

## I. INTRODUCTION: MYTH, THE LATENT PATTERN OF THE PLAY

The present research study is an attempt to analyze the Sam Shepard's masterpiece *Buried Child* (1978) from mythical perspective. The play presents sexual perversion, degeneration, incest, murder, deceit and disharmony. The mythical characters, events and persons become the underlying pattern to show such issues. The story deals with the passing of the family from Dodge representing the older generation to Vince, his grandson. The entire drama is a mythical story of a family curse.

The present study concentrates on the myths particularly the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Myth of the Holy Grail that Shepard has employed to form the underlying structure of the play *Buried Child*. The aim of exploitation of these myths is to show the potentiality of regeneration in degenerative contemporary American Society. Moreover, Shepard aims at how repressed violence and strangling behaviours pass down to the latest generation.

Shepard's plays are not easy to categorize but, in general they blend images of the Old West, fascination with pop culture - rock and roll, drugs and television, and bizarre family life. Moreover, his plays express a sense of loss, nostalgia for the original rural world and the national myths, destroyed by pragmatism, money and power. Shepard has repeatedly examined the moral anomie and spiritual starvation that label the world of his drama. Furthermore, his plays primarily deal with a social order in conflict; be it with emerging counterculture, or its own mythic and idealized past. But beneath this conflict often lies a more archetypal struggle, that between fathers and sons and brothers. The themes of incest, murder, deceit, disharmony, death and rebirth have been exploited in his play *Buried Child*, too, through different means such as myths especially fertility myths connected to sterility and regeneration.

At first glance, the play *Buried Child* is beguilingly ordinary that is because the simple interior is dominated by an old sofa and a television set. Even Vince's girlfriend Shelly finds the house as a "Norman Rockwell" (Jacobus 1207) painting - a stereotypical American house, when she visits the house for the first time. However, beginning with the ordinariness of the setting, the ordinariness of Tilden's walking in with armful of corn, and Dodge's wracking cough, Shepard builds a portrait of an extraordinary family.

Dodge's one-track alcoholic mind and Halie's nagging behaviour seem normal. Even Tilden's distant relationship with his father seems close to ordinary. But when Vince-once buried and Shelly, his girlfriend, walk in and Vince identifies himself first to his grandfather and then to his father - whom he does not expect to find, one begins to see that something is odd and that the situation is anything, but ordinary. He is not recognized neither by his grandfather nor father. Eventually, as we watch, Shepard explores the family relationships, one begins to sense that the surface ordinariness hides a deeper structure one that is built on myth.

The Pulitzer Prize-Winning play *Buried Child* is one of a trio of plays on the theme of family discord that also incorporated *Curse of the Starving Class* and *True West*. The play includes the recurring theme that is tension between fathers and sons and brothers. This domestic play is a macabre look at an American Midwestern family with a dark, terrible secret: years ago, Tilden, the eldest of three sons belonging to Dodge and Halie, committed an act of incest with his mother. She bore his child, a baby boy named Vince which Dodge, the family patriarch, drowned and buried in the field behind their farmhouse. Throughout the play it is assumed, but never made explicitly clear, that Tilden committed incest with his mother Halie and producing the buried child.

The act of infanticide destroyed the family. Dodge stopped planting crops in his field and took to drinking, smoking and watching television, slowly decomposing and never moving from the family's lumpy old sofa. Halie, wife of Dodge, apparently seeking salvation, turned to religion with fervor. She spouts Christian platitudes and cavorts with the hypocritical Father Dewis, a protestant minister. Tilden became, as the stage directions state, profoundly "burnt out" (Jacobus 1201) perhaps caused by guilt and grief and spent his mysterious time in jail in New Mexico. He has only recently returned to the farmstead, perhaps to set everything right. The secret is drawn out into the light of day, and the family curse apparently lifted with the arrival of Vince, Tilden's estranged son and his girlfriend, Shelly.

Sam Shepard, one of the most prolific contemporary American playwrights, was born in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, U.K. on 5th November 1943 as Samuel Shepard Rogers VII. His account of the career as a literary writer began with the publication of his first plays *Cowboys*, and *The Rock Garden* premiered at the Theater Genesis in 1964. Both these plays can be ranked as father-son plays in which sons attempt to extricate themselves both physically and psycho-spiritually from their father or father surrogate. The sons succeed in breaking free by defeating the father via a competition of some sort.

Shepard's works of the Mid-1970s showed a heightening of earlier techniques and themes. His *Angle City* (1976) and *Sucide in B-flat* (1976) only made it more obvious that his plays were progressing in a consistent vein of black humour and dark criticism of the sanctity of family life. They also exploit the potentials of music as an expression of character.

From the late 1970s, Shepard applied his unconventional dramatic vision to more conventional dramatic form, the family tragedy. *Curse of the Starving Class*

(1977), the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Buried Child* (1978) and *True West* (1980) are linked thematically in their examination of troubled and tempestuous blood relationship in a fragmented society. Both *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* helped in solidification of Shepard's reputation. Both these plays deal with the theme of family discord. The discord between husband and wife, father and son, and the like. Both these plays depict degenerated family life caused by some secrets such as incest, murder, deceit, sin etc. Both these plays can be ranked as domestic plays in which the sons fail in their attempts at autonomy, and instead fall prey to the same hereditary curses which befell their fathers. Similarly, the *True West* (1980) deals with the curse of ancestry. All the characters have tried very hard to escape the influence of the family but their attempts have failed. Even they can not create their own identities in relation to the identity formed for them in the family. It indicates that they are incapable of dealing with life in the regular world.

Published after five years of *True West*, *A Lie of the Mind* utilizes elements from many of Shepard's earlier father - son plays. Shepard, in this play, creates a drama where the protagonist befalls victim to a father's curse and destroys him. What distinguishes this, Shepard's most hopeful work, from his earlier ones, is that the son suffers for what he has done, as a result is spiritually transformed. Initially violent and self-deceiving, he emerges from the play gentle and contrite, having transcended his father's curse. *A Fool of Love* (1983) too deals with disturbed family life which is filled with secrets: incest, murder and sin. Specially incest-or potential incest- is also a theme of this play. The play is set in the West and contains all the themes for which his work is known.

My fundamental focus in this research will be on the mythical aspects of the play especially the fertility myths i.e. the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the

Myth of Holy Grail. In doing so, the study will give special attention to compare and contrast the main characters and events of the play with the constant characters and events of these two fertility myths. The research study is limited only to evaluate the play through the means of these two myths. The research will not cover the performatory aspects such as stage setting, use of music and light, etc; and socio-economic aspects of the play.

This research work has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter basically presents an introductory outline of the study. It incorporates the explanation of the hypothesis in terms of how myth is the underlying pattern of the play. It also provides a brief introduction to the writer and his works.

The second chapter is meant to develop theoretical modality that is to be applied in this research paper. It provides a short introduction to mythical study and develops critical tools by drawing ideas from the study of myth. This part of work also deals with Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Myth of Holy Grail which will be the critical approaches to study the play.

The third chapter of the research is an analysis of the text at a considerable length on the basis of the second chapter. It will sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study. Before doing it, this chapter provides the story of the play in brief. This chapter will serve as the core of this work.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the entire study. On the basis of the analysis of the text done in chapter three, it will conclude the explanations and arguments put forward in preceding chapters and show that myth forms the underlying structure of the play.

## II. MYTH AS UNDERLYING MODALITY

As this thesis concentrates on fertility myths i.e. Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Myth of the Holy Grail, it is relevant to discuss the origin of myth, its functions and its relation to literature in this context.

Myth, a traditional story, is based on fantasy transmitted orally over generations and ages representing certain cultural, religious pattern or system. It is the primitive science of exploration and codes of conduct. Myth, a story which is not true, but supposed to be serious story, reflects a society's spiritual foundations. That is why it is always concerned with creation and explains how culture, arts, civilization, philosophy came to exist. Myth, a symbol of human experience, embodies a form faith or belief in the cosmic view, is preserved by every culture tenaciously. Myth embodies feelings and concept with explanation of the natural order and cosmic forces.

Mythical stories are mostly concerned with god, angels, demons or other supernatural elements. Significantly, interference of heavenly spirits on human action holds important role in myth. Precisely, myth, traditionally accepted belief, is related to genesis of anything, for instance, the universe, earth, man or other things. Hence, it is obvious that gods, angels, and demons are seminal characters in myth. Though human beings may be characters, they are always led by spiritual or supernatural drives. The origin of myth goes back to historical past. It is believed that mythical stories are the outcome of anonymous origin, accepted by primitive people as truth concerning supernatural being and events, or natural beings and events influenced by supernatural agencies. Myths are born but not made. They are born in the infancy of a people. They owe their fathers not to any historical individual, but to the imaginative efforts of generations of story tellers.

Mythology has tended to grow into theology and myths tend to be viewed as the essence of religion. Myths are taken as conceived from a genuine religious experience. Theology is sacred experience that provides myths with their structure and converts them into beliefs. Myth, a story made or invented which might be true for particular cultural group or society, makes codes of behaviour for the betterment of the society. Myth, a pure fancy and the product of a race, is highly endowed with imagination and in artistic sense, made them see beauty even in things which may be otherwise taken as ugly and inclined to express their thoughts in the form of stories. Myth is not historical account rather a tale or saga of super human will but this fact does not minimize its importance and place in human life and culture. Though myth often emerges out of imagination and invention, myth often a dominant race is the development of our rules.

Similarly, it is believed that mythical stories are not made; they are rather born. They can not be ordered, invented or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of human psyche. It is interesting that mythical stories are demonstrated through unique rituals and rites that have been performed or reported from the primitive tribes and great civilization of the past. For example, Greek people would dance around the "altar" celebrating the joy on the name of Zeus. Broadly speaking myths tell of the certain man, of animals, and of landmarks. Furthermore, they tell why a particular animal has a certain characteristics (eg. why the bat is blind or flies only at night) how and why rituals and ceremonies began and why they continue. It does not mean that each and every origin story is myth but it must have a religious backgrounds. Precisely speaking its principal actors and actresses are deities.

Myth holds seminal differences from other literary aspects like folktale, legend and fable. The prominent difference between myth and folktale is that the gods

and semi-gods do not appear in folktale. So it is clear that a myth remains properly a myth only as long as the divinity of its actors or actresses is recognized. When a trickster becomes human rather than divine, when a hero is a man rather than a god, myth becomes legend. In other terms, the celebration of human heroism instead of god or spirit is the typical feature of the legend. Gautam Buddha, for instance, is a legendary figure in the Orient.

In the same way, fable holds remarkable distinction from myth. It is in the sense that fable, a story of animal with the motive of instruction, uses animal tale not to explain characteristics or behaviours of animals but to inculcate moral lesson for human beings or to satirize the conduct of human beings.

After the turn of the 19th century, various approaches emerged to interpret the myth. Psychology is one of them. Psychologically speaking, there is externalization of what happens in the human psyche. Psychology further interprets myth being closely related to biological science. Obviously, psychology reflects the unconscious desires and anxieties of individual. Sigmund Freud, one of the prominent psychoanalytical critics, has pointed out many parallels between myths and symbols by expressing the unacknowledged static physical attitudes. He has coined terms like 'Electra Complex' and 'Oedipus Complex'. The term 'Electra Complex' refers to daughter's erotic attachment for her father with co-existing jealousy of the mother. Similarly, the term 'Oedipus Complex' represents the sexual attachment of son for his mother, which is hidden and expressed in various other ways.

C.G. Jung in his *Man and His Symbols* elaborates Freud's ideas and says "that the mythical characters are the symbols of hopes, wishes, passions; not only that but they are historical individuals, too" (87). The mythical stories of Greece end in tragedy because of the realization of extreme wishes. Narcissus, Oedipus and Trojan



War can be taken as proofs for this. They deal with human problems as love, war, pain, courage, tyranny, fate, man to man relation and man to divine, which are sometimes just and sometimes cruel.

One of the remarkable approaches is archetypal which has been prominent aspect of interpreting myths. This sort of perspective has been developed by some anthropologists such as J.G. Frazer, Carl G. Jung, Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell. They share certain commonality that is archetype despite the fact that they slightly differ from each other. The term archetype denotes recurrent narrative designs, characters types, patterns of action or images which are said to be identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature as well as in myth, dream and even ritualized modes of social behaviours.

According to C.G. Jung, archetype motifs are part of collective unconscious. To state simply, archetypes are universal symbols and these symbols manifest themselves through the unconscious mind in myth, dream, and folklore. In other words, myths are the means by which archetypes, essentially unconscious forms become manifest and articulate themselves within the sphere of conscious mind. Jung further indicates that dreams are "personalized myths" and myths are "depersonalized dreams". Myths are by nature collective or communal. They bind a tribe or a nation together in common and psychological and spiritual activities. It is dynamic factors everywhere in human society. It transcends time uniting the past with the present and reaching toward the future. C.G. Jung in his *Collective Unconscious* conceives the psychological factors in the evolution of new society and says, "The union of conscious and unconscious changes new situation and new conscious attitudes I have therefore called the union of the opposite the transcendent function" (289).

Myths and rituals are necessary in society. Myth exists at the conceptual level and ritual exists at the level of action. Complementing each other myth and ritual function as responses to men's need for action. When such rituals are performed as social ceremonies, they make possible for individuals to identify with certain culture. The contradictory customs of rituals in different society as viewed by Kirk in his *Myth: Its Meaning and Function* is as follows:

The contradictory customs and beliefs or even neighbouring groups or cultures have been dramatically explored from the Pueblo culture of American Southwest were utterly different in their Indian neighbouring of Mexico, California and plains who indulged in crude sexual imagery, violent ritual and brutal self-torture. (28)

Joseph Campbell describes myth as a manifestation of the universal human need to explain reality. In his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he compares the myths of various cultures and concludes that they are the parts of same basic structure called monomyth, which consists of a uniform structural pattern.

There's a certain type of myth which one might call the vision quest going in quest of a boon, a vision which has the same form in every mythology . . . All these different mythologies give us the same essential quest. (128-129)

He examines religion as a myth in his *The Masks of God*, a text in which he claims that all myths have the same message. He opines that "stories people tell tend to have beginning, middle and ending parts, and a protagonist who does interesting things are monomyths. They involve the hero whose role consists of three parts; departure, fulfillment and return" (57). This was the only universal connection they saw

throughout literature. Other critics point out that one can manipulate, edit, and ignore parts of stories to end up with message.

As a as the functions of myth are concerned, it is very necessary to preserve culture for the continuity of human civilization so it is revalued in society. This continuity gives birth to new idea and develops new concept and new mode of thinking. Myth also provides a pattern, a way of controlling and ordering and giving shape to what is shapeless and chaotic.

Different critics have seen the functions of myth from different angles. Some critics examine myths in relation to literature. Some others have approached myth with relation to social ground and culture. The myth critics wish to discover how certain works of literature become "classics". Myth provides structural pattern in relation to both levels of narrative and meaning. As it is already stated that myth functions in literature, in addition to this, myth deals in social function because it develops in society. Viewing the social function of myth as the evolution of the cultural connotation, Cassier in *Language and Myth* assesses:

... it is evident that myth and language plays similar roles in the evolution of thought from momentary experience to enduring conception from sense impression to formulation and their respective functions are mutually conditioned. (43)

It is clearly viewed that function of myth is to interpret the position of mythical significance of cultural values. These values of culture differ and transform through time to give birth to new values. From this perspective, it can be argued that myth is a kind of story invented or made from time to time and every existing culture provides subject matter to it. There is no doubt that the plain narratives determine many aspects of myths. The linear sequence of the ideas and beliefs are presented in

almost all kind of myth, which provides the system for human practice. Myths, are not merely a guide to culture, they too point to the generation power underlying human life, a power that from time to time oversteps cultural limits. The fundamental operation of logic of myth is the resolution of contradictions. Kirk points out myth and explains that " all myths in all cultures have similar function namely to mediate contradictions" (Kirk 7).

As we have already stated that myth plays important role in social surroundings to preserve its meaningfulness. In this sense, myth always represents the form of cultural background, as it exists in society. Myths are told and retold to preserve the meaningfulness and purposefulness of social and moral role. Myth functions to reconcile the waking consciousness and interpretation of the total images as known to the contemporary consciousness. The primary function of myth is narrative and explanatory. To give continuity in nature, society and culture, myths play vital and necessary role. Northrope Frye in his *Anatomy of criticism* opines:

Traditions, political causes, esthetics, radicals, all these cultures are treated as a human production power which in the past has been like other productive powers, exploited by other ruling classes and in now to be revalued in terms of a better society. (346)

The study of myth is worthless without an examination of its connection with literature. While literature is the most effective medium for the expression of myth, literary forms are often grounded on mythologies. Frye says that, "Literary shape can not come from life, rather it comes only form literary tradition, and so ultimately from myth" (Frye 33). With brilliant audacity Frye identifies myth with literature, asserting that myth is a "structural organizing principle of the literary form" (Frye 341).

Mythology is inevitably an inherent necessity of language and myth is the power exercised by language as thought in every possible sphere of mental activity. In this sense, language produces literature while it is also the medium for the expression of myth. and literature is very need of human for the continuum of life. The lending archetypal critic Frye's vision in this sense is quotable, "The archetypal view of literature shows us literature as a total form and literary experience as a part of continuum of life in which one of the poets fiction is to visualize the goals of human works" (Frye 15).

Frye further says, "there are basically two structural processes in mythological perspective. One is cyclic structural process and the other is dialectical structural process" (Frye 29). The cyclic structural process consists of a movement from order to chaos and back to order. Regarding this, Frye's view is quotable here again, "Myth seizes on the fundamental element of design offered nature the cycle ... as daily in the sun and yearly in the seasons and assimilates it to the human cycle of life, death and rebirth" (Frye 32). Thus, mythical structure is the manifestation of the cyclical structure of nature where literary structure echoes to both cosmic and dialectical structure.

Myth provides special concepts and patterns to interpret work of literatures for various types of critical studies. Thematic study of literature is concerned with interpreting a work of literary in terms of its meaning; the formal study is concerned with interpreting it in terms of technique, style, language, and similar matters. Structural study, is on the other hand not concerned with the interpreting the work of literature as thematic and formal study, but is concerned to analyze the structural patterns that are presented in the work. Structural study of literature is not concerned with the interpreting content of the works which are continually changing; rather it is concerned with the unchanging elements or structures. These "unchanging structures"

are what we mean by structural patterns in work of literature, patterns that are manifestation of the archetypal form in the mind. When these patterns of images manifest in the work of literature, they assume the form structural patterns which then become the object of analysis.

Most myths have vegetation and quest motives significant as patterns to understand the cultural behaviour. In the context of play, these two elements are relevant to bring forth the underlying pattern of the play.

Myth, a traditional plot, transmitted orally from one generation to another, provides pattern, a way of controlling and ordering and giving shape to what is shapeless and chaotic, to literary works. In this context, two fertility myths-the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Legend of the Holy Grail-form the sub-text of the *Buried Child*. Sam Shepard exploits these two related myths that devolve from ancient fertility rituals, both focusing on the pattern of death and rebirth. The first derives from James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* and the second one from Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval* or the *Story of the Grail*.

Myths, creation of primitive people, interpret the cyclic events of nature. They explain the cycle of nature in relation to different vegetation gods. Due to interrelation - ship between the nature and the gods, the worship of gods took place in different societies in the form of rituals and ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies were observed to bring regeneration and productivity in vegetation and animals. All primitive nature-myths follow a common pattern-death, rebirth and death. This recurrent pattern centers round the cyclic, seasonal change in nature. Thus, winter is the death of the year, it is followed by rebirth in the spring when there are stirrings of life in all nature once again. This process was reenacted in a number of vegetation rituals and ceremonies.

Adonis, Attis, Osiris and Tammuz were the major vegetation gods. All rituals and ceremonies related to these gods were observed to bring regeneration in nature. In this context, James G. Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough* explains:

Under the name of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis and Attis, the people of Egypt and Western Asia represented the early decay and revival of life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. In name and detail they varied from place to place: in substance they were the same. (378)

Thus, in Egypt the effigy of the vegetation god, Osiris, was stuck with corn grains and was buried in the earth. This symbolized the death of the vegetation god. Very soon the grains sprouted, symbolizing the rebirth of the god. This recurrent pattern has been taken over in the Christian myth, in the birth of Christ, his crucifixion, and his resurrection.

The recurrent pattern of birth, death and rebirth in different Vegetation Myths is exploited in different literary genres by great literary figures like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Sam Shepard etc. But they did some modification in forms and patterns to prevent regeneration in nature. The position of vegetation gods is occupied by Corn-Kings later on.

As far as the Vegetation Myth of the Corn King is concerned, the Corn King's health guarantees the wellbeing of the tribe and the fecundity of the land. When he grows old and feeble, the crops die and the land becomes moribund. Before this event, he must be ritually put to death so that the King's spirit may be transmitted to younger and more effective successor. In this connection, James G. Frazer explains:

. . . that the King's life or spirit is so sympathetically bound up with the prosperity of the whole country, that if he fell ill, or grew senile, the

cattle would sicken and cease to multiply, the crops would rot in the fields, and men would perish of widespread disease. (313)

Furthermore, Frazer states:

... the only way of averting these calamities is to put the king to death while he is still hale and hearty, in order that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors may be transmitted in turn by him to his successor while it is still in full vigour and has not yet been impaired by the weakness of disease and old age. (313)

The central motive with Frazer deals is the archetype of crucifixion and resurrection, specially the myths describing the "Killing of the Divine King" (308). Among many primitive peoples it was believed that the ruler was a divine or semi-divine being whose life was identified with the life cycle in nature and in human existence. Because of this identification, the safety of the people and even of the world was felt to depend upon the life of the god-king. A vigorous, healthy ruler would ensure natural and human productivity; on the other hand, a sick or maimed king would bring blight and disease to the land and its people.

To sum up, the recurrent patterns (elements) of the Vegetation Myth of the Corn King are: the barren land, the maimed king, vigorous healthy successor, and regeneration of the land. The present researcher mainly evaluates these elements in the text to prove the hypothesis in the third chapter.

The Grail, also called Holy Grail, is an object of legendary quest for the knights of Arthurian Romance. The term 'Grail' evidently denotes a wide-mouthed or shallow vessel though its precise etymology remains uncertain. It is accepted as a sacred vessel of the twelfth century, made of purest gold and adorned with exceedingly precious stones. The Grail is also regarded as a chalice, a large cup for



holding wine especially one from which wine is drunk in the Christian communion service.

The Holy Grail legend is a Medieval legend associated with the adventures of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. It was the wine glass in which Jesus and his disciples drank during the Last Supper, in which the blood of the savior was collected when he was crucified. The original Grail disappeared mysteriously. It was generally believed that it could be seen only by a knight of virginal purity. In this context, defining Grail, *Encyclopedia Britannica* published by Helen Hemingway Benton, states:

Robert do Borron's poem recounted the Grail's early history, linking it with the cup used by Christ at the "Last Supper" and afterward by Joseph of Arimathe to catch the blood flowing from Christ's wounds as he hung upon the cross. The Quested del Saint Grail went on to create a new hero, the pure knight Sir Galahad, while the quest of Grail itself became a search for mystical union with God. Only Galahad could look directly into the Grail and behold the divine mysteries that can not be described by human tongue. (315)

Thus, the Grail refers to self-knowledge and self-integration. For some Medieval mystics, it may refer to the whole psychic man as well as to the quest for mystical union with God.

Similarly, the Grail is many things at the same times. On the terrestrial level, it could be a stock, a family. Besides, the grail is an experience, an illumination. The Grail is not at all a fantastic object, but a means for hiding something of great importance. So emphasis is on the need of secrecy. Because no man can conquer the Grail if he is not known in the heavens and called by the Grail itself. In the same

manner, the Grail, at a certain level, is an initiation experience that can be described as a transformation of conscience, a mystical experience, an illumination.

Chrestion de Troyes was a man who gave Christian significance to such a mysterious holy object in twelfth century. In this connection, he defines the Grail as "a sacred vessel, it was uncovered, it contained a consecrated host, and it was made of purest gold and embellished with costly jewels" (5). His late twelfth century unfinished romance *Perceval, or Le Conte de Graal*, introduces the guileless rustic Knight Perceval, whose dominant trial is innocence. In it, the religious is combined with the fantastic.

The romance *Perceval* constitutes the prototype and the model of novels on the Grail. Parsifal, the quester, the protagonist of the novel, happened to arrive in a country ruled over by a prince named the Fisher King. It was one of the regions where the Grail worship had been anciently in vogue, and a temple, known as Chepel Perilous, still stood there, broken and dilapidated. It was generally believed that the lost Grail was hidden in this Chapel. At that time, the Fisher King himself had become a physical wreck, maimed and impotent, due to a sin committed by his soldiery in outraging the chastity of a group of nuns attached to the Grail Chepel. The impotency of the Fisher King was reflected sympathetically in the land. It has become dry and moribund, the haunt and home of want and famine. The King, however, was waiting with hope, despite his feebleness, that one day the Knight of the pure soul would visit his star crossed kingdom, march to the Chepel Perilous, answer questions and solve riddles. This would be followed by a ritual washing of his King Fisher's sinful body, which would purge it and renew its health and energy. It was also hoped that this rebirth of the King would be followed by the life-giving rains to the parched land and the thirsty kingdom, which would once more enjoy its earlier fertility.

Sir Thomas Malory, in his book. *The Holy Grail*, providing the reference to Percivale and the Fisher King, states:

Then him beseemed a passing old man, and he had a crown of gold upon his head, and his shoulders were naked and unchilled unto his navel. And then sir Percivale espied his body was full of great wounds, both on shoulders, arms and visages. (137)

Furthermore, Malory explains:

And ever he held up his hands against our Lord's body, and cried. Fair, sweet Father, Jesus Christ, forget me not .... Then this King cried mercy and said; Fair Lord, let me never die till the good knight of my blood of the ninth degree be come, that I may see him openly that shall achieve the sangreal that I may kill. (137)

Thus, from above lines, it becomes obvious that the Wounded Fisher King is waiting the arrival of good knight that may achieve the Grail and heal him and once more the land becomes fertile.

The theme of Holy Grail appeared in many literary writings in different versions. In other version appearing subsequently in Germany and France, however, the searcher or the Quester is Sir Perceival, or Parsifal. The Holy Grail, the cauldron of regeneration of Bran, was originally connected with the fertility myth as it is witnessed by its sexual symbol (cup and lance), symbolizing the female and male respectively.

Apparently, the novels on the Grail recall rites connected to the cycle of seasons, to the death and rebirth of the year, with some reference to more ancient rites connected to Tammuz, Attis, Adonis and Osiris. Also in the Irish mythology, as well

as in the Welse, these are repeated calls to death to rebirth through renewal and to an analogous regenerative process of the earth: sterility and fertility.

To speak in a nutshell, the constant elements of the Myth of Holy Grail are: the Wounded Fisher King, the barren land, the questing Knight who must triumph over great difficulties, and the questions that must be asked in order to heal the King. The present researcher evaluates these elements in the text to prove the hypothesis.

### III. MYTHICAL ELEMENTS IN SHEPARD'S *BURIED CHILD*

The main purpose of this chapter is to make an analysis to see the mythical elements of the two myths in *Buried Child*. The story has dominant mythical structures in relation to above discussed myths (in Chapter II).

The play consists of three Acts including seven characters. The first Act provides the necessary background of the play. It also provides information about the lives of family members. Especially Halie's monologue of this Act functions the role of stage direction providing detail information about the bad relationship between Dodge and Halie, husband and wife. The second Act functions as the rising action of the play in which the conflict between Dodge and Halie, and Vince rises. The conflict focuses on the identification of Vince, in which family members do not recognize him. The third Act of the play provides resolution of the play in which the secret of the family is brought into light.

Dodge, as Shepard reveals, is the patriarch parked for the most part on the sofa, coughing, drinking, complaining and spewing forth the funniest lines. He is sardonic, frustrated curmudgeon, possessed of the kind of repressed violence that makes him commit a murder. He has become a cruel, unfeeling, embittered old man. As an old man, he's powerless and dependent, but he has not lost his voice as he complains "I'm an invisible man" (Jacobus 1201). Halie, wife of Dodge, is no more humane than Dodge. She first appears as an enduring and loving mother; then Shepard changes her role by presenting her as an amorous mistress, who loses her control and moral leadership when she seduces her son Tilden to have incest relation with her, and walks freely with father Dewis, a protestant minister. Her relation with father Dewis represents her passion and insincere religious morality.

Similarly, Tilden, the eldest son of them, a zombie like character, is a former All American football player. He had returned home after having unspecified problems where he was living in New Mexico. Now, he is grubby and inarticulate and spends his time harvesting corn while Dodge insists there's been no corn since 1935. He picks vegetables and seems retarded. In the same manner, Vince, Dodge's grandson, hasn't been home for six years and now finds none of his family recognizing him, his feelings of exclusion as he says "Am I being punished" (Jacobus 1225) and resulting frustration become the catalyst for the ultimate revelation of family secrets. Shelly, Vince's girlfriend, has come with him in his heritage for the first time, regards Vince's house as a Norman Rockwell painting, a stereotypical American house. She gets unbearable shock of rape when Bradley, the amputated son of Dodge, compels her to open her mouth to insert his hand into it. She also acts as a catalyst to reveal the sin committed by Dodge. Bradley, the violent psychotic son with the prosthetic leg, loves to cut Dodge's hair while he sleeps, and frightens Shelly too.

Shepard's play *Buried Child* is about a rural Illinois family sinking into spiritual ruin in the aftermath of a horrifying infanticide. This is a master work that captures all the macabre and imagery that the enigmatic Shepard presents. Filled with excruciating dramatic tension, terror and mystery, Shepard builds the dramatic opening scene where we meet Dodge, a sickly old man squandering his time watching T.V., smoking and drinking. After a long silence, his nagging wife, Halie is off stage doing a monologue that combines comments about her life before marrying Dodge, and a running commentary of the family. Dodge shouts but largely ignores her.

The setting depicts a run-down wooden farm house complete with screen in front porch and a dusty old green sofa that serves dysfunctional family Saga will. *Buried Child* deals with a family torn apart by a dark secret that leads all members of the family to psychologically and physically deteriorate moving into delusional

behaviour. The tension slowly builds as we meet the eldest son, Tilden, a damaged of a man obsessed with past tragedy, who brings corn and seems retarded. He tries to communicate with the nasty, cantankerous Dodge. More tension builds as we wonder what happened to these folks ? We see Halie emerge from her upstairs room in white wig and a stylish black funeral attire. She leaves to meet the reverend, Father Dewis. She is delusional and is obsessed with getting a monument to their son, Ansel, basketball star and a soldier, who died on his honeymoon in a motel while on leave from the army.

Bradley cuts Dodge's hair while he sleeps and you have a mean, hateful clan that puts a new slant on dysfunctional families. We become compelled by a sheer eccentrically weird behaviour that speaks to the father son relationship. The pain and anguish that is eating away at this family hangs in the air. We wonder once more, what happened ?

The arrival of Vince, grandson of Dodge, once drowned and buried, and his girlfriend Shelly, stirs up the family sending them searching for resolution to their long struggle to deal with their guilt. Vince has trouble understanding why no one seems to recognize him. When he agrees to fetch a bottle of whisky for Dodge, Shelly stays and tries to learn the family secret. Her quest turns from curiosity to terror when Bradley violently pins her against a wall and demands that she open her mouth wide so he can stick his fingers into her month.

By morning, Shelly adjusts somewhat to this crazy family but in a startling scene she gets Dodge, to reveal the entire family secret. The secret of the family was that Halie seduced her son, Tilden to have incest relation. Due to this sin, she gave birth to Vince. But Dodge, disliked the act, and drowned and buried the child in the backyard of their house but nobody knew it. Due to this sin committed by Dodge, the family turned into disintegration and the farm to barrenness. After revelation of this secret of the family, when Vince returns drunk, he throws bottle after bottle against

the porch wall in an amazing temper tantrum. All the family members recognize him and accepts as the inheritor of their house. He too vows to revitalize the land. In this way, the play ends with the death of Dodge and the revitalization of the land as it is indicated by the reference of rain, corn, carrots, peas etc from the voice of Halie who had suspected the corn in the beginning of the play.

### **Elements of the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King in the Play**

After the story in brief, the mythical structures can be understood by looking into the text. *Buried Child* employs some of the constant elements of the Vegetation Myth of the Corn King that form the underlying structure of the play. Shepard uses this myth that devolves from ancient fertility rituals focusing on the pattern of death-rebirth. This myth derives from James G. Fraser's *The Golden Bough*. In this myth, the Corn-King's health guarantees the wellbeing of the tribe and the fertility of the land. When he grows old and feeble, the crops die and the land becomes barren. Before this event, therefore, he must be ritually put to death so that the King's spirit may be transmitted to younger and effective hands. Shepard adumbrates this myth in his own way by establishing Dodge as the dying King of his family and his land. Because his power are falling, the land had become barren, but no worthy successor has arrived to take over his responsibility. Into this situation comes Vince, Dodge's grandson. In Act Three, Dodge recognizes Vince as a deserving inheritor and wills him the farm. In a presumed attempt to fulfill his new role, Vince vows to restore the farm. That this ritual process incarnates magical power is signified by the mysterious revitalization of the land. Now, all these elements will be discussed thoroughly by citing the lines from the text.

Dodge, in his seventies, is sick and feeble. He takes pills to minimize coughing. He never moves from his old, dark, green sofa. He always drinks whiskey



and smokes cigarette and watches a large, old-fashioned brown TV from the sofa. His weakness and feebleness as that of the Corn-King is supported by the narrative lines of the play "He's very thin and sickly looking in his late seventies. He stares TV. He starts to cough slowly and softly. The coughing gradually builds" (Jacobus 1195).

Dodge's sickness and old-age is directly responsible to cause the barrenness of the farm. His wellbeing guarantees the productivity of the land. The barrenness of the farm since 1935 is indicated by the suspect of Dodge when Tilden appears with corn: "There hasn't been corn out there since about nineteen thirty five! That's the last time I planted corn out there!" (Jacobus 1199).

In the same way, Halie's suspect about the corn brought by Tilden, too indicates the moribund of the farmhouse "There isn't any corn outside, Tilden ! There's no corn! Now, you must have either stolen this corn or you bought it" (Jacobus 1204).

Both Dodge's and Halie's suspect about the corn brought by Tilden indicates the barrenness of their farm. Hence the farmhouse of Dodge is parallel to the barren land of the Corn-King in Vegetation Myth and Dodge himself as the maimed Corn-King of his family. As Dodge has turned old and sick, the farmhouse has become barren.

Dodge and Halie have three sons: Tilden, the eldest, Bradley, the younger and Ansel, the youngest. Ansel is already dead. Bradley have lost his leg and become physically weak. Tilden who is seduced by his mother Halie, is weak and unable to look after himself due to grief and remorse for the act he had done. Thus, both Bradley and Tilden, as Dodge and Halie think, are unable to take the responsibility of Dodge. They are not healthy successors to inherit the property of Dodge and to uplift the barren land by taking the position of Dodge. Tilden's weakness, it may be physical or mental, can be traced in Halie's voice when she addresses Dodge: "You've gotta

watch out for him. It's our responsibility. He can't look after himself anymore, so we have to do it. We can't just send him away somewhere" (Jacobus 1202).

Similarly, Bradley, having one of his legs wooden, will be unable to take the responsibility of Dodge. His weakness, too can be traced in Halie's voice when she addresses Dodge:

Nobody's going to look after us. Bradley can't look after us. Bradley can hardly look after himself. I was always hoping that Tilden would look out for Bradley. When he got older. After Bradley lost his leg. Tilden's the oldest I always thought he'd be the one to take responsibility. I had no idea in world that Tilden would be so much trouble. (Jacobus 1202)

Thus, both Dodge and Halie have no hope of their sons Tilden and Bradley to take their responsibility. There is a vacuum for their successors. At the very moment there appears Vince, Dodge's grandson. For the first time after six years of long period, Vince with his girlfriend, Shelly, arrives there in his way to Mexico to meet his father, Tilden. But he happens to meet Tilden there where he had not expected. In such situation, nobody recognizes him rather Dodge states "He's not my flesh and blood ! my flesh and blood's buried in the backyard" (Jacobus 1204).

Though Vince would be Dodge's effective successor, but not Tilden and Bradley, he rejects to recognize him in the beginning. Vince calls him grandpa but Dodge becomes furious and states "stop calling me Grandpa will ya! It's sickening. "Grandpa". I'm nobody's Grandpa!" (Jacobus 1210).

Dodge's rejection to identify him builds the conflict that leads to reveal the secret act of family. When the conflict is at the climax, Vince happens to go to liquor store to bring whisky for Dodge. In absence of him, Tilden in his conversation with

Shelly, states " I thought I recognized him. I thought I recognized some thing about him" (Jacobus 1214). Hence, Tilden to some extent, recognizes his son but not Dodge and Halie. Tilden becomes able to recognize Vince by observing his childhood behaviours that he used to bend his thumb behind his Knuckles. Moreover, he used to curl his lips back and start drumming on his teeth with fingernails making little tapping sounds. After that Tilden reveals the secret act of Dodge to Shelly. He says. "We had a baby. (Motioning to Dodge). He did. Dodge did. Could pick it up with one hand. Put it is the other. Little baby. Dodge killed it. Dodge drowned it" (Jacobus 1215).

The aforementioned quote vividly indicates that Dodge has killed the baby, drowned and buried it in his farm behind the house like treasure. He never told about it to anyone even to Halie. The baby disappeared, cops looked for it, neighbours searched it but they could not find it. Every one has different answers: kidnap, murder, accident. Only Dodge knew but not other members of the family. Bradley tried to force to tell but he didn't. When Tilden reveals the secret act, there is incessant resistance of Dodge. But. due to Shelly's insist on to know the whole truth of the family, Dodge in his dialogue with Shelly explains:

See we were a well-established family once. All the boys were grown. The farm was producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over. Me and Halie here were pointed toward what looked like the middle part of our life. Everything was settled with us. All we had to do was ride it out. Then Halie got pregnant again. Outa' the middle a' nowhere, she got pregnant. We weren't planning on havin' any more boys. We had enough boys already. In fact, we hadn't been sleepin' in the same bed for about six years. (Jacobus 1223)

The above quote explicitly cues that their well-established family encounters degeneration due to Halie's immoral behaviour that she becomes pregnant not of Dodge but of someone else. It is because she becomes pregnant though they have not been sleeping in the same bed for about six years. Moreover, Shepard through Dodge hints the incest between Tilden and Halie:

Halie had this kid. ... I lived, see. I lived. It wanted to grow up in this family. It wanted to be just like us. It wanted to be part of us. It wanted to pretend that I as its father. She wanted me to believe in it. Even everyone around us knew. Everyone. All our boys knew. Tilden knew.  
(Jacobus 1224)

The aforementioned quote explicitly lays emphasis on Tilden. The focus on Tilden cues that he had incest relation with Halie. The baby was not of Dodge but of Tilden. Even Tilden's behaviours with the child too cue that the child belongs to Tilden. In this context, Dodge furthermore, states:

Tilden was the one who know. Better than any of us. He'd walk for miles with that kid in his arms. Halie let him take it. All night sometimes. He'd walk all night out there in the pasture with it. Talkin' to it. Singin' to it. Used to hear him singing to him. He'd make up stories. He's tell that kid all kinds a' stories. Even when he knew it could not understand him. Couldn't understand a word he was sayin'. Never would not him. We couldn't let a thing like that continue. We could not allow that to grow up right in the middle of our lives.  
(Jacobus 1224)

Thus, Sam Shepard through Dodge reveals the sin committed by both Halie and Dodge. Halie's incest with Tilden and Didge's act of murdering of their son

destroyed the family as well as the farm turned to barrenness. Dodge, himself accepts his sin, "I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter. Just drowned it" (Jacobus 1224).

In this way, their farmhouse has turned into barren land due to sin committed by Dodge. There is none to take his responsibility. Dodge becomes unable to recognize Vince when he arrives. Dodge has already revealed his secret act to Shelly when he returns from liquor store. Vince being furious, returns smashing of bottles after bottles on the wall. In his anger, due to rejection by his family members, speaks, "I'm the midnight strangler! I devour whole families in a single gulp" (Jacobus 1225).

His destructive acts and words are parallel to the destructive acts of Dodge, which he inherits from his family ancestors. By watching his destructive activities of Vince, Halie identifies and accepts him as their angel "Vincent was an angel. A guardian angel. He'd watch over us. He'd watch over all of us (Jacobus 1226).

Similarly, Dodge, too recognizes him and accepts as a healthy successor and requests:

Go ahead! Take over the house! Take over the whole goddamn house ?  
 You can have it ! It's yours. It's been a pain in the neck ever since the very first mortgage. I'm gonna die any second now. Any second. You won't even notice. So I'll settle my affairs once and for all. (Jacobus 1226)

Thus, the above quote obviously states that Dodge accepts Vince as his healthy successor and hands over his house to him. His weakness or old age, too is stated that he is going to die any second. It also indicates that Dodge is waiting his healthy successor to handover his property and responsibility. In this situation he

finds Vince. He further proclaims his last will and testament in a ritualistic manner" The house goes to my Grandson, Vincent" (Jacobus 1226).

Vince accepts the property and responsibility of Dodge when he makes a will of it. He further vows to restore the land. In this connection, he states", I just inherited a house. I've gotta carry on the line. I've gotta see to it that things keep rolling" (Jacobus 1226). As soon as Vince vows to restore the land, the narrative lines state that Dodge is dead. Immediately Halie, who had rejected (suspected) the corn brought by Tilden, informs about the rain, corn, carrot, peas etc by calling Dodge:

Dodge? Is that you, Dodge? Tilden was right about the corn, you know. I've never seen such corn. Have you taken a look at it lately ? Tall as a man already. This early in the year. Carrots too. Potatoes. Peas. It's like a paradise out there Dodge. You oughta' take a look. A miracle. I've never seen it like this. May be the rain did something. May be it was the rain. (Jacobus 1227)

The aforementioned quote signifies the revitalization of barren land as it is indicated by the reference of corn, rain, carrot, peas etc. This miraculous revitalization is caused by the rain as it is the symbol of growth and fertility. This revitalization of land indicates that Dodge's spirit is transmitted to younger effective hands of Vince.

From this long discussion, quoting the dramatic lines of the play, we can reach to conclusion that Sam Shepard has employed the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King to form the structure of the play *Buried Child*. The recurrent elements of this myth are parallel to the characters and events of the play. To speak in a nutshell, Dodge is treated as the Corn-King in which he is weak and feeble as that of Corn-King in the myth. Dodge's farmhouse can be taken as the barren land of the Corn-King, in which nothing grows. Similarly, Vince is treated as a healthy successor to take the

responsibility of Dodge as in Vegetation Myth. As there is regeneration on the barren land in myth so is in the play when Vince vows and takes the responsibility to restore the land. The regeneration of the farm in the play is indicated by Halie's expression at the end of the play which I quoted in my discussion. Thus, Shepard employs the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King to form the underlying structure of the play so as to prevent regeneration in nature and to show the potentiality of regeneration in contemporary society.

### **Elements of the Myth of Holy Grail in the Play**

*Buried Child* has the elements of the Myth of the Holy Grail, subverting some of them, to form the structure of the play. As we have already stated that the Myth of the Holy Grail is connected to the fertility and productivity in both nature and human life, there is no explicit reference of integration and productivity in human life but in nature. The productivity in nature may indirectly cue to integration and fertility even in human life. The human world has turned into sterility and degeneration due to inhuman acts like incest, murder etc. In such situation, myth especially fertility myth plays seminal role to indicate the potentiality of regeneration forming myth as the structure of the play. Shepard, on the other hand, subverts some of mythic codes to show how repressed violence and strangling behaviour pass down to the latest generation.

The legend of Holy Grail is Medieval legend associated with the adventures of Arthurian Knights of Round Table. It is connected to the object of quest, regeneration, self knowledge and illumination. Thus, the constant elements of this myth are: the Wounded Fisher King, the barren land, the questing knight who must triumph over great difficulties, and the questions that must be asked in order to heal the king. In *Buried Child*, we have already noted the dying king and the barren land.

Vince becomes the quester who returns home in an unconscious effort to discover a hidden part of himself. As to the difficulties Vince must face, they are two-fold: he must deal with the refusal or inability of his family to recognize him and, even more troubling, he must confront himself in the car's windshield as he is trying to escape from the stress of rejection. With reference to the unasked question, Shepard follows the pattern in that Vince never asks the restorative question of Dodge. In Act two, he, like Percival, is too self-concerned to inquire about others.

To discuss these constant elements of this myth, we should evaluate these elements by taking support from the play. As we have already discussed that the farmhouse of Dodge is barren due to sin committed by him Dodge has killed, drowned and buried a child of Halie and Tilden. This sin committed by Dodge causes the farmhouse barren and nothing grows there. He too becomes sick and feeble and is taking pills. These two elements sick Dodge and barren land are analogous to the Myth of Holy Grail. These element have be discussed in previous pages citing lines from the play, too.

Similarly, Vince can be treated as an errant quester, a prodigal son returned to seek significance, meaning and place in the roots he had once abandoned. Vince's responsibility is to unearth the past, purify it and look toward the future. Vince thus represents a "force of vitality" and plays the role of "the guardian angel of the family" (Jacobus 1226). In this way, Vince is valorized as the chivalric knight who achieves the Grail by renewing the land and himself. To see Vince as a reborn hero in this way means, however, that Shepard accepts the Myth of Perceval and the Grail as valid. On the contrary: whereas Chretien's Perceval, in Good Friday episode, is reborn-transformed from a self-centered into a humble penitent-Vince does not restore himself. He regresses from the well-meaning innocent of Act two to the violent sadist



of Act Three. That is, no inward improvement takes place; he brings to the surface a buried self of which he was unaware—a real demon. So the role of Vince slightly differs from the role of questing knight in the Myth of Holy Grail.

To understand how Vince fails as savior not as that of the questing Knight one must evaluate his emotional responses to the events of the play. At the outset, he appears to be an uncomplicated youngman returning home to reacquaint himself with what he calls his "heritage" (Jacobus 1207). A usual view of him at this stage suggests that he is a prodigal son who is searching for his identity, but no clear evidence in the play indicates that he has wasted his substance in riotous living. Infact, when Dodge, Tilden and Halie fail to recognize him, Vince is astounded: "Have I committed an unpardonable offence" (Jacobus 1213). His only offence consists in developing a personality that the male family members do not recognize. So immature is Vince that he expects his home to remain exactly as he remembers it: simple, comforting, protective. Indeed, by revisiting the scenes of his childhood with Shelly, he has fostered this expectation in her: she anticipates a Norman Rockwell home that is folksy, happy and benign. Since the audience has been exposed to the alienation of the family members in Act one, we know that this view is false. Vince is not even trying to search his identify, unless unconsciously. Consciously, he is on a quest for his father, and beyond that, he merely seeks to recapture his youth. At this stage his initiation into the real world of his family begins. He is rejected.

When Dodge and Tilden fail to recognize Vince, he is by no means ready, simple and naive as he is, to understand why he is puzzled, then frustrated, and finally angry. When he remonstrates, "How is the hell could they not recognize me ! I'm their son!" (Jacobus 1213). And Dodge brutally responds, "You're no son of mine. I've had sons in my time and you're not one of 'em" (Jacobus 1213). Vince finds his roots cut

out from under him. Estranged and alienated, he takes a long look at Dodge, then at Tilden. Not even the father he was searching for knows him. A turning point in his journey home has arrived. "I just gotta put this all together" (Jacobus 1213). Because he had been expelled from the tribe, his identity is now in question. Trying to piece these things together, he embarks on his own form of night-sea journey-in the nocturnal rain, alone, westward toward Iowa, the direction of freedom. Like Tilden and perhaps Ansel before him, he makes a desperate attempt to escape his fate.

Vince's confrontation with himself becomes the testing ground of his initiation into the individuation process. In particular he must meet the demons in his unconscious face to face and, in so doing, end the mystery of his expulsion. In accordance with Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's journey, Vince must enter one of the regions of the unknown which are free fields for the projection of unconscious content areas. Shepard has called these free fields as territories within us that are totally unknown. Huge, mysterious and dangerous territories. The journey begins inauspiciously in panic. He later tells Shelly, "I was gonna ran last night. I was gonna run and keep on running. I drove all night" (Jacobus 1213). The experience comes to a head when he looks at his own reflection: "I could see myself in the windshield. My face. My eyes. I studied my face. Studied everything about it. As through I was looking at another man" (Jacobus 1226). Before returning home, he had thought his roots were to be found in the places of his childhood. Instead, he learns that his identify is partially governed by the phylogenic history of his life:

I could see his whole race behind him. Like a mummy face. I saw him dead and alive at the same time. In the same breath. In the windshield, I watched him breathe ... And then his face changed. His face become his fathers face ... And his father's face changed to him grandfather's

face. And it went on like that. Changing. Clear back to faces I'd never seen before but still recognized. Still recognized the bones underneath. I followed my family clear to Iowa... Then it all dissolved. (Jacobus 1226)

By the time Vince reaches Iowa, the vision has done its work. Now he knows the shadow-like characteristics that he met in Dodge and that he began to feel in himself when he was rejected are bred in the bone. Vince can escape from the house, but not from himself, marked as he is by the imprint of past generations. Shepard raises the question here as to whether, like Perceval, Vince can create a newly integrated self. An epiphany of this sort might well provoke an attempt to achieve a psycho renewal, and according to Carl Jung. It has done so in the past:

The ancestral spirits played an important role in the primitive rites of renewal. The natives of Central Australia even identify themselves with their mythical ancestors. ... The regressive identification with the human and animal ancestors means psychologically an integration of unconscious, actually a both of renewal in the source of life where the individual becomes again a fish, that is unconscious as in sleep, drunkenness, and death. (30)

Vince's dream-vision signifies a journey into his unconscious, which becomes the place of ritualistic death in the initiation. He sees himself as dead and alive, but if his test consists in his submergence into the unconscious (his death) and his return to consciousness (his rebirth), he can complete it successfully only by integrating his newly discovered shadow side. His emotional reactions in Act three makes clear that he is imprisoned by his infantile unconscious.

Forced to return to the home of his ancestors, where his family has cruelly rejected him, he now, in a spirit of revenge, rejects them. After smashing the screen door and "on his stomach on the porch in a drunker stupor" (Jacobus 1224) he shouts, "What is this! Who are you people ?" (Jacobus 1224) He has taken over the family's psychic estate" May be I should come in there and usurp your territory !" (Jacobus 1225). And he does. His drunkenness, the sign of his unconscious condition, persists till the end of the play. Smashing bottle after bottle against the wall, he shows that he can not control his vicious, violent, alienated self. Since we know that these qualities in the person of Dodge, drove him from the house, we can see that he has become. Dodge's double. When Dodge perceives that Vince is now one of the family, he appoints Vince as his natural heir, willing him his house. Not only refusing to recognize the other, but also turning his back on the very qualities of love and sympathy that hold a family together, Vince is locked into the role of Dodge. He hardly gives promise of the revitalization of the American family. But as soon as Dodge dies, Halie, who doubted the existence of the corn calls down at the end of the play: "It's like a paradise out of there Dodge. You ought to take a look. A miracle. I've never seen it like this. May be the rain did something. May be it was the rain" (Jacobus 1227). Thus, it indicates the renewal of barren land indirectly.

Instead, there is no integration in the family. Vince sees himself as destroyer: "I am a murderer ! Don't underestimate me for a minute! I'm the midnight strangler! I devour whole families in a single gulp!" (Jacobus 1224-1225). His inheritance from Dodge as strangler and devourer becomes painfully evident. He simultaneously names his family for what they are and projects his own unconscious, fish like state on to others as beasts from the deep. The whole sequence of Vince's return home, from the child trying to renew family ties to the destroyer of families, signifies his regression to

a primitive state. He identifies himself with the violent cruelty of Dodge by positioning himself on the sofa not only next to his dead grandfather, but also in the same configuration. Rather than being poised on the moment of awakening, Vince has become living death. Unlike Chrétien's tale, *Buried Child* dramatizes no rebirth of the human spirit. What was a scene of familiar bickering between husband and wife in Act one has become by Act three the nightmarish demise of a whole family. But Vince's unconscious as in sleep, drunkenness and death, to some extent, may signify the renewal in his family as in primitive rites of renewal.

Shepard, then, authorizes the mystery of the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King as necessary background against which he unfolds his subverted version of the Myth of the Holy Grail in order to show how repressed violence and strangling behaviour pass down to the latest generation as in Vince from Dodge and Halie. Reaching the Grail of self-integration appears, on the evidence of *Buried Child*, to be beyond human capacity. Shepard dramatizes his sense of a basic American dilemma: we have deep in our unconscious a buried child, we want to act in culturally acceptable ways, yet at times of stress, the infantile urge to violence surfaces and cannot be controlled. If we have seen ourselves in Vince, we will by the end of the play, try to escape sinking sensations of entrapment and alienation, but Shepard is ruthless. We are held by the last image. It is a grotesque speaking picture of separation and dissolution. When Tilden enters carrying the corpse Vince "Keeps staring at the ceiling as though Tilden wasn't there" (Jacobus 1227). Vince, the buried child who has now become one of the living dead, is cut off from all connection with humanity, staring mindlessly into darkening air, oblivious of the passing of life or death. In this way, Shepard in his play *Buried Child* accepts the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King while subverting some of the elements of the Myth of the Holy Grail. While the natural world is renewed in the play, the human is not.

#### IV. CONCLUSION : MYTH AS AN UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

The present research study arrives at the following conclusion, which is drawn in the light of critical analysis done in the preceding chapters.

Sam Shepard, one of the greatest contemporary American playwrights, employs the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Myth of the Holy Grail in his play *Buried Child* to form the underlying structure of the play. On the surface level, the play presents normal/ordinary events like coughing of Dodge, nagging behavior of Halie, arrival of Vince with his girlfriend, Shelly etc. But this surface ordinariness hides the deeper structure in which, the characters and events resemble to the events and characters of the fertility myths.

The two myths, as we have already discussed, are connected with the fertility of land, human beings and animals. The first one, the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King, related to the fecundity of land, indicates the potentiality of regeneration in bizzare land indirectly cues to the hope of regeneration and reintegration even in human life. But the exploitation of this myth in the play signifies the revitalization of the barren farmhouse as well as reintegration in the family of Dodge implicitly.

According to the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King, the King's well being guarantees the well being of the tribe and the productivity of the land. As the King becomes old and sick naturally or due to sin committed by him, the land loses its productivity and crops die and nothing grows. Before the arrival of this situation, the King must be ritually put to death so that the King's spirit may be devolved to younger, effective and healthy successor. When this ritual is performed, the barren land gets revitalized. As we have discussed in Chapter Three, Shepard outlines this myth in his own manner by establishing Dodge, the family patriarch as the dying

King of his family and his land. He treats Dodge as the Corn-King since his powers are falling and the farmhouse has become barren. In such situation, there is no healthy successor to take over the responsibility of Dodge. But Vince, Dodge's grandson, the agent for the miraculous rebirth of land, arrives to fill the heroic vacuum. Because he is the reincarnation of the buried child, the last scene constitutes rebirth ritual, in which Vince becomes resurrected corn-spirit. At first, he is not recognized by any member of the family but in Act three Dodge recognizes Vince as a deserving inheritor and wills him the farm. Vince, in a presumed attempt to fulfill his new role, vows to restore the farm. This ritual process brings magical revitalization of the land as it is indicated by the reference of rain, corn, potatoes, carrots etc which can be taken as the symbols of growth and productivity. Thus, the surface ordinariness hides the underlying structure that is based on the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King.

The second one, the Myth of the Holy Grail, related to the fertility and regeneration, indicates reintegration, self-knowledge and illumination. Moreover, the exploitation of this myth by subverting some of its elements denotes how repressed violence and strangling behaviour pass down to the latest generation as we have discussed in the Third Chapter.

Sam Shepard adumbrates the Myth of Holy Grail in his own way by establishing Dodge as the Wounded Fisher King of his family and his land. He had committed a sin of drowning, killing and burying of his grandson, Vince that caused the farmhouse desert and the family disintegrated. He is waiting the arrival of a questing Knight hopefully. Into this situation comes Vince, once buried, as the questing Knight to heal the King and to bring regeneration in the barren farm and reintegration in the family. Shepard assigns Vince the role of an errant quester, a prodigal son returned to seek significance, meaning and place in the roots he had once

abandoned. His main duty is to uncover the past, purify it and look forward the future. Thus, he represents the force of vitality and the guardian angel of the family. As to the difficulties he must face are to deal with the refusal of his family to recognize, and to confront himself in the car's windshield as he is trying to escape from the stress of rejection.

As far as the question that must be asked in order to heal the Wounded King is concerned, there is no such question. Shepard follows the pattern in that Vince never asks the restorative question of Dodge. Shepard, thus, subverts the elements of this myth to show how repressed violence and cruelty and strangling behaviour transmit to the latest generation. The repressed violence and cruelty and strangling behaviour Dodge possessed by killing and burying the child is devolved to younger generation, Vince, which is proved by the dramatic lines spoken by Vince: "I am a murderer! Don't underestimate me for a minute ! I'm the Midnight Strangler! I devour whole families in a single gulp" (Jacobus 1225).

Similarly, Shepard attributes to Halie the witch like nature of the Terrible Mother as she reveals herself as a witch, wearing dresses in black, wearing veil, using intoxicating liquor and her sexual transgression. This terrible nature of Halie is transmitted to Vince as he smashes the bottles after bottles on the wall and throws toward the stage and curls his lips back and starts drumming on his teeth with his fingernails making little tapping sounds. Thus, subverting the elements of the Grail Myth, Shepard wants to show how repressed violence and strangling behaviour pass down to the latest generation.

In this way, to speak in a nutshell, Shepard employs the Vegetation Myth of the Corn-King and the Myth of the Holy Grail that form the underlying structure of the play. The main purpose is to show the potentiality of regeneration and integration



in American society and to show how the repressed violence and cruelty, and strangling behaviour and terrible nature transmit to the latest generation. Thus, the above conclusion drawn on the basis of preceding chapters helps to prove the hypothesis of this research work.

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