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Where Are the Men? — The Masculine Crises in *Buried Child*

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ABSTRACT

Concentrating on the masculine crises in *Buried Child* by American playwright Sam Shepard, the paper dissects causes of the crises and provides possible solutions to them. It finds that male characters in the play endeavor to maintain their hegemonic masculinities, but they are traumatized in the fights of power and production and ignored regarding emotion, and hence fall into the collapsed masculinities. Evasion and limited confession are not the thorough solution to the collapsed masculinities. Confrontation and resolute change are the only way to address the crises.

1. Introduction

Buried Child (1978)¹ is one of representatives of American playwright Sam Shepard (1943-2017) which won him the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1979, cementing his status in American theatre. The play is about the homecoming of prodigal sons and grandson and the exposure of a loathsome secret—horrible incest between mother Halie and son Tilden and infanticide of their incestuous son by patriarch Dodge—that the family struggled to bury for decades at the reappearance of grandson Vince, who left home six years ago, with his girlfriend Shelly.

Many a critic such as Crank used to hold that due to the complexity and roughness of his plays in terms of characters, languages, and images, “Sam Shepard is ... a difficult playwright to understand” (1). However, the debut of *Buried Child* immediately places Shepard and his play to the center of critics. The myths involved, family structure presented, theme, and characters’ psychology have incessantly become elucidated by scholars in and outside

¹ *Buried Child*, together with *Cursing of the Starving Class* (1977) and *True West* (1980), constitutes Shepard’s family trilogy. They are the most renowned plays of him.

China. Opiari (2010) argued that it was the “the overwhelming sense of shame felt by all [family] members” (123) not the secret that paralyzed the family in *Buried Child*. Both Thomas Nash (1983) and Jiang Mengmeng (2006)² from China interpreted the mythology of the Corn King found in *The Golden Bough* to construct the plot of *Buried Child*, the latter in particular dissected the role of the rite of passage played in the play and the audience. What deserves further attention is that reviews and criticism so far have attached more importance to emotional absence in the play in comparison with the researches on the absent masculinities. The current studies on the absent masculinities also fail to trace to root(s) of the absence. The paper holds that the collapsed masculinities is the exact key to interpreting *Buried Child*. Thus, the paper is designed to probe into reasons for the collapsed masculinities in terms of power, production, emotion and symbol, and try to clarify the family tragedy from the beginning to the end so as to figure out possible solutions to the problem.

I

Buried Child explores the secret life of an American family living on a farm in Illinois. The once affluent family “producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over” (Shepard 3.370)³ collapses abruptly, so do the three generations of male members in the family. Their behaviors are so odd that the readers/audience cannot help but questioning “What’s happened to the men in this family! Where are the men!” (3.410-11)

Dodge falls first of all from the patriarch to an invisible man marginalized by his family. His image is profoundly intertwined with death. The “festering away [and] decomposing” (1.388) atmosphere indicates a hue of dying, and Dodge’s appearance in “a well-worn T-shirt, suspenders, khaki work pants, and brown slippers [, covering] himself in an old brown blanket” (Shepard, 1102) and lying motionless on the sofa suggests a strong sense of funeral. Dodge declares his own death by the earth yellow and self-burying. Mentally, he is addicted to evasiveness as he “denies any affective bond with family” (Adler, 115), and any connections to truth and reality. Just as his name suggests, Dodge dodges everything: wrapping himself up tightly with a cap, a blanket or a coat, defining the boundary and demanding distance between him and everyone else.

The sons fathered by Dodge all inherit his weakness and disability. Tilden the elder son in the family who was “once a star athlete and a model son” (Crank, 70), the All-American fullback degrades into an overgrown man with severe mental disorder. He dodges the past, esp. the time when he was in New Mexico. Tilden also rejects the reality that he only recognizes the buried child rather than the alive one Vince as his only descendant. Therefore, “he is a shell of himself” (Crank, 69), retreating into the shell—the past when he shared with

² For detailed explanation of mythology and folklore in *Buried Child*, see Jiang, Mengmeng. “Collective Emotional Feeling and Psychological Experience—The Archetypal Interpretation of *Buried Child*.” *Foreign Literature Review* 2(2006): 42-48. and Nash, Thomas. “Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child*: the Ironic Use of Folklore”. *Modern Drama*, 04 (1983): 486-491.

³ The citations in the following parts from Shepard, Sam. *Buried Child*. 1978. *The Norton Anthology of Drama: The Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Vol. 2). Eds Gainor, J. Ellen, Garner Jr., Stanton B., and Pucher, Martin. New York: Norton, 2009. would be marked in the form of (x.yyy), indicating “Act x, Line yyy”.

the baby and the backyard where his “only” son was buried. Bradley is a contradictory character in *Buried Child*: “the central masculine force keeping the family together” (Crank, 79) but seized by his amputated body and traumatized psychology. The once able-bodied person currently is also an overgrown adult like Tilden. The violence out of his envy at parental love of siblings is the sole method he resorts to for winning parental attention, escaping from his frail psychology, and preserving his ostensible masculinity which immediately vanishes when he is deprived of prosthesis, turning him thus to a baby yelling merely “Mom! That’s my leg! Get my leg back” (3.293)! Ansel the youngest son in this family who was boasted as “a hero ... A genuine hero. Brave. Strong. And very intelligent” (1.286-87) by his mother declines in reality to an obscure corpse. Halie strives to convince herself of Ansel’s excellence by repeating establishing a statue of Ansel with “a basketball in one hand and rifle in the other” (1.294-95) to commemorate the All-American throughout the play. It is further disillusioned by the fact that “[Ansel] never played basketball” (3.201) nor was enlisted, showing that all is nothing but a self-made lie of Halie’s to numb herself.

The third generation in the family—Vince and the buried child—are too not spared from the contagious destiny of degeneration. The infant falls from an energetic being to the cold remains having no time to manifest his masculinity, because he is allegedly to be the illicit son of Halie and Tilden who threatened and shamed Dodge, the patriarch. Vince is regarded as “the perfect baby [who] used to sing in his sleep [...] like [...] a guardian angel” (3.471-76) in the family, and grows up to be a fashionable young musician wearing “a plaid shirt, jeans, dark glasses, cowboy boots” (Shepard, 1116) and carrying a saxophone, but he is also denied by the family after his homecoming for the sake of family scandal. The denial by his family, esp. by his father traumatizes his masculinity terribly and causes him to doubt his identity. Eventually he abandoned his past thoroughly and inherited everything of the family from his grandfather, including the violence. Vince in the end turns to become Dodge II as he resumes the dying posture of his grandfather: “[laying] down on the sofa, arms folded behind his head, staring at the ceiling. His body is in the same relationship to DODGE’s (Shepard, 1149).

The masculinities of male members in the Dodge’s seem to be affected intensively by their wounded body and psychology. It is true if perceived from Freudianism that phallus determines masculinity of men, and physical defects impede men’s achieving their masculinities⁴. Consequently, the impotence of Dodge, insanity of Tilden, disability of Bradley, and premature death of the buried child elaborate their lost masculinities since they can neither be manly nor undertake the responsibility as a father and a man in society. The play itself seems to stress that heroes make masculinity. Driven by hero-worship

⁴ Freud proposes penis envy and Penisneid when discussing female psychology and sex development, i.e., girls find out their physiological flaws and defects and think themselves inferior when seeing male’s penis. Therefore, phallus is crucial for male identity and masculinities, and the lacking of phallus hampers the formation and development of masculinities. For more discussion, please refer to Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*. 1899, 1955. Trans and Ed. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010: 370.

complex, Halie adores traditional hegemonic masculinity⁵. The reason why she shows affection first to Dodge, and then to Tilden and Ansel finally is that the three men all were once heroes, esp. Tilden, the once All-American fullback, who is most masculine.

The man controlling his environment is today the prevailing American image of masculinity. A man is expected to prove himself not by being part of society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it. He is to travel unfettered, beyond society's clutches, alone – making or breaking whatever or whoever crosses his path.
 . . . from the nation's earliest frontier days the man in the community was valued as much as the loner in control, homely society as much as heroic detachment. (Faludi, 10)

In traditional American society, “prowess at athletics and war become ... the two ways that manliness is measured” (Adler, 121) because men can be muscular, tough, energetic and full of the spirit of dominance after undergoing arduous tests and trainings, matching the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. It is never exaggerating to say that the traditional American society is dictated by hegemonic masculinity.

However, such statements have been ridiculous that if Shepard had aimed to defend such ideas, why would have he written such a play filled with endangered masculinities as the three generations of men in the Dodges' are confronted with fierce challenges of the hegemonic masculinity they endeavor to maintain. Meanwhile, Freudianism has been already questioned by the critics widely given that the feminist movement and the gay movement prevailing since the 1970s⁶ has impacted the traditional patriarchy and posed threats to cognition of masculinity of a man. People no longer hold that masculinity means dominance and muscles, and masculinity is men's privilege, and hence demand a new interpretation of masculinities.

Masculinity itself is not essentialist but fluid concept. Scholars like R.W. Connell reject the notion of physiologic determinism and instead underlines the

⁵ R.W. Connell (1944 -) in *Masculinities* (2005) categories masculinities into Hegemony, Subordination, Complicity and Marginalization. She holds a particular masculinity is extolled and becomes prevalent in a society and culture during a certain period (104-11). The hegemonic masculinity revolves around patriarchy and guarantees male dominance and female subordination. Such a masculinity is manifested through heterosexuality, absolute power, right, violence, belligerency, and downright rejection of females etc. For more discussion, please refer to Connell. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005: 76-86, 185-203.

⁶ Traditional masculinity in America was intensively attacked by the Civil Right Movement, Feminist Movement, Gay Movement, and Vietnam War from the 1960s to 1970s. The Civil Right Movement challenged white hegemonic masculinity exerted upon the black and claimed citizenship and masculinity for the latter. Feminist movement resists hegemonic masculinity, insisting that women were victims of and demanded changing such a masculinity. The gay movement denied hegemonic masculinity related with heterosexuality, and firmly demonstrated that both gays and the straight are males, and gays possess their own masculinity. The three social movements straightforwardly ask for redefining masculinities and propose equality in the public sphere, while the Vietnam War destructed traditional American masculinity, eroded the public confidence about such masculinity that relied on military, and broke the illusions of hegemonic masculinity in politics and military. Please refer to Kimmel, Michael S.. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 4th edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018: 221-45. for more discussions.

multidimensional and dynamic representations of masculinities. She attaches great importance to the initiative of the body, arguing that physiology is not the determinant but the basis of one's masculinity and femininity which has nothing to do with sex and gender (97). Connell scrutinizes masculinity in certain social and historical contexts and pinpoints bugs in conventional understanding of masculinity⁷. Therefore, she deems masculinities as “a position in gender relations, various practices that both sexes do in that gender position, and the influences exerted by practices on body experience, individuality and culture”⁸ (qtd. from Zhan, 103). Gender relations and gender practices are two focal points in the examination of masculinity. The masculinity is shaped by gender practices, referring to what a man or woman does to reach the position of masculinity in the structure of gender relations, in specific socio-historical condition, and gender practices of masculinities influence in reverse individuals and society. Therefore, physiological defects of Dodge and his first two sons' do not determine their own identity and masculinities at all. They can resort to bodily initiative to resist the collapsed masculinities and reconstruct them in terms of gender relations and gender practices.

As a position in gender relations, masculinities are further affected by four dimensions of gender relations, namely, “power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations” (Connell, 75-87). Regarding symbolic relations, it is associated with “language, clothes, makeup, gestures, photos, movies, architectures, and attitude etc.” (Zhan, 109). One can evaluate a person's masculinities according to the above symbols. The previous discussion of images of Dodge, Tilden and Bradley in this part hardly suggests that they have masculinity, but Vince would probably be the one with masculinity because he is the only one that looks like normal in the family. Similar to physical condition, however, symbolic relations cannot determine their masculinities solely; only when observed from the other three dimensions will the masculinity of men in Dodge's family be exhibited more comprehensively.

II

Dodge's “family life is viewed as a form of harshly competitive theatre” (Bottoms 164) in which “Shepard's men are almost invariably locked into intense competition” (Savran, 187) more for power and glory, but end with a drastic collapse of their masculinities. America is a society where men, especially patriarchs, are dominant in power relations and production relations, corresponding to ideas of hegemonic masculinity. In the small system of Dodge's family, masculinities are challenged and attacked as powers shifting between male and female and between male and male in power relations.

⁷ The traditional definition of masculinities is divided into four categories, namely essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic. Essentialist definitions usually centers on a specific trait; the positivist one relies on a certain lifestyle in a culture to explain masculinities. The normative school considers that masculinities indicate what a man should be, that is, masculinities are social behavior norms for men. The last sect regards phallus as the primal token of masculinities. Connell refutes the above definitions and their problems. Please refer to Connell, *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity, 2005: 67-70.

⁸ For specific expressions, see Connell, R. W.. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005: 71.

Although Dodge insists his central status of patriarch, it has indeed been worsened by his uncultivated back lot and terminated production. “A successful father displays his masculinities to the society by shouldering family responsibility. [...] He must be a qualified ‘breadwinner’ (Pu 35). “The breadwinner ideal would remain one of the central characteristics of American manhood until the present day” (Kimmel 17). Dodge repeatedly emphasizes that “there hasn’t been corn out there since about nineteen thirty-five! That’s the last time [he] planted corn out there” (1.175-76). If a man claims his status as the breadwinner in his family like Dodge, it is never masculine for him to deny his descendants and to stop bringing the home bacon which he is supposed to do. Dodge’s avoidance and non-actions are contrary to the core of traditional American masculinity, and overthrow and negate his patriarchy as well as masculinities. Dodge’s masculinities have been further crippled by his laissez-faire attitude towards Halie’s love affairs and parenthood. He dodges family responsibility and denies Vince as his grandson, bawling “Stop calling me Grandpa will ya’! It’s sickening. [...] I’m nobody’s Grandpa” (2.186-87) ! Such behaviors are indeed a declaration of automatically waiving his patriarchy and its obligations. Neither his family nor the American society recognizes Dodge’s masculinities; hence, his masculinities vanish.

The vacant patriarchy in the family causes the void of power, and immediately initiates power struggles among Dodge’s sons. Tilden gains the upper hand in production relations firmly that he dominates family livings by providing them food from the barren back lot, which testifies the fertility of the lot, and discloses father’s fake masculinities through exposing his lies. Tilden also is superior to others in terms of power relations. He kills Dodge symbolically by covering the latter with corn husks, and emasculates Dodge’s power and masculinities after snatching his whisky meanwhile. Bradley excels Tilden in power relations as he not only completes a symbolic patricide by de-caping Dodge and cutting his hair, which can be deemed as a suppression of Dodge’s masculinity, but instigates other to kill his father in reality as well that “[w]e could shoot him ... We could drown him! What about drowning him” (2.556-57). Bradley thus insinuates Dodge’s mistakes⁹ committed years ago and suppresses Dodge’s masculinities; meanwhile demonstrates his ambition of succeeding to the throne in the family.

Failure in power struggles distorts father-son relationship as the father turns to a wild animal who regards his offsprings as rivals challenging his authority and coveting the throne that must be eradicated. Dodge incites Shelly to “take his leg and throw it out the back door” (3.44-45) so that the pushover is deprived of masculinities and power. On the other hand, he threatens Tilden with the buried child and relies on its burial place to suppress Tilden’s masculinities and retrieves his own. The father and sons, though climbing to the summit of power struggles seemingly and asserting their manhood, in fact destruct their own masculinities since their interdependence has been smashed during the struggles. “They are at each other’s throat” (Opipari 137), coercing, attacking, mocking, and cursing each other like foes with their own flaws. Kinship filled

⁹ Dodge suggests when confessing that he drowned the incestuous baby of Halie and Tilden’s and buried it in the back lot.

with hostility turns the family into a barren battlefield, and the father-son power struggles cause the running away of power to female member in the family.

Halie is a typical Shepard matriarch in the play full of masculinities which in reality also are shattered. Halie's power and masculinities firstly are locked by her room upstairs and family album. "Her position offstage at the top of the stairs symbolizes her control" (Opipari, 134) that Dodge trembled and hid himself under the blanket when she descended. Halie is endowed discourse right in the family by the family album which is the carrier of family bloodline and history. She becomes the only agent and spokesperson that shape the Dodge's image. Halie, like Tilde, is a winner regarding production relations as she supports the family financially when Dodge corrupts. Halie, moreover, is a caregiver and a mediator who arrange the family life and settle disputes as if the family goes into stagnation if Halie were absent. However, the above all is a word play Halie herself directs and performs for hiding her empty masculinities. Halie's affection and adoration to males is rooted in her strong hero-worship complex, which should be frequently satisfied by males imbued with traditional masculinities. Halie terminates her affection and adoration to her husband and sons as they no longer are her heroes. She instead satisfies her lust via extramarital affairs which further traumatize Dodge and sons' masculinities. Halie first of all commits incest with Tilden and gives birth to a boy, becoming a factual couple in the family. It overthrows Dodge's patriarchy and leads to family breakdown, and she thus monopolies power and production relations. She also commits adultery with Father Dewis later and abandons the collapsed males in the family for the sake of personal indulgence. Halie's conducts and morality mismatches her matriarchy in the family, and her masculinities hence is merely a joke.

The Dodge's evaluate and preserve their masculinities with hegemonic masculinities and hero complex blindly, and are trapped accordingly into power struggles and shattered masculinities as the power center has been shifted to the outside: Vince's girlfriend, Shelly. Shelly is the victim of hegemonic masculinity¹⁰, but she, instead of subjugating to hegemonic masculinity, rebels against it: disillusioning and burying the hegemonic masculinity. She took Bradley's wooden leg away (the token of phallus symbolizing power) and revenges herself on Bradley's symbolic rape, unveiling his vaunting aggressiveness and cowardice. Shelly at the same time is an anatomist of masculinity in the family. "Her arrivals disrupt the hostile equilibrium existing among the family members at the plays' outset" (Bottoms 159).

SHELLY ... Don't you usually settle your affairs in private? Don't you usually take them out in the dark? Out in the back?

...

¹⁰ Tilden flirts with and Bradley symbolically rapes Shelly respectively in the form of sexual oppression so as to recapture their own masculinity, which presents male's dominance over females in the context of traditional masculinity.

SHELLY I know you've got a secret. You've all got a secret. It's so secret, in fact, you're all convinced it never happened. (3.330-36)

Shelly dissects the family and locating its crux: it is the self-paralysis and escape, i.e., daring not to “put all this together” (3.238) that smash their masculinities. Hence a significant contrast between the Dodge's and Shelly is established which both subverts “the traditional interpretation of woman as irrational and man as logical” (Creedon 69), and exposes the unrecoverable masculinities inside the family. In comparison with it, Shelly's masculinities become conspicuous in that she helps them to reconstruct masculinity after pulling it down. For one thing, Shelly's firmness without flinching set an example for the escape-inclined Dodge's, pushing them to confront the scandal. For another, she takes measures to lead the family to the buried child and confession. It is her rationality, courage, and resolution that confer the patriarchy and masculinities upon Shelly and to some degree salvage the Dodge's and their masculinities.

Struggles in power relations and production relations directly knockdown masculinities of the Dodge's and subvert the hegemonic one that adhere to; meanwhile, the distortion and absence of emotion further diminish the opportunity of reconstructing masculinities. Emotional relations usually refer to sexual orientation and parent-child relationship (Connell, *Gender* 81)¹¹ In *Buried Child*, the parent-child relationship is an upgraded version of typical hegemonic mode: “young children is the business of women, especially mothers; while fathers as breadwinners are expected to be emotionally distant” (Connell, *Gender* 82), which is also the graveyard of masculinities inside the Dodge's. Halie's hero complex draws her sons too close to her that Halie shifts kinship to lust and Tilden misjudges his masculinities so much so that he trespasses ethics and ruins his family. On the other hand, the distorted father-son relationship blurs the boundary between father and sons, because it reduces to a skeleton owing to the aforementioned power struggles. Dodge denies Tilden and Bradley as sons and Vince grandchild, and Tilden does not recognize Vince as his descendant. For another, they estrange from and compete with each other like opponents. The sons try to escape from the father for researching their identities and masculinities, but they are always dominated by the patriarchy. Meanwhile, “there is no [normal family] sharing [in the Dodge's], no drinking from the same cup, no communication” (Hays 443), and are wary of each other. The disformed parent-child relationship inside the family invites emotional alienation and absent family care which impair in consequence their masculinities.

The sexual orientation of emotion relations emerges as heterosexual marriage in *Buried Child*, which malfunctions inside the family and worsens the masculine crises of the members. Dodge and Halie have already been a couple in name for a rather long time since Dodge become impotent. There geographical separation, that is, Halie occupying the room upstairs and Dodge

¹¹ In the context of hegemonic masculinity, both sexual orientation and parent-child relationship are labelled significantly by gender, that is, they are majorly represented by cross-gender interactions.

the downstairs, symbolizes the emotional alienation. “Halie is a disembodied voice for most of her scenes, and Dodge remains constant throughout the play in trying to discredit or ignore her, or to distract the audience from everything that she says” (McDonough 54). The mutual distrust and alienating dialogues without affective interaction further highlight the remote emotional distance between Dodge and Halie. On the other hand, Halie’s dissolute nature empties emotional foundation of the search for masculinities in the family. Halie has always been controlled by the hero complex concerning her relationship with males. She not only joyously recalls one of her affairs with a breeder merrily before marrying Dodge without considering Dodge’s feeling, which oppresses Dodge’s masculinity, but also places her lustful love to Tilden, Ansel, and Father Dewis respectively that dismembers the whole family. Halie further mourns rather than rescue the loss of masculinities in the family by wearing black clothes every day, indicating that she no longer trusts the emotional relations inside the family and thus believes that only the heroic lover outside the house is what colors her life¹². The yellow flower hold in her hand when Halie returned home displays her mourning for Dodge’s dead masculinities and declares his death. Undoubtedly, Halie’s aloofness directly negates her masculinities as family matriarchy. The illusory conjugal relationship guides Dodge to the realization of self-futility and eventual quit of center of power; The incest between Halie and Tilden breaks the ethics, invites internal strives and traumatizes their masculinities.

Examined by symbols, power, production, and emotion, the deformed and collapsed masculinities of the Dodge’s surface from the abyss ultimately. Masculinities of males and females all are inflicted severely by the alienated family relationship, displaced family roles and crumbled structures. The hegemonic pursued by the Dodge’s does not consolidate their own status in the family but twist the family relationships and thus entrap their masculinities into abyss and rupture, unable to repair.

III

In power and production relations, suppressions among Dodge, Tilden and Bradley does not strengthen but damage their masculinities. The shattered masculinities fail to find shelter in emotional relations partly because the men fight against each other like foes and abandon themselves, and partly because the matriarchy further strikes their recognition of masculinity and drags them into the chasm. Though a number of critics insist that Shepard offered no solution to the problem, the play has actually provided two measures which coincide with the gender practice configurations proposed by Connell that “people center on social gender practice configurations, and shape their own masculinities through individual body-reflexive practices like initiative ways of learning, obeying, query, fight, resistance, alteration and negotiation” (Zhan, 164).

¹² Halie appears always in black throughout the play except when she showed up in a bright yellow the second day after spending a night out with Father Dewis, suggesting that only the outside world and lovers provide her with warm

Escape is one of the practices that men in *Buried Child* adopt to rescue their masculinities. Despite their strives to escape from the falling masculinity as soon as they perceive the crisis, they would eventually return to it. The most salient escape comes from Dodge that he always regards escape as a trump card for solving crises. Had not he abandoned family connections and unattended his wife's disloyalty, there would have been opportunity for saving the masculinities. Dodge also dodges the reality. Affected by hegemonic masculinity, he is determined to silence the family secret and keep it from the outside world, which indeed has sapped his patriarchy and masculinities partly because the silence covers the family secret as well as excludes Dodge from the outside world so deeply that he has no idea about the fierce attack on hegemonic masculinity which he blindly defends, and partly because Dodge fails to set good example of being responsible and confronted with crisis boldly for his two sons, pushing them to the infectious disease of escape.

Tilden and Bradley also resort to escape—denying the past—when reconstructing their own masculinities, but such a suppression on the contrary places them to vulnerability and insanity, losing masculinities thoroughly. Tilden at the same time escape from the reality. He and Bradley try to overthrow the corrupted masculinity descending from their father by symbolic patricide, but they do not realize that they have been infected by it. Fleeing from home may provide a solution for his searching for masculinities, but his fleeing into the West inundate with hero myths. The once prevailing “West Masculine Myth”¹³ and “Move Westward” (Roudané 70) are all illusion produced by the mainstream society. The west cowboy and the Frontier deemed as representative of masculinities and test field has already disillusioned after Westward Movement¹⁴, the real masculinities locate neither in the frontier nor the West (McDonough 38). The public rebel against firmly traditional social system that prioritizes patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, Tilden's escape from his experience in the West and social reality announces his failure in rebuilding his masculinities. Escape can only transfer him back to the beginning of nightmare instead of to the way to hopes.

Different from the senior's force homecoming, Vince seems to catch up the hope of reconstructing masculinities through escape and returns initiatively, but his masculinities are no longer able to revive. The denial by the original family results in Vince's becoming the victim of seniors' ossified masculinities. He tries to retrieve his identity and masculinities through the nightlong escape.

¹³ Michael Kimmel enunciates the relationship between the West and the American masculinity in “The Cult of Masculinity: American Social Character and the Legacy of the Cowboy” (2005). He holds that “the frontier was the place where manhood was tested, where, locked in a life or death struggle against the natural elements and against other men, a man discovered if he truly was a real man” (95). For more discussion, see Kimmel, Michael. *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2005: 91-103.

¹⁴ The cowboy is the cultural hero in America who is regarded as carrier of American spirit and an ideal that plays important roles in all respects of American society. The cowboy spirit is manifested as boldness, power, adventurous inclination, and a strong desire to conquer. Its core is might, freedom, violence and aggressiveness. Throughout the American history, the traditional masculinity constructed upon the cowboy spirit contributed significantly to expanding territory and overseas wars, but also invited unexpected disastrous consequences which provoke public deliberation and opposition. The cowboy myth dies out along with the time, and there show new interpretations of its denotations and connotations. For specific discussion, please refer to Kimmel, Michael. *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2005: 94-103.

VINCE: [*pause, delivers speech front*] I was gonna run last night. I was gonna run and keep right on running. I drove all night. Clear to the Iowa border. I drove all night ... I could see myself in the windshield. My face. My eyes. I studied my face. Studied everything about it. As though I was looking at another man. As though I could see his whole race behind him. Like a mummy's face. I saw him dead and alive at the same time. In the same breath. In the windshield I watched him breathe as though he was frozen in time. And every breath marked him. Marked him forever without him knowing. And then his face changed. His face became his father's face. Same bones. Same eyes. Same nose. Same breath. And his father's face changes to his Grandfather's face. And it went on like that. Changing. Clear on back to faces I'd never seen before but still recognized. Still recognized the bones underneath. The eyes. The breath. The mouth. I followed my family clear into Iowa. Every last one. Straight into the corn belt and further. Straight back as far as they'd take me. Then it all dissolved. Everything dissolved. (3.510-26)

The westward escape resembles the senior's searching for masculinities in the West incidentally but it is destined¹⁵. He reviews family history on the windshield and reconnects to family line. "even if you didn't know who your mother and father were, if you never met them, you are still intimately, inevitably, and entirely connected to who brought you into the world – through a long, long chain" (Roudané 68). The family traditions and history displaying in front of Vince through the bloodline echo with the family album recording family development in Halie's room, and not only recognize Vince as a family member but confer him power and patriarchy in the family as well, because his witness of family history negates Halie's album. In fact, the mummy is both Vince's buried elder brother and himself. They have all been denied by the patriarchy in the family for the sake of so-called fame and reputation, which gives them no chance to develop their identity and masculinity. The moment when he saw the mummy-like face, Vince had been the buried child who came back to reclaim his position and all that belong to him in the family. The only way of return is for Vince to become his grandfather, that is, abandoning his self as a rock musician and embracing hegemonic masculinity. It appears that such a return gives Vince new identity and masculinities, but it indeed devastates them mightily and confines Vince in the crumbled masculinity. Behaving violently like his senior generations, Vince sings the song of Marine Corps, whistles to imitate sounds of bomb explosion and throws beer bottles until he enters the home (Shepard 1144-45)¹⁶. Vince inherits the crown

¹⁵ According the script, the Dodge's are located in Illinois and Vince drives to the border of Iowa which lies in the northwest to Illinois throughout night. Therefore, Vince's westward escape coincides with his father's west experience in the New Mexico. Though denied, Vince still returns home, and his westward search bears no fruit like those of his seniors.

¹⁶ The Dodge's correlate violence with masculinity and shape their own masculinities through various violent methods. Shepard once suggested that violence is intrinsic to Anglo American males and their nature. Violence instead of cementing but actually saps American masculinities. Resorting to violence for shaping masculinities is doomed to fail. For specific discussions,

symbolizing impotence and death from Dodge and becomes buried in the family history. The escape trusted by the Dodge's without doubts brings everything but hope to their reconstruction of masculinities and entraps them into the mire, possessing no chance for recover and rebuild their masculinities. The other practice is "You gotta talk or you'll die" (1.429) – confessing positively and determinedly to solve the crisis and obtain the hope to revival. Shepard blends his life experience in to the play and believes that "there is no escape from the family" (Roudané 67): we cannot escape for good, and thus confrontation and confession are the gold rules. What really shatters the family and the masculinity of men in this family is not the incest and infanticide but how the family copes with the crisis. Obviously, what avoidance has brought to the family is unexpectedly and destructive¹⁷. "The more they focus on avoiding discussion of it, the more it becomes a part of their everyday lives because they talk about trying not to talk about it" (Opipari, 136). The more strongly they desire to deny and distort the secret, and the more their masculinities are traumatized as they are timid to face what had happened. Though maintained by the pact of keeping the secret inside family, the family is so vulnerable that it is corrupted internally—there is no truth, no trust nor intimate communication but lies and dodging in the family. "They do not resemble any family" (Crank, 74): truth, fact, mutual trust, and intimacy are absent while lies and escape become rampant.

Talk is believed to be one of the ways characters in the play to show their existence (Bottoms 165), and it at the same time is the best measure for reconstructing the Dodge's masculinities. Escape pushes the Dodge's into the bottom of valley, while confession and talk bring them brightness.

HALIE'S VOICE 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. Maybe the rain did something. Maybe it was the rain.

...

HALIE'S VOICE Good hard rain. Takes everything straight down deep to the roots. The rest takes care of itself. You can't force a thing to grow. You can't interfere with it. It's all hidden. It's all unseen. You just gotta wait till it pops up out of the ground. Tiny little shoot. Tiny little white shoot. All hairy and fragile. Strong though. Strong enough to break the earth even. It's a miracle, Dodge. I've never seen a crop like this in my whole life. Maybe it's the sun. Maybe that's it. Maybe it's the sun. (3.540-51)

please refer to Kakutani, Michiko. "Myths, Dreams, Realities—Sam Shepard's America". *New York Times*. January 29, 1984; Savran, David. *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre*. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 2003: 134-38.

¹⁷ For detailed explanation of the results brought by silencing the secret, see Opipari, Benjamin. "Shhhhhhome: Silencing the Family Secret in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*". *Style*. Dekalb: Spring 2010. Vol.445: 123-138.

The corn as tall as a man actually is the incarnation of the buried child who returns home in his own way and contributes to solve the family problem¹⁸. It is the sun and the SON that create such a miracle, and everything seems to be back on the right and prosperous track. In fact, this kind of confession is prevalent in American literature that many writers and authors like Confession School in American Poetry regard facing up to the crisis as the best way to solve the crisis. Poets like Sylvia and Robert Lowell never hide themselves from the public that they not only confess their inner feeling but also expose the problems in the family and society in their poems straightforwardly, helping to examine the self and society. Edward Albee also expresses such a hope in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* that the life of George and Martha would be corrected after the Exorcism, that is, Martha eventually accepted the reality that she had no child with the help of her husband George. Escape and passive attitude do not help to solve the crisis but worsen it in reverse. Like the situation in which Dodge's family is, only when they begin to really talk to each other and confess the secret bravely will they know where lies the problems and thus have a chance to restart. Even though Dodge talked and died, he had accomplished his final salvation because facing up to the crisis contributes to masculinity, and offered the family a precious peace.

Dodge's peaceful death declares the death of hegemonic masculinity and represents his self-redemption and reconstructed masculinities. Nonetheless, all is illusory. "The remains of the buried son have literally fertilized the earth in a grimly Gothic manner. The other 'son' Vince returns and the sun breaks through, yet neither his homecoming nor the sunrise, nor Halie's bright yellow dress that has replaced her earlier black of mourning, betokens resurrection or augurs renewal" (Adler 119). Dodge's death in nature implies the death of the whole family as it does not change from the inside. Tilden excavates the buried child and ascends stairs¹⁹ for family reunion continues the previous incest with Halie; Vince replace the old king of Dodge and becomes Halie's new husband, establishing another incestuous relationship. The collapsed hegemonic masculinity again is ignited because of Vince, and the once disappeared violence and escape rein t the family one more time. "the new god is as impotent and as unable to bring renewal as the old. [...] He either cannot or will not flee from the pattern of the past which he has beheld so clearly" (Adler 118). The new god Vince deserts the chance to reshape his masculinities, and the entire play hence returns to the decomposing and putrid start and forms a dead circle. The Dodge's are still haunted by the family curse which also devours a man's masculinities.

¹⁸ Shepard in the play actually hints that corn is the buried child. Firstly, the corn is nurtured by the buried child and carries its blood and essence, which is the way that buried child connects with the family. Secondly, the corn husks are the token of the child's corpse. Tilden buries his father with husks and achieves symbolic patricide, which also indicates that the buried child buries its foe in person. Meanwhile, Vince reveals that every ancestor he sees all come to the Corn Belt directly, showing that corn is the root of the Dodge's, and all ancestors come to welcome the buried child. Thus, the buried child in this way proves its all-time existence in the family and unveils Dodge's ineffective escape.

¹⁹ According to Freudianism, "ascending stairs" symbolizes sexual intercourse (see Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*. 1899, 1955. Trans and Ed. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010: 368.) In *Buried Child*, Tilden finally ascend the stairs and thus finishes another intercourse with his mother, reviving the previous nuclear family. It testifies Halie and Tilden's incestuous relationship.

2. Conclusion

Where are the men in Dodge's family? There is no man in his family? What has happened to the men in Dodge's family? They all suffer from some kinds of disabilities which cannot decide their masculinities. They are either seriously ill or handicapped, and afflicted by insanity and desperation. They reject to communicate with each other; curse, sneer, neglect and attack, instead, become ordinary fare. In the closed system kept by the loose pact of silencing the secret, the men are irresponsible, timid, lacking independence and afraid of contacting the outside world and bring changes. They fall back either on violence or on escape to tackle the dangers in life, but all of them fall to collapse in the end. How can such men be masculine? During the fights in power relations and production relations, the masculinities of men in Dodge's family deteriorate and perish in the end as they treat each other like enemies. Their masculinities are further hammered by emotional relations with women and the symbolic relations. Their individual practices—escape and confession—shows their resolutions to defend and reinforce their masculinities, but all is in vain because men are haunted by decadent hegemonic masculinities and never do they commit their obligation to the family, regardless of once-in-lifetime revival of masculinity and hope. Hegemonic masculinity has been sentenced to death not only in the play but also in the social movement at that time. Consequently, the only way to resolve it is to confront and combat it outrageously, introducing changes to the refresh it.

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