



# THE STUDY OF DISINTEGRATION IN SHEPARD'S *FOOL FOR LOVE*

Ahlam Dhahir Mohsin Alshamerti

ahlam.muhsion.ini@atu.edu.iq

Technical Institute of Najaf, Al-Furat Al-Awsat Technical University

Article history:	Abstract:
<p><b>Received:</b> 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023 <b>Accepted:</b> 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 <b>Published:</b> 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023</p>	<p>Disintegration has a great role in Sam Shepard's plays. This is quite clear in <i>Fool for Love</i> (1983), a family play written by him. This play is also a postmodern play. This research has also benefitted from the theory Jean Baudrillard's postmodernist theory and also Jean François Lyotard's postmodernist theory of Fall of Grand Narratives. There are some grand narratives or myths that are subverted in the play. American family, American identity .American family is in decline in the play through abandonment, alcoholism, having duel relations outside the frame of family and following the propagandist American dream by male characters. Gender identity is a significant concern of the play. May's resistance to go with Eddie to his fantastic dreamy land for living, her rejection of Eddie's male version of story and Eddie's willingness to approve May's story as the real reality of their past are some instances of her subversion of masculine mythic codes. The play consists of plays or stories within the main play or story. The findings of the study show that a simulated postmodern world is depicted in the play in which reproductions of the real take its place.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> postmodernism, family disintegration, gender identity, <i>Fool for Love</i></p>	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sam Shepard was born Samuel Shepard Rogers III in Illinois in 1943. He is an American "prolific dramatist, screenplay writer, memoirist and film actor." He was a former "cowboy" and "recluse." Since his "off-off-Broadway" days, he focuses on American traditions such as "rock and country music, western movies, science fiction and horror stories" (Bloom, 2003, p. 120).

In 1964, his "one-act plays" called *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden* were performed at "Theatre Genesis." *Chicago*, *Icarus's Mother* and *The Red Cross* are nominated as the best plays of "off-off-Broadway". *La Turista* (1967) is well-known for his pioneering use of "disorientation," "fantasy," "frontier myth" and "popular culture." *The Unseen Hands* (1969) and *Mad Gog Blues* (1971) are two of his other plays written before he moved to London. In London, he wrote *The Tooth of Crime* (1972), *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974). Then he came back to the United States and wrote about American family in his plays, *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), also *Buried Child* (1978) and *True West* (1980), which he gains the Pulitzer Prize. Furthermore, *Fool for Love* (1983), *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), *States of Shock* (1991), *Simpatico* (1994) and *The Late Henry Moss* (2000) (Bloom, 2003, pp.13-14).

Adler (2002) states that Shepard has been fascinated by the matter of "American family". The family resembles the whole society. Shepard aims to criticize his community through presenting the deteriorated American families. Furthermore, he tries to handle the masculinity crisis that appears to be the result of the destruction of the postmodern family (p.111).

Generally, Shepard's plays focus on the "crisis of man," whether it is moral or material. This can be clearly seen in the "ethical deterioration of *Fool for Love* (1983). Shepard's new image of the world presents "how the American man's character shifts from a heroic figure to a destroyed one" (Mokbel, 2013. p.1).

### 1.1 Postmodernism

Tasic (2001) states that postmodernism is an umbrella term which on its exact definition there is no consensus (p.4). Sarup (1998) claims that postmodernism is totally an "ambiguous" term (p.144). Connor (2004) loosely defines postmodernism as what 'comes after modernism, modernity, or the modern (p.1). Clippinger (2001) declares that in spite of being modernism which sows the seeds of postmodernism and postmodern thought, postmodernism has broken with modernism in order to flourish its own themes (p.251). In other words, Sarup (1998) states, it is in one way a "continuation" of the ideas of modernism and in another way, it is a kind of break from 'conventional' modernist forms (p.168).

Postmodern values of "human nature" are considered 'collectivist' in a way that social linguistic systems by modules of "sex, race, ethnicity, and wealth" design and make individuals' 'identities' (Hicks, 2001. p.6).

However, in the postmodern literary work the previous strict "boundary" between art and "everyday life" has been demolished. The distinction between "elite" and "popular" classes (Sarup, 1998, p.132) or between high and low culture has been collapsed (Powell, 1998. p.37).

Modernism is characterized by expansion, differentiation, and representing the real, but postmodernism is recognized by implosion, inertia, reproduction of models, hyperreality, loss of meaning and de-differentiation" (Kellner, 1989, p.117). Postmodernism is defined by the "critique of foundationalism" (Sarup, 1988, p.132). It rejects modernist's notion of "originality" and presents the term "appropriation," a postmodern strategy which deals with "borrowing, plagiarizing or stealing" a literary work to show the absence of originality in present world (Barrett, 1997, p.25). Therefore, the original work of art, in a postmodern age, loses its importance due to the perpetually reproduction of that work (p.26). In other words, postmodern theory is characterized by the critique of foundation and "originality." The fall of the originality or reality been substituted for focusing on the "repeated aspect of art production" (Sarup, 1998, p.132).

## 2. DISCUSSION

In order to study the concept of disintegration and family disintegration in Shepard's *Fool for Love* (1983), I may say that family disintegration equals to the "subversion of the myth of the family" (Putzel, 1989, p.114). Shepard's family play, *Fool for Love* (1983) depicts the American family disintegration in the family of The Old Man and also consequently in the lives of his children, May and Eddie. Shepard intentionally designs the protagonists, May and Eddie, as half siblings. Being sibling hints a universal American family but this being half indicates that the bond of family is shattered and is in decline.

In this play, the old man, the father of the family, abandons his first family as Eddie says to The Old Man: "You were gone" (p.73). Besides, the old man confesses that: "That's right. I was gone. I was gone" (Shepard, 1983, p.74). Thus, a reason for family disintegration is the husband's leaving the house and seeking love in a place out of the frame of his family. Family disintegration is an outstanding theme of Shepard's *Fool for Love* (1983). It limits family members just to have mechanical relationships. This mechanical behavior can be seen in the father of May and Eddie. And family members are physically and spiritually apart from each other.

Thus, the image of drunken and absent father is vivid in the play. Furthermore, alcoholism and feeling a fake kind of freedom and lack of responsibility toward one's family can be considered as the other reason of disintegration of this American family.

The problems of "parental influence" and "abandonment" concern Shepard's mind (Swan, 1999, p.4). His father abandoned his family and lived as a recluse in a world of alcohol until his death. The old man justifies his second marriage by the impassionate love of May's mother.

Not only does Eddie mirror his father, but also May reflects her mother's "history." Although May knows that Eddie will leave her again and again, she "repeats" her mother by staying with the man who is notorious for constant abandonment. It is as if a circle and the characters repeat themselves in that (Swan, 1999, p.6). May and Eddie are images of their parents. They are icons.

Alcoholism is the problem that leads Shepard's father to death. It also penetrates into his play, *Fool for Love* (1983). Repeatedly in the play the word tequila is used and all the characters, Eddie, May, The Old Man and Martin, drink. For example, when Eddie was a child his father shares the bottle with him. Even while Eddie is drinking with Martin, he repeatedly emphasizes that the tequila is his and he himself has brought it from Mexico. Besides, Alcohol is seen as a way of that Eddie and May, the children, can relate or make a bond with the Old Man, their father.

Furthermore, the old man claims that in his imagination he has married with the lady in the picture called Barbara. Eddie both love May, his half-sister and has secret relationship with the Countess. Besides, May deeply loves Eddie, her half-brother and is in relation with Martin.

To analyze Shepard's *Fool for Love*, I may say that different stories-within-the story, simulated moments, Mobius strip, making fake realities and recursion will depict how reality is lost within several narration of the same background. Besides, there are some grand narratives that here are considered as myths. These myths are American Dream, American identity, masculinity and the framework of family.

### 2.1 *Fool for Love* a family play

Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* (1983), a family play, is the story of two lovers, May and Eddie, who are half siblings. Their father, The Old Man, fall in love twice; once with Eddie's mother and on other time with May's mother. He has two totally separate lives. He repeatedly abandons them and he causes not only disintegration of his own family but also the families of his own children. In a motel room, Eddie, the womanizer re-tells his stories about the past of his family for Martin, May's boyfriend. But May claims that Eddie makes up all of them and she starts narrating their past. The Old Man, their father who only exists in May and Eddie's imaginations, cannot withstand May's version of the story of the past and asks his son, Eddie, as a male figure, to stop telling her story. But it is depicted at the end of the play that Eddie shows his willingness to accept May's version, the female. There are some hints that somehow May and the other woman in the play, Countess, can subvert the masculine violence of male figures, Eddie and The Old Man.

### 2.2. Plays-within-the-Play or Stories- within-the-Story

The critic Bonnie Marranca (1981) points out that "Shepard's characters are accomplished storytellers because they'd rather talk than act" (p.29). For instance, in this play we find the truth about the characters' past lives through their stories and speeches.

The play is made up of stories within the story. The Shepard's story named *Fool for Love* (1983) consists of three stories within the main story. These little stories are The Old Man's, Eddie's and May's. It is an instance of what

Lyotard remarks about the breaking of grand narrative into small narratives. Shepard's story can be considered as a grand narrative which is broken into the main characters' own stories. In this play, Shepard (1983) writes that:

The Old Man begins to tell his story as May moves slowly along the wall. He tells it directly to her as though she's a child. The Old Man tells a story about May's childhood. When he, May and her mother were driving in the old Plymouth. Suddenly May started crying and nothing could settle her down' (pp.36-37)

Eddie starts his story about how his family disintegrated. He simply recounts about his father's betrayal and abandoning his family that:

Our Daddy fell in love twice. That's basically how it happened. Once with my mother and once with her mother. He had two separate lives. Two completely separate lives. He's lived with me and my mother for a while and then he'd disappear and go live with her and her mother for a while. (Shepard, 1983, p.63).

May starts telling the story from her point of view which was different from what Eddie tells as the real story. In May's version it is her mother who seeks her husband, both the father of May and Eddie. It was May who with her mother discovers the town with all its peculiarities. In her story, it is she and her mother who are the seekers and finders. They find Eddie, his mother and his father at the table eating supper indifferently (Shepard, 1983, p.71). May continues her version of story in this way: "My mother begged Eddie not to see me but he wouldn't listen. Then she went to Eddie's mother and begged her. And Eddie's mother blew her brains right out" (Shepard, 1983, p.73).

The old man rejects this version of story and acknowledges that this one is not convincing. It shows that there are many micronarratives and also repetition of different sorts of reality or different referents or signifieds that the audience is skeptical which version is the real one. The Old Man says to Eddie that: "This story doesn't hold water. You're not gonna' let her off the hook with that one are ya'? That's the dumbest version I ever heard in my whole life. I wanna' hear the male side a' this thing" (Shepard, 1983, p.73).

### 2.3. The Fall of American Dream as a Grand Narrative

Fredric Jamson (1984) remarks that for Lyotard "myths or narrative archetypes (recites)" are instances of metanarratives that produces legitimation (p.ix). Metanarratives, total philosophies of history, set out "ethical and political rules" for the society (Hooti, 2011, p.80).

Shepard in his plays, especially *Fool for Love* (1983) aims to reveal that "contemporary culture has come to the end of what Lyotard called as grand narratives" (Hooti, 2011, p.87)

The male characters in the play, Eddie and The Old Man, present the American dream and American identity. These are some instances of Lyotard meta-narratives that propagandize human beings into a better future. But these master narratives decline though the play. For instance, The Old Man says to Eddie, his son that: "I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist, right? Isn't that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Isn't that true?" (Shepard, 1983, p.27). The word "fantasist" and "dream" are some hints of application of grand narrative of the American Dream in the play because fantasy like dream is not something real, it is just a kind of fake or constructed type of reality. For instance, owing land, property and freedom are the factors that make the fantasy of American dream. Ian Ousby (1993) believes that *Fool for Love* (1983) deals with "myth of the West" and the decline of "American dream" (p.863).

Wetzsteon (2006) states that the grand narratives of American pop culture is mined in Shepard's plays, especially *Fool for Love* (1983) (p.109). Besides, Madachy (2003) remarks that there is a deep connection between an American and his land. He depicts a trailblazer who came to the land, and conquered it. He changes the landscape into a useful place for his purposes (p.33). This idealized image of the 'frontiersman' becomes a recurring figure in American literature (Lemay, 1979, p.197).

Besides, Eddie addresses May that "You know we're connected, May. We'll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago" (Shepard, 1983, p.31). This claim represents his ideal vision of American Dream. But finally May shatters this dream by making Eddie approve her version of story about the past and not following his idealized dream.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The "familial disintegration" or the "deterioration of the American family," Patraha and Siegel (1985) mention, is the context for Shepard's assertion that community and belonging must be linked to family and biological roots. What is outside the framework of family is worse. Those who have escaped inevitably will be drawn back, even if reintegration is reduced to a patriarchal struggle for dominance that maims, even if the inheritance is one of loss and poison passed on from father to son (p.45).

Families that Shepard depicts in his play, The Old Man's family with Eddie's mother and Eddie, The Old Man's family with May's mother and May, Eddie's family and May's family- like Shepard's own family are in decline. The researcher of the present study aims to depict the causes and effects of the family disintegration. There are some outstanding realities in the play that are lost. These lost realities can be traced by Baudrillard's postmodern theories of simulation and hyperreality. Besides, Lyotard's postmodern theory of fall of grand narratives can be applied in order to present the subversion of mythic American codes. The researcher claims that there are some myths or grand narratives such as American identity, gender identity, masculine violent power and reality of human life which fall or being subverted in the play.

The researcher has found that the play consists of stories-within-story or various realities that finding the real reality is difficult. Besides, the borderline between reality and hyperreality or simulation is lost in the fantasist scenes of the play. Furthermore, there are some mythic codes in the play that can be considered as grand narratives. These myths are masculine powers, cowboys, American Dream, American identity which are subverted by the female characters of the play, May and the Countess. The American Family is also in decline due to males' abandonment of family, alcoholism and having duel relations out of the frame of family and following the fantasist American Dream of freedom and properties.

### REFERENCES

1. Adler, P. T. (2002). Repetition and regression in *Curse of the starving class* and *Buried child*.
2. In M. C. Roudané (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Sam Shepard*. (pp.111-123). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
3. Barsky, R. (2001). Postmodernity. In V. E. Taylor and C.E. Winquist, (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*. (pp. 304-308).London: Routledge.
4. Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Cool memories*. C. Turner, (Trans). (p.40). London: Verso.
5. Baudrillard, J. (1988a). Fatal strategies. In M. Poster, (Ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*. (pp.185-209). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
6. Baudrillard, J. (1988b). The hyperrealism of simulation. In M. Poster (Ed.), *Jean*
7. *Baudrillard: selected writings*. (pp. 143-49). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
8. Baudrillard, J. (1988c). *Simulacra and simulation*. In M. Poster (Ed.), *Jean*
9. *Baudrillard: selected writings*. (pp.165-84). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
10. Baudrillard, J. (1988d). Symbolic exchange and death. Trans. Charles Levin. In M.Poster (Ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*. (pp.119-148).Stanford: Stanford University Press.
11. Baudrillard, J. (1983). *In the shadow of silent majorities*. New York: Semiotext(e).
12. Baudrillard, J. (1983). *Simulations*. (Trans.). Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman.
13. New York: Semiotext(e).
14. Bloom, H. (2003). *Sam Shepard*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishing.
15. Clippinger, D. (2001). Intertextuality. In V. E. Taylor and C. E. Winquist. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of postmodernism*. (pp.190-91). London: Routledge.
16. Hicks, S. (2011). *Explaining postmodernism: Skepticism and socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*. Tempe: Scholarly Publishing Inc.
17. Hooti, N. (2011). A postmodernist reading of Sam Shepard's *Buried child*. *Canadian Social Science*, 7(1), 76-89.
18. Jamson, F. (1984). Forward. In J.F. Lyotard (Ed.), *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. (pp.vii-xxi). Manchester: Manchester University Press,
19. Kellner, D. (1994). *Baudrillard: A reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
20. Kellner, D. (1989). *Jean Baudrillard: From marxism to postmodernism and beyond*.
21. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
22. Lane, R.J. (2000). *Jean Baudrillard*. London: Routledge.
23. Lemay, L. (1979). From lout to hero: Notes on the significance of the comparative method and the stage theory in early American literature and culture. *American Antiquarian Society*. 1(1).190-199.
24. Lyotard, J. F. (1991). *The inhuman: Reflections on time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
25. Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The Postmodern condition: A Report on knowledge*. Trans.
26. Geoff Bennington. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
27. Lyotard, J.F. (1992). *The postmodern explained to children: Correspondence*. London: Turnaround.
28. Lodge, D. (1988). *Modern criticism and theory: A reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman
29. Madachy, P. S. (2003). *The nightmare of the nation: Sam Shepard and the paradox of american identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
30. Malpas, S. (2003). *Lyotard, Jean-François*. London & New York: Routledge.
31. Malpas, S. (2005). *The postmodern*. London: Routledge.
32. Marranca, B. (1981). *American dreams: The imagination of Sam Shepard*. New York:
33. Performing Arts Journal Publications.
34. Mokbel, S. A. (2013). *The postmodern american man in Sam Shepard's Curse of the starving class*. Lebanon: Beirut Arab University Press.
35. Ousby, I. (1993). *The Cambridge guide to literature in English*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
36. Poster, M. (1988). Introduction. In M. Poster (Ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: selected writings*.
37. (pp.1-6). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
38. Powell, J. (1998). *Postmodernism for beginners*. New York: Writers and Readers Publishing.
39. Putzel, S. (1989). The back side of myth: Sam Shepard's subversion of mythic codes in *Buried child*. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. 1(1), 109-124.
40. Sarup, M. (1988). *An introductory guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. New York: Simon and Schuster International Group.

41. Shepard, Sam (1983). *Fool for love*. New York: Dramatists Play Service.
42. Swan, S. J. (1999). *Direction of Sam Shepard's Fool for love*. Texas: Texas Tec University.
43. Tasic. V. (2001). *Mathematics and the roots of postmodern thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
44. Wetzsteon, R. (2006). Sam Shepard and pop culture. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*.
45. 2(1), 105-115.