York: The Library of America, 1988.
- _____. Desire Under the Elms. In Three Plays of Eugene O'Neill. New York: Vintage Books, 1952.
- _____. The Iceman Cometh. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- _____. Long Day's Journey Into Night. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.
- _____. A Moon for the Misbegotten. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- _____. More Stately Mansions. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973.
- _____. Nine Plays. New York: The Modern Library, 1959.

- _____. The Unfinished Plays: Notes for the Visit of Malatesta, The Last Conquest, Blind Alley Guy. Edited by Virginia Floyd. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1988.
- Orton, Joe. The Complete Plays. New York: Grove Press, 1976.
- Poliakoff, Stephen. Hitting Town. In Hitting Town and City Sugar. London: Methuen, 1978.
- Seneca. Oedipus. In Four Tragedies and Octavia. Translated by E. F. Watling. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Shakespeare, William. The Winter's Tale. New York: New American Library, 1963.
- Shaw, Bernard. Mrs. Warren's Profession. In Plays by George Bernard Shaw. New York: New American Library, 1960.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. The Cenci. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.
- Shepard, Sam. Angel City & Other Plays. New York: Urizen Books, 1976.
- _____. Buried Child & Seduced & Suicide In B. New York: Urizen Books, 1979.
- _____. Five Plays by Sam Shepard. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967. [Chicago, Icarus's Mother, Red Cross, Fourteen Hundred Thousand, Melodrama Play.]
- _____. Fool for Love and The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife. San Francisco: City Lights, 1984.
- _____. Four Two-Act Plays. New York: Urizen, 1981. [La Turista, The Tooth of Crime, Geography of a Horse Dreamer, Operation Sidewinder.]
- _____. A Lie of the Mind. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- _____. Sam Shepard: Seven Plays. New York: Bantam, 1981. [True West, Buried Child, Curse of the Starving Class, Tooth of Crime, La Turista, Tongues, Savage Love.]
- _____. The Oedipus Cycle. Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949.
- Sophocles. Oedipus the King. In Sophocles: I. Translated by David Grene. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

- _____. Electra and Other Plays. Translated by E. F. Watling. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1953.
- Strindberg, August. Five Plays. Translated by Harry G. Carlson. New York: New American Library, 1983.
- _____. The Chamber Plays. Translated by Evert Sprinchorn, Seabury Quinn, Jr., and Kenneth Peterson, 1981.
- Williams, Tennessee. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. New York: New American Library, 1955.
- Wilson, Landford. Home Free!. In Balm in Gilead and Other Plays. New York: Hill & Wang, 1965.

Articles

- Bachman, Charles. "Defusion of Menace in the Plays of Sam Shepard." Modern Drama 19, No. 4 (December 1987): 405-15.
- Balchman, Alex. "Group Interaction in Ibsen's Play Ghosts." Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen 4. Edited by Daniel Haakonsen. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978: 74-82.
- Black, Stephen A. "Letting the Dead Be Dead: A Reinterpretation of A Moon for the Misbegotten," Modern Drama 29, No. 4 (December 1987) 544-55.
- Blau, Herbert. "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy." Modern Drama 27, No. 4 (December 1984): 520-39.
- Bosch, Marianne. "Mother, Sister, and Wife in The Millionairess." Shaw: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies 4. Translated by Kirby Richards. Edited by Stanley Weintraub. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984: 113-27.
- Boyd, Blanche McCrary. "On the Trail of the True West." The Face No. 59 (March, 1985): 22-26.
- Callens, Johan. "Memories of the Sea in Shepard's Illinois." Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986): 403-15.
- Cameron, Kenneth N. and Horst Frenz. "The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci." PMLA 60, No. 4 (December 1945): 1080-1105.

- Carlson, Marvin. "Ibsen, Strindberg, and Telegony." PMLA 100, No. 1 (January 1985): 774-82.
- _____. "Patterns of Structure in Ibsen's Rosmersholm." Modern Drama 17, No. 3 (September, 1974): 277-88.
- Chubb, Kenneth and the Editors of Theatre Quarterly. "Metaphors, Mad Dogs, and Old-Time Cowboys." Theatre Quarterly 4, No. 15 (August-October 1974): 3-16. Reprint. Bonnie Marranca, ed. American Dream: The Imagination of Sam Shepard. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1981: 187-209.
- Coe, Robert. "Saga of Sam Shepard." New York Times Magazine, November 23, 1980, pp. 56-58, 118-24.
- Cott, Jonathan. "Sam Shepard." Visions and Voices New York: Doubleday, 1987.
- Demastes, William W. "Understanding Sam Shepard's Realism." Comparative Drama 21, No. 3 (Fall 1987): 229-48.
- Dolan, Jill. "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance." Theatre Journal 39, No. 2 (May 1987): 156-74.
- Durbach, Errol. "The Geschwister-Komplex: Romantic attitudes to Brother-Sister Incest in Ibsen, Byron, and Emily Bronte." Mosaic 12, No. 4 (Summer 1979): 61-73.
- Erickson, Jon. "Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary American Performance: The Wooster Group, Holly Hughes, and Karen Finley." Theatre Journal 42, No. 2 (May 1990): 225-36.
- Fagles, Robert and W. B. Stanford, "A Reading of The Oresteia: The Eagle and the Serpent." The Oresteia by Aeschylus. Translated by Robert Fagles and W. B. Stanford. New York: Viking Press, 1975; Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977: 13-97.
- Felman, Shoshana. "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis." MLN 98, No. 5 (1983): 1020-53.
- Forte, Jeanne. "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism." Theatre Journal 40, No. 2 (May 1988): 217-35.
- Freedman, Samuel. "Sam Shepard's Mythic Vision of the Family." The New York Times, December 1, 1985, Sec. 2, p. 1, 20.
- Fuchs, Elinor. "Staging the Obscene Body." TDR 33, No. 1 (Spring 1989): 33-58.

- Garvey, Sheila Hickey. "The Origins of the 1956 Productions of The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey Into Night." Theatre Survey 29, No. 1 (May 1988): 51-68.
- Goldmann, Lucian. "The Theatre of Genet: A Sociological Study." Genet/Ionesco. Edited by Kelly Morris. New York: Bantam, n.d.
- Gomez, Christine. "Profaning the Sacred: The Juxtaposition of Incest and Marriage in Ford, Ibsen and Osborne." The Aligarh Critical Miscellany 2, No. 1 (1989): 74-84.
- Griffin, Ernest G. "O'Neill and the Tragedy of Culture." Modern Drama 31, No. 1 (March 1988): 1-15.
- Groseclose, Barbara. "The Incest Motif in Shelley's The Cenci." Comparative Drama 19, No. 3 (Fall 1985): 222-39.
- Hinden, Michael. "Desire and Forgiveness: O'Neill's Diptych." Comparative Drama 14, No. 3 (Fall 1980): 240-50.
- Hoberman, J. "How the West Was Lost. Tracking the Decline of an American Genre: From Appomattox to Vietnam to Disney World." The Village Voice, August 27, 1991, pp. 49-50, 52-53.
- Jacobs, Barry. "Ibsen's Little Eyolf: Family Tragedy and Human Responsibility." Modern Drama 27, No. 4 (December 1984): 604-15.
- Jiji, Vera. "Reviewers Responses to the Early Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A Study in Influence." Theatre Survey 29, No. 1 (May 1988): 69-86.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Myths, Dreams, Reality--Sam Shepard's America." The New York Times, January 29, 1984, Sec. 2, p. 1, 26.
- Kennedy, Andrew. "The Confessional Duologue in Ibsen." Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen 4. Edited by Daniel Haakonsen. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978: 34-48.
- Kerans, James E. "Kindermord and Will in Little Eyolf," Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism. Edited by Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968: 192-208.
- Kisselgoff, Anna. "Martha Graham, 96, Revolutionary in the Dance World, Dies." The New York Times, April 2, 1991, p. B7.
- Kleb, William. "Sam Shepard's Free-For-All: Fool for Love at the Magic Theatre." Theater 14, No. 3 (Summer/Fall 1983): 77-82.

- Lippman, Amy. "An Interview with Playwright Sam Shepard." Dialogue. (April 1985): 50, 58-59.
- Mikos, Michael and David Mulroy. "Reymont's The Peasants: A Probable Influence on Desire Under the Elms." The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter (Spring 1986): 4-15.
- Nash, Thomas. "Sam Shepard's Buried Child: The Ironic Use of Folklore." Modern Drama 26, No. 4 (December 1983): 486-91.
- Orbison, Tucker. "Mythic Levels in Shepard's True West." Modern Drama 27, No. 4 (December 1984): 506-19.
- Osherow, Anita R. "Mother and Whore: The Role of Woman in The Homecoming." Modern Drama 17, No. 4 (December 1974): 423-32.
- Podol, Peter. "Dimensions of Violence in the Theater of Sam Shepard: True West and Fool for Love." Essays in Theatre 7, No. 2 (May 1989): 149-58.
- Putzel, Steven. "Expectation, Confutation, Revelation: Audience Complicity in the Plays of Sam Shepard." Modern Drama 30, No. 2 (June 1987): 147-60.
- Rosen, Carol. "Sam Shepard's Angel City: A Movie for the Stage." Modern Drama 22, No. 1 (March 1979): 39-46.
- _____. "Silent Tongues: Sam Shepard's Explorations of Emotional Territory." The Village Voice, August 4, 1992, pp. 32-36, 38-41.
- Savran, David. "Sam Shepard's Conceptual Prison: Action and The Unseen Hand." Theatre Journal 36, No. 1 (March 1984): 57-73.
- Schneider, Rebecca. "Holly Hughes: Polymorphous Perversity and the Lesbian Scientist." TDR 33, No. 1 (Spring 1989): 171-83.
- Schuler, Catherine. "Spectator Response and Comprehension: The Problem of Karen Finley's Constant State of Desire." TDR, 34, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 131-46.
- Shea, Laura. "The Sacrificial Crisis in Sam Shepard's Buried Child." The Theatre Annual 44 (1989/1990): 1-9.
- Strasberg, Lee. Introduction. In The Paradox of Acting by Denis Diderot and Masks or Faces? by William Archer. New York: Hill and Wang, 1957.

Whiting, Charles G. "Digging Up Buried Child." Modern Drama 31, No. 4 (December 1988): 548-56.

_____. "Inverted Chronology in Sam Shepard's La Turista." Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986): 416-22.

Wilson, Ann. "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard." Modern Drama 30, No. 1 (March 1987): 46-57.

Zinman, Toby Silverman. "Sam Shepard and Super-Realism." Modern Drama 29, No. 3 (September 1986): 423-30.

Reviews

Agate, James. Review of Little Eyolf. Sunday Times, Oct. 15, 1930. Compiled by R. J. Dubin at Lincoln Center Library, p. 84.

Atkinson, Brooks. "Theatre: O'Neill's Last." Review of A Moon for the Misbegotten. New York Times, May 4, 1957, n.p.

Barnes, Clive. "Menace, mystery in Shepard's Buried Child." New York Post, Dec. 6, 1978, p. 25.

Beaufort, John. "Sam Shepard Drama Assaults Audience, Actors--and Scenery," Review of Fool for Love. Christian Science Monitor, Jun. 9, 1983, p. 16.

Billington, Michael. Review of Little Eyolf. The Guardian, Feb. 14, 1985; London Theatre Record Vol. 5, Issue. 4 (1985): 148.

Brustein, Robert. "Fool for Love." The New Republic, Jun. 27, 1983, p. 25.

Coveney, Michael. Review of Little Eyolf. Financial Times, Feb. 14, 1985; London Theatre Record Vol. 5, Issue. 4, (1985): 148.

Clurman, Harold. Review of A Moon for the Misbegotten. The Nation, Jan. 19, 1974, p. 92.

de Jongh, Nicholas. Review of Ghosts. Guardian, Oct. 9, 1986; London Theatre Record 6 (1986): 1093.

Fenton, James. Review of Rosmersholm. The Sunday Times, Feb. 8, 1981, p. 42.

- Fox, Terry Curtis. "Many Deaths in the Family." Review of Buried Child. The Village Voice, October 30, 1978, p. 119.
- Frye, John. "Conflicting Reactions Mark O'Neill Premiere at Columbus." Review of A Moon for the Misbegotten. Chillicothe Gazette, Sep. 21, 1947, n.p.
- Feingold, Michael. Review of Buried Child. The Village Voice, Feb. 12, 1979, p. 94.
- _____. "Passionate Ibsen Heights." Review of Rosmersholm. The Village Voice, Dec. 20, 1988, p. 121
- Gibbs, Walcott. Review of Desire Under the Elms. The New Yorker, January, 26, 1952, p. 52.
- Gray, Dominic. Review of Buried Child. What's On, Oct. 5, 1988; London Theatre Record Vol. 8, No. 20, (1988): 1366.
- Gussow, Mel. "An Enemy of the People, With Personal Problems." Review of Rosmersholm. New York Times, Dec. 14, 1988, p. C21.
- Hirsch, J. "Mid-American Nightmare Haunts Sam Shepard's Latest, Buried Child." Villager, Oct. 26, 1978, p. 15.
- Hudson, Christopher. Review of Little Eyolf. Standard, Feb. 14, 1985; London Theatre Record 5, Issue 4 (1985): 149.
- Hurren, Kenneth. Review of Little Eyolf. Mail on Sunday, Feb. 17, 1985; London Theatre Record 5, Issue 4 (1985): 147.
- Isaac, Dan. "True Shepard: Fool for Love." Other Stages, Jun. 2, 1983, p. 3.
- Kalen, T. E. "Crazy Farm." Review of Buried Child. Time, Dec. 18, 1978, n.p.
- Kroll, Jack. "Bucking Bronco." Review of Buried Child. Newsweek, Oct. 30, 1978, p. 106.
- Loney, Glenn. "Borders of Sanity." Review of Buried Child. Other Stages, Dec. 28, 1978. p. 4.
- McGavran, Mary V. "O'Neill Lifts Curtain On Sympathetic Drama." Review of A Moon for the Misbegotten. Columbus Journal, Feb. 21, 1947, p. 10.
- Nightingale, Benedict. Review of True West. New Statesman, 1981, Dec. 13, n.p.

- Oliver, Edith. "News from Off Off." Review of Buried Child. The New Yorker, November 6, 1978, p. 151.
- Patterson, John S. "Two Revivals Detail 'Worm-Eaten' Soul of America's Recent Past." Review of Buried Child. Villager, Jan. 15, 1979, p. 13.
- Rabkin, Gerald. "The Bones Underneath." Review of Buried Child. Soho Weekly News, Oct. 26, 1978, pp. 74, 78.
- Ratcliffe, Michael. Review of Little Eyolf. Observer, Feb. 17, 1985; London Theatre Record 5, Issue 4 (1985): 147.
- Rich, Frank. "Stage: Fool for Love, Sam Shepard Western." The New York Times, May 27, 1983, Sec. C, p. 3.
- Robertson, Allen. Review of Little Eyolf. Time Out, February 21, 1985; London Theatre Record 5, Issue 4 (1985): 147.
- Say, Rosemary. Review of Little Eyolf. Sunday Telegraph, Feb. 17, 1985; London Theatre Record, 5, Issue 4 (1985): 150.
- Shaw, Bernard. Review of Little Eyolf. Saturday Review, November, 1893. Compiled by R. J. Dubin at Lincoln Center Library, p. 82.
- Tinker, Jack. Review of Ghosts. Daily Mail, Oct. 8, 1986; London Theatre Record 6 (1986): 1093.
- Tynan, Kenneth. "At the Theatre," Review of Little Eyolf. Observer, Mar. 16, 1958. Compiled by R. J. Dubin at Lincoln Center Library, p. 86.

Unpublished Materials

- O'Neill, Eugene. "A Moon for the Misbegotten." The only extant autograph manuscript of the play, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Live Performances

- Finley, Karen. Constant State of Desire, Performance Space 122, New York City, 1986.
- _____. We Keep Our Victims Ready, Alice Tully Hall, New York City, 1990.

Hughes, Holly. World Without End, directed by Kate Stafford, Performance Space 122, New York City, 1989.

Ibsen, Henrik. Rosmersholm, directed by Sarah Pia Anderson, La Mama E.T.C. Annex Theater, New York City, 1988.

Shepard, Sam. Buried Child, directed by Robert Woodruff, Theater de Lys, New York City, 1978.

_____. Fool for Love, directed by Sam Shepard, Circle Repertory Theater, New York City, 1983.

_____. A Lie of the Mind, directed by Sam Shepard, Promenade Theater, New York City, 1986.

_____. True West, directed by Gary Sinise, Cherry Lane Theater, New York City, 1982.

Film, Television, and Videotape

Buried Child, directed by Michael Englar, videotaped at Center Stage, Baltimore, 1986; available at Lincoln Center.

Curse of the Starving Class, directed by Robin Lynn Smith, videotaped at the Promenade Theatre, 1985; available at Lincoln Center.

Fool for Love, a film directed by Robert Altman, 1985.

True West, a film directed by Gary Sinise, shown on PBS Television, January 1984.