





جامعة أحمد بن يحيى الونشريسي
تيسمسيلت-

المعيار

مجلة نصف سنوية متعددة التخصصات
مصنفة " C "

في الآداب، الحقوق والعلوم السياسية، علوم وتقنيات
النشاطات البدنية والرياضية، العلوم الاقتصادية، والعلوم الإنسانية
والاجتماعية

المجلد السادس عشر العدد 01 جوان 2025

EISSN 2602-6376

ISSN 2170-0931

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جامعة أحمد بن يحيى الونشريسي، تيسمسيلت - الجزائر -

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تصدر عن جامعة تيسمسيلت - الجزائر

توجه جميع المراسلات باسم رئيس التحرير

عن طريق البوابة الإلكترونية www.asjp.cerist.dz

جامعة تيسمسيلت. الجزائر.

البريد الإلكتروني: www.cuniv.tissemsilt.dz

EISSN 2602-6376

ISSN 2170-0931

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كلمة العدد

السلام عليكم،

بعد واجب التّحيّة تطل عليكم مجلة المعيار – كما عودتكم – بمجلد جديد وعدد متجدد هو المجلد السادس عشر، العدد الأول، حاملة في طيّاتها مجموعة ثرية ومتنوعة من المقالات العلميّة والبحوث الأكاديمية، التي تتناول طيفا واسعا من المواضيع والقضايا التي تهم القارئ المتطلّع للمعرفة والفهم العميق.

وكالمتوقع، يتضمن هذا العدد نخبة من المقالات التي كتبت بأقلام نيرة، وبأفكار ناضجة، تجمع بين العمق العلمي والطّرح الجذّاب، وذلك في مجالات شتى، تشمل: الأدب، والقانون، والسياسة، والاقتصاد، والاجتماع، وغيرها وبلسان مختلف اللّغات منها الانجليزية، الفرنسية والألمانية، ومن الميادين التي تتجدّد أهميتها مع متغيرات الواقع وتحديات العصر.

وما يضيفي على هذا العدد طابعا خاصّا، هو ما يتضمنه من أعمال كتبت من داخل الوطن ومن خارجه، في دليل واضح على عمق الامتداد العلميّ للمجلة، وحرصها على جمع الآراء والأصوات العلميّة من كافة الأصقاع، فكلّ مقال يضيف بعدا ورؤية تساهم في بناء معرفة شاملة ورؤية متوازنة نتطلّع من خلالها إلى نيل رضى القارئ والفوز بإعجابه.

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أ.د. عيساني محمد

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Date of transmission: 22/01/ 2025, date of acceptance: 02/05/ 2025

Abstract:

The present article explores the theme of destructive patriarchal authority and patriarchy's disruptive ideological forces in Sam Shepard's plays *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) and *Buried Child* (1978) in the light of Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of myth. It investigates how the failure father figures, Weston in *Curse of the Starving Class* and Dodge in *Buried Child* are exerting violence and destructive authority to compensate for their inability to meet the social, economic and cultural assumptions. This article reveals the way the fathers' oppressive authority has contributed to family disintegration, identity crises, and alienation. It uncovers the deceitful ideological nature of American established foundational myths, which in reality are based on ideological domination and masked as universal truths.

key words:

Sam Shepard, *Buried Child*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, patriarchy, authority, ideology, myth, Althusser, Barthes.

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Exploring Destructive Patriarchy and Subversive Ideological Forces in Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977) and *Buried Child* (1978)

Introduction:

Shepard delineates a dystopian “gothic” portrait of the American family to evaluate traditional established ideals interpreted by American ideologies such as the ideology of capitalism, the patriarchal ideology, the ideology of success and myths illustrated by the myth of the sacred family and the myth of the American Dream. The American family's adherence to the promises of the dream myth has affected the stability of the individual's identity and the integrity of the family unit, which transcends the realm of the household to a broader analysis of the fabricated dominating ideological, social, economic and cultural assumptions. This article examines the ways in which dominant ideologies as well as American foundational myths are unconsciously reproduced and perpetuated by the characters in their quest for a sense of integration and self-realization as these are utilized as manipulative tools by the ruling class to maintain the status quo. Sam Shepard exposes the American family in a state of crisis where its members are psychologically and sometimes physically ailing presenting in microcosm a dysfunctional image of the American society. Shepard's plays critique traditional myths about the family and examine the effects of modern American culture on family relationships. They examine the characters of the fallen fathers whose adherence to patriarchy has led to detrimental effects on their families. Both plays scrutinize the issue of family dysfunction oppressed by the overwhelming burden of patriarchal authority. They uncover the destructive hostile nature of patriarchy shedding light on the way patriarchal ideology perpetuates isolation and contributes to the crumbling of familial relationships.

The theme of patriarchal authority is a central issue in Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* as it is pivotal to the functioning of each of the two families. From a conventional point of view, paternal authority represents the father's responsibility in providing financial stability, moral principles, ethical guidance, spiritual and emotional support. In other words, paternal authority carries a foundational function, which is to maintain the family's integration, unity and sense of wholeness. However, Shepard's plays present a miserable image of two American families struggling to survive through attempting to withstand a degenerate fragmenting present generated by a hegemonic patriarchal force. Christopher Bigsby explains that betrayal is a fundamental theme in Shepard's plays; his myths are older than those of the Republic whose degeneration is bemoaned. The sense of dissipation is deeper than that invoked by Sodom on the desert plains or the disintegration of puritanism into pragmatism. (Bigsby, 2004, pp.8-9)

Patriarchy has been a thematic concern in Sam Shepard's drama from his early plays namely *The Rock Garden* (1964) and the *Holy Ghostly* (1970) to his family trilogy including *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child* and *True West*. In *Patriarchal Pathology from The Holy Ghostly to Silent Tongue*, Carla J. McDonough (2002) employs a combination between feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives to examine patriarchy as a pathology that breaks individual identities and familial relationships. In *Monologue, Metaphor, and Maelstrom: Sam Shepard's Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child Reconsidered*, R.J. Cardullo (2019) employs semiotics to scrutinize the way in which

language functions as a system of signs shaping meaning in Shepard's plays. He examines Shepard's use of monologue and metaphor to expose the characters' psychological and emotional turbulence. In addition, J.Chris Westgate in *Negotiating the American West in Sam Shepard's Family Plays* (2005) focuses on the examination of the American West and the way it intersects with themes of identity, family dynamics and cultural mythology employing a critical structure that combines cultural criticism with postmodern perception. However, these critics did not shed light on the role of the imaginary in constructing reality as perceived by Althusser's conception of ideology and interpellation, in addition to Barthes' myth, which distorts reality; thus, deceiving its believers.

The American nuclear traditional family has always been idealized representing unity, harmony and the ethics of morality. However, in Shepard's subversive drama, this ideal is destabilized shaken by the forceful destructive patriarchy. The plays uncover the way patriarchal figures have become vehicles of dysfunction and dissociation. Shepard exposes the frailty of American foundational myths like the American dream through depicting defeated failure fathers. This article questions how do *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* delineate destructive patriarchal authority as a mechanism of ideological domination and how they subvert the myth of the ideal family and the American dream following Althusser's theory of ideology and Barthes' theory of myth.

Therefore, the present analysis investigates the way in which destructive patriarchy is perpetuated by dominant ideologies and mythical narratives to reveal the way Shepard delineates the detrimental effects of the patriarchal system on the identity of the individual and on family relationships. Its aim is to reveal that patriarchal constructs do not only shape the father figures' patriarchal narratives but strengthens patriarchal societal expectations, which support oppression, violence, inequity and injustice. The concept of patriarchy in the present article is not only employed to understand women's realities but patriarchy as an institutionalized system of male dominance. Thus the article's aim is to relate the text of the two plays to their larger contexts and argue that *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* in addition to being family plays they both illustrate the social, ideological and cultural implications of the destructive ideology of patriarchy and the deceitful nature of the myth of the American Dream. Thus, in order to examine the issues behind the father's destructive patriarchy, the present article will analyze the plays following Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and Roland Barthes' perception on the concept of myth.

1. Theoretical Framework:

This article adopts a critical literary methodology rooted in Althusser's post-Marxist structuralism and Barthes's semiotics as both theories focus on the way cultural texts reproduce dominant ideologies that serve the ruling class interests. Both theories stress the idea that ideology and myth are firmly embedded in discourse, language and symbolic representations; thus allowing for language analysis and ideological functions. This will reveal how Shepard critiques the dominant ideologies and myths that bind and fragment the American family for it makes it possible to investigate the way in which the characters' distress and division are rooted in ideological control.

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Therefore, in the light of Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, this paper examines the ways in which dominant ideologies are perpetuated and reproduced by the characters' in their quest for a sense of integration and self-realization. Althusser maintains that through a combination of Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses the dominant ideology secures, through interpellation, the consent of the governed people and the way the latter reproduce dominant ideologies. He argues that : " The domestic sphere of family life is included in the domain of the state, because it functions to maintain and develop an ideology that will maintain psychological adherence to and participation in class society" (Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* 134) Althusser perceives ideology as a tool that functions to strengthen and perpetuate dominant power structures, a critical perception that helps understand the way the patriarchal figures namely Weston and Dodge support patriarchal oppressive rules.

In addition, Roland Barthes' conception of myth further highlights the way ideological constructs conceal profound realities for what seems to be natural and everlasting is; actually, a constructed pronouncement of a particular ideological perception. He stresses the nature of myth which is deceitful as falsity is at its core; thus, it is crucial to critically analyze American foundational myths like the American dream to which American males cling in order to reveal the deeper realities that these are ideological apparatuses utilized by the dominating groups to mislead, manipulate people and convince them that they are universal truths. Barthes explains that myth is "what conforms to a particular ideological world view, serving particular social interests" (Barthes qtd. In Moriarty 60) In other words, Barthes' conception of myth reveals the way cultural narratives are implanted and maintained by ideologies like destructive patriarchy to shed light on the way the myths surrounding paternity and masculinity have led to family dysfunction. Althusser's ideology and Barthes' myth intersect in the way that both theorists examine the function of the imaginary in fabricating reality using myths as manipulative apparatuses to inculcate ideological messages. Thus, by exploring the convergence of these two theoretical perceptions with the two chosen plays for analysis, it will be revealed the way the ideology of patriarchy is destructive alienating individuals and contributing to the fragmentation of the family unit.

2. The Father Figures' Destructive Patriarchal Authority and the Consumerist

Ideology in *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* :

Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* is the playwright's first play of what will come to be called his family trilogy, it signals the beginning of Shepard's mature style depicting a family in their home experiencing the events of a two-day period. The play's subject is implied by the title, it is a gnawing hunger but not for food on stage; instead, the characters are starved for some modest level of fulfilment, for just the chance at happiness, self-definition and self-esteem. Everyone in the family suffers from a sense of incompleteness, which Wesley blames on the faceless 'they' who run the world. Weston identifies them more explicitly with the institutions of American capitalism. *Curse* is an

indictment of the American system for awakening a hunger it does not fill, and for then punishing the hungry. Bigsby confirms that Shepard's America has lost connection with its own perceptions, where myths have turned into fantasies, families have disintegrated, language is fragmented, metaphors are torn apart, and natural rhythms disrupted. (Bigsby, 2004, p.9)

To reveal the underlying issues that led to destructive patriarchy, it is necessary to explore Weston's and Dodge's subjectivity and alienation in the light of Althusser's and Barthes' theories through considering the consumerist and materialist environment in which the two characters lived and the way the patriarchal figures are constructed within myth narratives especially those surrounding the American Dream and the myth of the cohesive American family. The ideology of consumerism is a significant ideology within the capitalist system supported by various ISAs like the educational system, the media, religion and the family. American capitalism is based on consumerism and the American Dream is firmly associated to the consumerist ideology that supports the consumption of goods and the accumulation of wealth as a symbol of social status and prestige. Weston and Dodge have internalized the ideology of consumerism by means of different ISAs like the family and the media as the most influential ideological apparatuses used to promote the materialist as well as the consumerist ideology. Althusser argues that: "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. It distorts our view of our true conditions of existence". (162) The consumer culture constructs an imaginary relationship where Weston and Dodge associate their identity and social status with material possessions, they are hailed by ideology which does not only misrepresent reality but it fabricates it dictating the individual's subjectivity. In other words, the consumerist ideology promotes the imitative culture, which instills the belief which considers that to be esteemed one has to possess what the rest of the society does not own.

The culture of imitation encourages the individuals to spend the money accumulated on consuming goods, in addition, it obliges people to purchase goods on credit for they cannot afford buying them at present. Tyson Lois explains that the ideology of rugged individualism which is a cornerstone of the American Dream, misleads people by driving them to believe that their decisions are free from ideological influence; while in reality people are dominated by numerous ideologies whether they perceive it or not. (2006, p.60) Thus, rugged individualism is contradictory in nature, even though it incorporates independence and determination; it also serves as an impediment to acknowledging the interdependencies of social challenges.

2.1 Weston as a Failed Patriarch:

In *Curse of the Starving Class* Weston is an incarnation of destructive patriarchy, as a failure father figure he reflects the alienating effects of clinging to the deceitful promises of the American Dream and the breakdown of the family unit pressured by the capitalist as well as the patriarchal ideology. Weston is destroyed by alcoholism leading him to grapple with debt and an alienating sense of failure enacted through violent and abusive actions. He suffers from alcoholism and drunken rage, which have deeply undermined the stability of a cohesive familial relationship.

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Weston's failure to accomplish the role of provider and protector leads to a collapse in the family structure. In fact, Weston is himself victimized by the patriarchal and capitalistic powers imposed on him that he, in turn, imposes on his wife and children. He succumbed to a destructive sense of masculinity poisoned with violence and brutality. In other words, Weston's inability to meet the social expectations of masculinity, financial success and domination in a capitalist environment contributed to self-alienation and the destruction of his family. Weston's repressive patriarchy does not only reflect personal flaws but mirrors the broader ideological apparatuses that dominate the individuals to maintain oppressive, irrational and destructive beliefs. The image of the empty refrigerator symbolizes more than just a physical hunger, but represents a spiritual deprivation, its emptiness illustrates the failure of the capitalist promises of wealth undermining the myth of the American dream.

The play starts with Wesley, Weston's son, trying to repair the damage of the door violently kicked and smashed by his father who came home enraged by a night of drunken carousing. In the meantime, Ella, the mother, and Emma, the daughter, dispute over different subjects like menstruation and money when Ella reveals that she plans to sell the house and property to a lawyer without her husband's knowledge. When the intoxicated Weston reappears after spending another night of debauchery, he discloses to Wesley that he has sold the house and the family property to a local bar owner for fifteen hundred dollars, the exact amount of money he owes to pay his gambling debts. R. J. Cardullo asserts that in *Curse of the Starving Class*, the father is culpable of betraying his wife and children by selling the house to evil-minded speculators, and the familial curse is spiritual deprivation conveyed through alcoholism, greed, unfaithfulness, and deceit. (2019, p. 57)

Weston is interpellated by the ideology of patriarchy which dictates a set of fixed roles on men as the authoritative heads of the family expected to provide and protect their families to prove their masculinity. However, patriarchy becomes destructive as it does not only affect the identity of the patriarchal figure only, but it negatively affects the whole family. In relation to Althusser's theoretical perspective, patriarchal interpellation binds Weston to embrace patriarchal expectations as not only indispensable but also a natural aspect of a man's identity construction. In other words, the belief that a man's worth is attached to the patriarch's financial success and domination over his family has been inculcated in his personality as it constructs Weston's perception of his identity as a man and as a head of family. Carla J. Mac Donough argues that Shepard writes about the pathological nature of patriarchal ideology, he is more concerned with the predicament of men within and against patriarchy than it is with women, he indicates that men are often ruined by patriarchy's oppression. (2002, p. 160) This is reflected by Shepard's use of fragmented incoherent dialogues exposing the breakdown of communication within the family to exemplify the failure of patriarchal authority to sustain coherence and unity.

The ideology of patriarchy has formulated devastating social norms for American men like Weston and Dodge to be met and their failure brings about a sense of defeat and lack. Therefore, Weston's ineffectiveness and incapacity to meet the ideologically constructed patriarchal expectations

led him to retreat into destructive patriarchal behavior such as unrestrained alcoholism, gambling and devastating business decisions when he sold the house and the family property to his creditors, to assert his masculinity and imaginary potency. Indeed these attempts to reaffirm Weston's manliness and patriarchal authority further aggravate his personal and familial fragmented situation as these represent fallacious endeavors to conform to a disintegrating ideology.

2.2 Dodge as a Fallen Father Figure:

Just like Weston, Dodge in *Buried Child* is interpellated by the dominant ideology of patriarchy, which expects him to adhere to the ideology's beliefs to reproduce and perpetuate the ideology in the family, which functions according to Althusser as the system's Ideological State Apparatus generating a domineering draconian patriarch. The latter's dominance is alienating and devastating because it prioritizes dominance and power over familial emotional and spiritual relationships. Despite Dodge's degenerate personality and deteriorated ailing physical situation, he is hailed into patriarchy expected to conform to the hegemonic insistence of the ideology. In fact, Dodge's incapacity to meet the requirements of a despotic patriarch is reflected by the act of incest enacted by his wife Halie and her son Tilden, a sinful sexual relationship that he was unable to control. The ideological burden of patriarchy pressured Dodge to use power in a tyrannical way despite being on the detriment of his wife and children to maintain order; however, Dodge's hollow domination led to his own personal feeling of resentment and to family degeneration and decadence. He endeavored to restore order through committing infanticide when he killed and buried Halie's and Tilden's baby child in the backyard; a devastating way adopted to prove his masculinity and assert that his patriarchal strength is still domineering.

In fact, Dodge's violence proves that he is incapable of fulfilling the ideologically assigned role of a patriarch that has contributed to family disintegration where his wife Halie and two remaining sons Tilden and Bradley experience a degenerate sense of alienation and defeat. Dodge's patriarchal authority has, in fact, profoundly been undermined by the act of incest a manifestation that his authority has been subverted. The family, which is an Ideological State Apparatus, does not only function through ideology but through repression too an oppressive system that subjugates and alienates Dodge and his family too. He is estranged from his own identity as a father, husband and head of the family expected to rule authoritatively to maintain command while his control has been destabilized by the act of incest. In other words, the system, which uses the family as an ISA, has inculcated an ideology whose function does not ensure order and integration but instead reproduces violence and perpetuates dysfunction and detachment.

Dodge represents another form of patriarchal authority similarly naturalized through myth despite its harmful impact on the family's cohesion. Dodge no longer possesses neither the physical nor the mental strength to maintain his role as a patriarch. However, the myth of patriarchal dominance ensures that his role is maintained untarnished. Even though Dodge is unable to provide for and protect his family, he is still perceived as the central figure around whom the entire family life revolves.

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Barthes would point out that the myth of Dodge's patriarchal authority obscures the reality that the family's degeneration is the outcome of the very system, which upholds the oppressive patriarchal ideology. In fact, the concealed dark secrets of infanticide, incest and Dodge's destructive attitude and emotional and spiritual withdrawal reflect the real image of a degenerate collapsing patriarchal system.

There is a complex mythic exploration of family guilt and betrayal conveyed through an intricate web of symbols. Items like the old sofa, the torn blanket, the cornhusks, the baseball cap, the rabbit-fur coat, Bradley's wooden leg, and the yellow roses carry symbolic resonance, which represent the family's deterioration and their futile attempts to conceal their dysfunction and sinful past. The cornhusks and the vegetables brought home by Tilden evoke the image of a land that used to be thriving; a farm now driven to desolation. This is an image highlighting the inconsistency between the myth of the American pastoral ideal and the family's devastated reality. It serves to deconstruct the pastoral myth revealing the constructed nature of the ideal family farm and its doubtful basis. Bradley's wooden leg is a physical indication of his ailment that symbolizes men's helplessness and loss of power. It reveals the inclusive wider emasculation of the family's male figures and the subverted patriarchal dominance. Bradley's disability represents the failure of Dodge's family as an ISA to reproduce effective conditions of existence and to sustain dominant patriarchal ideological pressure.

In *Curse*, Weston is interpellated by the consumerist ideology, which encourages the belief that financial success, property and material prosperity are the features representing personal success, worth and merit. Weston's identity as a man and as a patriarch is profoundly interwoven with the ideological expectations of financial prosperity and securing the family farm, he is unconsciously interpellated by the consumerist ideology which forces him to involve himself in detrimental financial business when he sacrifices his family's property in a hopeless endeavor to pay his creditors back and achieve financial stability. In fact, Weston, who is controlled by the American society's consumerist ideals, is obsessed with easy money acquisition (gambling), a fixation that made him struggle within a cycle of personal as well as familial failure, alienation and despair.

The ideology of consumerism perpetuates deceiving promises of wealth acquisition and success to which Weston clings. He is unconsciously subjugated by both patriarchy and consumerism, which have imperceptibly become a source of exasperation and disappointment for himself and his family, as they have never been able to raise above the suffering of poverty, starvation and debt. In other words, the persistent collapse to meet the capitalist consumerist expectations further exacerbates Weston's feeling of defeat and inadequacy as a man and a father, a feeling transmitted to his wife Ella, his son Wesley, and his daughter Emma. Thus, Weston's failure to accomplish his expected role of the provider led him to behave in a violent macho like manner to assert his dominion over his family. The latter has fallen apart a direct outcome of Weston's incorporation of the patriarchal and consumerist ideologies which impose unattainable ideals on men as a result contributing to an alienating feeling of defeat and powerlessness.

Dodge is, in addition, interpellated by the materialist consumerist ideology, which values material possession and property ownership while it marginalizes emotional relationships and spiritual

ties. The consumerist ideology determines the individual's worth as it associates it with the individual's ability to succeed in accumulating wealth. Dodge's farm was once a symbol of prosperity and wealth; however, it now became a sterile wasteland representing Dodge's corruption and defeat. The farm which once was thriving was a central mirror of Dodge's identity as a successful patriarchal figure; however, since its degeneration, Dodge's sense of selfhood declined too. He declares: "were once a well-established family once. Well established. All the boys were grown the farm was producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over... Everything was settled with us." (**Buried Child**, p.123) His failure to preserve the farm's prosperity reflects the deceitful misleading nature of the capitalist ideology. Despite its decadence, Dodge is incapable to retreat from his attachment to the land because it is a symbol of his patriarchal authority and his masculine worth in the American capitalist system.

Dodge's obsession with the ideology of material success drives him to perpetuate devastating masculine behaviors since he helplessly longs for maintaining domination over the degenerating remnants of the farm and his crumbling identity which deteriorates since the land, which is the material cornerstone of his identity, has become a ground of decomposition and dissipation generated by the crime of infanticide and the corpse of the baby child buried there. Patriarchal ideology has informed Dodge that his worth depends on his control over his family, while the materialist ideology has informed him that his identity is conditioned by the prosperity of the farm; however, because both systems proved to be deceiving Dodge struggles with a deep alienating sense of identity crisis. In other words, the ideologies to which Dodge cling promising happiness and harmony proved to be a source of alienation and degeneration trapping him and his family in a state of emotional, psychological and physical devastation.

Myth, according to Barthes, functions through changing complex cultural and ideological constructions into "natural" truths concealing their fabricated nature and disguising their implication and destructive effects, likewise patriarchal ideology is fabricated as the main undisputed organizing principle of the family despite contributing to alienation and family fragmentation. Barthes explains that: "...examples of ideology (or the naturalization of culturally specific phenomena) are more directly the product of bourgeois disingenuousness. Politicians ... make themselves seem one of the people and thus outside of ideology". (**Mythologies**, p. 43-6) This emphasizes the deceitfulness of bourgeois political representation whose ideology shapes the common people's perceptions and experiences especially those marginalized by its constructs.

Patriarchal authority is depicted as an inevitable structure necessary to regulate family life, while in reality it is an alienating social construct rooted in ideology. Barthes' myth functions through concealing the social, ideological, economic and historical implications that constructed destructive patriarchal authority. The latter is rather introduced as a foundational natural truth which is inevitable to the functioning of the American family. Therefore, the ideology of patriarchy is obscured making the destructive outcomes it engenders invisible on the one hand, or justified only as a defect or

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imperfection, on the other hand, rather than as destructive outcomes of the system's limitation and deficiency. According to Barthes, the myth of patriarchal control conceals the truth that Weston's and Dodge's destructive patriarchy is socially constructed and conditioned by the dominant ideologies namely capitalism and the American dream which associate Weston's and Dodge's masculinity with wealth and real estate. Despite the alienating effects of his aggressive patriarchy, the myth portrays Weston as an indispensable father. That is to say, the detrimental outcomes of the father figure's patriarchal authority are masked by the naturalization of the myth, which presents Weston's together with Dodge's shortcomings as individual flaws, rather than manifestations of profound ideological defection of the American system.

3. Self- Alienated Fathers and the Myth of the American Dream in *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* :

Weston and Dodge are both unable to question or go beyond the dominating patriarchal and capitalistic restrictions thus leading to the fragmentation of their families highlighting the permeating and destructive effects of dominant ideologies. The American dream functions as a myth that conceals the cruel realities of capitalism and unfairness through presenting the pursuit of wealth as reachable for every individual. Barthes maintains that myths like the American Dream falsify history and social reality to disguise underlying injustices and paradoxes inherent in the American system. The characters' grapple against their socioeconomic circumstances exposes the truth that American ideals are unreachable for the majority disguised by cultural narratives, which promote these ideals as universal truths.

3.1 The Alienated Manipulated Weston:

Weston is manipulated by the myth of the American dream, which drove him to believe that saving his family depends on securing property. However, the myth disguises the ideological inequalities, which hinders Weston from attaining his dreams. In fact, Weston's financial failures are indicative of the deceiving broader capitalist system, which misleads and exploits dreamers rather than being merely the outcome of Weston's personal ineffectiveness. From Barthes' point of view, Weston's belief in the myth of the American Dream blinds him to the real underlying inequalities and ideological paradoxes which represent the main forces at play, and deprives him from perceiving the truth that the disintegration of his family is a direct outcome of his pointless belief in a myth that distorts history and social reality, thus no longer securing neither his life nor that of his family.

The falsity of the myth catches Weston and his family in the false narrative of the dream leading to alienation and dissociation. The family unit becomes another victim of the myth because chasing material possessions substituted for sincere spiritual and emotional family attachment. Weston declares: "THERE'S NO MORE MIRACLES! NO MIRACLES TODAY! THEY'VE BEEN ALL USED UP! IT'S ONLY ME! MR. SLAVE LABOR HIMSELF COME HOME TO REPLENISH THE EMPTY LARDER!" (*Curse of the Starving Class*, p. 157) Weston expresses a deep sense of distress

regarding patriarchal duties and the American Dream. He laments the emotional and material impoverishment generated by these ideologies, which are tightly interwoven. Therefore, Weston's endeavor to achieve the ideals promoted by the deceitful promises of the American Dream inevitably contributed to his defeat, generating violence, destructiveness and family disintegration. Therefore, Barthes' perception of myth which sheds lights on the way cultural narratives distort reality, led Weston and Dodge to embrace destructive behaviors and alienating ideologies which contributed to devastating personal and familial experiences.

3.2 The Deceived Estranged Dodge:

In *Buried Child* Dodge is deceived by the false promises of the dream myth and the dominating capitalist system, which led to his destructive behavior as a father figure. Cultural myths like the American Dream serve to naturalize dominant ideologies making them appear as natural truths. Dodge's attachment to the false promises of the myth estranged him from his own identity and his family too. In the past Dodge used to incarnate the archetypes of the American dream as a prosperous successful farmer; however, now Dodge's farm, which has fallen to decay, represents the broader failure of the ideal of the dream myth. In fact, the truth behind Dodge's alcoholism, violence and degeneration is the outcome of the deceitful myth, which betrays people into believing in unattainable ideals. That is to say, Dodge's retreat into alcoholism, hostility and crime serves as a coping mechanism to illuminate the way in which individual's determination to pursue the promises of an idealized life contributes to self-destruction and family dissociation. Dodge's detrimental actions mirrors his internalized disillusionment and feeling of isolation.

The crime of infanticide highlights Dodge's rejection of his role as head of the family and his abandonment to achieve the ideals associated with the American Dream. Therefore, rather than nurturing and providing for his family, Dodge perpetuates cycles of violence and destruction which are not mere representatives of personal flaws but are deeply rooted in the falsity of the myth which promises success and achievement while paradoxically it provides alienation and fragmentation instead. Dodge denies the existence of the abundant corn brought home by Tilden, which mysteriously but plentifully grows in the backyard wasteland, this denial represents Dodge's unconscious acknowledgment of his failure to attain the American Dream. Despite his suffering and the anguish of his family, Dodge is still trapped in the promises of the dream myth, which constantly continues to affect the worth of his identity as a father.

4. Family Dissociation and Subversion of Ideological Constructs in

Curse of the Starving Class and Buried Child:

4.1 Dodge's Destabilized Domination:

In *Buried Child* and *Curse of the Starving Class*, the ideological constructs surrounding the American family are significantly subverted by the characters' actions and behaviors. Paradoxically, the family as an ISA, which is believed to perpetuate dominant ideology for the sake of maintaining

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social order, is in Shepard's plays depicted as defective traditional families. Dodge's incapacity to fulfill his patriarchal role undermines the stability of the ideology's domination. His identity crisis, resulted from his isolation due to his subverted authority as a patriarch, reflects the way Dodge's interpellation by the dominant patriarchal ideology is destabilized. The masculine hegemony, Dodge is expected to exert, has been withdrawn from him reflected in his impotency and helplessness. In fact, Dodge's degenerate soul exposes the truth that patriarchal ideology crumbles under its pressured force.

In addition, the myth of the family as a harmonious nurturing institution is fragmented; it is poisoned by the sin of incest and the crime of infanticide haunting the family, which is now bound, by trauma and guilt. The truth is openly revealed at the end of the play when Tilden exhumes the corpse of the buried child disclosing the family's dark secrets, which disrupts the myth, that family unit is a pure cohesive unit. In fact, the myth of patriarchal authority has been destabilized from the beginning of the play witnessed in the burial rituals staged by Tilden and Bradley. The former occasionally covers his father with cornhusks; while, the latter shaves Dodge's hair until his head bleeds while sleeping. The sons' burial rituals and the father's imperceptible death at the close of the play confirm Dodge's subverted overthrown patriarchy. The father's incapacity to maintain order reveals the truth that patriarchal control is not a natural integral reality but a frail cultural construct, which decays under its own oppressive constraints.

4.2 Weston's Undermined Patriarchy:

In *Curse* Weston's patriarchal role is also subverted by his failure to assure solid patriarchal constructs exposing the vulnerability of the system. His loss of control over his family life reveals the great extent to which patriarchy has failed to successfully interpellate him reflecting the fragility of the ideology. Wesley, who is interpellated by patriarchal assumptions and assumed to take his father as his model, withstands and eventually repudiates these beliefs. In fact, Wesley undergoes an identity crisis, as he has been a witness of the disintegrating damaging impact of his father's patriarchal beliefs on his family. Wesley's disappointment with his father's defeat and disillusionment with the patriarchal ideology influencing masculinity and responsibility undermine the interpellating system. Instead of adopting the dominant patriarchal beliefs, Wesley tries to embrace his father's traits; however, he also strives to detach himself from the cycle of destructive patriarchy, signifying a collapse in the interpellation process.

Emma, Weston's daughter, is expected to be restricted to traditional gender roles of domesticity and submission awaited to abide by her father's patriarchal rules. Nevertheless, Emma rebels against these assumptions attempting to carve her own path through pursuing autonomy revolting against her father's oppressive power.

Emma's rebellion is witnessed at the very beginning of the play when she confronts her mother screaming about boiling the chicken she raised, which she was going to use for her school demonstration. "Emma's Voice: (*off*) YOU BOILED MY CHICKEN!...YOU USED IT WITH NO CONSIDERATION FOR THE LABOR INVOLVED..." (Curse, 1997, p.140) Emma expresses her

anger over the act and over her family's lack of consideration for her hard work. Her outbursts reflect her rejection of the hegemonic system's ideologies that confine her to domestic feminine duties expressing her desire for recognition and agency.

This system makes people lead a life of starvation; a hunger, which is raised by the system itself, that is not able to fill and then it punishes the starved. Ella like all her family members are actually starved for some modest level of fulfilment, for just the chance at happiness, self-definition and self-esteem. Emma's desire for self-sufficiency and agency is noticed in her fanaticized life of crime highlighting her break from patriarchal constraints destabilizing a world dominated by oppressive male authority. She declares: "I'm going into crime. It's the only thing that pays these days... it's the perfect self-employment". (Curse, 1997, p.196) This declaration highlights Emma's disillusionment with the hegemony of the dominant ideologies like capitalism. She turns to crime as a representative of her rejection of the deceiving ISAs that supposedly guarantee success through education and hard work. She paradoxically embraces an illegal way of survival seeking immediate financial success and an escape from the constraints of societal assumptions. Emma's embrace of crime unravels the falsity of the myth of the American Dream, which obscures the reality of the American's desperate lives. She stresses the way foundational myths are reversed and redefined by the starving destitute like her excluded by the very system that sustain these myths. Emma's defiance culminates in a violent criminal act riding into her fathers' creditor's property; Ellis's "Alibi Club" where she shoots it up with a rifle challenging a male-dominated environment as a reaction to the exasperation she experienced.

Ella the mother, also destabilizes patriarchal expectations and masculine ideologies, she seeks to sell the family home to move to Europe challenging her husband's patriarchal confines. She secretly confides to Taylor, the real estate agent, about her future projects and ambitions. Her rebellion against patriarchal confines is further illustrated by her sexual affair with Taylor, an attempt to reclaim her sexual agency and to subvert the belief that women are expected to yield to submissive domestic roles and be accomplice with male violence to ensure the functioning of the family as an ISA; thus, maintaining order. The cyclical "curse" that afflicts the family marked by violence, poverty, and self-destruction is delineated as an "invisible" force that has permeated their lives undermining their endeavor to sustain a semblance of order. Ella declares: "It's a curse. I can feel it. It's invisible but it's there. It comes onto us like nighttime... It goes back and back to tiny little cells and genes... It's bigger than government even... We inherit it and pass it down..." (Curse, 1997, pp.173-174). Emma's declaration reflects a deep sense of existential distress and trauma revealing that the invisibility of the curse indicates that it subconsciously operates affecting behavior and societal roles.

This lines up with Althusser's interpellation where the characters identify themselves within the dominant ideologies, which are incorporated as part of their identity. This reveals that the characters' struggle transcends personal flaws to larger ideological and cultural issues, which cheatingly perpetuate such curses across generations. Therefore, the curse is an image of the ideological powers

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that oppress their lives exasperating their sense of deception and estrangement. In addition, the curse can be perceived as a myth, which naturalizes ideological constructs perceived as inevitable and universal by the characters. Aligning with Barthes' view, the curse functions as a signifier of broader manipulative forces that dictate the individuals to internalize their degenerate socio-economic conditions as natural part of their existence.

Conclusion:

The aim of the present paper has been to examine destructive patriarchal authority as a thematic concern in Shepard's plays namely *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* from Althusser's perspective of ideology and Barthes' view of myth on the dynamics of both families. Both plays serve as powerful condemnations of detrimental patriarchy and its broader implications affecting the American family unit. Both plays unravel the vulnerability of patriarchal control, presenting its destructive effects on the individual and the family too. The alienating feeling of defeat underwent by Dodge and Weston accentuates the insignificance and worthlessness of adhering to foundational but unattainable ideals like the American Dream. Therefore, this article has contributed to a new rereading of Shepard's plays examining the characters of Weston and Dodge as ideological victims hailed into roles they could not fulfill in a deceiving system rather than as tragic figures with personal flaws. It has revealed that *Curse* and *Buried Child* are not just family dramas, but they are presented as ideological critiques exposing the way myths disguise systemic injustice and alienation. It has shown that identity crisis is not only an existential or psychological issue, but it is ideologically generated unveiling the reality that subjectivity is destabilized by crumbling belief systems. The disintegration of the family is a symbol of national identity, which exposes the way economic and ideological disruption penetrates within the most private family relationships. Thus, *Curse* and *Buried child* invite audiences to reevaluate the foundational narratives surrounding the family, masculinity and femininity and the pursuit of success and happiness in a postmodern American context.

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