

## CHAPTER I: Life and Works of Sam Shepard

### Background: Modern American Drama

Drama in the United States of America is always incapable of keeping pace with the progress in other branches of literature, because of the crude realities of war and the swift development of industry. Later the puritan prejudice against theatre and completely vanished and great many plays has been produced. Furthermore, the stage techniques too improved tremendously. The growing interest of the dramatist brought out the realistic and social dramas. But drama and theatre developed fully only in the twentieth century. National expression became the instrument in American Drama after the First World War. The modern theatre, in its initial stage responded to the new literary climate with infusions from the experimental and critical drama of such European writers as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, George Bernard Shaw and the others. Their experiments are on naturalism and realism. (*Balasubramaniam*, 5)

In 1916, experimental writers emphasized content of psychological analysis and symbolic representation character. The little theatres developed regional writers. Social and problem play attained special brilliance in the hands of Rachel Crothers, Philip Berty, George Kelley, George S. Kaufman, Marc Connelly, Sidney Howard, Robert Sherwood and others. These authors are interested in character analysis rushed to strip away the veneer of society in search of primitive support for naturalistic or deterministic interpretation of life. The characteristics of the realistic plays is clearly understood; the heroes in realistic plays are ordinary human beings.

O'Neill, Robinson Jeffers and William Faulkner are the three most successful of many American authors of the period who explored the subconscious

as a means of characterization and drew on concepts of primitivism to shape their works. O' Neill is the genius behind the change that came over the American theatre in 1920's and 1930's, the greatest period in its history. The stature of Eugene O' Neill casts a long shadow in the American drama, who is a peerless prolific writer. O' Neill, throughout his dramatic career, has been experimenting with new techniques. Faithfulness to the truth of human nature and life is the fundamental of O' Neill's dramatic art. The setting, characters, theme and form of most of O' Neill's early plays are realistic. (*Balasubramaniam*, 8)

The human personality has been dwarfed as much by the dehumanizing magnitude of modern events due to the stupendous totality and horror of World War in 1920s. The important fact of literary history in the vast disillusionment of American liberals is writers which coincided with the national extravagance, corruption, and social decadence of the so called Jazz Age. Leftist sympathy emerged as a more important part of mainstream literature in 1930s, marked by a formidable presence of proletarian literature and art in the USA. Money lost its glamour except in the escapist worlds of movies and popular fiction, while serious writers recorded the plight of the poor and observed the isolation of the rich, highlighted in Edward Dahlberg's *Bottom Dogs* (1929); and Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930). (*Tekinay*, 3)

After 1950s, faced with continuing inflation, American poverty cried out for help. In this very time, the war and industrialism affected the large centers of black population, their long-neglected problems of race and civil rights and thrust themselves into public view. Postwar writers carried with their new forms, to further limits of the impulses begun by the generations of the First World War Drama,

Poetry, and fiction continued to employ expressionism as a tool for exploring human nature and behavior, particularly the non-rational and the violent with imagistic directness and symbolic economy. American theatre continued to thrive for a time, but after the 1960s Broadway is increasingly given over to glassy spectacles, a condition resulting from high production costs and the competition of movies and television. (*Tekinay*, 4)

Arthur Miller's creations like, *Death of Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), *The Price* (1968) and others shows Miller's strength: his uncompromising vision of what a moral society should stand for and the failures of individuals to abide by or to find their own standards of integrity. The dialogue is very simple and lively. Though most of Miller's plays are social and realistic, he tends to be moralistic in his outlook.

Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Landford Wilson, David Mamet and Sam Shepard have been great innovators in American drama since the late 1960s. Their works reflect a spectrum of styles- Realism, Expressionism and Naturalism- as does the work of other important contemporary playwrights. The dramas of 1970s expressed the pessimism of a Post Watergate and Post Vietnam culture. While much of Broadway reinstated realism and the well made play, experimental theatre challenged them.

Before entering into the realm of Sam Shepard, a modern American dramatist, has to taken in the background of American theatre before and after the period of his first play. It is essential for one to comprehend the background in which his plays are produced. As Off-Broadway had tended to become commercial, Off-Off-BroadWay theatre emerged in the early sixties. It seems that a critic, Jerry

Tailermer named it so. Joe Cino's cafe cino became an art gallery and it gave room for poetry readings and staging plays. After him, many new plays are staged almost everywhere. Actually this is the first opportunity given to those who are in love with the theatre and in search of a hearing for their new plays, most of actors are unpaid and the cost of production is very low. Theatre Genesis is one of the youngest and well established theatres of Off-Off-Broadway. Its artistic director was Ralph Cook. It is a workshop for young dramatists. It is housed in the church of St.Marks in the Bowery. Until 1970, Ralph Cook has been running the theatre and a group of playwrights have started working for it, the works he has directed in this theatre have a distinctive style of their own. Walter Hadler, Murray Mednick and Tom Sankey are some of the dramatists who have staged their plays in this theatre. It is Theatre Genesis which has introduced Sam Shepard to the theatre - goers. Many writers who have worked with the Off-Off-Broadway theatre have not earned sufficiently. Some have started to move to other media. Some have put an end to their creative talents after writing one or two plays. (*DeRose*, 3)

Sam Shepard is widely admired for his enigmatic portrayals of family and societal tensions. He is one of the most important experimental playwrights of this period, though his work is not commercially successful as that of mainstream playwrights. His *Curse of Starving Class* (1978) and Pulitzer winning *Buried Child* (1978) captured a sense of American disillusionment. His meditations on American myths, such as the cowboys or the failure of American dream appeared in later works.

## Sam Shepard and His Works

Sam Shepard, one of the most prolific contemporary American play wrights, is born on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1943 as Samuel Shepard Rogers VII. While Shepard is studying in school, he received a copy of a play from his friend, which gave him an altogether new experience- it is *Waiting for Godot*. Actually it is in New York that Shepard's earnest thirst for writing developed. He is a busboy at the Village Gate, the Greenwich Village Cabaret. Here in this village, Shepard is excited and thrilled to be amidst artistic, poetic and musical surrounding. He is encouraged to write plays for the Off- Off Broadway by Ralph Cook, the founder of Theatre Genesis. Even before that time, Shepard is writing poetry in the Deaf style. Then Shepard started writing a series of one-act plays with full speed in 1964 in Theatre Genesis, his *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden* are staged and directed by Cook. His plays deal with modern social concerns such as individual alienation and the destructive effects of family relationship in an ailing American society. (DeRose, 2)

Sam Shepard has written forty-five plays, eleven of which have won Obie Awards, and has appeared as an actor in sixteen films. In 1979, Shepard bagged The Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Buried Child* (1978), and in 1984 he gained an Oscar nomination for his performance in *The Right Stuff*. His screenplay *Paris, Texas* won the Golden Palm Award at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival, and he wrote and directed the film *Far North* in 1988. He is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters and in 1992. He received The Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy. In 1994, he is inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame. (DeRose, 1)

Shepard's works can be roughly divided in three periods. The early plays, mostly from 1964 to the early 1970s, were abstract collages, elusive but intensely

concentrated sketches and fragmentary but resonantly linked anecdotes, characterized by lyrical monologues, abrupt shifts of focus and tones, and stunningly visualized climaxes. These plays (*Red Cross*, *Chicago*, *Icarus's Mothers*, etc.) are about their highly charged atmosphere- terrified loneliness, for example, or sexual betrayal, or paranoid despair- their surreal dislocations perfectly conveyed Shepard's sense of the psychic pressures of contemporary life. In these plays, Shepard portrays very ordinary day-to-day incidents. They seem to be very normal situations. All of a sudden, they are found to be transformed by their flight of imagination. There is a sort of comic vision piercing through these plays. This comic vision is going to be fully developed in his later plays.

Shepard second group play deals with the ways the artist pursues his identity and freedom even if it results in isolation and betrayal, the ways the artist is at once essential and intolerable to his society. These works invariably see the writer as a visionary sometimes in parable form, often obliquely and twice directly. One of the characteristic figures of the media century from Franz Kafka to J. D. Salinger to Woody Allen- has been the artist who publically exposes his/her deepest feelings while at the same time ruthlessly concealing his private life. Shepard discovered in this theme a profound metaphor for contemporary life, brilliantly exploring our paradoxical need for both individuality and belonging.

Shepard's plays has the characters of shaman figures- those pop-heroes embodying their national obsessions, cowboys, criminals, rock stars, who confront the psychic traumas that result when the integrity of the self comes into conflict with the compromises of community. Striving to escape the confinements of the flesh, the family, the culture, these heroes- who frequently refer to themselves as

“escape artist”- are either victimized by a civilization and turns their history into cultural debris or spiritually kidnapped, their gifts corrupted, their souls poisoned. The shaman figures thus allows Shepard to explore the paradoxes at the core of the American experience- the contradictory desires for self and community, for freedom and roots, for escape and family. These paradoxes contain their own paradoxes, for he realizes that self, freedom and escape may disorient as well as liberate, and community roots and family may nourish as well as confine.

The plays, categorized under the third group are two great “family play”, are *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child*. In these two plays, the hero after his visionary quest returns home, to the place from which he originally escaped, to confront the desolating paradox at the theatre of the family- the fact that simultaneously defines our being and denies our existence.

Summing up, Shepard’s dramatic universe is complicated and largely unhappy place where characters suffer extraordinary anxiety due to the instability and inauthenticity of the worlds which surrounds them. Shepard and many of the characters endeavor to defend themselves against the weight of the past and the anxiety of the present by searching out a deeper, more essential origin through which to establish a viable identity. Barnes, who rightly pointed out about these plays, “Shepard makes a searing indictment of the American family, seeing it as a destructive unit rather than a supportive one”.

#### States of Shock and Critics

Sam Shepard being disillusioned with the horrendous and devastating war experiences in the post-Vietnam war generation wrote this popular play. This play

drew high critical appreciation from readers around the world. Different critics have attempted to overview this play from different perspectives. Asly Tekinay relates this play with existential nihilism of Nietzsche. He comments:

Manifesting itself in various realms (political, moral, cosmic and existential), nihilism may refer either to a well-constructed system of thought or philosophy, or merely to a certain mood, to feelings. In the domain of literature, it is the latter that is usually the case. Sam Shepard, one of the most prominent playwrights of the contemporary American theater, has managed, however, to join together both references of nihilism, the intellectual and the emotional, in his political play *States of Shock*, staged in 1991. (71)

According to another critic David J. DeRose, this play is a reflection of Jung's definition of archetypal imageries of "collective unconscious". He elaborates:

*States of Shock* condemns both the American government's military invasion of Iraq in February of 1991 and, more notably, the compliant and complacent reaction of the American public to that invasion and to the manner in which it was mass-marketed by our leaders. *States of Shock* is a play written in the style of the Viet Nam era as a wake-up call to the Viet Nam generation which seemed so appallingly silent during the invasion of Iraq. But, *States of Shock* is more than an angry political tract; it is a fluid, dreamlike event of hypnotic, archetypal images, as full of visual poetry as it is of current politics. Reminiscent of Shepard's hallucinatory plays from the late 1960s, *States of Shock* is more concerned with expressing a highly personalized state of



traumatized consciousness--what Shepard calls a "shock state"--than with telling a story. (3-4)

Similarly, according to another critic Eric Andrew Lee, this play reflects on the creation of more explicit social and political critique by Sam Shepard. He states:

*States of Shock* is clearly a political play, expressing Shepard's dismay over the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Of the Gulf War, Shepard has said, "I can't believe that, having come out of the 60's and the incredible reaction to Vietnam, that voice has all but disappeared [. . .]. This is supposed to be what America's about? (qtd. in Shewey 217).

Obviously, this remark suggests an about-face from Shepard's earlier statements in the 1970's and 1980's where he claimed not to have any political theories (qtd. In Marranca 195) and also claimed that he was "not interested in the American social scene at all" (qtd. in Derose 94). (325)

Likewise, Paul Seamus Madachy relates Sam Shepard's *States of Shock*, continues his effort to force the American psyche to its moment of crisis through a deliberate confrontation. He further states:

With *States of Shock*, Shepard seems to move away from the realistic and linear elements of his recent plays, beginning with the family plays. *States of Shock* creates more of an atmosphere of calculated mayhem, a sort of shock-for-shock's-sake that compels Kramer to comment, "The point has been reached where the presence of [...] an ice-cream sundae or a bowl of soup predicates the creation of a mess" (78).

In this regard, it becomes clear that though the text has been analyzed through various perspectives, the trauma approach have not been applied yet. There exists a strong need to carry out research on this play from a new perspective. Without a proper study on this issue, the meaning of the text will remain incomplete. Having taken this fact into consideration, the present researcher proposes to carry out research from trauma approach.

## CHAPTER II: Trauma and Shepard

The term “trauma” is a medical term of Greek origin denoting a severe wound or injury and the resulting after effects. The term also refers to the action shown by the abnormal mind to the body which provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress and destruction. Trauma now has become a mode of interpretation of narrative, history, culture and various other philosophical fields. Because of its wide acceptance and broader periphery, trauma cannot be limited only with medic-clinical and psychiatry. It has now developed as a theory and is now given a distinct position in the heap of theories. (*Caruth, 1*)

Relating to the Medic, *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines trauma as “a serious injury or shock to the body, as from violence or an accident” and relating to psychiatry. The dictionary defines trauma as “an emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person” (1439). Trauma has now crossed the boundaries of psychiatry and medical-clinical and has shown an increasing insistence on the direct effects of external violence in psychic disorder. This happened after the multi-culturalists ‘celebration’ of ‘decenters’ and ‘meaninglessness’. Multiculturalists and post-colonial critics share an interest in demystifying and dismantling those institutional mechanisms that reinscribed and power structure that favored the interest and continuing privilege of certain groups and nations.

Trauma theory tries to turn criticism back towards being an ethical, responsible, purposive discourse, listening to the wounds of the other. Trauma is intrinsically multidisciplinary. It needs to displace older paradigms and attend to new configuration of cultural knowledge. Cathy Caruth, Dominik LaCapra, James

Berger, Jeoffery Hartman, Jenny Edkins, Kali Tal, Roger Luckhurst and others, basing their theory of trauma on Freud's psychoanalysis, speak and argue about the need for "acting out" or "working through" of the trauma for leading life as healthy citizens.

Trauma theory has aroused a vivid interest among the cultural and literary theorist. The person behind why trauma theory has begun to drag the attention of theorist pushes us to look at popular culture and mass media obsessed by repetitions of violent disaster. James Berger says it has become popular because of:

The successions of Die Hards, Terminators, and Robocops, as well as Nightmares on Elm Street, disease and epidemic films and now the return of the "classic" disaster films and of twisters and turbulence and the repeated sequence of minipocalypses within each films; at "real life" cop shows; and at the news itself, that never exhausted source of pure horror. (571)

Thus, these days there are horror-inspiring representation of violence and disaster in books, films and TV serials which have interested the critics who have felt the need to study trauma theory because these events leave a great mental shock in readers and viewers.

Berger talks about Holocaust linking with trauma. 'Holocaust Studies' is an interdisciplinary field that attracts not only scholars committed to pursuing research relating to the perpetrators and victims of the final solution, but also cultural critics interested in the hermeneutics and politics of memory more broadly conceived.

Sigmund Freud finds the dynamics of trauma, repression and symptom formation as the matter of hysteria. Freud held that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and is revealed in the form of somatic symptoms of compulsive and repetitive behaviors. Studying the trauma theory related with Freud, Berger comments on the relating matter of neurotic symptom with the repressed drives:

[...] initial theory of trauma and symptom became problematic for Freud when he concluded that neurotic symptoms were more often the result of repressed drives and desires than of traumatic events. Freud returned to the theory of trauma in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, a work which originated in his treatment of World War I Combat Veterans who suffered from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experiences. (570)

The critics such as Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman turned from work on the undecidability of interpretation in literature to publish work on Holocaust memory and witness in the early 1990s. Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma as the limit of knowledge is a continuation of the Yale Project. Trauma may create many problems such as multiple personalities, anger, and paranoia and sleep problems; tendencies towards suicidability, irritability, mood swings and odd rituals; difficulty trusting people and difficult relationships; and general despair, aimlessness and hopelessness. Post traumatic stress disorder happens when one’s mind and the body are found in numbed state due to traumatic experiences.

Cathy Caruth, in her essay, “*Unclaimed Experience Trauma and the Possibility of History*” defines trauma as perplexing experience and other

contrastive responses (11). Each traumatic event is the result of its own unique triggered experience. She further elaborates:

[...], trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and reoccurring image of trauma in our century. (181)

Caruth presents de Manian reference as a literary symptom, an unconscious, inevitable imprint of events all texts exhibit in the form of verbal ticks, or tropes; and she quite effectively reinterprets de Man's blindness and insight model in terms of traumatic impact and later inscription.

The impact of major traumatic events is never identical to any two people and trauma manifests where political and psychological forces fuse. On this point Deborah M. Horvitz citing Caruth states:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect with the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic precisely meet. (5)

Caruth identifies the ‘surprising impact’ of trauma as the dislocation of traditional disciplinary boundaries and calls for its acknowledgements as an unsettling force that urges us ‘to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication, in therapy in the classroom and in literature, as well as in psychoanalytic theory’ (4).

The major thrust of Geoffrey Hartman in his work “*Trauma within the Limits of Literature*” is to consider trauma within the limits of language and literature. In order to clarify this issue about the limitation of languages and literature he further argues:

I am considering trauma within the limits of language and especially literature. Respect for the formal integrity of literature has salutary side effects: it prevents theory from being applied reductively. Theory should not insist, in particular, on the psychic wound being located in a single biographical event (the early death of Wordsworth’s mother, for example) a wound occulted by literary device that must be cleared away as if they were defensive structures. (267)

The art of trauma study explores the relation between psychic, wounds and signification. Hartman further discusses about how trauma affects the formation of words or how words deal with trauma. And then he points out:

[...] technical matter in which the focus becomes what region and processes of the brain are involved. But neurology, cognitive science or a formal therapy are not the primary concerns of trauma study in arts. In so far as there is an established field to which it belongs. It

would be close to semiology in Saussure's context of social interaction. (257)

Hartman in his essay "*On Traumatic Knowledge and Literature Studies*" argues that trauma theory throws light on figurative or poetic language, and perhaps symbolic process in general, as something other than an enhanced imaging or vicarious repetition of a prior (none) experience. The post-traumatic story often needs a "suspension of disbelief". The phrase is from Coleridge's famous poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", where according to Hartman requires a kind of empathy i.e. suspension of belief. "It tries to make us believe the unbelievable; it demands the acknowledgement of being real, not only imagined" (541). Hartman points out that drawn into a species of belief is by the recovery of certain visceral sensation: "extreme of hat", "cold and thrust", "glare of color", "horror of the void of speech". In this regard he says: "perhaps the only way to overcome a traumatic severance of body and mind is to come back to mind through the body" (541).

In this regard, in order to make linkage between language and literature, he takes an example of that poem "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*" by S.T. Coleridge and proves that Mariner its medium at unpredictable times is as disruptive as the journey itself. And then he puts forward:

There is no happy ending, however. Repairing the breach between the symbolic order and the individual seems to be an endless task. The story-telling momentum that makes the Mariner [...] astonished by it, medusaed like the wedding-guest. The repetitions, too, though cathartic, suggest an unresolved shock: a rhythmic or temporal stutter they leave the story teller in purgatory, awaiting the next assault, the



next instance of hyper arousal. Concerning such repetition Yeats said that a personal demon always brings us back to the place of encounter to make it final. (543)

Dominick LaCapra in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory and Trauma*, talks about two related goals: to intervene in and clarify some of the recent public controversies regarding holocaust representation and to elaborate a theory historical trauma and its transmission. LaCapra's contribution to the trauma theory and its cultural transmission is extraordinarily lucid and insightful. His theory of trauma focuses on three psychoanalytic topics: the return of the repressed, acting out versus working through and the dynamics of transference. A traumatic historical event as LaCapra argues tends to be repressed and then return in form of compulsive repetition. LaCapra is concerned primarily with the return of the repressed as discourse, rather than with physical returns such as the genocidal repetitions in Cambodia and Bosnia. LaCapra focuses more in trauma's nature which denies compulsively fireated but accept the role of paradox and 'aporia'. In this regard, Berger opines:

LaCapra wants to create a position that avoids redemptive narrative and sublime acting out. He sets out to describe a way to work through trauma that does not deny the 'irreducibility' of loss or the role of 'paradox' and 'aporia' but avoids becoming compulsively fixated. (575)

LaCapra describes two important implications of his view regarding the historical trauma. First, trauma provides a method of rethinking postmodern and post-structural theories with the historical context. LaCapra views, "the postmodern

and the post-holocaust become mutually intertwined issues that are best addressed in relation to each other” (490). Secondly, LaCapra provides an original rethinking of the debates over the literacy canon suggesting that a canonical text should not help permanently install an ideological order. Each text would be, in effects a site of trauma with which the reader would have to engage. But, LaCapra does not examine the relations between historical trauma and any literacy text although can be the site of acting out or working through.

Lacapra in “*Trauma, Absence, Loss*” talks about historical trauma and structural trauma in relation to the conflation of absence and loss. In terms of absence, one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had. The terms can be used with the term, lack too. Structural trauma is related to trans-historical absence (absence of/at the origin) and appears in different ways in all societies and all lives. Everyone is subject to structural trauma. And, historical trauma is related to particular events that do indeed involve losses, such as, the dropping of the atom bomb on Japanese cities. The Holocaust, slavery or apartheid- even suffering the effect of the atom bomb in Hiroshima or Nagasaki can become a founding trauma. Historical trauma is specific and not everyone is subject to it. LaCapra in relation to it opines:

The belated temporality of trauma and the elusive nature of the shattering experience related to it render the distinction between structural and historical trauma problematic but do not make it irrelevant. The traumatizing events in historical trauma can be determined while structural trauma (like absence) is not an event but

an anxiety producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization. (725)

Similarly, Jenny Edkins in her essay “*Introduction: Trauma, Violence and Political Community*” states that the trauma theory now has become a mode of discourse which studies any text in relation with trauma violence and political community. She elaborates the concept of trauma mentioning the fact that each traumatic figure has a distinct tale to tell because of the violence they have faced. She opines, “Some traumatic people are haunted by nightmares and flashback to scenes of unimaginable horror. In their dreams they re-live their battlefield experiences and awake in a sweat” (1). She relates trauma with political community and violence and also examines the connection between these terms. In the same essay, she explores how traumas such as wars or persecutions are inscribed and re-inscribed into everyday narrative. She further says through these lines:

Trauma takes place in practices of remembrance, memorialization and witnessing. It also takes place in political action. All these practices are the site of struggle. For example, the temporality and inexpressibility of trauma makes the role of the witness an almost unbearable one [...]. I argue that the process of inscription into liner narrative, whilst possibly necessary from some point of view- it is argued that telling the story alleviates traumatic stress [...]. And that, there is an alternative that of encircling the trauma. (15)

These lines makes clear the fact that, narrative of trauma requires a sort of historical implication that is closely attached with catastrophe of human civilization due to the different types and sizes of war. Trauma studies in literature outline the

turmoil of victims. The result of trauma has become a tool of a literary and cultural analysis, which undoubtedly keeps close contact with political community and violence respectively. Edkin's notion of trauma elaborates the trauma's relation with catastrophe horror, death and violence. She views that we can find trauma everywhere because of the frustrated, devastated destructive worldview of modern life. In modern chaotic or mechanized world people find chaos is closer than peace, which makes them traumatize. Saying differently, trauma cannot be isolated from contemporary socio-political situation and it keeps intimate relationship with day to day phenomena.

In the view of Edkins, traumatic experiences can be resulted when there is a mismatch between expectation and event. Traumatic experience may also arise in the forms of revelation since trauma cannot be comprehended when it first occurs. Edkins cites Stavoj Zizek to make strong her argument. He writes, "The essence of trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our symbolic universe. All we have to do is to mark repeatedly the trauma as such" (Edkin 1). Ultimately, Edkins relates traumatic experiences with war, horror, catastrophe political instability, chaotic situation and violence.

Roger Luckhurst in "*Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology and Trauma Theory*" cites different critics; Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Sigmund Freud, Ian Hacking, Hartman, LaCapra and Ruth Leys to talk about trauma in relation to psychoanalysis, psychology along with memory and desire. Cathy Caruth provides psychoanalytic studies of trauma through the filter of Paul De Man's literary theory. Felman presents a study of the difficulties of testifying to the traumatic memories of the Holocaust. Freud gives a key early theory about

physical trauma, with the compelling case histories and reflections and the method of the 'talking cure'. Huckling provides crucial background regarding the emergence of the disease of memory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trauma theory is explored principally in relation to Romantic theory in Hartman's essay. LaCapra's essay explores how to turn to trauma refashions cultural theory. And, Ruth Lays provides a historical survey of origins of trauma theory through Freud, Shell-Shock, and recent neurobiological approaches. Luckhurst, citing such views concludes that the exposition of trauma could have remained within the field of cultural theory, satisfied with regarding the emergence of trauma theory as a set of refinements internal to psychoanalytic or deconstructive approaches. Luckhurst, in this regard, further says:

I began by suggesting that trauma theory can be understood as a place where many different critical approaches converge [...]. Trauma theory tries to turn criticism back towards being and ethical, responsible, purpose discourse, listening to the wounds of the other. But if it is truly to do this, this point of convergence also needs to be the start of a divergence of an opening out of theory to wider contexts.

(506)

He takes references of different approaches, picturizes trauma theory as the new output after the convergence of those critical approaches. Trauma affects a range of disciplines and cultural expression. Freudian psychoanalysis provided a model of traumatic subjectivity and various accounts about the effect of trauma on memory. Feminism generated not only the crucial political context but also a model of community for speaking out about forms of physical and sexual abuse that has

been borrowed by subsequent 'survivor' groups. New historicism, fascinated by the ideological omissions and repressions of historical narratives developed a mode of dissident or countervailing recovery of what have been silenced or lost in traditional literary histories. Finally, deconstruction particularly American Yale School version redirected its concerns with reference, representation and the limits of knowledge to the problem of trauma.

The traumatic event and its aftermath become central to psychoanalysis. Freud shifts his emphasis biological urge toward equilibrium which he then theorized as the 'death drive'. Freud's elaboration of the concept of 'latency' of how memory of a traumatic event can be lost over a time is a challenging task of symptomatic event. Berger defines the term 'latency' as "memory of traumatic events which can be lost over time but then regained in asymptomatic form when triggered by some similar events" (3). If repression, in trauma, is repeated by latency, this is significant in so far as its blankness- the space of unconsciousness- is paradoxically what precisely preserves the event in its literally.

The trauma theory has aroused a vivid interest among the cultural and literacy theorists. We can look at a popular culture and mass media obsessed by repetitions of violent disasters to find the reason behind the beginning of trauma theory to drag the attention of theorists.

The search for the reasons about the popularity and inevitability of trauma theory makes us look at the preoccupation with family dysfunctions-child abuse, incest spousal abuse in the media, most strikingly on the talk show circuit. The family is taken as a hope for curing all social ills which can be damaged beyond hope. According to James Berger, along with the interest in family breakdown and

violence comes the interest in the enigmatic figure of the survivor, the one who has passed through the catastrophe and can tell us what it is like. The survivor is a kind of living “black box”, a source of final knowledge of authority.

Trauma can also be divided into mimetic trauma and anti-mimetic trauma. Traumatized subject is like the hypnotized subject and to an extent subjugated by the aggressor or event in mimetic trauma. But, conversely the trauma is also seen as anti-mimetic too. The anti-mimetic theory also tends to make limitation basic to the traumatic experience, but it understands imitation differently. The anti-mimetic theory facilitates to the idea that trauma is a purely external event that befalls fully cultivated subject. In contrast to the mimetic theory’s assumption of identification with the aggressor, the anti-mimetic theory depicts violence as purely and simply as assault. In contrast to the labile subject of mimetic trauma, the subject, in anti-mimetic trauma remains intact and removed from the scene, a spectator. These two models of trauma correspond to the traditional way of reading story.

In addition, people in the modern world suffer with the anxiety, depression, frustration and alienation created by the chaotic and destructive world affairs and destructive World War I and II. The undergoing suffering from all sorts of experiences somehow lead to a path near to traumatic survivor and its attempted prospects neither has procedure a course of phase out. That is why modern world, disintegrated with its historical perspective, mainly due to the destruction of agrarian society and the development of modern technology, urbanization, industrialism and capitalism, establishes itself in a definitive break from the past.

Thus, it becomes clear that traumatic theory is developed form of psychoanalysis which not only includes those psychoanalytical theories but it

includes various fields. That is why philosophical, ethical, esthetic question about nature, war experiences violence, depression, phobia, hyperactivity disorder, anxiety disorder, somatization disorder, attachment disorder, conduct disorder, dissociative reactions, eating disturbances, multiple personalities, paranoia, anger, tendencies towards suicidability, irritability, aimlessness and hopelessness include to define the actual meaning of traumatic theory.

Hence, this present dissertation on *States of Shock* by Sam Shepard, tries to analyze the text from the perspective of trauma. The following chapter will analyze traumatic vision in Shepard's finest play, *States of Shock*. Traumatic experiences of the character especially, Colonel's life is triggered by the wounds of war, sexuality and familiar betrayal, can be best analyzed by traumatic vision.



### **CHAPTER III: Traumatic Experience in Shepard's *States of Shock***

*States of Shock* is a humorous yet frighteningly revealing probe into the world of an archetypal military man known only as the Colonel, his disabled veteran son Stubbs, and their relationship to the microcosm of American society represented in the play. In Shepard's play, it is Stubbs, the young victim of American military aggression, sent to fight by the warmongers of his father's generation, who takes on Hamm's physically incapacitated role. Somewhat frail and hunched over, he periodically displayed the hole blown through his chest by "friendly fire," also flaunting his sexual impotence by shouting "My thing hangs like dead meat!"(11). In contrast, the Colonel, a staunch believer in the values of imperialist dominance, continually lauded the myths of war, stating repeatedly "without the enemy we're nothing!" Colonel as an obsessive tyrant for whom every act of life, including placing an order at a restaurant or delivering a glass of water, was a military maneuver requiring an appropriate strategy to be "repeated and practiced" (3). Their relationship portrayed the oppressive stance of a father willing to send a naive son to war in an effort to defend his own totalitarian interests.

The setting for *States of Shock* is a "family restaurant" where the Colonel and Stubbs are joined by "the white couple". Stationed at their table, the white couple, bulwarks of the upper class white establishment, endured the presence of the Colonel and Stubbs as they awaited a long overdue order of clam chow der. The white couple engaged in static, tangential dialogue, commenting on working class ineptitude while remaining trapped in a past crippling both to themselves and to the survivors of their "white-washed" society. In contrast, Glory Bee, the African American waitress represented the working class. Enslaved to her position, she withstood both the criticism of the white couple and the sexual advances of the

Colonel and Stubbs. Glory Bee's reactions and responses are stereotype, reminiscent of the ally, the cryptic, incomplete movements of Stubbs in the wheelchair, at times in tandem with the Colonel's tirades, provided choreographic "text" equally as important as the play's language.

In *States of Shock*, Shepard portrays the idea expressed above on stage. The play includes no place which might be deemed a "home"—no Illinois farmhouse, no mom's kitchen, no childhood bedroom, not even a claustrophobic motel room. Instead of a home, the play presents a commercial diner situated "somewhere," and Shepard shows that family dynamics and dysfunction can rear its head in any setting and at any time. *States of Shock* is a political play, expressing Shepard's dismay over the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Of the Gulf War, Shepard has said, "I can't believe that, having come out of the 60's and the incredible reaction to Vietnam, that voice has all but whereas in *The Late Henry Moss*, the play opens by showing us Henry's stiffening corpse. . . This is supposed to be what America's about?" (qtd. in *Shewey* 217). Obviously, this remark suggests an about-face from Shepard's earlier statements in the 1970's and 1980's where he claimed not to "have any political theories" (qtd. in *Marranca* 195) and also claimed that he was "not interested in the American social scene at all" (qtd. in *Derose* 94). Apparently it took a specific military (and political) event like the 1991 Persian Gulf War to spur Shepard to create a more explicit social and political critique than he had ever before attempted in his family plays.

Thus far, Shepard has expressed neither desire nor intention to revise *States of Shock*. Any attempt to clarify or explain away the ambiguities in *States of Shock* would weaken the play's gothic power. Since Shepard is simultaneously protesting the U.S.-led Persian Gulf War and exploring the mystery of the father-son gothic

relationship, the costumes of the Colonel and Stubbs are especially significant. The pair makes their initial entrance following the shrill sound of a referee's whistle that dangles by a red string from Stubbs's neck. The Colonel is pushing Stubbs's wheelchair, and the Colonel is "dressed in a strange ensemble of military uniforms and paraphernalia that have no apparent rhyme or reason" (5). His costume includes an Air Force Captain's hat from World War Two, a Marine Sergeant's coat "with various medals and pins," and a Civil War-era saber which hangs from a belt at his side (5). The Colonel's costume suggests a composite of military might throughout recent American history, as if to suggest that all of these wars have been, in some sense, the same war—justified by the same political excuses and resulting in the same destruction and death. On a gothic level, the Colonel's costume is a visual amalgam of the past and all of the horrors associated with past wars. The Colonel, of course, does Shepard himself has been rather reticent on this particular military conflict, not see it this way: for him, the uniforms and medals are trophies to be worn proudly. But in the tortured psyche of the haunted son the Colonel's uniform is a constant reminder of horrors that the son would prefer to repress, but these horrors nevertheless return during the play. Stubbs sits in a wheelchair which is decked out with "small American flags, raccoon tails and various talismans and good luck charms flapping and dangling from the back of the seat and arm rests" (6).(*Earnest*, 2)

These props are ironic on several levels. First, the good luck charms have clearly failed to prevent Stubbs from being seriously injured in battle, so their conspicuous appearance now seems a mocking reminder of their futility and inefficacy. Secondly, the only "good luck" which these charms and talismans seem to have brought Stubbs—when the 90 mm shell passed through his body and killed

the Colonel's son instead—proves to be a lie once the readers learn that Stubbs is in fact the Colonel's son. Finally, since Stubbs's injury has paralyzed him from the waist down he probably would have been unable to fasten these flags and talismans onto the back of his wheelchair himself. Indeed, most likely the Colonel decorated the wheelchair since it is he (the Colonel) who still pledges loyalty to the American flag and what it represents. Stubbs, as a result of his traumatized “state of shock,” has ceased making such empty plaudits. Stubbs is dressed in a long sleeved black shirt and black jeans, literally draped in the gothic color of death and ill omen. Stubbs's clothing provides a sharp contrast both to the White Couple in the café who, besides being dressed all in white, also have white skin “like cadavers” (5).

Shepard's stage directions are important in establishing the play's gothic elements, and certainly one of the most important gothic elements is the gradual revelation that the customers and staff inside Danny's Café are dead, casualties of war. The White Couple's cadaverous pallor is suggested by their expensive white outfits, “reminiscent of West Palm Beach,” and by their hands and faces, which are covered in white makeup to make them look like corpses. The White Man sits “slumped in his chair with his chin on his chest, not asleep but in a deep state of catharsis” (5). The White Woman seems similarly catatonic when the play begins: she stares off into space, but we never see her eyes which are hidden behind “elaborate jeweled dark glasses” (5). With their expensive outfits, and the woman's straw hat and sunglasses, the White Couple might pass for snobbish, glitzy tourists. They berate the waitress, Glory Bee, for taking so long with their clam chowder. Yet Shepard makes clear by the end of the play that the couple we are looking at has died at some time before the action of the play begins, and that their deaths were brought about by the war which rages outside—and very near—the café. Shepard

represents the horrors of war using a cyclorama which covers the “entire wall and ceiling” of the upstage area (5). “Two live percussionists” are seated out of sight behind the cyclorama, and their drumming intensifies the visual effects displayed on the cyclorama. As the play begins, the sound of the drumming builds in intensity as the cyclorama takes on an ominous tone. The cyclorama is lit up with tracer fire, rockets, and explosions in the night. A cross-fade takes place in which the war panorama and drumming are exchanged for the stage light and silence of the white couple who just sit there very still but not with the sense that they’re frozen in time. (5)

As the play progresses, the cyclorama is “lit up” repeatedly with scenes of war, and the readers comes to realize by the end of the play that these are not only scenes of a past war (like the one which killed the people in the café) but also of some present battle that is raging all around the café. Midway through the play, during an argument between the Colonel and Stubbs, the “cyclorama explodes with bombs, missiles, and blown up planes” while the “percussionists and war sounds join in full swing” (18). Here, the images and sounds of war clearly mirror the Colonel’s anger at Stubbs, almost as though the explosions on the cyclorama were instigated by the Colonel’s violent outbursts. In fact, each time the Colonel smashes a fist or a sword on the tabletop, the audience hears an “explosion” offstage. But these war sounds and images are more than mere representations of or metaphors for the Colonel’s rage; rather, the war on the cyclorama shows a “real” war that inflicts real casualties throughout the play. When the White Couple demands to see the café manager, the waitress, Glory Bee, replies, “The Manager is dead” (19). Moments later, when she finally brings out the clam chowder, Glory Bee tells the couple, “Sorry for the delay but the cook has been wounded” (22). The waitress’s

words suggest that a battle is raging near enough to the café that the staff has been killed and wounded by collateral fire. Glory Bee's testimony is corroborated by the other characters, including the Colonel, who tells Stubbs they must hurry back to the hospital or they will be "wide open to attack": "If we're caught in the open they'll cut us to pieces!" (27).

Finally, in the closing moments of the play, Glory Bee reveals that she never thought "Danny's could be invaded" and how "When the first wave of missiles hit us" (34). This is the first indication that Glory Bee, like the unseen cook and café manager, is also dead—a walking, talking ghost. Whereas the White Couple's cadaverous appearance provides some clue that they may be ghosts, Glory Bee seems very much alive, even sensual, as when she rolls around on the floor with Stubbs, stimulating him to his first erection since his wounding. Almost immediately after Glory Bee alludes to the missile attack that killed them all, a bus boy's cart rolls onstage "all by itself," stopping center stage (34). The cart is loaded with gas masks, and in the play's final moments, most of the characters don a gas mask, except for the Colonel and the White Man. The appearance of the gas masks reinforces the idea that the café is situated in the middle of a battlefield. The suddenness with which the busboy's cart mysteriously wheels itself onstage perhaps suggests the suddenness with which death befell the inhabitants of the café. By the end of the play, the readers may wonder where, geographically speaking, the café might be located since it is obviously situated on or near a battlefield. Because the play represents Shepard's protest against the Persian Gulf War, one might expect the battlefield to be somewhere in the Middle East, perhaps Kuwait or Iraq. But, as usual, Shepard is elusive. The setting certainly does not seem to be Middle Eastern,

but rather vintage Americana: the café appears to be a 50's-style soda shop, complete with vinyl booths and banana splits. (*Earnest*, 7)

Yet ironically, Shepard shows this, too, to be a culturally constructed myth; for in this play, the diner is the scene for a horrifying family apocalypse. Besides the reference to “West Palm Beach” in the stage directions describing the White Couple’s attire, the only other mention of geographic place is the Colonel’s cryptic remark that he “didn’t think we were that far south for key lime pie” (8). Both of these vague references imply that the diner is set somewhere in America. Yet Stubbs is wounded in the battlefield, as he makes clear when he describes wanting to be transported “back across the green sea” and taken “safely back home” (32). If the war raging around Danny’s café is occurring somewhere in America, then Shepard seems to be suggesting that America’s military involvement in foreign affairs has eventually brought war to U. S. shores—that our chickens have come home to roost, as it were. The result is the death of the customers and staff of this generic café. This is one of the play’s two gothic mysteries—we have been watching and listening to dead people throughout the play. The other gothic mystery concerns Stubbs’s true identity and the circumstances surrounding his “death.” (*Earnest*, 8)

In order to unravel the mystery of Stubbs’s identity, his repressed traumatic memories must be exhumed and finally given voice—and all of this must occur despite the Colonel’s best efforts to cover the truth with a fabricated falsehood. By first examining the Colonel’s fantasy about his son’s “death” and then by examining Stubbs’s revelation of the truth, we can see how, once again, Shepard’s cultural and political commentary take a back seat to his fascination with portraying family relationships in a gothic light.

Stubbs possesses several traits which make him a gothic character. First, he is a traumatized character who now exists in a death-in-life state similar to other gothic characters from American drama. The Colonel attempts to explain Stubbs's condition to Glory Bee, the waitress, telling her that Stubbs has "suffered an uh—kind of disruption. Temporary kind of thing, they say. Takes some time to unscramble" (6). In *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys explains, "from the beginning trauma was understood as an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened" (9). Stubbs is "immersed" in his own traumatic scene to such an extent that his physical wounds have resulted in a psychological rupture as well. In fact, as we see later in the play, Stubbs's psychological wound is more damaging than his physical one. Stubbs tells the Colonel, "When you left me it went straight through me and out the other side. It left a hole I can never fill" (20). The physical hole in Stubbs's chest is mirrored by the hole in his psyche, the trauma of his abandonment by the Colonel (his father). Another trait which makes Stubbs a gothic character is his physical deformity and impotency. Early in the play, the Colonel, true to his rank and role, gives Stubbs an order to lift his shirt, exposing a "massive red scar in the center of his chest" as though Stubbs is some sort of sideshow freak (7). The visual spectacle of Stubbs's scar, exposed so conspicuously more than once during the play, makes Stubbs himself a grotesque character (though not an unsympathetic one).

Likewise, Stubbs's wound has resulted in castration and, therefore, impotence; both Stubbs and the Colonel acknowledge how the wound has weakened his masculinity—that is, the American myth of masculinity which is characterized by virility, machismo, and sexual conquests. With *States of Shock*, Shepard



intertwines all of the gothic mysteries, showing that the reasons behind Stubbs's wounding are directly linked to his true identity and to why the Colonel "killed" him, metaphorically, by denying him as his son. Stubbs is silent for the first several minutes of the play, while the Colonel rambles on to the waitress. In fact, in this play more than any other; one character (the Colonel) monopolizes a majority of the dialogue through lengthy speeches and diatribes.

Because the play is a one-act, the disparity between the Colonel's volubility and Stubbs's relative reticence becomes all the more egregious. Much of the Colonel's dialogue revolves around his attempts to deny Stubbs as his son. Colonel committed infanticide, figuratively speaking, by inventing his son's death. The Colonel explains to Glory Bee that today is the anniversary of his son's death, and he is treating Stubbs to a dessert to commemorate this event. Stubbs finally breaks his silence by blowing the silver whistle hanging around his neck. Blowing the whistle seems to signal a return of the repressed traumatic memories, for immediately after blowing it, Stubbs speaks to the White Couple (indeed, perhaps he is able to speak only after blowing it and breaking through some type of psychic barrier). Once Stubbs finds a voice, we discover that his traumatized memory is fragmented; the memory begins at the very moment when he experienced his physical trauma: "When I was hit—it went straight through me. Out the other side, someone was killed . . . I'm the lucky one" (8). Stubbs cannot seem to remember who killed ("someone") was, but by referring to himself as the "lucky one," Stubbs seems to confirm the Colonel's account that the "son" was killed while Stubbs survived. Here, Shepard is using misdirection and false clues to confound the readers. In *States of Shock*, Shepard aims for (and achieves, though to a lesser

degree) a similar gothic effect which leaves the audience in suspense and doubt about Stubbs's true identity until the closing moments of the play.

The Colonel perpetuates his own fabrication of Stubbs's identity at every turn, and he has adopted denial as his mantra. As he tells Glory Bee, the secret to carrying a steady tray of coffee is to "pretend the cups don't exist" (10). The Colonel has taken his own advice by pretending that his son does not exist, that he has died a warrior's death in battle. The Colonel tells Glory Bee of Stubbs, "This is the man who attempted to save my son's life by placing his body in the way of incoming artillery fire" (11). The Colonel's words imply that Stubbs is a hero who deliberately placed himself in harm's way in order to save his fellow soldier. But the Colonel undercuts this claim when, later in the play, he beats Stubbs with a belt and slaps him—not the way a grateful father would treat the hero who tried to save his son's life. Before this outburst of violence, however, the Colonel seems obsessed with solving a mystery for him by finding out everything he can about the precise moment of his "son's" death. The Colonel's attempt to reconstruct the moment of his son's death—the revelation of a gothic mystery. In each case, the gothic mystery involves a return of repressed memories and a shattering of a shared lie. As the Colonel and Stubbs reconstruct the fateful battle, the readers comes to realize that, up to this point, Stubbs has shared in the Colonel's lie Stubbs's fragmented memory.

But following the reconstruction of the battle, Stubbs's repressed memories rise to the surface and he refuses to participate in the charade any longer. The Colonel has brought a bag full of toy soldiers, tanks, airplanes, and ships which he lays out carefully onto the tabletop in hopes of reconstructing the battle in which his son was killed and Stubbs was wounded . The Colonel uses a red toy soldier to

represent Stubbs—red perhaps suggesting his bloody wound or the symbolic scarlet letter of shame and disgrace which Stubbs’s impotence and paralysis have brought upon the Colonel—while a white soldier represents the Colonel’s “son” (white perhaps representing the “white-washing” of the truth). Stubbs is of little help to the Colonel’s sleuthing, however, because all of Stubbs’s attempts to reconstruct the memory inevitably jump to the traumatic moment: “When I was hit—” (12). Stubbs tries to explain the phenomenon of his repressed memories by equating repression with loss: “The part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead” (13). Stubbs’s memory of these “parts that are all dead” has been lost (13). For Stubbs, as for many trauma victims, repression of traumatic memories is an instinctual, subconscious tactic for psychological survival. (*Earnest*, 12)

Trauma is thus defined as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego’s protective shield, one that set in motion every possible attempt at defense. By forcing the toy props upon Stubbs, the Colonel is forcefully and deliberately rupturing Stubbs’s psychic defense mechanisms, though obviously the Colonel does not anticipate the extreme and irrevocable consequences of such a rupture. Stubbs’s defense mechanisms have been in place for approximately one year now, since the Colonel says today is the “anniversary” of his son’s death.

Stubbs’s repressed memories return suddenly and without warning when he tells the Colonel, “I remember the moment you forsake me. The moment you gave me up,” culminating with a startling accusation which becomes, by the end of the play, a gothic revelation: “The moment you invented my death” (20). This is a “gothic” revelation in at least two ways. First, this revelation shows the return of the repressed memory which is a gothic phenomenon, especially in twentieth-century American drama, as the previous chapters of this study have shown. Secondly, this

revelation transforms the Colonel's son (Stubbs) from "dead" to "undead." Though Stubbs is alive, physically, he has existed for the past year in a state of death-in-life, psychologically shattered, in a "state of shock." As an emotionally sterile fallen father, the Colonel responds to Stubbs's revelation with flippancy and callousness: "That dog won't hunt, Stubbs." (*Lays*, 11)

When Stubbs finally gets round to describing the moment when they were hit with the artillery shell, he describes himself and the Colonel's son as two different people who were standing "back to back" with "his spine trembling on my spine" (26). Here Stubbs seems to contradict what he said about the Colonel "inventing" his (Stubbs's) death, for how could Stubbs and the Colonel's son be one person if they were standing "back to back?" Stubbs's comments must be read in a gothic light to be fully understood. "Back to back" suggests a gothic *doppelgänger*, in this case a split personality, perhaps similar to Jekyll and Hyde—one personality (or persona) which existed prior to the traumatic moment and another which has emerged as a result of the trauma. Stubbs's remark about "his spine trembling on my spine" perhaps alludes to the moment when the two personalities began to split from the same person.

On a mythological level, the back to- back image also might allude to Janus, the two-faced Roman god who looks at once to the future and the past: certainly Stubbs's present, as well as any future he will have, is circumscribed by his past trauma. Even his new name, "Stubbs," suggests his useless legs and sexual impotence, and we are never told what his real name was before he was wounded. But Shepard is not content in this play with revealing the gothic secrets about the play's dead characters (Glory Bee, the White Couple, and the café Manager) and its "undead" character (Stubbs). In *States of Shock*, Shepard goes a step further by

indicting the political and military machine which left this motley crew of gothic creatures in its wake. (*Earnest*, 13)

While the Colonel worries about getting back to the hospital by curfew, Stubbs announces suddenly, “It was friendly fire that took us out . . . I could see its teeth when it hit us. I could see its tongue . . .” (27). As he speaks, Stubbs turns to face the audience, perhaps symbolizing its own culpability in his trauma as he reveals, “There was a face on the nose of the missile. They’d painted a face. You could see it coming. A lizard with smiling teeth. We couldn’t resist its embrace” (27). Stubbs describes a U.S. missile which American troops, trying to be clever, has painted with a comic-grotesque design. This same shell, misguided, wounded Stubbs and, apparently, killed or wounded other American soldiers who are with him. Shepard’s indictment of the U.S. military action in the Persian Gulf, then, involves not a memory of atrocities committed against the Iraqi soldiers or civilians (though Shepard certainly might have used this technique), but rather involves a memory of a “friendly fire” accident, the kind which is all too common during this particular war. The very country Stubbs is fighting for (in patriotic parlance) is the country that wounded him physically and “killed” him metaphorically.

Likewise, the same father for whom Stubbs ostensibly went to war (to make his father proud and to wrest from him some grudging respect) is the same father who “killed” him by denying him. The concept of “friendly fire” could be read as analogous to the violence and betrayal which characterize the American gothic family: the family members, which ought to evince mutual trust and emotional support, instead attack one another (either physically or emotionally). Because the Colonel has denied him, Stubbs’s psyche has become ruptured, as we see when he refers to himself in the third person and when he attempts to reconcile his

previously mythical ideals about country and family with the harsh truths that he has learned in the war. Stubbs refers to himself in the third person, reinforcing the idea that this trauma has split his personality in two, making one personality a type of *doppelgänger* for the other.

He tells the Colonel:

Your son. I remember him running. Crazy. Running toward the beach.

Throwing his rifle in the green sea. Throwing his arms to the sky . . .

Screaming. I remember his eyes . . . Carrying him on my back . . . He

kept speaking your name in my ear. Whispering it. Chanting your name

like a prayer. Calling to you as though you might appear out of nowhere

[and] sweep him up in your arms and take him safely back home. (32)

Just as when Stubbs described standing back to back with the Colonel's son, here he describes carrying the son on his back. Stubbs's words serve to further misdirect or confound the gothic mystery by referring to himself and the Colonel's son as two separate people. The audience must remember that Stubbs is a victim of trauma and, as such, he speaks in riddles, using defense mechanisms (namely the notion of a split personality or *doppelgänger*) which he has created in order to cope with his trauma.

Furthermore, Stubbs's trauma is two-fold: because he suffers both a physical wound and his psychological wound as a result of his father's denial of him, perhaps Stubbs's split personality is a response to this two-fold (dual) trauma. The Colonel's denial of him has clearly traumatized Stubbs at least as much as the physical wound itself. Stubbs tells the Colonel, "The moment you invented my death. "That moment has lasted all my life" (33). In response to this, the Colonel replies with an emotional frigidity that rivals even that "If you think you're breaking my heart,

you're sadly mistaken. I can easily do without. It's a question of training, repetition and practice" (33). The Colonel's allusion to "training" implies that his lack of compassion and paternal care was the necessary result of his military service, and we must remember that in Shepard's gothic family plays, the fallen father is nearly always a military veteran. During this exchange, Stubbs's repressed memories rise to the surface of his consciousness, culminating with his most passionate accusation against his father:

I remember—the part that's coming back—is this. Your face. Your face leaning over my face . . . Your bald face of denial. Peering down from a distance. Bombing me . . . You had my name changed! YOU INVENTED MY DEATH! (37)

This return of Stubbs's repressed memories is accompanied by (and symbolized through) Stubbs physically rising, first to his knees and finally to his feet. Moreover, his phallic power returns as he regains an erection following a tryst of rolling about on the floor with Glory Bee. The return of Stubbs's phallic power is an important symbol of his recovered identity, his refusal to allow him to be killed and buried by the Colonel's denials and fabrications. Early in the play Stubbs had announced his impotency in a pitiful cry of shame and anguish: "MY THING HANGS LIKE DEAD MEAT!" (11). At one point, the Colonel replies to this declaration by telling Stubbs, "No son of mine has a 'thing' like that. It's not possible" (29).

The play contains many references to phallic power, and not all of these references involve dialogue. At one point late in the play, the White Man masturbates himself to orgasm while the Colonel viciously beats Stubbs with a belt. In this scene, the White Man's phallic pleasure contrasts to Stubbs's impotency, an

impotency which allows the Colonel to dominate him. As the play nears its conclusion, Shepard (characteristically) presents a role reversal whereby the Colonel's phallic power begins to wane. This is symbolized when the Colonel removes his saber from his belt (in order to whip Stubbs) and, later, forgets where he put the sword. This realization (that he has lost his phallic symbol) signals the onset of the Colonel's panic about getting back to the hospital before the curfew, and this realization also signals the onset of role reversal and power exchange between the fallen father and haunted son. This reversal and exchange are swiftly concluded during the play's closing moments. This reversal is a visible and physical manifestation of the gothic return of the repressed—indeed, the reversal is possible only because Stubbs's traumatic memories have broken through the Colonel's fabrication, and Stubbs is strengthened and resurrected (metaphorically speaking) through this return of the repressed. The Colonel seats himself in Stubbs's vacant wheelchair and quips, perhaps in a subconscious pun, "Looks like we've finally hit our crossroads here" (33).

Indeed, from this moment the Colonel and Stubbs have crossed roles. As the Colonel wheels himself, Stubbs rolls on the floor with Glory Bee and announces that his phallic potency has returned: "My thing is arising! I can feel it!" (36). Following this announcement, Stubbs rises to his feet and stands behind the Colonel, who is still seated in the wheelchair. As Stubbs approaches the back of the wheelchair, the Colonel faces the readers and speaks in rambling, fragmented speech: "Put your back against me, Stubbs, so I can feel you. Press your spine into my spine. Give me the impression that you're with me to the bitter end . . . I'll take you back. I promise you" (38). As the Colonel senses danger, he panics. For all his talk about being a strong, independent man who needs no one, the Colonel is finally



frightened, much as Stubbs must have been frightened during and after his wounding in battle. This shows that the role reversal is nearly complete. All that is left is the final power exchange. When Stubbs, now standing, grabs the Colonel from behind and begins choking him, he has obviously subverted or usurped his father's power. The Colonel seems oblivious to this throttling, however: he offers to buy Stubbs "two desserts" if Stubbs is "very good" (39). In choking the Colonel, Stubbs seems intent more on getting his father to acknowledge him than on killing him. But when the choking fails to prompt the Colonel to acknowledge him as his son, Stubbs snatches the Colonel's sword (phallic power) and readies himself to decapitate his father. But the death blow never comes: Stubbs "freezes in that posture" and declares, "GOD BLESS THE ENEMY!" while the White Man and Glory Bee break into a chorus of "Goodnight Irene" as the curtain closes (39).

The ending of *States of Shock* thus resembles the one character suddenly choking the other, and both plays show a violent act that is "frozen" in time but never completed. The significance of the song "Goodnight Irene" perhaps lies in the song's chorus which says, "I'll see you in my dreams." The Colonel has certainly "dreamed" up an explanation for his son's mutilation and impotence by pretending that his son was killed in the war.

So, Shepard pictures out the traumatic vision in the novel through the vivid portrayal of war wounded hero, contemporary disillusioned post Persian Gulf War society. Not only this, but also presents the traumatic world view with the behaviors of characters and their living in severe suffering. Character's rootless frustrated, depressed and anxious condition vividly picturize the traumatic vision in the play.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

The study shows the historical trauma caused mainly by the imperialist dominance. *States of Shock* as a political play vividly unmasks the traumatic vision of Shepard's dismay over the 1991 Persian Gulf War and then also unfolds the devastated, destructive and disillusioned contemporary world view. This research pictures out the traumatic vision through the means of war wounded hero, Colonel, and his son, Stubbs, and exploring the mystery of the father-son gothic relationship that is especially significant. Both father and son i.e. Colonel and Stubbs are haunted by the terrible war memories which are reflected in the restaurants. Round the whole play, the characters are motivated by the shady, bitter and horrible past memories which not only block their attempt to forget it but also haunt their present sound livelihood. In fact, here in the play, physical and psychological sufferings of the characters are deteriorated due to the emasculated paralyzed and traumatic experience of the Persian Gulf War. So in this regard, traumatic experiences are extended when they try to escape from sufferings. Haunting of the past to the present becomes traumatic when characters fail to meet success in life. As the characters are beset with traumatic vision of Persian Gulf War and contemporary devastated world view, they are unable to maintain psychological equilibrium.

Trauma is defined as a severe emotional shock having a deep effect upon the personality, characters authentic, beautiful and decorated life ruined by this emotional shock and other war effects. Stubbs, seriously injured in battle now seems a mocking reminder of their futility and inefficacy. Father, Colonel, has certainly dreamed up an explanation for his son's mutilation and impotence by pretending that his son was killed in the war.

In the play, we have the reverse: the fallen father has tried to escape the truth about his son by inventing a lie of the mind. But the truth, as usual, returns to shatter the lie. Midway through the play, Stubbs tells the Colonel, “You’ll never erase me completely” (30). These statements allude to the essence of gothic in Shepard’s family plays—the past can never be erased or escaped completely which their traumatic condition tremendously visualize the traumatic vision in the play. Theirs wounded life, in search of spiritual remedy and escape from traumatic anxiety but the tranquility of haunting image of war experiences leaves them in pain, sorrow, depression and at last anxiety. Their expectation of decorated and beautiful life is ceased by not only false American standard but also continuous traumatic haunting.

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