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Breaking the Grand Narrative in Sam Shepard's "Buried Child": A Postmodern Study

Prof. Dr. Ansam Riyadh Almaarof *

Tikrit University -College of Education for Women-English Department

Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq

&

Fedan Jawdat Abdullah

Tikrit University -College of Education for Women-English Department

FedanJawdat.Abdullah775@st.tu.edu.iq

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ABSTRACT

This study explains the collapse and the break of the Grand narrative in Sam Shepard's "Buried Child" through a postmodern lens. The analysis examines how the play reflects the situations in which the acknowledged Grand narrative is broken inside the little unity of the society, the American family and its consequences. This study argues that "Buried Child" is a well-known and important work of postmodern literature generally that exposes the effects of breaking the Grand narrative's effects on the individuals of the postmodern era. This study explains postmodernism, the pioneer of the concept of Grand narrative, and how Sam Shepard depicted them in his play.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Grand Narrative, Lyotard, Tragicomedy, The American Dream

* Corresponding Author Prof. Dr. Ansam Riyadh, Email: Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq

Affiliation: Tikrit University - Iraq

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كسر السرديات الكبرى في مسرحية "الطفل المدفون" لسام شيبارد: دراسة ما بعد الحداثة

أ. د. أنسام رياض المعروفى

كلية التربية للبنات/جامعة تكريت-قسم اللغة الانكليزية

و

فيدان جودت عبدالله

كلية التربية للبنات/جامعة تكريت- قسم اللغة الانكليزية

المستخلص

يشرح هذا البحث الانهيار والرفض في المسلمات الكبرى في مسرحية سام شيبارد "الطفل المدفون" من خلال عدسة نظرية ما بعد الحداثة. يفحص هذا التحليل كيف تعكس المسرحية المواقف التي يتم فيها كسر السرديات الكبرى المعترف بها داخل الوحدة الصغيرة للمجتمع والأسرة الأمريكية وعواقبها. يجادل هذا البحث بأن مسرحية "الطفل المدفون" هو عمل معروف ومهم لأدب ما بعد الحداثة بشكل عام والذي يكشف آثار تأثيرات انهيار السرديات الكبرى على الأفراد في عصر ما بعد الحداثة. يشرح هذا البحث بإيجاز عصر ما بعد الحداثة ، رائد مفهوم كسر السرديات الكبرى ، وكيف صورها سام شيبارد في مسرحيته.

الكلمات الدالة: ما بعد الحداثة، السرديات الكبرى، ليوتار، الكوميديا التراجيدية، الحلم الامريكي.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new era started to establish due to the shift in the intellectuality of the individuals, especially after the first world war. WWI affected almost Europe, making everybody question the truth behind everything. The church collapsed, and morality and religion were rejected. People became lost, and the ideologies of the Victorian era declined, so the search for modernity was established. According to Kolocotroni et al. (1998), modernism was a response to the rapid changes and upheavals of the modern world, including industrialization, urbanization, and the trauma of World War I. Modernist artists and writers sought to create new forms of expression that were in tune with the modern age and reflected the fragmentation, ambiguity, and complexity of the modern experience.

Unfortunately, with the end of the second world war, individuals started to reject the modern age's individuality and subjectivity. They moved forward to establish a new era of thinking and dealing with the new problems they faced, the era after modernism:

postmodernism. Postmodernism was a reaction against the ideologies and the norms of modernism following a cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement that emerged in the late 20th century, characterized by a scepticism toward the grand narratives of modernism and an emphasis on the fragmentation, ambiguity, and plurality of recent experience (Hutcheon, 2002).

Postmodernism was marked by skepticism and questioning everything, even the unquestionable. Although many critics defined the movement, it is a statement that even these definitions are not fixed truths. Because according to postmodernism, there is no absolute truth; everything is questionable so everyone can present a definition of this movement with useful resources. Every definition can be true, and any kind can be wrong.

According to Lyotard (1984), postmodernism challenges the dominant discourses of modernity and seeks to disrupt traditional dichotomies such as reason/emotion, nature/culture, and self/other. It emphasizes the plurality and diversity of human experience and rejects the notion of a universal human essence or telos. Postmodern philosophy draws on various thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, who question the foundations of Western metaphysics and epistemology (Lyotard, 1984). These philosophers argue that language, power, and discourse shape our understanding of reality and that there is no objective or neutral standpoint from which to view the world. Postmodernism has significantly impacted a range of fields, including literature, art, architecture, and social theory. It has influenced how scholars and thinkers approach identity, difference, and globalization.

Postmodernism significantly impacted literature, challenging the conventions of narrative, character, and language and opening up new possibilities for literary expression (Hutcheon, 1988). One of the key features of postmodern literature is its self-reflexivity techniques, which call attention to the constructed nature of narrative and the role of the author in shaping meaning. Postmodern writers often use parody, pastiche, and intertextuality to subvert traditional genres and challenge the author's authority. Another important contribution of postmodern literature is its exploration of themes such as identity, difference, and power. Postmodern writers often focus on the experiences of marginalized groups and highlight how dominant discourses and cultural norms shape our understanding of the world. They also question traditional notions of subjectivity and agency and challenge the idea of a unified, essential self. Some key postmodern writers include Salman Rushdie, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon, all of whom employ postmodern techniques to question the author's authority and challenge the boundaries of narrative (Hutcheon, 1988).

Postmodern literature has profoundly impacted the literary landscape, opening up new avenues for experimentation and challenging the traditional boundaries between genres and forms.

Postmodernism featured many characteristics that distinguished it from the previous movements. These characteristics were:

- Rejection of grand narratives: Postmodernism rejects the idea of a single, overarching narrative that can explain all of human history or experience. Instead, it emphasises the plurality and diversity of human experience and the importance of local, contingent knowledge (Lyotard, 1984).

- Skepticism toward objectivity and truth: Postmodernism questions the idea of objective truth and emphasizes the role of power, language, and discourse in shaping our understanding of reality (Foucault, 1972).
- Self-reflexivity and metafiction: Postmodern art and literature often call attention to their status as constructed objects, highlighting the role of the author or artist in shaping meaning (Hutcheon, 1988).
- Irony and parody: Postmodernism often employs irony and parody to challenge and subvert dominant discourses and cultural norms (Hassan, 1987).
- Intertextuality: Postmodern art and literature often incorporate elements from other texts and cultural traditions, blurring the boundaries between high and low culture (Kristeva, 1966).
- Non-linearity and fragmentation: Postmodern narratives often eschew traditional linear structures, emphasizing fragmentation, repetition, and non-sequentiality (Jameson, 1984).
- Relativism and skepticism: Postmodernism rejects the idea of objective truth or universal values, emphasizing knowledge's contingency and historical specificity instead (Lyotard, 1984).
- Embrace difference and diversity: Postmodernism celebrates the diversity of human experience and seeks to challenge dominant discourses that erase or marginalize difference (Haraway, 1985).

One of the most important features of postmodernism is the rejection of fixed Grand Narratives. In postmodernism, the concept of a grand narrative refers to a comprehensive, all-encompassing story or theory about the nature of human history, progress, and society (Lyotard, 1984). The idea of a grand narrative suggests that there is a singular, overarching narrative that can explain all of the human experience and that there is a linear path towards progress and Enlightenment.

Postmodernism rejected the idea of grand narratives, arguing that they were often used as a means of social control and that they ignored the complexity and diversity of human experience (Lyotard, 1984). Instead, postmodernism emphasized the importance of local, contingent knowledge and rejected the idea of fixed identities. The rejection of grand narratives had significant implications for fields such as philosophy, literature, and politics, challenging traditional notions of authority and legitimacy. In particular, it contributed to the rise of identity politics and the emphasis on the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups (Butler, 1990).

Postmodernists argued that the grand narratives of the Enlightenment had become dominant through colonization, imperialism, and exclusion and that they had been used as a means of social control and domination (Lyotard, 1984). They believed that the grand narratives of the Enlightenment ignored the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups and did not account for the complexity and diversity of human experience. As a result, postmodernism rejected the idea of grand narratives, emphasizing the importance of local, contingent knowledge instead and rejecting fixed identities. This rejection of grand narratives had significant implications for philosophy, literature, and politics, challenging traditional notions of authority and legitimacy (Butler, 1990).

Jean-Francois Lyotard is a French philosopher known for contributing to the postmodern critique of grand narratives. His theory of the grand narrative is central to his

work, and it has influenced the development of postmodernism as a philosophical and cultural movement.

Lyotard defines grand narratives as "totalizing stories" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv) that claim to provide a universal account of history, progress, or human nature. He argues that these narratives are often used to legitimize political and social institutions and have been used to justify violence and domination throughout history. According to Lyotard, the Enlightenment project of universal reason and progress is a grand narrative that has become dominant in Western thought and has been used to marginalize and oppress non-Western cultures.

Lyotard suggests that grand narratives have lost their credibility in the postmodern era and that knowledge has become fragmented and diverse. He argues that the coexistence of multiple competing narratives characterizes the postmodern condition and that no single overarching narrative can provide a universal account of reality. Instead, Lyotard suggests that knowledge is best understood as a collection of smaller narratives that compete for acceptance rather than a single, overarching narrative. Lyotard's theory of the grand narrative has had a significant impact on the development of postmodernism and has influenced the fields of philosophy, literature, and cultural studies. It has challenged traditional notions of authority and legitimacy and encouraged scholars to explore the diversity and complexity of the human experience.

One of the most outstanding pioneers in the field of postmodernist writers is Sam Shepard (1943-2017). Throughout his plays, he portrayed the postmodernist struggles and problems that the American family and society had due to the new ideologies of postmodernism. His works often explore family, identity, and the American West. According to Gussow (2017), Shepard was born in Illinois in 1943 and grew up on a farm in California. He began his career as a playwright in the 1960s and quickly gained recognition for his experimental style and unique voice. His plays often explored themes of family, identity, and the American West, and his work is known for its dark humour, surrealism, and exploration of American mythology. Some of Shepard's most famous plays include "True West," "Buried Child," and "Fool for Love," which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979. In addition to his work as a playwright, Shepard was also a prolific actor and screenwriter, appearing in over 50 films and writing screenplays for films such as "Paris, Texas" and "Zabriskie Point" (Gussow, 2017).

Throughout his career, Shepard was recognized with numerous awards and honors, including the PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2009 (Gussow, 2017). His work continues to be studied and performed in theatres worldwide, and his contributions to American theatre and film have had a lasting impact.

1.1 THE HYPOTHESES

This study hypothesizes that Sam Shepard's play "*Buried Child*" embodies the criticism of breaking the Grand Narrative. The play serves as a critique of the traditional American narrative of the family and the American Dream. Through the portrayal of a dysfunctional family and their buried past, the play challenges the idea that there is a single, unified American story. The rejection of the grand narrative can be seen in several themes explored in the play.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1- How does "*Buried Child*" challenge the traditional American narrative of the family and the American Dream?
- 2- How does the loss of hope for the future in the play challenge the grand narrative of the American Dream?
- 3- What are the implications of rejecting the grand narrative in "*Buried Child*" for our understanding of American culture and identity?
- 4- What are the key themes and motifs in "*Buried Child*", and how do they contribute to its overall meaning?

1.3 THE AIMS

- 1- Challenging the dominant interpretations and assumptions about the play and its themes.
- 2- Exploring how the play challenges or subverts conventional narrative structures.
- 3- Examining the play's portrayal of American society and its cultural myths.
- 4- Analyzing the play's use of symbolism and imagery.
- 5- Considering the play's relevance and resonance in contemporary society.

1.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of breaking the Grand Narrative and its effect on contemporary society, especially the family unit, and how this is reflected in literature. By analyzing "*Buried Child*" through the lens of postmodernism, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of the socio-political context of the postmodern era and its influence on literature.

1.5 CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to literary studies by providing a postmodernist analysis of Sam Shepard's "*Buried Child*". The study Promotes innovation and experimentation in the arts. The Study could encourage artists and writers to experiment with new forms and techniques by examining how the play disrupts traditional narrative structures. It promotes innovation and creativity in the arts and pushes the boundaries of what is possible in literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sam Shepard's "*Buried Child*" has been subject to extensive literary criticism since its publication in 1979. The play has been analyzed through various lenses, including conventional American myths and narratives, fragmentation of the narrative structure, and deconstruction approach. However, the postmodernist analysis has proven to be a fruitful lens through which to examine the play.

Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of the Grand Narrative and its rejection, emphasizing how this rejection affects the American family's unit, showing its fragmentation and its disconnection of the family member between themselves and between the outsiders. Postmodernist literary analysis is concerned with how The play subverts the traditional narrative of the family by portraying a family in crisis, torn apart by secrets, lies, and betrayals. Often seen as a source of stability and security, the family structure is instead shown as a site of trauma and dysfunction.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a postmodernist literary analysis to explore the theme of breaking the Grand Narrative in Sam Shepard's play, *"Buried Child"*. The analysis is grounded in subverting the traditional narrative of the family's context of the postmodern era, drawing on postmodernist theories of breaking the Grand Narrative to analyze the text. The study employs a close reading of the text, exploring the themes and motifs of the play and their significance in the context of postmodern literature. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the play's narrative by presenting a dysfunctional family living in a decaying farmhouse with patriarchal authority figures who are corrupt and abusive and how this is reflected in literature.

3.1 THEORY OF STUDY

The postmodernist literary theory is the primary theoretical lens employed in this study. The theory emphasizes how corruption and fragmentation of the family unit by breaking the grand narrative theory and how this theory explains and shapes the decaying of the family in literature. *"Buried Child"* exposes the limitations of dominant narratives and myths and the need to question and challenge them. By studying the play through the lens of breaking the grand narrative, it is better to understand how it challenges traditional modes of storytelling and representation and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of American culture and society.

The breaking of the grand narrative argument in Sam Shepard's play *"Buried Child"* refers to how the play subverts and challenges dominant narratives and myths of American culture. Shepard exposes the limitations and contradictions of these narratives and presents an alternative perspective that is more complex and nuanced. One of the ways that the play breaks the grand narrative is by challenging the traditional narrative of the family. Rather than presenting an idealised image of the nuclear family, *"Buried Child"* portrays a dysfunctional and disintegrating family. Secrets, lies, and betrayals haunt the characters, and they cannot escape the destructive effects of patriarchal authority. It challenges the myth of a stable, cohesive family and exposes the dark underbelly of family life. The play also challenges the narrative of the American Dream. Instead of presenting upward mobility and success, the characters experience disillusionment, stagnation, and decay. The family's farmhouse is decaying, their land is barren, and their hopes and dreams are shattered. It challenges the myth of the American Dream as a universally attainable goal and exposes the harsh realities of life for many Americans.

Finally, the play challenges the narrative of the rural heartland. Rather than presenting a romanticized view of rural life, *"Buried Child"* exposes the poverty, decay, and corruption in this supposedly idyllic setting. The family's farm is a barren wasteland, and their surroundings are marked by decay and decayed dreams. It challenges the myth of the rural heartland as a place of abundance and prosperity.

4. DISCUSSION

"Buried Child" by Sam Shepard is typically classified as a dark, surrealistic drama that blends elements of realism, naturalism, and symbolism (Henderson, 2007). The play explores themes of family dysfunction, the American Dream's erosion, and the rural heartland's decay. Shepard's surrealistic elements and symbolism create a sense of unease and uncertainty, emphasizing the characters' inability to escape their past and the limitations of traditional storytelling and representation (Sandoval-Sánchez, 2012). The

play's genres and styles challenge traditional narratives and invite the audience to question their assumptions about the world (Elliott, 2013).

Dodge, the family patriarch, is a disillusioned alcoholic detached from his family and the world around him. Halie, his wife, is emotionally distant and detached from her family, as she has had an affair with her son Tilden. Tilden, the eldest son, is a disturbed and troubled character who has suffered from mental health issues since his son's mysterious disappearance. The youngest son Bradley is violent and aggressive, physically harming his family members. Also, Vince, the grandson and his girlfriend, Shelly, is an outsider and represents the voice of reality, and Ansel, the dead brother.

Through their portrayal, the characters in "*Buried Child*" challenge the traditional narrative of the perfect American family and expose the hidden traumas and secrets that exist within it (Sandoval-Sánchez, 2012). Shepard's use of surrealism and symbolism emphasises the characters' inability to escape their past and the limitations of traditional storytelling and representation, inviting the audience to question the grand narrative that shapes our understanding of the world (Lyotard, 1984).

One of how the play challenges the traditional American narrative of the family is by exposing its hidden traumas and secrets. As Halberstam (1998) notes, "*Buried Child*" "reveals the hidden wounds and scars that mark the psyches of those who live in this supposedly idyllic landscape" (p. 101). It is evident in the character of Dodge, who is haunted by the memory of a buried child and is emotionally detached from his wife, Halie. As Dodge says, "**I am not the father of that boy. He is not my son. He is not my flesh and blood. I do not know whose son he is**" (Shepard, 1996, p. 27).

Furthermore, the play explains the importance of secrets through the fall of the grand narrative of the family. One of the most powerful secrets in the play is the buried child, which represents the family's dark past and inability to move forward. The buried child is a metaphor for the family's repressed memories and unresolved traumas. Halie, the family matriarch, says, "**We do not talk about that. We do not talk about that anymore**" (Shepard, 1978, p. 13). This line suggests that the family has deliberately avoided discussing their past, and the buried child represents the suppressed emotions and memories that have been buried deep within them. Another important secret in the play is the identity of the father of Tilden's child. Tilden, the family's eldest son, brings home a child that he claims is his, but the mother's identity is unknown. As the family tries to uncover the truth, they are confronted with their secrets and lies, but whether Halie could be the mother is debatable. Dodge, the patriarch of the family, admits to killing the infant and burying it in the backyard of their house. The revelation of this secret causes further dysfunction and emotional turmoil within the family. The significance of these secrets in the play is that they reveal the breakdown of traditional family structures and the societal expectations placed upon families. The family's secrets have caused them to become disconnected from each other, and their inability to confront their past has led to their dysfunction. These secrets represent the family's inability to move forward and reliance on traditional family and identity narratives.

The play portrays a broken family unit that cannot communicate and connect. It is demonstrated through the character of Dodge, who is the family's patriarch but is depicted as a weak and dying man. His wife, Halie, is unfaithful and disconnected from her family, while their sons, Tilden and Bradley, are dysfunctional and mentally unstable. The play also challenges the American Dream by showing how the family's farm has

been ruined, and they cannot make a living. It is exemplified by Tilden, who was once a star athlete but has returned home after a failed attempt to make it in the big city. The play challenges the grand narrative of the American Dream, which promises that anyone can achieve success and prosperity with hard work. The characters in the play are unable to overcome their demons. Their family is falling apart, which is stated by Bradley's character: **"We got no future, Dodge. We got nothin' but the past. Nothin' to live for, nothin' to die for, nothin' worth nothin'."** (Shepard, 1978, p. 64).

The loss of hope for the future is a central theme that challenges the grand narrative of the American Dream. The characters in the play are struggling with a sense of purposelessness and despair, and their dreams of success and happiness have been shattered. It is exemplified by Tilden, who was once a successful athlete but has returned home to a broken and defeated man. He says, **"I thought I had a future once. I thought I was going to be something. But look at me now. I am nothing"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 29). The play challenges the grand narrative of the American Dream by exposing the flaws and limitations of the idea that hard work and determination are the keys to success and happiness. The characters in the play work hard but cannot escape the cycles of poverty, dysfunction, and despair that characterise their lives. It is exemplified by Bradley, who cannot find work and is forced to rely on stealing to survive. He says, **"I ain't got no job. I ain't got nothin'. You gotta eat, don't you? You gotta live somehow"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 22).

The loss of hope for the future in *"Buried Child"* also challenges the grand narrative of progress and improvement that underpins the American Dream. The characters in the play are stuck in a cycle of decay and decline, and their situation only seems to be worsening. It is exemplified by the family farm's decay, which symbolises the loss of hope and possibility. Dodge says, **"I remember when this place was somethin'. Now look at it. It is nothin'"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 24).

As Lyotard notes in his work *"The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,"* the rejection of grand narratives leads to a state of "incredulity toward metanarratives," in which individuals question the validity of overarching stories that attempt to explain the world and their place in it (Lyotard, 1984). The characters in *"Buried Child"* exemplify this incredulity as they struggle to make sense of their own lives and reject the traditional American narrative of success and upward mobility. Through their rejection of this narrative, the characters highlight the fragility and complexity of American culture and identity, challenging us to rethink our assumptions about what it means to be American. In the words of the character Dodge, **"It is a hard thing livin' in a country where you can trust nothin' more. Cannot find nothin' to believe in"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 27). This statement engulfs the disillusionment and loss of faith in the American Dream that pervades the play. Through the lens of breaking the grand narrative, *"Buried Child"* challenges our assumptions about American culture and identity, inviting us to engage with the complexity and ambiguity of these concepts in new and more nuanced ways.

The family in the play is dysfunctional and disconnected, and they struggle to communicate with each other, representing the theme of the breakdown of the family unit. It is exemplified through the character of Vince, the grandson of Dodge and Halie, who comes to visit the family after a long absence. He says, **"I do not know any of you anymore. You are all strangers to me"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 47). The breakdown of the family unit represents the decay of traditional values and the breakdown of the social

fabric. The motif of the buried child is a central element of the play, and it serves as a metaphor for the dark secrets the family has been hiding. The buried child represents the past the family has tried to bury and forget. It is exemplified through the character of Tilden, the son of Dodge and Halie, who brings home an ear of corn that he has dug up from the field. He says, **"I didn't think it would ever grow again. Nothing will grow here"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 23). The buried child represents the family's inability to deal with their past and move forward.

Throughout the play, an outsider interferes with the bleak atmosphere of the play. This outsider is represented in the character of Shelly, who is Vince's girlfriend. Through her interactions with the family, she exposes their secrets and confronts them about their past, catalysing change in the family. Through the lens of breaking the grand narrative, Shelly's character subverts traditional narratives of family and identity by offering an alternative perspective and challenging the family's assumptions about their history. Shelly's arrival in the family's home is initially met with suspicion and hostility, as she represents an outsider who threatens to disrupt the family's fragile balance. However, as the play progresses, Shelly becomes a force for change, challenging the family to confront their past and secrets. As she tells Dodge, the family patriarch, **"I think it is time somebody started talking around here"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 39). This line suggests that the family has been silent about their past for too long and that it is time to start addressing their secrets and traumas.

Through Shelly's character, Shepard subverts traditional narratives of family and identity by presenting an outsider's perspective on the dysfunction within the family. Shelly is an independent, educated woman who challenges the traditional gender roles within the family and offers a different perspective on the family's history. She tells Tilden, the eldest son, **"You are all crazy. You are all out of your minds"** (Shepard, 1978, p. 48). This line suggests that Shelly sees the family's dysfunction for what it is and offers an alternative view of their history. Shelly also says: **"It is so flat out here. You can see for miles. There is nothing to stop the wind. It is like living in the middle of the ocean. No wonder you guys drink so much."** (Shepard, 1979, p. 19). By this quote, Shepard's portrayal of rural life in *"Buried Child"* challenges the grand narrative of the heartland as a place of simplicity and wholesomeness is seen. The play confronts the poverty, violence, and dysfunction many individuals and families face in the heartland. Through its depiction of these challenges, Shepard's play forces the audiences to confront the limitations of traditional narratives about rural life and invites us to consider a more nuanced and realistic view of this experience.

Pathos and humor are combined in Shepard's play *"Buried Child"* to explore the role that identity plays in a dysfunctional family, especially as identity refers to the idea of the American edge and its mythological sense of freedom. The play makes a case for freedom in a society that has changed significantly. It discusses the ways in which a capitalist society fosters anarchy and the desire for freedom, even if that logic of freedom remains unfathomable. It is freedom that disregards the values and moral standards that society and religion hold dear. (Al-Maarof, 2017)

"Buried Child" shows the subversion of heteronormative sexuality and reproduction which is exemplified in the complex and unsettling relationship between Dodge and his grandson Vince. This dynamic is most clearly revealed in Act 2, Scene 5, when Vince returns home after being away for several years. Dodge, the family patriarch, initially

does not recognize Vince and treats him with hostility. However, as the scene progresses, Dodge gradually comes to acknowledge Vince as his grandson. The stage directions describe a troubling intimacy that develops between them:

"Dodge reaches up and touches Vince's face tenderly, almost caressingly. Vince remains motionless, allowing the touch. They lock eyes for a long moment. Dodge's hand moves down Vince's neck and across his shoulder. Vince still does not move." (Shepard, 1985, p. 116)

This physical, almost erotic touch between a grandfather and his grandson subverts the expected boundaries and norms of a healthy familial relationship. The stage directions convey a sense of unease and transgression, as the bond between Dodge and Vince borders on the incestuous. Later, when Vince asks Dodge directly, "Are you my grandfather?", Dodge replies cryptically, "I don't know. How would I know that?" This ambiguous response further blurs the lines of their familial connection, undermining the assumed heteronormative structure of the family. Through this unsettling interaction between Dodge and Vince, Shepard challenges conventional notions of sexuality, reproduction, and the sanctity of the family unit, destabilizing the grand narratives that typically govern such social and familial norms. *"Buried Child"* by Sam Shepard is an excellent example of a postmodernist play that examines the break of the Grand Narrative and its consequences on contemporary society and how it contributes to the corruption of the family unit. It also highlights the illusion of the American dream and the big challenge to fixed facts and narratives.

5. CONCLUSION

Sam Shepard's play *"Buried Child"* challenges traditional grand narratives of family and identity, exposing the dysfunction within the family and the fragility of identity. By breaking the grand narrative, the play offers an alternative view of society and the family, presenting a critique of the traditional structures that define them. The characters, particularly Shelly, serve as catalysts for change, challenging the family's assumptions and exposing their secrets. This study has examined the significance of secrets, the role of Shelly, and the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the mother of Tilden's child in *"Buried Child."* By analyzing these themes through the lens of breaking the grand narrative theory, the audiences can better understand the play's cultural and social significance and contribution to contemporary literature. Overall, *"Buried Child"* is a powerful work of literature that challenges our assumptions about the nature of the family and identity, inviting us to consider new ways of understanding ourselves and our society. Finally, In Sam Shepard's play "Buried Child," the key grand narratives that are challenged and broken include:

The American Dream: The play subverts the traditional notion of the American Dream, characterized by upward social mobility, family stability, and the promise of a prosperous future. Instead, the Wesleyan family at the center of the play is plagued by dysfunction, poverty, and a buried secret that haunts their past.

Familial Stability and Continuity: The play dismantles the idea of the traditional, nuclear American family. The Wesleyan family is fragmented, with broken relationships, power struggles, and a terrible secret that has been suppressed across generations.

Patriarchal Authority: The play destabilizes the traditional patriarchal authority within the family structure. The father figure, Dodge, is an ineffectual, alcoholic patriarch who has lost control of his family and household.

Heteronormative Sexuality and Reproduction: The play challenges heteronormative assumptions about sexuality and reproduction. The incestuous, unnatural relationship between Dodge and his grandson Vince subverts the expected norms of healthy familial bonds.

Nostalgic Pastoral Imagery: The play's setting of a rural Midwestern farmhouse initially evokes a nostalgic, pastoral image of traditional American life, but this idyllic vision is quickly shattered by the family's dark secrets and dysfunction.

By breaking these grand narratives, Shepard's play presents a deconstruction of the idealized American family and reveals the darker, more complex realities underlying the myths of stability, progress, and tradition.

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