

“What’s Happened to this Family Anyway?”
The Disintegration of the American Family in Selected Plays
by O’Neill, Miller, and Shepard

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Norman Rockwell's *Freedom from Want* (1943)

Master's Thesis in English Literature
Department of Culture and Literature
Faculty of Humanities
University of Tromsø
Spring 2009



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“It is like a Norman Rockwell cover or something (...)

I thought it was going to be turkey dinners and
apple pie and all that kinda stuff”

- Shelly in *Buried Child*

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my advisor, Professor Fredrik Chr. Brøgger, who introduced me to the fascinating world of American drama two years ago, and whose exceptional assistance I have received the past year during this writing process. His careful guidance helped me in shaping my ideas, and his constructive criticism enabled me to carry on writing. He is, in every respect, a source of inspiration.

I am also thankful to other members of the Department of English who taught me in the BA and MA programs, from the fall of 2004 to the spring of 2008, and contributed in making my stay at the University of Tromsø a pleasant and instructive one.

I would also like to seize the opportunity to express my appreciation for my fellow student, Majda Sojtaric, who embarked with me on this long journey into the academic world five years ago. I wish all the best for her MA thesis in the time to come.

I am incredible grateful for the encouragement and support I have received from all the members of my immediate family: my parents and my three sisters. A special thank goes to my parents, for always having belief in me and for always being there for me.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear Peter, for much-needed patience and willingness to engage in my never-ending discussions concerning this project.

This thesis is dedicated to my maternal and paternal grandparents, for always keeping their doors open to me, and never letting me experience what Vince in *Buried Child* does when he pays a visit to his grandparents.

Tromsø, June 1, 2009

Kari Mathisen

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Introduction: Family and Society

“Society is inside of man and man is
inside society (...) The fish is in the
water and the water is in the fish”
- Arthur Miller

Four plays constitute the main material for my analysis and discussion of the family in 20th century American drama: Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, and Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child* and *True West*. Already in the initial stage of choosing a topic for my MA thesis, I had decided to write on the genre of drama, partly because drama receives less focus compared to fiction both in literary studies and at the university. More importantly, I chose drama as my subject for analysis because I take great pleasure in this particular genre. Although the relationship between the written text and the dramatic performance on stage is an interesting one, in this study I am going to focus exclusively on the dramatic text itself. In American drama plays concerning the family are frequent, and some of the greatest American dramatists are recognized for plays that are centered on family life. O’Neill, Miller, and Shepard are no exceptions; their works express a profound concern for the role of the family in the American society.

O’Neill, Miller, and Shepard are among the most prolific, influential, and celebrated playwrights the United States has produced. Their literary works span almost over the entire 20th century; O’Neill ruled the American stage during the 1920s and 30s, Miller had his heyday during the 1950s and 60s, and Shepard loomed large during the 1970s and 80s. O’Neill is widely considered “The Father of American Drama”; his plays are recognized for revolutionizing the American stage. Most critics regard *Journey* (written in the early 1940s, first performed in 1956) as O’Neill’s ultimate masterpiece - the peak of his artistic talent. O’Neill is the only American playwright who has received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama four times, the last in 1957, posthumously for *Journey*. In addition, O’Neill is the first - and so far only - American dramatist to be honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1936. Along with O’Neill, Miller ranks as one of the finest artists of the American theater, and *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is by common consent regarded as an icon of American culture. A number of critics view *Salesman* as the “quintessential” American play. It won immediate success on

Broadway and was awarded the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Similarly, Shepard belongs to the elite of 20th century American dramatists, and a number of his plays are already considered classics of the American theater. Shepard is still a productive dramatist; he has published four plays since the new millennium. *Buried Child* (1978) launched Shepard's career as a playwright, and is the first off-Broadway play to receive a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Shepard's subsequent play, *True West* (1980), is by most critics considered his signature piece, and is also the most revived Shepard play in American theaters.

It is significant to note, however, that while a number of parallels may be drawn between *Journey* and *Salesman*, for instance in terms of dramatic form, the two plays by Shepard appear as more extreme and absurd. *Journey* and *Salesman*, which constitute my major focus and serve to generate my thesis statement, may be argued to be "traditional" family plays leaning - at least in part - toward the "Ibsenesque" tradition. A number of Shepard's plays such as *Buried Child* and *True West*, on the other hand, contain absurdist elements and thus place Shepard within the tradition of contemporary, experimental theater. His drama is permeated by a number of inconsistencies and thus raises more questions than answers. Family relations in Shepard are strange or non-existent. Delving into a Shepard play feels like stepping into unfamiliar and confusing territory, and the urge to run away from this surrealist atmosphere soon arises; still, there is something intriguing about his grotesque characters and strange plots. You become attracted to the "Shepardian universe" without really understanding why. In some of the aspects of family life that I am going to examine in this study, *Buried Child* and *True West* emerge as the direct opposites of *Journey* and *Salesman*. The intention of including the two plays by Shepard is to create some dynamics of contrast in my study, as *Buried Child* and *True West* illuminate the thematic concerns of *Journey* and *Salesman* from quite a different perspective.

It is also noteworthy that all four plays depict the same family structure: mother, father and two male siblings. This was a deliberate decision on my account; in this way, parallels and contrasts immediately call attention to themselves. Consequently, my textual study of these family relations will acquire more sharpness of focus and depth of analysis. *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* portray a wide range of families, spanning from the early to the late 20th century. The Tyrones in *Journey* are an affluent, cultivated group, and the play is set in 1912 New England. *Salesman* takes place in Brooklyn in the aftermath of the Great Depression and the Second World War, and portrays a traditional lower middle class family. *Buried Child* and *True West*, on the other hand, are of a more recent date. Set in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they tell the stories of families in Illinois and California

respectively. In this manner, the family tensions in my study acquire a historical dimension; the position of the family develops through different periods of the 20th century. In some respects, this gives me the opportunity to combine literary and sociohistorical perspectives.

In my opinion, family issues are particularly interesting because everyone in some way or other can relate to them. Certain aspects of the family may be seen as universal or archetypal, positioned outside time and place. I share Shepard's opinion that everything can be traced back to the family: "What doesn't have to do with family? There isn't anything, you know what I mean? Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other - everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It's an endless cycle" (qtd. in Bigsby, "Born Injured" 21). Family issues are intensely personal yet powerfully universal. In this respect, one may argue that my four selected plays in many ways transcend their historical settings. They probe deeply into the American psyche and explore the cultural heritage of their nation, yet they have a mainstream appeal to people all over the world. We are all in some way or other shaped by the family we belong to; it remains rooted in our experience, our identity, our personality, as Miller argues: "We - all of us - have a role anteceding all others: we are first sons, daughters, sisters, brothers (...) The concepts of Father, Mother, and so on were received by us unawares before the time we were conscious of ourselves as selves" ("The Family..." 81). Family roles are often permanent and inescapable, and the attempt to distance oneself from one's family often fails. According to Shepard, we are "intimately, inevitably and entirely connected to who brought [us] to the world" (qtd. in Roudané, "Shepard on..." 68).

Considering the prominent position the family holds in American drama, it came as a surprise to me to find that criticism in this field is rather limited. There are very few extensive works devoted entirely to the role of the family in American drama. To me, however, this felt like an advantage because there was no already down-trodden path within drama studies that I needed to trace or follow. In my search for works concerning the family in American drama, only two books appeared to be relevant for my thesis. Tom Scanlan's study, *Family, Drama, and American Dreams* (1978), provides a sociological and historical survey of the changing role of the family depicted by some American playwrights. Scanlan centers his attention on O'Neill, Miller, and Tennessee Williams - "our best playwrights" (5) - and grants one chapter to each of them. Considering the year of its publication, it comes as no surprise that Shepard is absent from Scanlan's study. The second work, *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama* (2003) by Thaddeus Wakefield, applies a Marxist approach and explores ways in which the capitalist culture of the United States is seen to affect the family. According to

Wakefield, the American family is only valued in monetary terms and is merely a commodity within the American culture of consumption. Despite its promising title and the pertinence of its assertion, Wakefield's study offers no sophisticated readings, but gives a brief 100-page overview of fourteen American family plays, leaving very little room for in-depth analysis. Wakefield's study does not mention Shepard's contributions to American family drama at all; and in view of the year of its publication, Wakefield cannot be excused for excluding one of the most relevant contemporary family dramatists. Nevertheless, the individual success of each playwright has spawned a great deal of critical response, and several collections of essays regarding their dramatic production are to be found. *The Cambridge Companion* collections provide detailed lists of serious criticism on each playwright, and were great starting points for my process of collecting secondary material.

Within a sociological context, on the other hand, a great deal has been written about the American family. The position that the family holds within society has in recent decades become an area of considerable debate within the United States. Opinions on the American family are multifarious and fluid, and theorists disagree widely. Quite widespread is the traditional belief that the family is the backbone, or foundation, of American culture and society, and popular culture tends to project an image of the idealized, happy, American family. Most sociologists, however, agree that the American family has undergone a profound process of change during the 19th and 20th centuries. Historically, the nuclear family - a term that refers to "a unit consisting of spouses and their dependent children"¹ - has been the prevalent family structure in the United States. Due to the industrial and technological revolution a major shift in the role of the family in American society may be argued to have taken place. Contemporary sociologists often speak of the fragmentation of the nuclear family. One of the most recognized and influential American sociologists of the 20th century, Talcott Parsons, refers to the "loss of the function of the family" (7). In Parsons' view, the needs of the modern family are met by outside agencies, whereas formerly they were met by the family itself. It is important to note, however, that most of the sociological studies of the American family that I came across appear as too empirical and too statistically oriented to be successfully applied to the imaginary worlds of my playwrights. Thus, except for certain aspects of Parsons' social theory, I am going to make very little use of sociological theories in my study. The Parsonian theory, as presented in *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (1955), coincides with the historical settings of the two plays that are of my greatest

¹ Cf. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Marshall, p. 173.

focus: *Journey* and *Salesman*. It may in lesser degree be applied to the two plays by Shepard; in this respect, it will serve as a point of departure for discussing possible changes that have taken place, for instance in terms of gender roles and regarding the division of labor within the family.

The relationship between the public and the private is a major focus in O'Neill's, Miller's, and Shepard's family plays. Society is an inseparable part of family life, and the family is a central constituent of society, as the initial quote by Miller serves to illustrate: "Society is inside of man and man is inside society (...) The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish" ("The Shadows..." 39). Parsons objects to the idea of categorizing the family as "a little society [in itself]" (19), but insists that it should be viewed as "a differentiated subsystem of a society" (ibid.), and thus suggests that a person's private role is premised on his or her public role. My four selected plays may be said to reflect Parsons' theory; they extend themselves from the private and into the public. In this respect, they can be argued to be individual dramas and social dramas at one and the same time. In Miller's view, the greatest plays are those who lift their visions "out of the merely particular toward the fate of the generality of men" ("The Family..." 74). In other words, the identity questions raised in these plays go far beyond the personal level; personal and national alienation appear to go hand in hand. O'Neill, Miller, and Shepard are widely recognized for their persistent critique of American society and their desire to wake a social conscience in their audiences. Theirs is a society seen to be in moral free fall, and they attack what they regard as its cause, the traditional value system upon which the United States is founded.

A discussion of the tension between the public and the private introduces the agenda of my project very well. The main focus of my thesis is, as my title suggests, the disintegration of the American family, as portrayed in *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child* and *True West*. Harold Bloom states that *Journey* depicts "the nightmare realities that can afflict American family life (...) The helplessness of family love to sustain, let alone heal, the wounds of marriage, of parenthood, and of sonship" (xii). This synopsis of *Journey* may be applied to all the four plays of my study; all of them offer a bleak view of the complicated dynamics of American families. Shelly's question in *Buried Child* - "What's happened to this family anyway?" (112) - touch upon the very essence of my project. Like Shelly, I have status as a spectator, an observer, of these families. As I delved into my selection of plays, I shared Shelly's shocked reaction, and I attempt to answer the question she raises. My thesis is motivated by the idea that pressures from the exterior world enter the family realm and contribute to the disintegration of the American family. I attempt to demonstrate ways in

which industrialization, capitalism, and consumerism - in short, the modernization of the western economy - affect the role of the family within the American society. In order to ensure the myth of the American dream, however unattainable, family life is by these dramatists seen to pay the price. The theme of familial dysfunction relates to the values embedded in society; the family is breaking up from within by their allegiance to public values.

It is fruitful to open my study with an examination of the tensions that characterize the relationship between fathers and sons; out of this relationship comes the erosion of the entire family. As its title suggests, this chapter looks at the father's legacy and the son's plight. More specifically, it serves to demonstrate that a success-driven society combined with ideas of masculinity contaminate the relationship between fathers and sons. My subsequent chapter focuses on the rivalry between male siblings, and may be viewed as an extension of the father-son relationship; once again societal expectations cause deep tensions between male family members. My third chapter examines the dilemmas and challenges of family life through a female perspective; more specifically, through the figure of the wife-mother. It serves to illustrate that patriarchal ideas confine women to the domestic sphere; in addition, the patriarchy represents an obstacle to women attempting to fulfil their roles as mothers. In these plays, women and men alike are victimized by the gender roles imbedded in a predominantly male-oriented society; more strikingly, my four selected plays serve to illustrate that gender roles are reinforced within the family circle. In my concluding chapter I am going to explore the existential dimension of these plays. *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* raise important questions regarding the role of the individual in the modern world. Does society at large provide modern man with some sense of belonging? If not, can the family home be viewed as a last refuge?

Patriarchal Heritage: The Father's Legacy and the Son's Plight

“A man can't go out the way he came in (...)
a man has got to add up to something”
- Willy Loman in *Salesman*

In the United States as elsewhere, men's lives are structured around ideas of masculinity that in some degree are related to patriarchal beliefs. Historically, man's role has been anchored in the public sphere, or, in Talcott Parsons' words, “in the occupational world” (15). According to Parsons, the status of the 20th century American family is determined by the level of job the “husband-father” holds and by the income he earns (13). Men are expected to be committed to their public role, and preferably, a man's profession should be a source of pride. In addition, the 20th century male is expected to be devoted to his wife and children, primarily through his function within the family realm as the main provider, but also through the upbringing, or the socialization, of children. Taking into consideration that young boys tend to look to their fathers in search of appropriate male behavior one may conclude that fathers are important role models for their sons. In other words, paternal influence is particularly evident in the construction of male identity. The American male of the 20th century is undoubtedly met with a number of expectations and may be argued to be under a “double pressure”; he is expected to successfully manage his roles in both the public and the private arenas. Not surprisingly, the public and the private role are at times in conflict with each other; more importantly, it appears that the private role as husband-father is premised on the role that man holds in the public sphere. Moreover, in my four plays, socially constructed ideas of masculinity permeate the father-son relationships and serve to define and shape even their most personal interactions.

The characters of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* are strongly bound to the time in which they live. As Brenda Murphy argues, “every member of the Loman family is under pressure to behave in a socially predetermined way regardless of what they personally want to do” (126). Murphy's statement may be applied to all the plays of my study. The lives of Willy Loman, James Tyrone, Dodge, and the Old Man - the fathers of my plays - are structured and controlled by definitions of masculinity suggested by a patriarchal, capitalist society. All the plays deal with man's struggle to

confront society and to establish a respectable position in the public sphere. More strikingly, patriarchal ideas and societal expectations that men are met with are passed on from generation to generation: from fathers to sons, as Shepard's personal experience testifies to: "I know what this thing is about because I was a victim of it; it was part of my life, my old man tried to force on me a notion of what it was to be a man" (qtd. in McDonough 50). In *Journey* and *Salesman*, the father harbors great expectations for his son, which becomes a source of deep conflict. In the two plays by Shepard, on the other hand, the fathers have withdrawn from paternal authority. In this respect, Dodge and the Old Man may be viewed as the opposites of Tyrone and Willy. However, all four plays may be argued to portray endless circles of masculine despair; the father's patriarchal challenges and mistakes are on some level repeated by his son. In fact, ancestry may be interpreted as a curse; a self-destructive male behavior repeats itself from one generation to the next.

The conflict between male generations is a recurring theme in the drama of O'Neill, Miller, and Shepard, and an issue closely related to the playwrights' personal experiences. The parallels between the playwrights' lives and their dramatic works are striking and require some brief commentary. For O'Neill, *Journey* was an attempt to capture the essence of his family life and his own true self. The play is in every respect a portrayal of O'Neill's family; the structure of the Tyrone household and the tension between its members resemble to a great extent those of O'Neill's own family. He portrays his own parents through the characters of Mary and James Tyrone; Jamie is the fictional recreation of O'Neill's older brother; and the younger brother in the play, Edmund, is O'Neill's imaginative projection of himself. Transforming his own experience into drama involved such an intimate, personal exposure that O'Neill requested that *Journey* should not be presented to the public until at least twenty-five years after his death. Nevertheless, his wife Carlotta - to whom the play is dedicated - decided to push forward the publication, and as a result, the play saw the light of day only three years after O'Neill's death. In his dedication, O'Neill states that *Journey* is a "play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood" (7) and reflects his desire to "face [his] dead at last" (ibid.) and thus come to terms with sufferings buried in the past. However, O'Neill was unable to escape his origins, as his biographer, Louis Sheaffer, argues: "O'Neill, clearly, never really 'left' his parents. An eternal son, forever haunted by the past, he was obsessed with the subject of familial relations, particularly those between parent and child" ("Son and Artist" 506). Throughout his literary career O'Neill showed a great interest in the father-son dyad, as expressed in *Journey* and other plays. *Beyond the Horizon* (1918), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1920, tells the story of a father who disowns his son. Similarly,

Desire Under the Elms (1924) is a portrayal of the turbulent relationship between Ephraim Cabot and his three sons. *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933) is O'Neill's only comedy among several tragedies and is often regarded as a depiction of how he desired to experience youth and family. For instance, the head of the family, Nat Miller, is quite the opposite of James Tyrone in *Journey*. During their years of coming to age, O'Neill and his brother experienced their father's demands as a violation of their freedom as individuals. Thus, *Ah, Wilderness!* may be regarded as the light-hearted equivalent of the darker *Journey*.

Similarly, the vast majority of Shepard's plays explore the conflict between fathers and sons. The father remains a crucial character in Shepard's drama; some would probably claim that the playwright is thematically obsessed with the figure of the father. A recent play by Shepard, *The Late Henry Moss* (2000), portrays a dead father's enormous impact on his son, and in many ways echoes one of his early plays, *The Holy Ghostly* (1970), in which a son attempts to escape the legacy of his late father. Shepard's drama draws heavily on his personal experience and is inspired by his own childhood and youth. In *Motel Chronicles* (1982), which may be regarded as an autobiographical testimony, Shepard chronicles his own life, from childhood in Illinois to adult life in rural California. The similarities between Shepard's portrayal of his own grandparents in *Motel Chronicles* and Dodge and Halie in *Buried Child* are unmistakable: "My Grandpa sits exactly as he's always sat - in a hole of his sofa wrapped in crocheted blankets facing the T.V. He's like a skeleton now (...) [My grandmother] has great ears" (45-46). Furthermore, it reads: "My father lives alone on the desert. He says he doesn't fit with people" (55). The absent father in *True West* is in part based on Shepard's father, who - emotionally wounded after working as a bombing pilot during World War II - on several occasions left his wife and children and headed for a solitary life in the desert (cf. Schvey 14). In 1963, in the urge to create and define himself, the twenty-year-old Samuel Shepard Rogers decided to drop his last name, which he shared with his father. Symbolically, Shepard attempted to break with his paternal lineage. Nonetheless, in the collection of some of his most important works, *Seven Plays* (1981), the dedication reads: "For my father, Sam." Shepard has stated that the conflict between him and his father continued after his death: "My relationship with him is the same. Exactly the same. It's a relationship of absolute unknowing. I never knew him, although he was around all the time. There's no point in dwelling on it. I mean, my relationship with him now is exactly the same as when he was alive. It's just as mysterious" (qtd. in Schvey 15). Apparently, in Shepard's case, the battle between a father and his son is endless, even capable of transcending death. Also in Shepard's dramatic works, there is a bond between father and son which is never to be

broken. As in the case of O'Neill, Shepard's drama becomes an attempt to confront problematic family issues: "I've been trying to escape myself ever since I left home (...) and I realize now that I have to face things, I can't run forever" (qtd. in Bottoms 154). Along with O'Neill, Shepard may be referred to as an "eternal son", unable to escape the legacy of his family, particularly that of his father.

One of Miller's early plays, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), forms the basis for the dramatist's numerous plays dealing with the father-son dyad. In Miller's own words about the play, "in the writing of the father-son relationship and of the son's search for his relatedness there was a fullness of feeling I had never felt before; a crescendo was struck with a force I could almost touch" (qtd. in Martin 126). In Miller's first great success on Broadway, *All My Sons* (1947), Chris Keller's admiration of his father is brought a brutal end when he realizes his father's betrayal. In *The Price* (1968) - regarded as one of Miller's greatest plays - the father is a crucial character even though he only exists in the memory of his two sons, who are brought together because of his death. One critic argues: "In all [of Miller's] major plays, the prime authority and guidance of the father is of primary importance" (qtd. in Roudané, *Conversations...* 44). Like O'Neill and Shepard, Miller has confirmed that his plays contain autobiographical elements: "The plays are my autobiography (...) I'm in all of them" (qtd. in Bigsby, "Introduction", 1). However, when it comes to *Salesman*, no source indicates an immediate parallel between Miller's relationship with his father and that of Willy Loman and his sons. Miller once declared that he shared a close relationship with his father, and that none of his plays directly reflect upon the two of them (cf. Roudané, *Conversations...* 89). Miller points to the contrast between Willy Loman and his own father: "The reason why I was able to write about the [father-son] relationship, was because it had a mythical quality to me. If I had ever thought that I was writing about my father, I suppose I never could have done it. My father is, literally, a much more realistic guy than Willy Loman, and much more successful as a personality" (ibid. 90). However, it is reasonable to assume that there is some familiarity between Miller's life and the thematic concerns of *Salesman*. When his father's business collapsed in the Great Depression of the 1930s, the family was forced to move into a small house in Brooklyn, which is believed to be the model for the Loman residence in *Salesman*. The impact of the Depression on the Miller family appears to have caused some tension between father and son. Miller's autobiography, *Timebends: A Life* (1987) hints at his negative feelings toward his father: "I had two fathers, the real one and the metaphoric, and the latter I resented because he did not know how to win

out over the general collapse” (112). Apparently, his father’s failure to cope with the financial crisis prompted Miller to see him in more ambivalent terms.

The Father’s Struggle: Patriarchal Ideas of Masculinity

In order to analyze the relationship between father and son in these four plays, one must pay close attention to the prevailing ideas of masculinity in the 20th century United States. The term “masculinity” refers to certain qualities, or traits, associated with the male sex.² For instance, “power”, “strength”, and “dominance” are characteristics frequently connected with masculinity, and men are expected to live up to these standards. According to Halie in *Buried Child*, a “whole man” (124) should be “hero[ic]”, “brave”, “strong”, and “very intelligent” (73). Clearly, preconceptions of masculinity are deeply internalized in the American psyche.

According to Carla J. McDonough’s study, *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* (1997), there exist two conflicting ideals of masculinity in American society: “the ideal of masculine success” and the “frontier ideal of masculinity” (47). While the former represents men who hold respectable jobs and remain active participants of public life, the latter may be understood in relation to men who seek the adventurous life of cowboys and pioneers. Similarly, Murphy argues:

Twentieth-century American society appears to promote a variety of roles toward which males might wish to aspire. While on the one hand society applauds the man who marries, has children, and provides them with a good home and everything they might desire, on the other hand, society also displays a tremendous respect toward figures who represent none of these reliable qualities (142).

It seems that the 20th century male is caught between two contradictory ideals of masculinity; on the one hand, the adventurer living in the American wilderness; on the other hand, the urbanized businessman. In both settings, however, man is expected to achieve success and to be in control of his environment. These conflicting images of masculinity may be argued to stem from a major socioeconomic change in the United States. By the end of the 19th century, as the American economy became organized along industrial, capitalist lines and the United States saw the emergence of urbanization, the American frontier eventually vanished. As a result, “the pioneer image of the father who would rise to fame and fortune through self-determination was giving way to the image of the company man” (Rosefeldt 39).

² Cf. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Marshall, p. 312.

The vanishing of the American frontier prompted a major shift in men's sense of their gendered identity, as McDonough argues: "American manhood faced a crisis as the frontier gave way to urban sprawl" (36). Nonetheless, a romanticizing of the great Wild West - representing rugged individualism, freedom and masculine pride - still remains rooted in American culture. A nostalgia toward the American frontier characterizes for instance a number of Shepard's male protagonists; in fact, a fascination with the cowboy is echoed throughout Shepard's oeuvre: "Cowboys are really interesting to me - these guys, most of them really young, about 16 or 17, who decided they didn't want to have anything to do with the East Coast, with that way of life, and took on this immense country, and didn't have any real rules" (qtd. in McDonough 37). Even though very little is revealed about the Old Man in *True West* it is implied that he at one point in his life was part of civilized society; however, unable to succeed or find fulfillment in the new emerging ideal of masculinity projected upon him by a capitalist society, he eventually chose to leave the chaotic city life behind, even if it involved deserting his family. His rebellion against modern civilization may be argued to stem from a longing toward the legendary heroes of the old West and the freedom they represent. Nonetheless, by the 20th century, the "frontiersman" had become a mere ideal. By escaping into a time and a place that no longer exists (the Wild West) the Old Man becomes an outcast of American society, as John M. Clum argues in "The Classic Western and Sam Shepard's Family Drama": "In contemporary society, there is no place for a man outside the economic system" (177). Similarly, in *Buried Child*, the father has chosen a "back-to-the-land location" (Bottoms 156). This appears to be a deliberate decision on Dodge's account: "it wasn't gonna' be the city!" (111). Nonetheless, neither Dodge nor the Old Man manages to achieve masculine success and prosperity in the rural environment of the United States.

In *Salesman*, Willy is caught between two extremes; his innermost longing of living in harmony with nature is undermined by the business ideology of post-World War II United States to which he belongs. McDonough argues: "Among the plays of modern American drama, perhaps no other captures the instability and dilemma of traditional American masculinity better than does Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*" (27). Willy yearns for the adventurous life of the frontiersman, but is trapped by his role as company man. Clearly, Willy believes that the contemporary business world of the United States is filled with opportunity, arguing: "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead" (33). After meeting the successful salesman, Dave Singleman, Willy is convinced that "selling [is] the greatest career a man could want" (81). Nonetheless, Willy also sees his own father as the embodiment of

masculine success, though representing a very different ideology than Singleman. Whereas Singleman epitomizes the urbanized businessman, Willy's father is an adventurer of the wilderness, and thus a hero of a lost American past: "at once the untamed man and the westward-bound pioneer, the artisan, the great inventor, and the successful entrepreneur" (Hadomi 53). Willy's life-long idolization of both his father and Singleman leaves him torn between two different ideologies. As McDonough sees it, "Willy is trapped between competing versions of manhood, and his unwillingness to see the two versions as incompatible leads to his failure and death" (27).

According to Tom Scanlan's study, *Family, Drama, and American Dreams*, two models of the family have emerged: "the family of security" and "the family of freedom" (27). The former is characterized by "the urge toward the safety of mutuality" while the latter by "the contrary urge for independence and self-hood" (ibid.). To some extent, Scanlan's classifications of the American family mirror McDonough's differentiation between conflicting ideals of masculinity. In *Salesman*, Willy gives voice to the confinement of family life when he expresses one of his greatest regrets: "Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! (...) What a mistake! (...) If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different" (41, 45). The responsibility Willy has toward the welfare of his family prevents him from pursuing his need for personal freedom. At the same time, Willy is very much dependent on the sense of security that family life represents. The struggle to combine conflicting yearnings is present in *Journey* as well. As in the case of Willy, Tyrone longs for the companionship of a woman and the security of home life, but he also yearns for individualism. The two men's itinerant professions, one as a touring actor and the other as a traveling salesman, may be seen as attempts to reconcile their conflicting needs for freedom on the one hand and security on the other (cf. Proehl's discussion of Willy 61). Indeed, the mobility of their professions resembles the freedom of the traditional American adventurer.

The perhaps most prevalent strain of masculinity is connected to the idea of the patriarchy. The term "patriarchy" indicates the social authority - or rule - of men, both within the family realm and the public sphere.³ Within the patriarchal system of the 20th century United States, Tyrone, Willy, Dodge, and the Old Man are expected to be leaders, both within and outside the family sphere. They are expected to be successful in occupational terms; in addition, they are expected to be the breadwinners, and the guiding heads, of their respective households, exerting authority over wife and children. *Journey, Salesman, Buried Child* and

³ Cf. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Marshall, p. 383.

True West portray the strategies of men dealing with both settings: home and society. In *Salesman*, Willy lays claim to his role as head of the household and is the only breadwinner of the family. His quest to exercise absolute domestic authority over his wife and sons is made evident throughout the play. Nevertheless, Willy does not appear as the traditional, authoritarian patriarch. For instance, he has a boy's name, probably short for William. Only on rare occasions is he addressed as "Mr. Loman" (90). In fact, Biff refers to him, rather ironically, as "the boss" (123), and in the course of the play both of his sons call him "scout" (105, 129). His employer, Howard Wagner - who in fact is much younger than Willy - patronizes him by calling him "kid" (84). In addition, the surname "Loman" is reminiscent of "Low Man", denoting inferiority and insecurity. Miller's initial presentation of Willy, carrying two large sample cases, immediately suggests his burden: "*his exhaustion is apparent*" (12). Willy's fatigue stems from his lack of professional career achievements and his inability to attain prominence in terms of wealth and money. Willy knows that for a man to achieve acceptance in modern society, he must be ambitious, hard-working and preferably, in his own words, "accomplish something" (15). However, Willy can barely make ends meet, which means that he falls short in the private sphere as well. Thaddeus Wakefield argues that "the main twentieth century American capitalist expectation of masculinity is for one to provide for one's family" (28), and failing to meet this expectation, Willy fails as patriarch.

In *Journey*, on the other hand, James Tyrone is obviously the patriarchal head of the family, and the principal bearer of the family name. He is *the* Tyrone, emphasizing his authoritarian role within the family. O'Neill's initial description of Tyrone may be sharply contrasted with Miller's portrayal of Willy. Tyrone is presented as the stereotypical male; strong, proud, and confident: "*About five feet eight, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, he seems taller and slenderer because of his bearing, which has a soldierly quality of head up, chest out, stomach in, shoulders squared*" (11). In many respects, Tyrone resembles the character of Big Daddy in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), who appears as the patriarch incarnate. The men's superior physique mirrors their domineering behavior toward their wives and sons. Thus, power and the need to be in charge seem to characterize both Tyrone and Big Daddy. Like Big Daddy's name, "Tyrone" denotes power and strength; the name is believed to derive from the Greek word "Turannos", referring to "sovereign" or "king."⁴ In addition, in the course of the play, Tyrone is compared to a leopard (31) and a

⁴ <http://wiki.name.com/en/Tyrone>

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hawk (102) - independent, powerful and predatory animals. Considering that both Big Daddy and Tyrone represent financial prosperity, they are considered successful in the eyes of the capitalist culture of the United States. While the former is a plantation millionaire, the latter owns “property valued at a quarter of a million” (147), and both are able to provide for their families, at least materially. For instance, Tyrone is in position to equip his residence with two servants and a personal driver. In this respect, the contrast between Tyrone and Willy is striking, although there are, as my subsequent analysis will reveal, many similarities between them.

Dodge in *Buried Child* comes to represent the very anti-thesis of the traditional 20th century patriarch: “I’m an invisible man!” (68). The failed patriarch of this play, whose death goes unnoticed, may be sharply contrasted with the dying patriarch in Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, who is surrounded by worried family members. Dodge is confined to the couch and is the only character of *Buried Child* that never leaves the stage, which emphasizes his lack of a public role. Even his name suggests that he has shunned both his public and private responsibilities as patriarch. He is characterized as a frail man: “*very thin and sickly looking*” (63). According to Dodge himself he is “dependent on the whims of others” (96) and “can’t be left alone for a minute!” (79). Family secrets, such as incest and infanticide, have ruined Dodge’s sense of masculinity. He insists that his family at one point was “well-established” (123); in addition, the farm is portrayed as prosperous: “producing enough milk to fill Lake Michigan twice over” (ibid.). Then, “outa’ the middle a’ nowhere” (ibid.), his wife Halie becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby boy, revealed to be a result of incest between mother and son. The child marks a turning point for the fate of the family, and prompts a major shift in Dodge’s sense of manhood by challenging his position of authority within the family: “It made everything we’d accomplish look like it was nothin’. Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness” (124). Dodge resolves to kill the baby boy who threatens his patriarchal power. However, after realizing his inability to control the action of his oldest son, Tilden, and even the sexuality of his own wife, Dodge realizes that he is utterly disempowered and he decides to imprison himself within his own house. As a result, he evades his role as authority figure within the public sphere and the farming is brought to an end: “There hasn’t been corn out there since about nineteen thirty-five! That’s the last time I planted corn out there!” (69). The barren fields surrounding the family farm reflect the symbolic emasculation of Dodge as a patriarch. Quite ironically, he argues: “Persistence, fortitude and determination. Those are the three virtues. You stick with those three and you can’t go wrong” (98). In Dodge’s twisted perception of reality, he has managed to transform

his vices into virtues; his only determination is to escape from his problematic situation. He attempts to compensate for his lack of power by bossing his wife and sons around. None of them, however, show any sign of obeying the defeated Dodge. Undoubtedly, Dodge has utterly failed in his role as family patriarch.

In *True West*, Shepard portrays another failed patriarch, one who has actually walked out on his family. According to McDonough, “Shepard’s plays of the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, abound with images of men who abandon (or wish to) their responsibilities toward jobs and families in favor of a self-absorbed life alone in a desertic region (usually the Mojave) or in the bottom of a liquor bottle” (38). In *Buried Child*, Dodge has escaped into his bottle of whiskey, and although he is always present on stage, he has somehow left his family behind. The Old Man of *True West*, however, has abandoned his family in a more literal sense than Dodge. It is important to note that the Old Man is never present on stage; nevertheless, he is a crucial character and somehow drives the action of the play. Even though he indirectly exerts some kind of power over his two sons and is a great force in their lives, he is certainly not portrayed as the traditional, patriarchal father. The Old Man corresponds to Henry I. Schvey’s description of Shepard’s fictional fathers as “weak” and “distant” (13). According to Megan Williams, Shepard’s drama portrays “a series of nowhere-men who have willingly abandoned a sense of time, place, and history (...) Without the ability to ground himself in space and time, man becomes deprived of a sense of his private and public selves” (57-58). Williams’ statement is undoubtedly applicable to the Old Man in *True West*. The fact that he remains nameless throughout the play reinforces his status as a “nowhere-man” and emphasizes his lack of authority. The barren desert that he inhabits suggests a kind of “sterilized” manhood. Powerless both within the public and private arenas, the Old Man falls far short of patriarchal ideals.

As a result of sharp gender role restrictions, Tyrone, Willy, Dodge, and the Old Man are trapped by the established ideas of masculinity laid out for them already at birth. While Dodge and the Old Man have acknowledged their inability to be figures of authority in neither the public nor the private spheres, and walked away from the responsibilities imposed on them by society, Tyrone and Willy are making vain attempts to sustain the roles they are expected to fill.

The Culture of Masculine Success and Performance

Unlike Dodge and the Old Man, the fathers of *Journey* and *Salesman* are deeply entangled in the culture of masculine success and performance deeply embedded in 20th century American culture. The United States is in many ways founded upon the belief in hard work, and the desire to “strive and succeed” is inherent in the American psyche, as Willy’s statement serves to illustrate: “A man can’t go out the way he came in (...) a man has got to add up to something” (125). Quite ironically, Dodge in *Buried Child* also appears to cling to a stereotypical view of masculinity: “There’s nothing a man can’t do. You dream it up and he can do it. Anything” (110). In the United States, success is synonymous with respect and prestige; more importantly, it represents the idea of social mobility. Both *Journey* and *Salesman* are characterized by a hunger for financial success. The fathers in these plays are determined to conform to social norms and live by the code of a capitalist, patriarchal society. Both Tyrone and Willy embody the idea that “capitalism influences a man’s ideologies in defining his masculinity” (Wakefield 23).

Tyrone and Willy have a strong work ethic and take great pride in their professions; in fact, they are defined in relation to their professional careers. With these words, Miller introduces his male protagonist: “*From the right, Willy Loman, the Salesman, enters*” (12, emphasis added). Similarly, O’Neill’s portrayal of Tyrone reads: “*The stamp of his profession is unmistakably on him. (...) the actor shows in all his unconscious habits of speech, movement and gesture*” (13). It seems that Tyrone and Willy identify themselves first and foremost in terms of their roles in society, not in terms of their private roles as husbands and fathers. They are ambitious men who dedicate themselves to the public sphere, and the peak of their lives is related to their professional careers. Tyrone clings to the praise given him by the famous 19th century actor, Edwin Booth: “As I look back on it now, that night was the high spot in my career (...) I made the manager put down his exact words in writing. I kept it in my wallet for years” (153, 155). Similarly, *Salesman* abounds with references to a time when Willy’s achievements allegedly were great: “in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions” (82).

Above all, Tyrone and Willy consider themselves important businessmen actively participating in the capitalist system of the United States. They adopt the American culture’s obsession with material wealth, as seen in Tyrone’s hobby of investing in property and Willy’s preoccupation with material possessions. They choose to adapt to a society in which men first and foremost are valued in terms of their public achievements and the size of their

bank accounts. Tyrone's fear of poverty and his aristocratic affectations may be compared to Willy's striving for financial prosperity and his preoccupation with the men of success. Eventually, Tyrone and Willy become unable to negotiate between their public and private roles, which prompts them into neglecting their families. In the case of these men, the quest for material success proves irreconcilable with the expectation that they be successful as husbands and fathers. In their fervent pursuit of wealth and status - the American definition of success - their families always come second. In the case of Tyrone and Willy, the public role overpowers the private role, as Wakefield puts it, "America's twentieth century capitalistic society thwarts American fathers attempting to fulfill traditional paternalistic roles" (24). Indeed, Willy and Tyrone project their public role onto the home arena as well.

Willy's profession requires him to constantly play the role of the talented, confident salesman. In order to succeed in occupational terms, Willy relies on his ability to perform and win other people's conviction. His sense of self-worth depends solely on the approval of others, and as a result, he becomes preoccupied with his reputation within the public world. Willy's behavior echoes the Dale Carnegie⁵ business philosophy: the idea of conquering the world through one's charm and personality. Willy believes success can be achieved through "personal attractiveness" and on the basis of being "well-liked" and argues: "personality always wins the day" (65) and "[b]e liked and you will never want" (33). Clearly, according to Willy being popular is synonymous with being successful. The outward mask of confidence which he resorts to in the public world, Willy also brings home with him. He constantly applies his business philosophy on his family and raises his sons in terms of the ideology of salesmanship. In front of Biff and Happy, Willy always plays the part of the thriving and venerated businessman, telling them: "America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England (...) I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own" (31). Undoubtedly, the salesman has become an inseparable part of Willy's identity. It is also significant to note that in the course of *Salesman* it is never revealed what kind of product Willy sells. In some sense, one may argue that Willy is selling himself. Thus, he allows himself to become a mere commodity in the capitalist system. Willy is also preoccupied with Biff's worth within the business world; in fact, Willy's treatment of his son suggests a desire to "sell" him on the capitalist market. In doing so, Willy commodifies Biff in terms of the

⁵ Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) was a famous American lecturer on self-improvement and salesmanship, recognized for his best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936).

culture of consumption upon which the United States of the 20th century is founded, and he seems unable to look beyond Biff's market value. According to Steven R. Centola, Willy "has deceived himself into thinking that the values of the family he cherishes are inextricably linked with the values of the business world in which he works" (27). One may argue that Willy plays the role of the businessman to the very end; he sells his life for a profit.

The role of performance is central also in *Journey*. As a professional actor, Tyrone knows when to step out of himself and into an acquired role, and he is repeatedly seen performing to himself as well as to others. *Journey* is permeated with literary allusions; on a number of occasions Tyrone and his sons quote well-known philosophers and authors. Tyrone's life has always evolved around the theater, and it has clearly left its mark on him. For instance, he is seen "putting on a fake heartiness" (68) in front of Edmund, and later he "forc[es] his face into a pleasantly paternal expression" before approaching his son "[w]ith an actor's heartiness" (91). As in the case of Willy, Tyrone allows his occupational role to pervade his private role as father and husband. On several occasions, Mary points to her husband's tendency of bringing his profession home with him: "He isn't a great actor for nothing, is he? (...) I can tell when you're acting!" (29, 124). She also claims that he always "make[s] such a show of himself" (44). In addition, as a real-estate spectator, Tyrone relies on his acting skills in order to ensure a profitable bargain, and like Willy, he puts on a mask of masculine confidence. In some degree, Tyrone's way of performing for profit resembles the Carnegie ideology that Willy attempts to take advantage of. According to Jamie, "[Tyrone] puts on an act for every damned fool that comes along" (57). Like Willy, Tyrone appears first and foremost to value his sons in capitalist terms, which is made evident when he argues that Jamie is not worthy of his salary (32). Jamie draws attention to his father's way of valuing everything - even his sons - in monetary terms: "If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be the limit!" (31). Wakefield argues: "In twentieth century American society, family members do not value each other through intrinsic standards but rather are objectified and commodified by economic standards" (2). This statement is applicable to both *Journey* and *Salesman*.

The performative nature of masculinity serves to characterize family relations in *Buried Child* as well, portrayed through the characters of Dodge and Bradley. It is significant to note, however, that these men's masks of performance differ greatly from those of Tyrone and Willy, who put on masks of masculine success. In all four plays, nevertheless, the masks stem from a feeling of masculine inadequacy, and may be viewed as attempts to gain male dominance. The father and son of *Buried Child* are fully aware of the American culture's

obsession with the “importance in a man” (105), as Bradley puts it. Unable to meet societal expectations in terms of success, they appear to resort to an aggressive behavior in order to prove their masculinity. According to Shepard, “[t]here’s some hidden, deeply rooted thing in the Anglo-male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always, continually having to act out some idea of manhood that is violent” (qtd. in McDonough 35). For instance, the language of both Dodge and Bradley may be characterized as extremely aggressive. From an early point, the father threatens to kill his son (67), and it is striking to witness that the vast majority of his utterances end with exclamation points, which serve to emphasize Dodge’s aggressive behavior. Bradley also attempts to compensate for his lack of masculine power through a violent attitude, which is demonstrated by his entrance into the play: “Sonuvabitch! Sonuvagoddamnitch!” (81). His imposing, physical appearance may be seen as an attempt to prove his masculine dominance and compensate for his amputated leg: “*His arms and shoulders are extremely powerful and muscular*” (82). Towards the end of Act II, Bradley brutally puts his fingers into Shelly’s mouth - a symbolic rape - in a demonstration of his masculine superiority. However, as Ann C. Hall argues, Bradley’s “patriarchal power is questioned at the very moment he is trying to prove his potency” (99).

In *Journey* and *Salesman*, Tyrone and Willy appear to exist first and foremost through their public performances. The performative façades project the men’s need for masculine pride and success, within both the public and the private spheres. It appears that the men’s role in the public world completely overshadows their private role as fathers. However, it is even more striking to witness that the expectations imposed on Tyrone and Willy they pass on to their own sons; they express a desire for them to adopt the mask of the successful male as well. In this manner, masculine ideologies are perpetuated.

The First-Born Son and the Father’s Quest for Authority

Within a patriarchal society, authority, lineage and descent are first and foremost situated in men.⁶ In addition, the first-born son has historically held a privileged position within the patriarchal lineage. According to legislation, the first-born male was the appointed heir of his father’s inheritance. Upon the death of the family patriarch, property and titles were passed to the oldest son. Undoubtedly, the patriarchal father expected his first-born son to be worthy of his inheritance, and as a result, he tended to assume a special responsibility and commitment toward him. Usually the father had an underlying hope that the son would become a source of

⁶ Cf. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Marshall, p. 383.

pride and follow in his footsteps, for instance in terms of occupation. This doctrine certainly applies to the fathers of *Journey* and *Salesman*. In both plays the desire to exert paternal authority is particularly noticeable in the relationship between the father and the first-born son. In *Buried Child* and *True West*, on the other hand, the father-son relationships are utterly estranged and the patriarchal authority of Dodge and the Old Man may be questioned. Fatherhood, it seems, is a role none of them know how to play; consequently, they appear to have no expectations or ambitions for their sons.

The father's patriarchal favoritism of the first-born son is a marked feature in *Journey* and *Salesman*. A common tradition within a patriarchal culture is to name the first-born son after his father, as seen in *Journey*. Tyrone has given his own name - James - to his oldest son; a gesture that involves certain demands. In O'Neill's initial stage directions, Jamie appears as a reflection of his father: "*He has his father's broad-shouldered, deep-chested physique* (19). It appears that Tyrone identifies with Jamie's strength and physique rather than with Edmund's fragile health. On some level, he seems to distance himself from his youngest son. He tells Jamie: "You're a healthy hulk like me (...) but [Edmund has] always been a bundle of nerves like his mother" (34). As in the case of Tyrone, Willy identifies with and dotes on the son who expresses what he considers cherished, masculine qualities: his first-born son, Biff. Willy worships the ground Biff walks on; he admires his athletic skills, his good looks, and his popularity among friends. In fact, Willy's favoritism of Biff resembles Big Daddy's obvious preference for Brick over Gooper in Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Willy compares Biff to heroes of Greek Mythology: Adonis and Hercules (33, 68). According to Willy, Biff is "[l]ike a young god" and a magnificent star that "can never really fade away" (68). In Anne Stavney's opinion, Willy ascribes to Biff godlike qualities: "In Willy's eyes Biff is superhuman, sanctified, haloed, divine" (57). One may assume that Willy favors Biff because he embodies all the qualities that he himself has craved his entire life. In the eyes of their fathers, Jamie and Biff represent the prospects of success; as a result, Tyrone and Willy place very high expectations on them. Even in Shepard's *Buried Child*, Halie gives voice to the idea that the first-born son holds a special position: "Tilden is the oldest. I always thought he'd be the one to take responsibility" (72).

The most central conflict in *Journey* and *Salesman* is clearly the one between the father and the first-born son. Tyrone and Willy expect their sons to willingly play the same public roles as them. Both fathers attempt to impose their own ideals and ambitions on their sons, and express a desire for them to follow in their footsteps in terms of occupation. While Tyrone wants Jamie to succeed as an actor, Willy wants Biff to pursue a career in

salesmanship, and both fathers expect that their sons gain recognition and achieve commercial success. In other words, the fathers' ideals of prominence and dreams of grandeur are transferred to their sons. In fact, by forcing their own life philosophy on to Jamie and Biff, Tyrone and Willy express a desire for their sons to adopt the identities of their fathers, and throughout the plays, they struggle in order to create Jamie and Biff in their own image. They harbor great hopes not only for themselves, but also for their sons' future prospects. Nonetheless, in both *Journey* and *Salesman*, the father's quest for paternal authority is incompatible with the son's craving for selfhood. While Tyrone and Willy struggle in order to control the life choices of their sons, Jamie and Biff yearn to embrace their own individuality and freedom of mind. Both question the father's authority, but still struggle in order to free themselves from paternal domination. When they turn out to fall short of their fathers' ideals, they become a source of disappointment, which creates deep tensions within the family realm.

In both plays, the father's frustration with his son goes hand in hand with his great ambition for him to succeed, and he expresses resentment at his son's lack of accomplishments. In fact, the turbulence between father and son in *Journey* and *Salesman* is hinted at even before the two of them meet on stage. Both Tyrone and Willy complain about their sons to their wives, clearly disappointed that they are not settled yet. Willy insists to Linda that "[n]ot finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!" (16). Similarly, when Mary tells her husband that Jamie eventually will turn out all right, Tyrone replies: "He'd better start soon then. He's nearly thirty-four" (18). Clearly, Jamie fails to live up to the name he shares with his father, and thus becomes Tyrone's main target of verbal attack. His father refers to him as "a lazy lunk" (32) who has no ambition in life except for "loaf[ing] in barrooms" (ibid.). Similarly, Willy criticizes Biff throughout *Salesman*, and states: "Biff is a lazy bum!" (16). He desperately questions him: "Don't you want to be anything?" (112). Tyrone and Willy know that unless their sons hold a respectable position in the occupational world, they fall far short of 20th century ideals of masculine success. Quite ironically, in *Buried Child*, the stereotypical preconception of masculinity is communicated through a female character, Halie. She is appalled by the lack of accomplishments that characterizes her husband and sons: "What's happened to the men of this family! Where are the men!" (124).

Despite the sons' refusal to live up to their fathers' demands regarding man's role in the public world, both Jamie and Biff experienced success in early boyhood and were predicted wonderful futures. Jamie was "a brilliant student" who received "glowing reports" (112) from the boarding school he attended: "Everyone liked him. All his teachers told us what a fine brain he had, and how easily he learned his lesson" (ibid.). Tyrone becomes

infuriated by Jamie's inability to achieve professional and financial success as an adult member of society: "After all the money I wasted on your education, and all you did was get fired in disgrace from every college you went to!" (32). Biff was also a shooting star in his younger days, and the Ebbets Field Game is clearly a moment of glory. Willy realizes that even though three great universities offered Biff scholarships, "from the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him" (92). Similarly, Tilden in *Buried Child* was an "All-American" football player, but like Jamie and Biff, he has "turned out to be so much trouble" (72). Horrified by her husband's and sons' detachment from the public arena, Halie is in desperate need to commemorate the only member of her family who meets her expectation of masculine success: her late son, Ansel. She wants to put up a statue that symbolizes the stereotypical, heroic male: "A big, tall statue with a basketball in the one hand and a rifle in the other" (73). However, it is likely that Ansel's stature as a successful male is only a product of Halie's imagination. Firstly, the death he suffered in a motel room was far from heroic; secondly, Bradley even claims that Ansel never played basketball (116). Yet, Halie insists that Ansel "*could've* earned lots of money. Lots and lots of money (...) Ansel *could've* been a great man. One of the greatest" (73, emphasis added). As Ansel is never present on stage, only existing vividly in his mother's mind, it seems likely that Halie overstates his masculine strength. As David DeRose notes: "Halie's tales of Ansel seem almost a fantasy she has formulated and that she trots out from time to time as a substitute for the disappointment of her real sons" (106). Halie's illusionary attitudes toward Ansel may be paralleled with Tyrone's and Willy's refusal to acknowledge their sons' disinterest in success. Both fathers cling to the hope that their sons eventually will succeed. Tyrone tells Jamie: "You're young yet. You *could* still make your mark. You had the talent to become a fine actor! You have it still. You're my son - !" (33, emphasis added). Similarly, Willy attempts to reassure himself: "Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf (...) I'll put my money on Biff" (18).

The father-son conflict in *Salesman* may be argued to stem from the conflicting ideas of masculinity that also Biff becomes entangled in; it appears that Biff inherits his father's confusion. Biff is a dreamer, an adventurer, and resembles his own grandfather to a great extent. Nevertheless, his preference for his grandfather's way of life is in conflict with the expectations he is faced with as a member of an urbanized society; as a result, he becomes - like his father - torn between two extremes. He laments: "I don't know what I am supposed to want" (22). Biff's statement perfectly captures the disintegrating relationship between the society and the individual, in which outside forces clash with the individual's quest for

autonomy. Even though Biff repeats his father's personal struggle, Willy does not seem to show any consideration for his son's bewilderment. He expects Biff to follow convention and achieve professional success, or at least to construct a façade of masculine performance. To his father's great disappointment, Biff declares: "I don't fit in business" (60). He prefers manual labor and desires to be outside "with [his] shirt off" (22). Willy, however, regards such work as second-rate and tells his son: "Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter" (61). Biff is aware that he fails living up to his father's ideals, and he somehow feels obligated to make his future in the business world of his father. Thus, Biff's belief in himself is undermined by his father's desire for him to succeed: "I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life" (22-23). In this manner, Willy constantly reminds Biff of his failure.

In *Journey*, the relationship between the father and the first-born son may be characterized by a constant struggle for dominance. Tyrone continuously reacts to Jamie's mind-set and attacks him verbally on a number of occasions. In fact, he is capable of entering a discussion with Jamie even when he is not present: "*Wrathfully*. The padlock is all scratched. That drunken loafer has tried to pick the lock with a piece of wire, the way he's done before. *With satisfaction, as if this was a perpetual battle of wits with his elder son*. But I've fooled him this time" (124, emphasis added). The incompatible life philosophies of father and son are indicated by the contrasting bookcases introduced in the initial stage description. While the bookcase representative of Tyrone contains classical, historical works, Jamie's (and Edmund's) bookcase contains literature of revolt, which serves to reflect the sons' need to rebel toward their father. Tyrone disapproves of their taste in literature and condemns it as second-rate and morbid. A picture of Shakespeare - Tyrone's idol - is prominently displayed over his sons' bookcase, indicating the father's quest for authority over his sons.

Jamie has developed certain strategies of resistance in order to avoid entering into a discussion with his father. He ignores his father's comments by shrugging his shoulders, remaining silent and not initiating further discussion. On several occasions, Jamie is seen exercising this power technique. Witnessing his son's passivity and lack of interest to stand up for himself, Tyrone becomes enraged:

JAMIE
Boredly
What's all the fuss about? Let's forget it.

TYRONE
Contemptuously

Yes, forget! Forget everything and face nothing! It's a convenient philosophy if you've no ambition in life except to - (21).

Shortly afterwards, Jamie repeats his pattern of resistance: "*Jamie is about to make some sneering remark to his father, but he shrugs his shoulders*" (26). Over the years, Jamie has probably realized the futility of entering into a quarrel with his father. The only subject the two men seem to agree on is their disagreement. Jamie knows that there is nothing he can say or do to reverse his father's resentment of him, and tells him: "I'm a fool to argue. You can't change the leopard's spots" (31). Jamie's accommodating, almost indifferent behavior is nonetheless just an act: "All right, Papa. I'm a bum. Anything you like, so long as it stops the argument" (33). By resorting to passivity, he not only avoids a discussion with his father, but he is also left with the upper hand. In some sense, he rises above his father's bitterness and reverses the traditional power dynamics between father and son. One may argue that Jamie shifts the power by not confronting it.

In comparison, the relationship between Dodge and Bradley in *Buried Child* is characterized by an explicit struggle for dominance. In this play, however, the father and son obtain power through extreme means. They yearn to break each other down, and both are seen performing acts of emasculation on each other. Bradley brutally cuts the hair of his sleeping father, leaving him exposed and vulnerable, bleeding from numerous cuts (82). Symbolically, the cutting of hair may be seen as an invasion of privacy. On a later occasion, Bradley leaves Dodge helpless on the floor, and covers his head with a coat (107). This act may be interpreted as an imaginary "burial" of Dodge; in fact, Bradley's actions introduce the idea of patricide. He suggests: "We could shoot [Dodge] (...) We could drown him! What about drowning him?" (106). Dodge also yearns for power over Bradley, as his advice to Shelly serves to illustrate: "All ya' gotta do is take his leg and throw it out the back door. Helpless. Totally helpless" (110). By removing the artificial leg - which Shelly eventually does - Bradley is left literally crippled, immobilized, and powerless.

The Myth of Masculine Success: Moments of Revelation and Confrontation

The male members of *Buried Child* represent modes of behavior that seem to question the socially constructed definition of masculinity, although Dodge, Tilden, and Bradley themselves never acknowledge their inability to live up to societal expectations. A sense of masculine inadequacy also lurks under the surface of the identities of Tyrone and Willy in *Journey* and *Salesman*. Even though they frantically cling to the illusion of their own

professional success and always play the role of the stereotyped, thriving male, their masks of success are gradually shattered, as the men increasingly give expression to a sense of insecurity and a feeling of failure.

In his private conversations with Linda, Willy pours out his lack of confidence about his job: “Other men - I don’t know - they do it easier. I don’t know why - I can’t stop myself - I talk too much (...) I’m fat. I’m very - foolish to look at (...) they do laugh at me. I know that” (37). Losing his job becomes the ultimate humiliation for Willy, leaving his sense of manhood symbolically slain. Similarly, his masculine pride stands in the way of accepting a job offer from Charley. He feels literally insulted by the idea of needing a helping hand from anyone and insists: “I’m not a cripple!” (84). For Willy, not being successful in the business world and consequently not being able to provide properly for his family is synonymous with hitting rock bottom. According to Wakefield, Willy “has crumbled under the weight of a capitalistic social system that destroys an individual’s manhood” (29). Willy expresses awareness that, in capitalist terms, he is worthless: “Funny, y’know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up more worth dead than alive” (98). It is significant to note, however, that Willy only experiences glimpses of self-examination, and takes the illusion of his success with him to his grave: “that funeral will be massive! They’ll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange licence plates (...) I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey - I am known!” (126). His suicide also becomes an attempt to prove his success to Biff: “that boy will be thunderstruck (...) I am known (...) and he’ll see it with his eyes once and for all. He’ll see what I am (...) He’s in for a shock, that boy!” (ibid.). Linda’s confusion by her husband’s grave, however, reflects a different reality: “Why didn’t anybody come? (...) where are all the people he knew?” (137). One may argue that despite Willy’s lack of success, he experiences a great fall, as Irving Jacobsen argues: “the fall from a height only imagined is nevertheless a fall” (247).

Perhaps O’Neill, through the character of Tyrone, more successfully depicts the “Aristotelian” fall from prosperity to misery. Toward the end of *Journey*, Tyrone’s professional - and moral - shortcomings are disclosed. He confides in Edmund, revealing that he feels his entire career to have been a failure. He admits that his fear of poverty and quest for financial success prompted him to sell his soul for money. Instead of becoming the classical actor he wanted to be, he headed toward a career as a matinee idol, and as a result, his reputation within the acting circle was ruined. Apparently, the golden days he so frequently has referred to, were not so golden after all:

I've never admitted this to anyone before, lad, but tonight I'm so heartsick I feel at the end of everything, and what's the use of fake pride and pretense. That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such great success in - a great money success - it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune. I didn't want to do anything else, and by the time I woke up to the fact that I'd become a slave to the damned thing and did try other plays, it was too late. They had identified me with that one part, and didn't want me in anything else. They were right, too. I'd lost the great talent I once had through years of repetition, never learning a new part, never really working hard (...) I could have been a great Shakespearean actor, if I'd kept on. I know that! (152-153).

In the final act of *Journey*, O'Neill describes Tyrone as “*a sad, defeated old man, possessed by hopeless resignation*” (127). Clearly, this description of Tyrone may be highly contrasted with O'Neill's portrayal of him in the initial stage directions. Thus, as in the case of Willy, Tyrone's sense of professional pride and success is merely a matter of masculine performance. In this respect, one may argue that both men's ambitions overshadow their actual accomplishments. While Tyrone grieves his lack of artistic success, Willy laments his failure to achieve material wealth. Both men yearn for greater recognition in the public arena and to be appreciated as worthy members of the male elite. Thus, maintaining a mask of masculine success becomes a life-long struggle for both Tyrone and Willy.

According to Brenda Murphy, “[s]ociological studies of American families speak of a common expectation among parents that their children will ‘do better’ than they have” (125). Indeed, one may argue that Tyrone and Willy harbor hopes for their first-born sons to carry on the line more successfully than the generation preceding them. Incapable of succeeding on their own, the fathers hope to find some consolation in their sons' successes. As Stavney argues, “the higher Willy elevates Biff, the better he can feel about himself as a parent” (56). Stavney, however, fails to comment upon what is more striking: if Biff succeeds, Willy can feel better about himself in occupational terms as well. The prospect of their sons' success becomes the fathers' final chance to confirm that they have at least succeeded in providing their sons with the right male values. A common characteristic for both plays is that the son's inability to conform to the norms of society reminds the father of his own professional shortcomings. As a result of his son's failure, the father is forced to recognize a disappointment in himself as well. Nevertheless, even though Tyrone and Willy are aware of their own professional failures, they constantly reprimand their sons for falling short of social ideals of masculine success. This is a classic example of psychological projection, a defense mechanism in which one transfers one's own flaws and weaknesses to others. On some subconscious level, Tyrone and Willy criticize themselves through their sons. For instance, Willy reproaches Biff for defects that in fact are deeply embedded in his own character. The

immaturity he perceives in Biff - "You never grew up" (93) - is representative of Willy as well. A psychological projection is closely related to self-delusion: instead of accepting the reality of their own failure, Tyrone and Willy ascribe their own negative attributes to their sons.

In an essay entitled "Love and Liberty: The Contemporary American Family", Professor of Education at Columbia University, Hervé Varenne, emphasizes the importance of allowing a child to develop according to his own desires. He insists that "these desires are not those of the parents, who must search for the signs that reveal the child's personality, and be careful not to mistake their wishes for his" (421). Since a child's distinct individuality is formed already at birth, Varenne argues that "the exercise of parental authority is always suspect. A child must make himself" (425). As a provider of moral rectitude and advice, the father should be an authority figure in his children's lives, but also recognize his child's individuality as separate from his own. Neither Tyrone nor Willy is able to recognize the prerogatives of their adult sons. For instance, in *Journey*, Jamie accuses his father of forcing his ambition upon him: "I never wanted to be an actor. You forced me on the stage" (32). Unable to acknowledge their sons as independent human beings - but rather as extensions or weak versions of themselves - Tyrone and Willy see their sons' failure as insults to their own identity and pride.

By the end of Act II, an intense confrontation between Willy and Biff takes place, as *Salesman* reaches its climax. Biff confronts his father with the lies and hypocrisy that have characterized their family, and he exposes the self-deceptions upon which their relationship is built: "Let's hold on to the facts tonight, Pop" (106). Then he demands his father to let go of the idea that he eventually will rise to fame and fortune: "I am not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!" (132). Biff breaks down the myth of masculine success by insisting to his father that they are not prominent members of society: "I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you! (...) I'm not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them!" (132). Biff also reveals that he holds his father responsible for his inability to hold down a job: "I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody!" (131). Willy's worship of his son may thus be argued to have been highly destructive. As far as Biff is concerned, he has given up on connecting with his father: "Dad, you're never going to see what I am, so what's the use of arguing? (...) Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? (...) I'm just what I am, that's all" (132-133). He announces his departure and breaks with his father once

and for all. At his father's grave, he says: "the man didn't know who he was (...) I know who I am" (138). By the end of *Salesman*, Biff appears to have broken free from his father's ideology and created his own system of values.

Similarly, in a climatic scene toward the end of *Journey*, the conflict between Tyrone and Jamie reaches a peak. In the final act, Tyrone openly declares his disappointment in Jamie: "My first-born, who I hoped would bear my name in honor and dignity, who showed such brilliant promise! (...) A waste! A wreck, a drunken hulk, done with and finished!" (171). Jamie confirms his father's accusations by satirically reciting Dante Gabriel Rossetti: "Look in my face. My name is Might-Have-Been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell"⁷ (171). As in the case of Biff, Jamie expresses awareness of his own lack of accomplishments as well as his father's false pride: "That's where I got - nowhere. Where everyone lands in the end, even if most of the suckers won't admit it" (164). One may thus argue that Biff and Jamie are able to see through the hypocrisy of 20th century façades of masculine success and accomplishments, and compared to their fathers they appear to reach a higher level of self-knowledge. While Tyrone acknowledges a sense of masculine inadequacy rather late in life, Willy refuses to admit that he, in fact, is a failure in professional and masculine terms.

Even though the father-son dyads of *Journey* and *Salesman* are characterized by a mutual disillusionment - any positive feeling between father and son appears to be overshadowed by a desire to accuse and criticize each other - moments of closeness also occur. During the peak of their confrontation, Biff suddenly bursts out in tears. Willy is overwhelmed when he witnesses Biff's show of emotion: "*astonished*. What're you doing? What're you doing? *To Linda*: Why is he crying?" (133). Even though they do not reach a higher level of communication, they somehow express their affections for one another. Willy becomes convinced that Biff loves him: "Isn't that - isn't that - remarkable? Biff - he likes me (...) Oh Biff! (...) He cried! Cried to me!" (ibid.). Reassured of Biff's love for him, Willy commits suicide to enable Biff to create a successful business of the insurance money - a success Biff has insisted that he does not want. The suicide may therefore be interpreted as Willy's final attempt to control the future of his son. Thus, by the end of *Salesman*, Willy and Biff have not been able to reconcile, and the father-son conflict remains unresolved. Similarly, Jamie's show of emotion towards the end of *Journey* touches Tyrone: "*Jamie's sobbing breaks his anger, and he turns and shakes his shoulders, pleading*. Jamie, for the love

⁷ The excerpt is from Rossetti's poem "A Superstition" in *The House of Life: A Sonnet-Sequence*.

of God, stop it!” (174). Nevertheless, it seems very unlikely that the antagonisms between father and son ever can be reconciled.

In comparison, there are a few moments of closeness between father and son in *Buried Child* as well. Unlike Bradley, Tilden shows no sign of hostility toward his father; on the contrary, he appears as very helpful and caring:

TILDEN: You all right now?

(...)

TILDEN: Why don't you lay down for a while? Just rest a little.

(TILDEN *helps* DODGE *lay down on the sofa. Covers him with a blanket.*)

(...)

(TILDEN *tucks blanket around* DODGE) (79-80).

Tilden expresses a desire for paternal love: “You’re not worried about me, are you? (...) You shoulda worried about me (...) Because I was lonely” (71). Similarly, the following utterance made by Dodge suggests a trace of paternal concern: “Are you in some kind of trouble? (...) You can tell me if you are. I’m still your father” (70). Tilden expresses his love for his father by covering his body with corn husks: “*He stands holding the husks over DODGE and looking down at him he gently spreads the corn husks over the whole length of DODGE’s body (...) He gathers more husks and repeats the procedure until the floor is clean of corn husks and DODGE is completely covered in them except for his head*” (81). Critics seem to agree that Tilden performs a symbolic burial of his father (Schvey 24; Steinke 79). In my opinion, however, this may at the same time be seen as a gesture of love and care. Tilden might want to prevent his father from being cold; more importantly, he covers Dodge’s fragile body with the fresh corn, representing life and growth. Nevertheless, Dodge and Tilden are, like the fathers and sons in *Journey* and *Salesman*, ultimately unable to communicate, at least verbally, their love for one another. Dodge even denies that he feels any kind of love or concern for his sons, telling Shelly: “You think just because people propagate they have to love their offsprings?” (111-112).

In *Journey* and *Salesman* the relationship between the individual and society appears to fray and disrupt the bonds of love and kinship between family members. A person is not expected to live in accordance with his own immediate desires, but in accordance with the needs of the society in which he lives. Societal pressures invade the personal sense of self and lead to the deterioration of the individual’s feeling of autonomy. Most tragically, all plays in this study dramatize how these public pressures are transferred from one male generation to the next. Ultimately, the 20th century ideology of masculine success serves to utterly corrode the relationship between father and son.

Lost Patrimony and the Curse of Ancestry

In order to gain a sufficient understanding of the disintegrating relationship between the father and the first-born son in *Journey* and *Salesman*, one must pay attention to the male generation preceding Tyrone and Willy. In early boyhood, both of them were abandoned by their fathers and hence deprived of a crucial male role model. In both plays, the father's absence has a profound, negative effect for the son who spends his entire life lamenting his desertion. The absent father in *Journey* and *Salesman* undoubtedly exercises a tremendous impact on his abandoned son. It is important to note, however, that Tyrone and Willy do not hold the same view of their fathers. While Tyrone resents his father's desertion and spends his entire life struggling in order to distance himself from him, Willy worships his adventurous father and attempts to emulate him. In both cases, nevertheless, the preoccupation with the absent father leads Tyrone and Willy into neglecting their own sons. Thus, one may argue that the sins of the absent father are revisited on his son. Both plays convey a sense of doom; the son repeats the father's mistakes in a cycle of self-destruction.

Since the absent father of *Salesman* left when Willy was only a few years old, his memories of him are vague: "All I remember is a man with a big beard, and I was in Mamma's lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music" (48). The melody which is heard occasionally in *Salesman* is telling of "grass and trees and the horizon" (11), echoing his father's location in the American country-side. In addition, the melody is played upon a flute, an instrument associated with Willy's father. Miller notes that Willy "hears but is not aware of it" (12), indicating that the father has become a subconscious part of Willy's identity. In many respects, Willy's father resembles the absent father in Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), who "fell in love with long distances" (235). The latter's portrait, prominently displayed in the living room of the Wingfield apartment (236), is - like the flute music in *Salesman* - a constant reminder of the father's desertion. Willy hungers for information about his male predecessor, and begs his older brother Ben: "Please tell about Dad" (48). The absent father comes to represent a profound sense of loss: "I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel - kind of temporary about myself" (51). Willy may be sharply contrasted with Dodge in *Buried Child*, who rejects his paternal forefathers: "Who gives a damn about bones in the ground?" (112). Unlike Dodge, Willy yearns to reunite with his male predecessor, and eventually, the quest for paternal ancestry completely overshadows Willy's sense of individualism - any formation of his own self. In *The Absent Father in Modern Drama* (1996), Paul Rosefeldt argues: "Lost and alienated, the sons of the absent

father are confused, perplexed, and unsure of their identity. They feel compelled to bring back the father or to follow in his path” (39). In order to know himself, Willy must search for his father, but unable to find him, he instead seeks to “double” him: “Willy tries to recapture the wilderness life of his absent father by creating a wilderness in his backyard, a suburban frontier where he can hunt snakes and rabbits” (Rosefeldt 45). However, Willy’s quest to reunite with his father is never carried through; the barren soil of urban civilization thwarts his desperate attempts to duplicate the world of his father.

While Willy spends his entire life attempting to live up to his father’s success, Tyrone’s yearning to rise above his father’s failure becomes a life-long struggle. His father abandoned his family by returning to Ireland shortly after immigrating to the United States, as Tyrone recollects: “When I was ten my father deserted my mother and went back to Ireland to die. Which he did soon enough, and deserved to, and I hope he’s roasting in hell” (150). As the first-born son, Tyrone was forced to take responsibility: “I was the man of the family. At ten years old!” (151). Being a provider of his family, as well as a substitute father figure for his five younger siblings, was a role Tyrone clearly did not qualify for at such an early age. His childhood is portrayed as a battle for survival; he worked in a machine shop and never had any schooling after the age of ten. He and his mother worked for poor wages and could barely make ends meet: “It was at home I first learned the value of a dollar and the fear of the poorhouse” (149). Tyrone grows up bearing a deep grudge against his father, and spends his adult life attempting to compensate for his failure. It appears that Tyrone’s quest for financial and professional success is partly fuelled by his father’s inability to provide for his family. In addition, the absence of a male authority figure in his childhood compels Tyrone into playing the part of the family patriarch to the fullest. By achieving material wealth, Tyrone proves his masculine adequacy and thus triumphs over his father’s financial shortcomings.

In *Salesman* as well, there is a hidden rivalry between the son and his father. On the one hand, Willy sees his father as an idol; on the other hand, his father’s success reinforces Willy’s own feelings of masculine inadequacy. The lost father is described as “a very great and a very wild-hearted man” (49), and thus comes to represent qualities Willy himself lacks. As a result, he serves as Willy’s hero as well as his opponent. The ambivalence that characterizes the relationship between Willy and his father is reminiscent of the relationship between Willy and Biff as well. As the title of Anne Stavney’s essay suggests, Willy’s sentiments toward Biff are a mixture of “reverence” and “repugnance.” Stavney argues that their relationship is ambivalent because Willy functions both as Biff’s disciple and as his rival. Moreover, she claims that Willy’s admiration for Biff is tainted with jealousy, and to

some extent accounts for his low self-esteem: “Biff is both a model of accomplishments and an obstacle on Willy’s path to success” (57). For instance, on the same day that Biff asks Bill Oliver for a loan in order to start his own business, Willy becomes determined to improve his own working condition: “I’m gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I’ll get an advance, and I’ll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I’m gonna do it!” (74). Willy obviously rivals with the male generations both preceding and succeeding him. The relationship between Willy and Biff becomes “cursed” as Willy transfers the rivalry between himself and his father unto himself and his son. In addition, Willy’s preoccupation with following in his father’s successful path prompts him into neglecting his own sons. He suffers from his father’s absence, yet he repeats history by choosing a profession that forces him to spend a great deal of time away from his sons, who “miss [him] every minute” (30). Willy also fails to provide his children with moral integrity, in much the same way as his own father did. Most importantly, he imposes his own success dreams on his oldest son - and thus also the sense of masculine inadequacy they serve to engender. One may argue that Willy in some degree is bound to repeat the wrongs inflicted on him by his father.

Similarly, there is a connectedness between father and son in *Journey* that the son is unable to escape. O’Neill believed in a hereditary curse; the fact that certain family traits repeat themselves down the generations. Even though Tyrone condemns his father’s betrayal, he follows in his footsteps and somehow adopts his moral corruption. Due to his poor origins - partly caused by his father’s desertion - Tyrone is frightened by the idea of poverty and is very reluctant to spend money on his family. He learns the value of a real home after being brought up in a “miserable hovel” (150) which the family was repeatedly evicted from. However, instead of learning from his own experience and create a decent home for his family, Tyrone follows the example of his father. His need for wealth, which he was denied in his childhood, prompts Tyrone to invest his money in land, which he considers “safe” (15). As a result, his wife and children must pay the price. Thus, quite ironically, his miserly behavior toward his sons becomes part of Tyrone’s inheritance from his father. In addition, as his father’s longing for Ireland caused the separation between father and son, Tyrone allows his Irish heritage to become a source of conflict - or an element of separation - in the relationship between himself and his two sons, who are both born and raised in the United States, and therefore not in position to share their father’s national pride. Tyrone is in many ways unable to escape the past created for him by his male predecessor. Even though he strongly rejects his father’s life choices, he in many respects appears to repeat his father’s mistakes.

As in the case of Willy who rivals with both his father and his son, the battle between Tyrone and his father is soon transferred to the next generation. Forever marked by childhood poverty, Tyrone appears to be jealous of what he sees as the privileged upbringing of his sons: “You said you realized what I’d been up against as a boy. The hell you do! How could you? You’ve had everything - nurses, schools, college (...) You’ve had food, clothing” (149). It seems that a part of Tyrone resents the fact that he himself had to work his way from poverty, while his sons are brought up into wealth without really taking notice of it. Witnessing Jamie’s passivity and lack of achievements in the public sphere, Tyrone seems to be reminded of his father’s masculine inadequacy. In Tyrone’s eyes, Jamie’s shortcomings resemble the failure of his own father, and he cannot allow his son to become a version of his grandfather. In addition, certain qualities of Edmund’s character appear to remind Tyrone of his father’s masculine and patriarchal failures. According to rumor, his father committed suicide after returning to Ireland, but Tyrone denies it: “He mistook rat poison for flour, or sugar, or something. There was gossip in my family it wasn’t by mistake but *that’s a lie. No one in my family ever* - “ (150, emphasis added). Similarly, when Edmund in the very same scene tells his father of his attempted suicide, Tyrone seems to deny the biological connection between himself and his son: “*No son of mine would ever* - “ (ibid., emphasis added). Tyrone is terrified by the thought of discovering his father’s qualities in his own sons; however, he fails to realize that his father is first and foremost part of his own psyche. Mary points to the relatedness between Tyrone and his father: “[Tyrone] is a peculiar man (...) [His father] must have been a peculiar man, too” (64, 120).

The curse of ancestry is at the core of Shepard’s drama as well. In a number of his plays, the son is seen to take on the burdens of the generation preceding him. In an interview, Shepard argues that there is no escape from the family: “I’m interested in the family’s biological connections and how those patterns of behavior are passed on. In a way it’s endless” (in Roudané, “Shepard on...” 68). Central in his family plays such as *Buried Child* and *True West* is the character of the negligent father. Even though Dodge has withdrawn from his responsibilities as a father, and despite the fact that the Old Man of *True West* is physically absent, both exert an inexorable power over their male descendants. In both plays, as in the case of *Journey* and *Salesman*, lost patrimony goes hand in hand with a hereditary curse. Shepard, along with O’Neill and Miller, suggests that certain character traits are inevitably passed on from fathers to sons; the members of the youngest generation is to some extent doomed to replicate the mistakes of the generation that precedes them. The title of Henry I. Schvey’s essay, based on a statement made a character in Shepard’s *Hawk Moon*

(1973), suggests that the father in Shepard's drama emerges "like a worm in the wood" in his son, an assertion that *Buried Child* and *True West* perfectly serve to illustrate.

True West portrays the ties between father and son, and suggests that the legacy of the ancestor predetermines the life of the successor. There is an obvious bond between the Old Man and the first-born son, Lee, who - like Willy in *Salesman* - attempts to emulate his father. A number of parallels can be drawn between Lee and his destitute father of *True West*. Both men have broken with their family, retreated from civilization, and are leading solitary lives in the desert. By doubling his father, Lee expresses a desire to reunite with - or feel a connection with - the Old Man. He shows understanding for and patience toward his father, and articulates hope for the latter's situation: "We could get the old man outa' the hock then (...) Maybe if we could work on this together we could bring him back out here. Get him settled down some place" (25, 39). In fact, one may argue that the father-son relationship in *True West* is the reverse of those of *Journey* and *Salesman*. While Tyrone and Willy attempt to lead their wanton sons back on the right track, Lee attempts to gain authority over the life of the Old Man rather than the other way around. Austin, on the other hand, is utterly disillusioned with his destitute father and rejects his way of life, which resembles Tyrone's attitude to his father in *Journey*. Austin resents his father's inability to conform to social standards of masculine success and seems to more or less have given up on him: "He's not gonna' change (...) I gave him money! I already gave him money. You know that. He drank it all up! (...) I've had it with him!" (25, 33, 39). It appears that Austin has spent his entire life attempting to distance himself from the Old Man, exemplified by his Ivy League Diploma and his professional and financial success.

However, as *True West* progresses Austin's behavior gradually becomes more and more reminiscent of that of the Old Man. The sudden drunkenness and lack of responsibility toward his public role suggest that Austin harbors a great deal of his father's psyche within himself. As Shepard argues, "Sometimes in someone's gesture you can notice how a parent is somehow inhabiting that person without there being any awareness of that. How often are you aware that a gesture is coming from the old man?" (qtd. in Robinson 151). Indeed, the Old Man of *True West* dwells in both of his sons, as Lauri B. Steinke argues: "at all times, one of the brothers emulates the father" (75). Responding to Austin's drunken, perplexed statements Lee tells him: "You sound just like the old man now" (39). Austin replies: "Yeah, well we all sound alike when we're sloshed. We just sorta echo each other" (ibid.). Moreover, Austin's growing fascination for the desert implies that he experiences a profound yearning to connect

with the lost father. In other words, the quest for paternal ancestry is made evident in the character of Austin as well.

Both brothers of *True West* are deeply mired in the muddle of the Old Man, and are unable to escape his impact. Even though Austin has desperately attempted to create his own identity, he seems unable to fight the legacy of his father. Steinke argues that even though Austin resents his father's desertion, heredity eventually claims his personality (75). His desire for the desert eventually becomes overwhelming. Similarly, Lee realizes that he is unable to "civilize" either himself or his father, and seems fated to return to the desert. The pull toward their father's territory represents the brothers' mutual desire to return to an awaiting father in the wilderness of America, much like Willy in *Salesman*. They both yearn to be like their father, or to share his identity. When Mom returns, she acknowledges the inevitability of her sons' flight. She is convinced that they eventually will follow in the footsteps of their father:

MOM: You gonna go live with your father?

AUSTIN: No. We're going to a different desert Mom.

MOM: I see. Well, you'll probably wind up on the same desert sooner or later (53).

By the end of the play, both brothers are trapped in the world of the father: "[T]he figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape" (59). Shepard's view of the endless cycle of biological connectedness is thus confirmed by his father-and-son portrayals in *True West*.

In *Buried Child*, however, Shepard even more successfully manages to convey a sense of cyclic return, or, in McDonough's words: "the eternal patriarchal return" (35). Dodge's grandson (Tilden's son), Vince, returns to his forefathers' home in search for his paternal heritage. To Vince's great astonishment, neither his father nor his grandfather seems to recognize him. Dodge confuses him with Tilden, who at first shows no sign of recognition, but later admits: "I thought I recognized him. I thought I recognized something about him (...) I thought I saw a face inside his face" (100). Perplexed and disappointed, Vince decides to escape his ancestral home: "I was gonna run and keep right on running" (130). However, in an intense moment of epiphany, Vince realizes that he is intricately bound to his male predecessors, as DeRose argues: "Vince finds his father, his family, and his personal heritage within himself" (107):

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 changed 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 (...) Then it all dissolved. Everything dissolved (130).

Vince's sudden sense of connectedness to his forefathers resembles Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1979), in which the son, Weston, becomes aware that his blood is infected with his father's poison (167). In *Buried Child*, Vince eventually returns to his ancestral home and claims his inheritance: "Maybe I should come in there and usurp your territory!" (126). He disowns his father and grandfather in just the same way as they disowned him: "Who are you people?" (126). Dodge soon declares Vince as heir: "The house goes to my Grandson, Vincent" (129). When Dodge dies, Vince asserts: "This is my house now, ya' know? All mine. Everything" (131). The play comes full circle as Vince transforms into Dodge: "I've gotta carry on the line" (130). He lies down on the sofa and positions himself like Dodge, as the stage directions reads: "*His body is in the same relationship to DODGE's*" (131).

Vince - along with James Tyrone, Willy Loman, and the brothers of *True West* - is trapped in an endless cycle of masculine despair, strongly marked by the legacy of his paternal forefathers, seemingly unable to escape their mistakes, and more or less doomed to replicate them.

Entrepreneurs, Gunfighters, and Frankensteins: Rivalry between Male Siblings

”Never wanted you to succeed and
make me look even worse in comparison.
Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you.”
- Jamie Tyrone to his brother in *Journey*

In my discussion and analysis of the disintegration of the American family, the relationship between male siblings is of great importance and calls for close examination. Quite surprisingly, no extensive works and very few articles have been written on brothers in American drama. In my view, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *True West* present the relationship between brothers as intensely ambivalent. It comes to represent friendship and affection on the one hand, and rivalry and jealousy on the other. The brothers apparently function as each other’s confidants as well as each other’s opponents. The cutthroat competitiveness inherent in the capitalist, male-dominant culture of the United States enters the family realm once again, this time affecting the relationship between male siblings. In much the same way as fathers and sons disagree when it comes to man’s role in the public sphere, so do the brothers. In all plays, one finds examples of pairs of brothers who represent conflicting ideals of manhood. In fact, the struggle between two brothers can be seen as an extension of the disintegrating father-son relationship. To some extent, the brothers repeat the pattern of tension that characterizes the relationship between father and son. Thus, the relationship between male siblings should partly be explored in light of the father; his powerful legacy undoubtedly affects the way the brothers view each other. It is important to note, however, that Shepard’s *Buried Child* does not call immediate attention to itself as far as relationship between brothers is concerned. In this play, the brothers are portrayed as utterly estranged; there is barely any interaction or communication between them. Therefore, I have chosen to exclude *Buried Child* from my analysis of brother pairs.

There are a number of similarities between O’Neill’s, Miller’s, and Shepard’s ways of distinguishing between the brothers in *Journey*, *Salesman*, and *True West*. The playwrights share the tendency of presenting two brothers through sharp and clear contrasts. The brother pairs of all three plays are biased toward each other and portrayed as complete opposites, in terms of both appearance and outlook. The juxtaposition of the brothers serves to demonstrate

their incompatibility, and thus immediately hints at the deep tensions that are seen to characterize their relationship. In addition, one brother is usually bound to - or resembles - the father, while the other seems more connected with - or resembles - the mother. Miller's autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*, portrays the playwright's personal experience of parent-child connections: "Kermit, three years my senior, I early on paired with our father as a force for order and goodness. With his blue eyes and fair skin he so resembled the old man, while my dark mother and I were linked not only in appearance but in our unspoken conspiracy against the restraints and prohibitions of reality" (11). The brother pairs of my study may also be separated in terms of movement in and out of the family; one brother often leaves while the other chooses to stay close to his parents. This trend is common for all three plays.

The order of birth undoubtedly affects the brothers' personalities as well as the division of family roles. In fact, age may be seen as the most important factor for predetermining the hierarchal structure and power dynamics within the different brother sets. For instance, the oldest brother is often expected by his parents to be a reliable role-model for his younger sibling, steering him toward the right track in life. As a result, the older brother tends to view himself, and hence behave as, the most experienced and mature. According to Geoffrey Proehl's chapter on brother pairs in American drama, "[t]he youngest child is the classic underdog, almost by definition the smallest, least experienced, most vulnerable member of the family group" (106). The relationship between Ben and Willy in *Salesman* and the relationship between Jamie and Edmund in *Journey* stand out as the strongest examples in which such power dynamics occur. In both plays, the older brother is portrayed as exerting authority over his younger brother, who seems inferior in relation to his older sibling. In addition, Proehl argues that American drama reflects a "persistent tendency to make the younger brother the hero and the elder brother something more or less of a villain" (107). In my view, however, there are weighty exceptions. For instance, in *Salesman* (Biff and Happy) and *True West*, the oldest brother appears to be more adventurous and in need to create his own destiny, while the younger brother has adopted the social code and adapted to the "machinery" of a capitalist culture. Biff and Lee are seekers, rather than villains, and neither Happy nor Austin can be said to embody heroic qualities.

On some level, *Journey* and *True West* suggest, as Proehl argues, that the struggle between male siblings is a struggle between two halves of one self: "The tale of two brothers is, almost by definition, the tale of the divided self" (119). Among the plays of my study, *Journey* and *True West* perhaps most successfully depict brothers who despite being each other's complete opposites are deeply bound to one another. According to Proehl, *Journey*

portrays “perhaps the most memorable brother scene in American drama” (102). In my opinion, however, Shepard’s representation of Lee and Austin in *True West* is no less memorable. It is a perfect example of the “representation of a divided self through differentiated brothers” (Proehl 121). Through the characters of Lee and Austin, Shepard reveals the dualism of the human psyche caused by societal pressures, and the brothers may be viewed as two parts of a whole, as doubles. In both plays, an intense confrontation between the brothers eventually takes place. *Salesman*, however, in some lesser degree come to represent a divided self through its brother pairs. Nonetheless, along with *Journey* and *True West*, *Salesman* serves to demonstrate ways in which the relationship between male siblings is contaminated by success dreams and ideals of masculinity embedded in the American society.

The Gloating Mentor and his Protégé:

Ben and Willy

Despite the static quality of his presence, Willy Loman’s older brother Ben contributes to the rising action of the play, and is crucial for a fuller understanding of Willy’s character. As *Salesman* opens, Ben has recently passed away; thus, he never appears on stage in the present time of the play. However, he exists vividly in Willy’s mind and participates in scenes of the past. Throughout *Salesman*, Willy is obsessed with his older brother, and wants to be a part of his world. Due to the fact that Willy and Ben never grew up together, their relationship is characterized by a long-term separation. Nevertheless, in much the same way as the legacy of the absent father eventually overpowers the abandoned son, the distant brother remains a dominant force in the life of the brother who is left behind. Ben has reached great stature in Willy’s mind: “There was the only man I ever met who knew all the answers” (45). It is, however, very likely that Ben looms larger in Willy’s imagination than in reality.

When Willy was nearly four years old, Ben, who was seventeen years old at the time, decided to go find the father who had deserted them and join him in his adventures. Willy recalls: “I remember you walking away down some open road” (48). Thus, Ben is the brother who leaves as well as the one who resembles the father, while Willy is the brother who stays, and who is linked to the mother. It is important to note, however, that Ben eventually heads for the opposite direction of his father’s location and ends up at the other end of the earth: “I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa” (48). By increasing the distance between himself and his father and by creating his own empire, Ben compensates for the father’s desertion, and therefore avoids

living in the shadow of his grandiose legacy. Willy, on the other hand, is unable to live up to the accomplishments of either his father or his brother, and constantly finds himself in their immense shadow. Being abandoned by two crucial male role models leaves Willy deeply wounded emotionally, as Steven R. Centola argues: “When Willy also suffers the sudden disappearance of his older brother, he nearly completely loses his self-confidence and a sense of his own identity as a male” (29). Nonetheless, Willy spends his entire life idolizing the two men who abandon him. Like his father, Ben represents the self-made, self-reliant man whom Willy worships: “That man was a genius, that man was a success incarnate!” (41). Ben also comes to represent worldliness: “there is an aura of far places about him” (44). He has succeeded in taking the leap from rags to riches, and thus comes to represent the social mobility embedded in the American dream: “There was a man started with the clothes on his back and ended up with diamond mines” (41).

The yearning for a paternal-fraternal companionship is echoed throughout *Salesman*. When Ben arrives at the Loman residence in one of the scenes of the past, Willy bursts out: “I’ve been waiting for you so long! (...) Where is Dad? Didn’t you follow him” (47). When Ben is about to leave, Willy says “*longingly*”: “Can’t you stay for a few days? You’re just what I need, Ben” (51). Obviously, Ben is Willy’s only connection to his father; a connection he desperately needs in order to sustain his memory. By bonding with Ben, Willy hopes to fill the void in his life which is caused by the father’s desertion. In another scene of the past, Ben offers Willy a job proposition in Alaska. Willy is thrilled by the idea of a family reunion on the male side of the family: “I thought I’d go out with my older bother and try to locate him [their father], and maybe settle in the North with the old man” (81). In addition, Ben assures him: “There’s a new continent at your doorstep, William. You could walk out rich. Rich!” (87). Thus, this also becomes Willy’s opportunity to finally gain the kind of success and recognition his father and brother have achieved. His eagerness to reunite with the male branches of the family tree - as well as living up to their successful legends - is shattered by the presence of Linda, representing the constraints of family life. He is eventually convinced to follow the example of Dave Singleman: “We’ll do it here, Ben! You hear me? We’re gonna do it here!” (87). Willy’s conviction, however, is highly unstable. Throughout the play he is vacillating between the ideology of Singleman and that of his father/brother.

According to Paul Rosefeldt’s study, *The Absent Father in Modern Drama* (1996), the abandoned son often reconstructs the father through a series of fraternal relationships (39), which is exactly what Willy does. In many ways, Ben appears as a substitute father figure for his younger brother. The power dynamics between the two men resemble those between the

mentor and the protégé. Ben willingly plays the role and in some degree comes to resemble the traditional, authoritarian father. Willy subordinates himself to Ben; he continuously seeks his guidance and displays a desperate need to win his approval: “Ben, am I right? Don’t you think I’m right? I value your advice” (87). In a conversation with Ben, Willy pours out his admiration and insecurity: “What’s the answer? How did you do it? (...) Oh, Ben, how did you do it? What is the answer?” (47, 84). In front of his sons, however, Willy acts like the self-assured, successful father: “What’s the mystery? [Ben] knew what he wanted and went out and got it!” (41). One may in fact argue that Willy’s quest for authority over Biff stems from his desire to play the role of Ben, to assume mentorship over another human being. In a vain attempt to prove his masculine success, Willy tells his brother: “I am building something with this firm, Ben, and if a man is building something he must be on the right track, mustn’t he?” (85). He also tries to convince Ben that he is part of his adventurous world: “It’s Brooklyn, I know, but we hunt too” (50). However, he eventually ends up revealing his sense of masculine inadequacy: “Ben, nothing’s working out. I don’t know what to do” (84). In addition, he expresses his sense of insecurity toward fatherhood: “sometimes I’m afraid that I’m not teaching them the right kind of - Ben, how should I teach them?” (52).

In Centola’s opinion, Ben may be interpreted as Willy’s alter ego: “Ben is the other self which Willy could have become had he chosen to live by a different code of ethics” (29). More importantly, perhaps, Ben represents qualities embodied within Willy’s psyche, and can thus be interpreted as an extension of one aspect of Willy’s personality. At the same time, Ben, paradoxically, functions as a character foil for Willy; his confidence is directly contrasted with his younger brother’s insecurity and lack of authority. For instance, Ben is “utterly certain of his destiny” and is described as a “stolid man” with “an authoritative air” (44). One may argue that Willy’s feelings for Ben are ambivalent. On the one hand, he admires him, but on the other hand, Ben is a constant reminder of Willy’s failure. For instance, Ben’s seven sons who are going to inherit his estate (45) remind Willy of his failure to provide properly for Biff and Happy. Throughout *Salesman*, Ben is characterized as a one-dimensional character; in fact, it appears that his sole purpose is to accentuate Willy’s sense of inadequacy. When entering the Loman household, Ben is gloating about his success, and expresses almost a malicious sense of self-satisfaction. Even though he is aware of Willy’s despair, he repeatedly tells him: “When I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. *He laughs.* And by God, I was rich!” (52). In both of Willy’s recollections of the past in which Ben participates, he exits the stage with the final word

“rich” (52, 87), emphasizing his achievement of wealth, but also illustrating what Willy is without.

From beginning to end, Ben is portrayed as a character highly inconsiderate of Willy’s feelings. He belittles his younger brother and shows very little respect for his way of life: “Great Inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime” (49). It is significant to note that the older brother is able to make such an assumption without knowing his younger brother’s profession. Later, after going on and on about his own accomplishments, he asks Willy briefly:

BEN, *to Willy*: And good luck with your - what do you do?

WILLY: Selling.

BEN: Yes. Well... *He raises his hand in farewell to all* (50).

While Willy confides in Ben and tells him his innermost thoughts, Ben never shows any genuine interest in his younger brother. His self-absorbedness is striking and his haste is made evident. He is always on the move, unwilling to dedicate his precious time to the desperate Willy: “I only have a few minutes (...) I’ll be late for my train (...) Haven’t the time, William (...) I haven’t much time (...) I’ve got to go” (45, 52, 84-86). In addition, Ben is the only character who refers to Willy as William; however, rather than a sign of respect and recognition, it serves as a sign of estrangement and distance.

It appears that Ben does not care about his brother’s human qualities, but measures Willy only in monetary terms. According to Irving Jacobsen, “[Ben’s] seven sons seem more like commodities than members of a family” (250). Ben clearly represents a ruthless capitalist system and a cynical money-oriented culture. Toward the end of *Salesman*, in the planning of Willy’s suicide, Ben plays an important role. This time, however, he appears only in Willy’s hallucination. At first he opposes the suicide, suggesting that it will be an act of weakness. Eventually he convinces Willy that it is a clever decision, indicating that within capitalism, considerations of money take priority over human worth.

BEN: It’s called a cowardly thing, William.

WILLY: Why? Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of my life ringing up a zero?

BEN, *yielding*: That’s a point, William. *He moves, thinking, turns*. And twenty thousand - that *is* something one can feel with the hand, it is there (126).

Tangible evidence of success - what Ben values - is what Willy tries to come up with by the end of his life (cf. McDonough 29). Thus, the suicide may be interpreted as Willy’s attempt to emulate his brother; to follow his example and leave behind a legacy for his son. Ben convinces Willy that one must make sacrifices in order to succeed: “One must go in to fetch a

diamond out” (134). While Ben ventures into the dark jungle and fetches out diamond mines, Willy approaches death in order to “fetch out” the insurance money for Biff. Undoubtedly, the darkness embedded in the jungle - Ben’s territory - resembles the darkness associated with death, which now has become Willy’s location. In many ways, the suicide suggests Willy’s quest to reunite with his older brother, as Kay Stanton points out: “Although he had missed ‘the boat’ of Ben’s success, Willy can catch the ‘boat’ of death to join the recently dead Ben” (qtd. in Rosefeldt 49). Even though the siblings are separated in life by capitalist ideologies and American success dreams, the older brother has become a crucial part of his younger brother’s identity. Without his mentor, Willy is lost.

The Involuntary Mentor and his Protégé:

Biff and Happy

The second set of brothers in *Salesman*, Biff and Happy, are portrayed as stark contrasts with regard to convictions and values. According to Proehl, Biff and Happy standing in front of the bathroom mirror are “doubled, reflected, mirrored and mirroring; clearly bound to one another; just as clearly separated; two selves merging into one and then dividing again” (102). In my opinion, however, there are very few qualities beside the exterior surface that unite Biff and Happy. It is true that they resemble each other when it comes to appearance; Biff is “*well built*” and Happy is “*tall, powerfully made*” (19). Both men’s physique suggests masculine strength; nonetheless, only Happy resorts to - and takes advantage of - a false, masculine pride. The brothers differ greatly in terms of outlook, which is reflected in their public involvement. Miller notes that Biff “*has succeeded less*”, yet, his dreams are “*stronger and less acceptable than Happy’s*” (19). Unlike Biff, Happy “*has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat*” and is therefore “*seemingly more content*” (ibid.). On the basis of Miller’s initial stage directions, one may argue that both brothers suffer as a result of the ideals imposed on them by a success-oriented society. They are both lost, but only Biff dares to acknowledge his sense of masculine inadequacy. Happy, on the other hand, adheres to the 20th century idea of manly success, clings to the illusion of his professional accomplishments, and adopts his father’s mask of masculine confidence. This becomes particularly evident in the restaurant scene, in which Happy plays the part of the successful, powerful male.

Charlene Fix argues that Biff and Happy are deeply mired their father’s muddle (469). Indeed, the brothers come to represent the two conflicting ideals of masculinity embedded in the character of Willy. Happy is determined to identify himself with the business world and

may thus be said to lean toward the ideology of Dave Singleman. Biff, on the other hand, views the life of the businessman as “a measly manner of existence” (22). He longs for manual labor in a rural environment out West, and thus embodies Willy’s fascination with the American wilderness. Biff rejects the cutthroat competitiveness inherent in the business world; to “always to have to get ahead of the next fella” (22), while Happy states that he has “an overdeveloped sense of competition” (25). Even though Happy blames the ruthless social system for his own lack of morality - “everybody around me is so false that I’m constantly lowering my ideals” (24) - he is, unlike his brother, unable to break free. He expresses his scepticism toward Biff’s choice of life: “[I]s there any future for you out there? (...) Well, you really enjoy it on a farm? Are you content out there?” (22). He criticizes his brother for not resorting to a mask of false pride: “The trouble with you in business was you never tried to please people” (60). If only for a brief moment, Happy seems attracted to Biff’s proposal to join him out West; however, the quest for financial and professional success conquers his desire to bond with his brother: “The only thing is - what can you make out there?” (24). Clearly, Happy feels the urge to prove his masculine capability in the public world before taking off with Biff: “I gotta show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade (...) Then I’ll go with you, Biff” (24). It is significant to note that Happy seems to experience togetherness with his brother only when they share the same business aspirations. Thus, Happy in some degree corresponds to his uncle Ben, as Leah Hadomi argues “[Happy] shares his uncle’s unscrupulousness and amorality (...) He also resembles Ben in the shallowness of his [...] emotions” (55). While Willy and Biff articulate a genuine desire to bond with their brothers, Ben and Happy first and foremost seek professional success.

One may in fact argue that Miller has doubled his portrayal of brother relationships in *Salesman*; Biff and Happy seem to repeat the struggle of their father and uncle. For instance, they may be said to resemble Ben and Willy with regard to power dynamics. In both plays, the oldest brother’s authority over his younger brother becomes evident. In the recollections of the past one observes that Willy raises his oldest son to become a mentor for his younger brother: “Show [Happy] how to do it, Biff!” (28). Biff is the one who gives Happy orders, never the other way around. Linda points to Biff’s authoritarian behavior: “The way they obey him!” (34). The young Happy always looks to his older brother for advice and approval, and the adult Happy suggests that Biff has functioned as a mentor for him: “You taught me everything I know about women” (21). In addition, in much the same way as Willy allows his mask of success to become shattered in front of Ben, Happy confides in his older brother and

gives expression to a sense of insecurity and confusion: “I don’t know what the hell I’m workin’ for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment - all alone. And I think of the rent I’m paying. And it’s crazy. But then, it’s what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I’m lonely” (23). Nevertheless, as in the case of his father, Happy only experiences glimpses of self-examination; throughout *Salesman* he appears to exaggerate his importance in the business world.

According to Hadomi: “In both [brother] relationships, the son who left [Ben and Biff] arouses envy in the son who stayed [Willy and Happy]” (49). In my view, a more accurate formulation may be that it is the older brother’s bond with the father that arouses envy in the younger brother. The absent father is a dominant force in the relationship between Ben and Willy, and the latter longs for the bond that his older brother shares with him. One may argue that Willy attempts to reach out to his father by becoming part of his brother’s success. In the same way, Happy appears to seek his father’s recognition through his brother. Undoubtedly, Willy exerts agency over Biff and Happy, whose relationship is deeply affected by their father’s favoritism of the first-born son. Throughout his childhood, Happy always comes second in his father’s life. For instance, in one of the scenes of the past, Willy makes plans with Biff, apparently ignoring the presence of Happy: “*Biff*, first thing *we* gotta do when we get time is clip that big branch over the house (...) *Biff*, up in Albany I saw a beautiful hammock. I think I’ll buy it next trip, and *we*’ll hang it right between those two elm trees” (28, emphasis added). The young Happy’s desperate need to earn his father’s attention becomes evident: “I’m losing weight, you notice, Pop? (...) I lost weight, Pop, you notice?” (29, 33). Willy, however, never pays attention to Happy’s questions and comments, and never expresses any genuine interest in him as an individual. It seems that the relationship between the two of them evolves around Willy’s feelings for Biff. In this respect, Happy’s business proposal to Biff - “The Loman Brothers” (63) - may be interpreted as an attempt to gain his father’s recognition through his older brother. Happy knows from experience that he can only achieve his father’s recognition through Biff’s actions: “Happy, use newspaper on the windows, it’s the easiest thing. *Show him how to do it Biff!* You see, Happy? Pad it up, use it like a pad. That’s it, that’s it, good work. *You’re doing all right, Hap*” (28, emphasis added). One also observes that the young Happy yearns to be a part of Biff’s success on the football field: “I’m carrying the helmet (...) I’m carrying the helmet” (87). Clearly, Happy is living in the shadow of his older brother, and in this respect, one may argue that Biff and Happy seem to double the situation of Ben and Willy once again. As Paul Rosefeldt sees it, “Ben is the older brother who achieves success through prowess while Willy tries to do his best as a

salesman. Similarly, the young Biff is a football hero destined to go to the University of Virginia while Happy is satisfied to carry Biff's gear and brag about losing weight" (48).

Much like the relationship between Ben and Willy is contaminated by ideas of success and ambition, so is the relationship between Biff and Happy. The tension between the two of them rises as their contrasting views of the business world emerge, and in a climatic scene toward the end of *Salesman* their antagonism is further underlined. In the intense confrontation that takes place between Willy and Biff, Biff also confronts Happy's hypocrisy:

BIFF, *turning on him*: You big blow, are you the assistant buyer? You're one of the two assistants to the assistant, aren't you?

HAPPY: Well, I'm practically -

BIFF: You're practically full of it! (131).

The brothers' irreconcilable ideologies are also made evident in *The Requiem* by the end of *Salesman*. By Willy's grave, Biff insists: "He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong" (138). Happy, on the other hand, is still deluded by the American dream, and determined to follow in his father's footsteps: "He had a good dream. It's the only you can have - to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him" (139). Miller's stage directions - "BIFF, *with a hopeless glance at his brother*" (ibid) - suggest that the gap that characterizes the relationship between the brothers can never be successfully bridged. Outside forces are once again seen to corrode the relationship between male siblings.

The Mentor and his Protégé: Lee and Austin's Role Reversals

In *True West*, Shepard portrays a reunion between two brothers: Lee and Austin. In the initial stage directions, he presents his two male protagonists as complete opposites. Information about what they wear draws attention to the external differences between the two brothers. While Austin is dressed in "*light blue sports shirt, light tan cardigan sweater, clean blue jeans, white tennis shoes*" (2), Lee is wearing "*filthy white t-shirt, tattered brown overcoat covered with dust, dark blue baggy suit pants from the Salvation Army, pink suede belt, pointed black forties dress shoes scuffed up, holes in the soles, no socks, no hat*" (ibid.). In addition, he has *long pronounced sideburns, 'Gene Vincent' hairdo, two days' growth of beard, bad teeth*"⁸ (ibid.). The difference in appearance mirrors the men's contrasting lifestyles, as *True West* soon reveals that the two brothers have chosen completely different paths in life. While Austin is a member of the social elite, Lee is an outcast of society. They

⁸ Gene Vincent (1935-1971) was a pioneer in American rock-and-roll history.

come to represent contradictory values: “Austin represents objectivity, self-control and self-discipline, form and order, the intellect, reason. Lee stands for subjectivity, anarchy, adventure, excess and exaggeration, intuition and imagination” (Kleb 121).

According to Carla McDonough’s study, *Staging Masculinity: Male Identity in Contemporary American Drama* (1997), Austin strives for “the ideal of masculine success” (47), to achieve financial prosperity in his role as the modern businessman. Lee, on the other hand, strives for “the frontier ideal of masculinity” (ibid.). His fascination with the archetypal hero of the American past prompts him to avoid the industrialized city. While Austin belongs to a civilized suburbia, Lee comes to represent the “macho” man incarnate: the cowboy, the loner, the wanderer. According to John M. Clum, Lee and Austin represent a classic masculine split: the natural man versus the social man respectively (172). As Shepard sees it, the modern American man is faced with a conflict within himself:

It sounds a little trite, but there’s not a whole lot of men who know what a man is, and I always thought it was weird that American men haven’t resolved this; the American male is in conflict, uniquely in conflict in the cultures of the West. You’re either a rasser or you’re a book guy, and I think they’re getting farther and farther apart; there’s a bigger gap between the macho man and the other one (qtd. in Clum 172).

Moreover, the brothers come to represent Tom Scanlan’s two conflicting models of the American family as presented in *Family, Drama, and American Dreams* (1978): “the family of security” and “the family of freedom” (27). While Austin is established “up North” with “the wife and kiddies (...) The house, the car, the whole slam” (9), Lee is a self-declared “free agent” (8) and claims that biological bonds “don’t mean a thing” (23).

Austin’s identification with his suburban mother and the domesticated sphere, rather than with his destitute father and the desert, is made evident from the opening of the play. Lee, on the other hand, is just like his father situated at the outskirts of civilized society, and seems displaced in the kitchen of Mom’s suburban home. Both brothers, however, feel the urge to claim their “right” to the parent they are the least connected with. Austin is aware of the bond between his older brother and the Old Man, and therefore states that also he is connected with his father:

AUSTIN: So, you went down to see the old man, huh?

LEE: Yeah, I seen him.

(...)

AUSTIN: *I was down there too, you know* (7, emphasis added).

Shortly afterwards, and rather strikingly, Lee emphasizes in front of his brother that he too has a “right” to his mother:

AUSTIN: Well, you can stay here as long as I'm here.

LEE: I don't need your permission do I?

AUSTIN: No.

LEE: *I mean she's my mother too, right?* (7, emphasis added).

Shepard gives the impression that both parents are absent figures in the lives of their sons, and the fact that they remain nameless emphasizes a sense of distance between parent and child. Their absence serves to strengthen both brothers' need for both parents, which consequently reinforces the conflict between the two of them.

Each brother prefers his own way of life and strongly objects to his brother's lifestyle. In this manner, a struggle for power characterizes *True West* from beginning to end. Austin argues: "I drive on the freeway every day. I swallow the fog. I watch the news in color. I shop in the Safeway. I'm the one who's in touch! Not [Lee] !" (35). He also assures his brother: "You don't understand the way things work down here" (14). Austin's quest for authority over Lee in their mother's house is striking; in fact, one may argue that Austin in some degree takes on the role as Lee's mentor. He rejects his brother's solitary life in the desert, his lack of morality, and eventually attempts to guide him on the right track by converting him into civilized society: "You could really turn your life around, you know. Change things" (24). Lee, on the other hand, objects to his brother's lifestyle and insists: "You, yer stuck. Yer the one's that stuck. Not me. So don't be warnin' me what to do in this town" (31). He resents Austin's middle-class status, his Ivy League diploma and the "prominent people" (11) he surrounds himself with. He assures Austin: "I'm not like you" (22). Nonetheless, considering that he repeatedly jumps to his own defense in the presence of his brother, Lee reveals that he is, at least partly, intimidated by Austin's success.

Even though each brother frantically rejects the other's way of life, they also reveal their admiration for one another, as Doris Auerbach argues: "The two brothers, who ostensibly represent the opposing world of father and mother, each long for the sphere that is denied him" (58). The following excerpt of *True West* indicates that Lee and Austin are drawn to each other's lifestyles:

LEE: (...) I always wondered what it'd be like to be you.

AUSTIN: You did?

LEE: Yeah, sure. I used to picture you walkin' around some campus with yer arms full of books (...)

AUSTIN: (...) That's funny (...) Because I always used to picture you somewhere

LEE: Where'd you picture me?

AUSTIN: Oh, I don't know. Different places. Adventures. You were always on some adventure.

LEE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: And I used to say to myself, 'Lee's got the right idea. He's out there in the world and here I am. What am I doing?' (26).

Ever since the opening scene of the play, Lee has attempted to take over Austin's territory; first by breaking his concentration; and later by belittling him in front of his business associate, Saul Kimmer. The tension between the brothers rises as both of them become involved with Kimmer, a representative of the Californian film industry. Realizing that Kimmer expects him to focus his attention on Lee's movie idea instead of his own, Austin becomes enraged, and the conflict between the brothers escalates. The competitiveness within the business world eventually tears the brothers further apart, as Lee confirms: "Competition's getting' kinda' close to home, isn't it?" (32). Kimmer represents the stereotypical unscrupulous businessman. Manipulative, narcissistic and unsympathetic, he is willing to do whatever it takes to get his way. Kimmer tells Austin: "I have never felt so confident about a project in quite a long time (15). Similarly, Lee reports: "[Kimmer] said it was the best story he's come across in a long, long time" (31). Loyalty and trust are obviously foreign concepts in the business world to which Kimmer belongs. Phrases such as "commercial potential" (18), "a great deal of merit" (32), and "big studio money" (33) are Kimmer's main priorities. He attempts to buy Austin into participating in the writing of the script: "Three hundred thousand, Austin. Just for a first draft. Now you've never been offered that kind of money before" (34). Austin, however, refuses to be a part of Lee's script. Obviously, outside forces - represented by Kimmer - invade the private sphere and reinforce the conflict between the brothers.

When analyzing the characters of Lee and Austin, it is important to stress that as the play progresses a role reversal eventually takes place. *True West* is a play about the quest for identity, and at the same time, a play about exchanging identities. The lack of a solid sense of self becomes evident, as one recognizes a sudden transformation in the behavior pattern of the main protagonists. On the writing of *True West*, Shepard notes:

I wanted to write a play about double nature, one that wouldn't be symbolic or metaphorical or any of that stuff. I just wanted to give a taste of what it feels like to be two-sided. It's a real thing, double nature. I think we're split in a much more devastating way than psychology can ever reveal. It's not so cute. Not some little thing we can get over. It's something we've got to live with (qtd. in Williams 60).

The clear distinctions between the brothers as represented by Shepard in the opening of the play eventually become blurred, and one may thus question the stability of each brother's identity. After the failure of his movie deal, Austin reveals a new aspect of his personality by becoming increasingly reminiscent of his brother. He turns to alcohol, petty crimes, and adopts his brother's aggressive attitude; more importantly, he becomes obsessed with life in

the desert. He eventually decides to abandon his civilized life and instead embrace whatever the desert has to offer. Similarly, Lee all of a sudden emphasizes that he hates his rootless life and that he longs for the stability presumably embedded in civilized society. He situates himself in front of the typewriter and performs the role of Austin. As Lee attempts to concentrate on his writing, Austin drunkenly disturbs him. While Lee says: "I'm a screenwriter now! I'm legitimate" (37), Austin notes: "Now I'm the intruder. I'm the one who is invading your precious privacy!" (38). Scene Seven may thus be argued to be a total inversion of the opening scene; by now, the brothers have obviously exchanged identities, or, as William Kleb puts it: "the spirit of each brother actually seems to possess the other" (118).

By the opening of Scene Eight, however, Lee realizes that he cannot complete the screenplay without the assistance of his brother. His inability to play the role of Austin prompts him to attack the typewriter with a golf club. Due to his violent behavior and his sudden longing for the desert, one may argue that Lee has fallen back on his own role. He realizes that he cannot achieve financial success according to societal expectations: "I'm livin' out there 'cause I can't make it here!" (49). Nonetheless, he still yearns to attain the kind of success his brother represents. He then promises Austin - who still longs for his brother's lifestyle - that he can join him to the desert if he completes the screenplay. When the screenplay is almost finished, however, Lee withdraws his promise. By taking advantage of his brother, Lee allows his quest for financial success to conquer any sense of morality. Realizing his brother's betrayal, Austin becomes infuriated and wraps a telephone cord around Lee's neck and starts strangling him. *True West* ends as both brothers attack each other rather brutally.

By the ending of *True West* the conflict between the brothers remains unresolved. This excerpt from Scene Four may even be regarded as a foreshadowing of a forthcoming killing: "You go down to the L.A. Police Department there and ask them what kinda' people kill each other most. What do you think they'd say? (...) Family people. Brothers. Brothers-in-law. Cousins. Real American-type people. They kill each other in the heat mostly (...) Right about this time a' year" (24). By the end of *True West*, the brothers appear locked in an endless showdown, just like the characters of the script that they developed together: "Each one separately thinks that he's the only one who's afraid (...) And the one who's chasin' doesn't know where the other one is taking him. And the one who's being chased doesn't know where he's going" (27). Thus, *True West* may be regarded as a "meta-play"; the script inside the play is gradually acted out as *True West* turns into a Western and Lee and Austin become the characters within the script. In this respect, *True West* serves to illustrate that the brothers are

caught in an eternal battle, which suggests that “the two versions of masculinity can exist together only in that moment of absolute unresolved conflict that we witness (...) at the end of the play” (McDonough 49). In other words, even though Lee and Austin harbor aspects of each other’s psyche within themselves, the contradictory versions of masculinity tear them apart, and it seems that they never will be able to reconcile their differences.

The Jealous Mentor and His Protégé:

Jamie and Edmund

In his description of Jamie and Edmund, O’Neill, like Miller and Shepard, lists a number of features in the stage directions that separate the two of them. Firstly, the brothers are distinguished in terms of physical appearance: Jamie is “*broad-shouldered*” and “*deep-chested*” whereas Edmund is “*thin and wiry*” (19). Secondly, there is an obvious connection between Tyrone and Jamie, Mary and Edmund, respectively: “*Where Jamie takes after his father, with little resemblance to his mother, Edmund looks like both his parents, but is more like his mother*” (ibid.). O’Neill states that Edmund is “*plainly in bad health*” (20) and that “[i]t is in the quality of extreme nervous sensibility that the likeness of Edmund to his mother is most marked” (ibid.). Clearly, Edmund is immediately perceived as the fragile brother. In comparison, Jamie is a reflection of Tyrone’s masculine strength. In Act III, Mary reflects on the sharp contrasts that separate her sons:

Do you remember what a healthy, happy baby [Jamie] was, James? The one-night stands and filthy trains and cheap hotels and bad food never made him cross or sick. He was always smiling or laughing. He hardly ever cried (...) It was Edmund who was the crosspatch when he was little, always getting upset and frightened about nothing at all (...) [To Edmund:] Everyone used to say, dear, you’d cry at the drop of a hat (112).

Considering that Jamie has not left home but attempted to create a career in the same business as his father, while Edmund has been on a long voyage at sea, the brothers may be argued to correspond to Happy and Biff respectively.

As the oldest brother, ten years Edmund’s senior, Jamie perceives himself as the one with most life experience, and he feels the urge to share his “wisdom” with his younger brother. In several encounters between the two of them, Jamie’s sense of - and quest for - authority over Edmund is made evident. For instance, he repeatedly refers to his younger brother as “the Kid”, and he assures him: “You’re still wet behind the ears” (159). Like Ben in *Salesman*, Jamie asserts his sense of superiority over his younger brother, telling him: “Don’t play the wise guy with me! I’ve learned more from life than you’ll ever know!” (167). In

addition, in most of the conversations between the two brothers O'Neill depicts Jamie as the dominant speaker (cf. Hadomi 44). He clearly yearns for the upper hand; to assert mentorship over his younger brother. Nonetheless, Edmund never seems to seek his older brother's guidance, the way Willy constantly does in *Salesman*.

In this play, as in all the others, the father exerts a decisive influence on the brothers' relationship to one another. Unintentionally, Tyrone in one respect brings Jamie and Edmund closer together. Both of them bear a grudge against their father and hold his stinginess responsible for Mary's morphine addiction. Jamie and Edmund are thus able to join each other in their shared contempt for Tyrone, as the stage directions suggest: "*They forget their [own] quarrel and are as one against him on this issue*" (79). Proehl argues: "Edmund and Jamie create a small community by scapegoating the father" (114). However, Tyrone's actions first and foremost serve to generate tension between the brothers.

The father-son dyads in *Journey* are more complex compared to those in *Salesman*. While Willy shows a clear preference for Biff over Happy, Tyrone's sentiments toward both of his sons are more ambivalent. Clearly, Tyrone feels a deeper connection to his oldest son, Jamie, and it is of him he has always expected the most. While Tyrone constantly reproaches Jamie, Edmund to a greater extent escapes his father's criticism. As the fragile son, Edmund gains his father's sympathy and understanding. His illness prompts Tyrone into maintaining a more protective attitude toward him, and it seems that he does not face the same kind of expectations as Jamie. At one point, Tyrone is about to criticize him, but instead pays him a compliment:

TYRONE: (*starts automatically on a customary lecture*). You'll always be broke until you learn the value - (*Checks himself guiltily, looking at his son's sick face with worried pity.*) But you've been learning, lad. You worked hard before you took ill. You've done splendidly. I'm proud of you (77).

On a similar occasion, Tyrone threatens to reprimand Edmund physically, but "*[s]uddenly he remembers Edmund's illness and instantly becomes guilty and shamefaced*. Forgive me, lad. I forgot - " (130). Apparently, Edmund's fragile health lets him off the hook time and again. Tyrone is first and foremost interested in starting an argument with Jamie, and is constantly seen putting him down. Edmund's rebellion, on the other hand, is paid less attention to:

EDMUND
Irritably.

Yes, for Pete's sake, Papa! The first thing after breakfast! Give it a rest, can't you?

He slumps down in the chair at left of table next to his brother. His father ignores him (21, emphasis added).

More strikingly, Tyrone demonstrates a kind of favoritism of Edmund in front of Jamie: “Whatever Edmund’s done, he’s had the guts to go off on his own, where he couldn’t come whining to me the minute he was broke” (36). “*With a touch of pride*” (ibid.) he states that Edmund shows great promise of becoming a successful writer. Tyrone applauds Edmund: “You’ve got brains in that head of yours (...) You’re not like your damned tramp of a brother. I’ve given up hope he’ll ever get sense” (131). When Jamie witnesses that his father sides with his younger brother, he is “[s]tung into sneering jealousy” (36). He grows increasingly resentful of Edmund, and tells him: “You’ve been given a swelled head lately. About nothing! About a few poems in a hick town newspaper” (167). Throughout *Journey*, Tyrone’s favoritism serves to reinforce Jamie’s feelings of contempt for Edmund. As it turns out, Jamie has conspired against his younger brother his entire life.

Toward the end of *Journey*, the contempt Jamie harbors against Edmund is disclosed in a climatic scene. Jamie returns home drunk and realizes that his brother and father have shared a moment of closeness during his absence, as Edmund reveals: “Papa’s all right, if you try to understand him” (160). As a result, Jamie’s jealousy increases dramatically and shortly afterwards he reveals that his treatment of Edmund has always been motivated by jealousy and egotism:

I’ve been a rotten bad influence. And the worst of it is, I did it on purpose (...) Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating (...) Never wanted you to succeed and make me look even worse in comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama’s baby, Papa’s pet! (169).

Jamie clearly yearns to see Edmund become a failure in the public world in order for him to be deprived of their father’s sympathy and respect. One may argue that while Tyrone has attempted to create Jamie into a better version of himself, Jamie has struggled his entire life to create Edmund into a weak version of himself. By attempting to bring his brother down by imposing his own flaws and weaknesses on him, Jamie and Edmund in this respect parallel the biblical brother pair Cain and Abel. Cain’s sense of jealousy toward his younger brother Abel prompts him to murder him; similarly, Jamie holds himself responsible for indirectly “killing” Edmund’s prospects.

Throughout *Journey*, Jamie’s sentiments toward his younger brother are portrayed as intensely ambivalent. Even though he reveals his secret hatred for Edmund, he is also seen to declare his love for him on a number of occasions: “We’ve been more than brothers. You’re the only pal I’ve ever had. I love your guts. I’d do anything for you (...) My kid brother. I love your guts, Kid. Everything else is gone. You’re all I’ve got left” (166, 159).

Paradoxically, Jamie's confession of his concealed hatred for Edmund is in itself a declaration of brotherly love. After their intense confrontation, Jamie assures Edmund: "I love you more than I hate you" (169). He also seizes the opportunity to warn his younger brother against himself, because he knows that he will stab Edmund in the back whenever he gets the chance. Jamie alludes to the Bible, declaring to Edmund: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he saveth his brother from himself" (170). In this respect, Jamie and Edmund may be regarded as the most hopeful brother pair of my study; they somehow seem to reach a deeper understanding of themselves. Nonetheless, when Jamie finally tells Edmund "think of me as dead" (ibid.), O'Neill expresses very little hope for the future relationship of the brothers.

The allusion to Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*, is crucial for understanding the relationship between the brothers in *Journey*. Jamie insists: "I've had more to do with bringing you up than anyone (...) Hell, you're more than my brother. I made you! You're my Frankenstein!" (167). The allusion clearly creates a great deal of confusion; Jamie now contradicts all his earlier statements. Considering that Frankenstein in Shelley's novel is the name of the creator, not the creation itself, Jamie would have had to say "I made you. I'm your Frankenstein" if his intention was to announce himself as Edmund's creator. By stating "You're my Frankenstein", Jamie suddenly places Edmund in the position of the creator. Edmund even reaffirms Jamie's assertion: "All right, I'm your Frankenstein" (167).

In his essay "Long Day's Journey into Frankenstein" Joseph Cordaro examines the problematic allusion to Shelley's novel, which according to him has been given surprisingly little attention in the critical writing done on *Journey*. Cordaro refuses to believe that the allusion to Frankenstein is a mistake made unintentionally by a great writer like O'Neill. Nor does he believe that Jamie and Edmund - considering their great knowledge of 19th century literature - mistake Frankenstein with the monster/creation. In other words, Cordaro argues, the allusion must be motivated from within the play. There is clearly a strong parallel between Jamie and Frankenstein; both men attempt to create someone according to their own desires. Cordaro, however, also draws an important parallel between Jamie and Frankenstein's monster; they share a quest for parental recognition, which drive them into fatal acts. Shelley's creation yearns for Frankenstein's attention and must destroy those who have it, for instance Frankenstein's brother. Similarly, Jamie indirectly kills his baby brother, Eugene, after infecting him with measles, and now he uses his mentorship over Edmund as a weapon, attempting to infect him with his own mistakes in order to deprive him of his parents' attention. The line, however, may also be interpreted literally; "I made you" illustrates Jamie's influence on Edmund, while "You are my Frankenstein" illustrates Edmund's impact

on Jamie. In Cordaro's view, "a confusion of identities between creator and creation (...) is not uncommon in O'Neill's plays." According to Proehl, Frankenstein represents "continuity between two individuals, between the maker and his creation, between a mentor and his protégé" (111). Jamie's influence seems to be deeply rooted in Edmund, and vice versa. In this respect, they may be viewed, like Lee and Austin in *True West*, "like two sides of the same individual" (Hadomi 38).

As in the case of the "curse of ancestry" that passes down from father to son, there is a connectedness between the brothers that none of them is able to escape. As my opening chapter serves to illustrate, the legacy of the father is deeply embedded in the son's sense of self, and vice versa. Then, the brothers are seen to carry on the bond of continuity - between creator and creation - that characterizes the father-son relationship. In fact, the image of Frankenstein and his monster may be applied to all the masculine relations in my study. The fathers, the sons, and the brothers of these plays all become each other's Frankensteins and thus also each other's creations. Nonetheless, the greatest and most powerful Frankenstein in this connection is the American society, which attempts to mold its members according to its own desires, and which is seen to produce a number of unhappy "monsters."

The Figure of the “Wife-Mother”: Family Life through a Female Perspective

”I don’t know what to do.
I live from day to day”
- Linda Loman in *Salesman*

The literary universes of O’Neill, Miller and Shepard are first and foremost populated by men. *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Death of a Salesman*, *True West*, and *Buried Child* are deeply masculine plays that focus extensively on male conflicts. In these dramas, women characters are outnumbered by male ones, who dominate and take the leading role. According to Florence Falk, “[m]en are the energy centers of most of Shepard’s plays, while women take peripheral roles” (95-96). Falk’s assertion is accurate; Shepard creates a male landscape, and most of his female characters are given a marginalized position. Similarly, Matthew Roudané notes that *Salesman* “presents a grammar of space that marginalizes Linda Loman and, by extension, all women, who seem Othered, banished to the periphery of a paternal world” (“*Death of a...*” 61). Miller’s drama is often scolded for its limited representation of female characters, and most feminist readings on *Salesman* tend to view Linda as a mere victim of a patriarchal culture. Similarly, a number of O’Neill critics point to the playwright’s stereotypical portrayals of submissive female characters. Judith E. Barlow describes Mary Tyrone as “a figure whose suffering exposes the limitations and paradoxes imposed on women in a world shaped around male desires” (172). In an essay entitled “Women and the Family in American Drama”, Carol Billman argues that the main focus of *Journey* and *Salesman* is the estrangement between fathers and sons: “The wives and mothers are important only insofar as they participate in or help to describe the suffering of their men” (37). Similarly, Ann C. Hall claims that the wives and mothers in the vast majority of Shepard’s plays “merely highlight the complicated oedipal relationships between fathers and sons” (92).

The studies of Barlow, Billman, and Hall undoubtedly touch upon a widespread tendency within the patriarchal culture of 20th century United States: even though women occupy a central position within the family, it is men who confront society. In these plays, the male struggle extends itself into the public world, while the female struggle is confined to the private sphere of the home; nevertheless, the female suffering may be argued to be no less

consequential, as exemplified by the chapter's initial quote by Linda Loman in *Salesman*: "I don't know what to do. I live from day to day" (60). The female characters of *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* are far from superfluous; on the contrary, their presence contributes to drive the action of the plays. Not only does the female family member shed light on the male conflicts within the family, but she also gives expression to woman's position within 20th century American family and society. In much the same way as men's lives are controlled by definitions of masculinity, women's lives are controlled by ideas of femininity. In sociological terminology, femininity and masculinity are social constructions that reflect contrary, conflicting characteristics. While masculinity usually is associated with strength and authority, femininity comes to represent the very opposite: "Precisely what characteristics are listed varies, though passivity, dependence, and weakness are usually mentioned."⁹ Such "feminine" characteristics may be argued to stem from a long-lasting confinement of women to the domestic sphere. All the female family members of *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* confirm as characters that woman's role historically has been anchored in the family home; they are first and foremost defined in relation to their roles as wives and mothers.

In order to explore the function of the "wife-mothers" - O'Neill's Mary, Miller's Linda, and Shepard's Halie and Mom - the plays should be placed in their historical contexts. Set in 1912 and 1949, *Journey* and *Salesman* depict a time when the roles of women remained fairly restricted. In the capitalist, patriarchal system of the early 20th century, marriage was the only way for women to secure financial stability for the future. Women were expected to dedicate themselves to the service of the family in the traditional feminine nursing role; thus, one may argue that marriage was the primary "occupation" open to them. Being a member of the world outside the family home was a man's privilege; in fact, women were not even considered "citizens" in the sense of being involved in public activities. At the time of the plot of O'Neill's play, women did not even have the right to vote. In analyzing Shepard's female characters in *Buried Child* and *True West*, one must take into consideration the noteworthy changes in the roles and perceptions of women brought by the Women's Movement during the 1960s and 70s. Considering that Halie and Mom are not controlled by a family patriarch, one may argue that they are the modern counterparts to Mary and Linda.

⁹ Cf. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Marshall, p. 179.

The Loyal Housewife vs. the Emancipated “Matriarch”

The 1955 study by Talcott Parsons, *Family Socialization and Interaction Process*, coincides with the golden days of the American housewife; in this respect, a number of Parsons’ assertions are representative of the wife-mother figures in *Journey* and *Salesman*. For instance, Parsons argues that woman’s role within the family is primarily linked to “the internal affairs of the family, as wife, mother and manager of the household” (14). Unquestionably, Mary Tyrone and Linda Loman are women who have dedicated their lives to the welfare of their families. As a result, their sense of identity and self-worth resides first and foremost in their roles as wife and mother. According to patriarchal norms, they are expected to be obedient supporters of their husbands and to have no ambitions that reach beyond their domesticated horizons. Clearly, Mary and Linda live in the shadow of their husbands. They are, in Beauvoirian terms, the personification of “The Second Sex.” In both plays, masculine superiority is pitted against feminine inferiority. O’Neill depicts Mary and Tyrone as polarities; while the former is portrayed as the insecure, fragile female, the latter is portrayed as the confident, powerful male. The most marked feature of Mary’s character is “*extreme nervousness*” (12). Suffering from rheumatism, she has become painfully self-conscious about her appearance: “*her hands are never still*” (ibid.). In comparison, O’Neill emphasizes Tyrone’s good health: “[*h*]e has never been really sick a day in his life. He has no nerves” (13).

Similarly, the major power imbalances between husband and wife in *Salesman* are introduced in the playwright’s initial stage description. Miller’s synopsis of his male protagonist’s principal role may be sharply contrasted with the principal role of his female protagonist: “*Willy Loman, the Salesman* (...) *Linda, his wife*” (12, emphasis added). Willy is obviously defined in relation to his role in the public world while Linda is defined only in relation to her husband. Her dependency on Willy and her location in the home is immediately evoked. Considering Willy’s frequent attempts to silence Linda, the husband’s quest for authority over his wife is made strikingly evident by Miller. By subjecting Linda to verbal abuse, Willy asserts his role as family patriarch:

LINDA: Isn’t that wonderful?

WILLY: *Don’t interrupt.*

(...)

LINDA: Maybe things are beginning to -

WILLY [*wildly enthused, to LINDA*]: *Stop interrupting!*

(...)

LINDA: He loved you!

WILLY [to LINDA]: *Will you stop!*

(...)

LINDA: Oliver always thought the highest of him -

WILLY: *Will you let me talk?* (62, 64-65, emphasis added).

By refusing his wife to participate in a conversation between the men of the Loman family, Willy expresses a desire to exclude Linda from the male circle. As a mere housewife, Linda is in Willy's opinion disqualified from discussing issues of the American business world, and her constant attempts to offer her viewpoints threaten his masculine superiority. Linda is also banned from the celebration at the restaurant after Biff's supposed business deal with Bill Oliver. In addition, Willy's praise of his wife - "You're my foundation and my support, Linda" (18) - above all serves to emphasize that Linda's place is in the home (cf. Stanton 135). In fact, Linda is the only character of *Salesman* who never leaves the Loman residence, which is in itself a strong indication of her confinement to the domestic realm. Miller's autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*, suggests a clear parallel between Linda Loman and Miller's own mother: "She was a woman who was haunted by a world she could not reach out to, by books she would not get to read, concerts she would not get to attend, and above all, interesting people she'd never get to meet" (17-18).

One may argue that the exclusion from the public sphere also indicates a lack of power in the home arena, as Billman puts it: "Female characters who have no future outside their families, are also weak and powerless within the family structure" (39). Considering that the male members of the Tyrone and Loman families appear to seek paternal-fraternal communities rather than female companionship, Billman's argument may be applied to both *Journey* and *Salesman*. Throughout *Journey*, Mary's needs are completely overshadowed by the numerous demands by the male members of the family. Laurin Porter makes an interesting observation about this play, noting that the public spaces of the Tyrone residence are claimed primarily by the male Tyrones, while the private spaces, such as the restroom, are relegated to Mary. Thus, the spaces associated with the men are "public, communal, and visible to the audiences", while those spaces associated with Mary are "private, isolated, and invisible" ("Why Do I Feel..."). For instance, during most of the final act, Mary is absent from stage, while the three men are gathered in the living room. When she eventually enters the stage toward the end of the play she appears in the front parlor, which emphasizes her separation from the male Tyrones. In addition, the heavy drinking in *Journey* is presented as a male activity that Mary is advised not to participate in. In another essay, Porter argues that the numerous literary allusions in *Journey* form a kind of forum that only the men engage in:

It is also interesting that although the three male Tyrone are heavily allusive (four quotes by James, ten by Jamie, and five by Edmund), O'Neill assigns no allusion to Mary (...) In fact, the men never use allusions in their conversations with her, only with one another. It's almost as if they have their own language, subtly reinforcing the extent to which Mary is isolated, even within the family unit ("Musical and Literary...").

Observations such as these suggest that Mary holds a peripheral role in the family. Except for a visit to the drugstore, she never leaves the summer house, while Tyrone, Jamie, and Edmund spend most of the afternoon in town. Tyrone - like Willy Loman - emphasizes that his wife's role is anchored in the domestic realm and that her main priority is to secure her husband's happiness by creating a respectable home: "She's been so well in the two months since she came home (...) It's been heaven to me. This home has been a home again" (37). Mary obviously suffers as a result of her isolated existence: "Your father goes out. He meets his friends in barrooms or at the Club. You and Jamie have the boys you know. You go out. But I am alone. I've always been alone" (47). She longs for female companionship: "If there was a friend's house where I could drop in and laugh and gossip awhile. But, of course, there isn't. There never has been" (88). Relegated to the private sphere, Mary is reminiscent of the female narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1891), who is metaphorically and literally imprisoned in a summer mansion. The barred windows in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the fog in *Journey* are striking symbols of female imprisonment. In this respect, it is significant to note that one of Mary's most striking features is a "youthfulness she has never lost"; in addition, she reflects "an innate unworldly innocence" (13). One may argue that Mary embodies child-like qualities, and it is immediately suggested that the marriage reduces her to an infantile state, much like the female narrator of Gilman's short story.

There is no doubt that Mary and Linda are devoted to their husbands and truly love them. As Linda declares: "Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world - (...) To me you are (...) The handsomest" (37). Similarly, Mary states: "James! We've loved each other! We always will! Let's remember only that" (88). However, their devotion to their husbands is further reinforced by early 20th century patriarchal ideas of wifedom. While their husbands are expected to be highly committed to their public role and thus project an image of themselves as successful businessmen, Mary and Linda are expected to unyieldingly stand by their men during all times of hardship. In this respect, one may argue that the female role - much like the male role - is a matter of performance. Both women may be argued to embody the Victorian feminine ideal of the 19th century - "The Angel in the House" - which is

examined by Virginia Woolf in “Professions for Women” (1942). Woolf argues that well into the 20th century most households had its angel, who she describes as “immensely charming”, “intensely sympathetic” and “utterly unselfish” (2215); in addition, this angel “sacrificed herself daily” and “excelled in the difficult arts of family life” (ibid.). These characteristics may be applied to both Mary and Linda. Even though they are suffering under the patriarchal rule of family and society, they somehow sustain their supportive roles. Mary admits: “[My husband is] a peculiar man” (64); similarly, Linda confesses: “I know [Willy is] not easy to get along with - nobody knows that better than me - but...” (55). Still, Mary and Linda are strongly bound to their husbands and apparently unable - and unwilling - to break free from patriarchal oppression.

In the initial stage directions, Miller states that Linda “*has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to Willy’s behavior - she more than loves him, she admires him*” (12). Linda resembles the wife-mother figure in Miller’s *All My Sons*, Kate Keller, who has “*an overwhelming capacity for love*” (69). Both women loyally follow the lead of their husbands and never oppose or criticize them. Throughout *Salesman*, Linda sustains Willy’s illusion of masculine success, even though she is fully aware of her husband’s professional inadequacy. She expresses great awareness of the kind of pressure her husband is met with as a member of a success-oriented society: “what goes through a man’s mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent?” (57). She is aware of her husband’s obsession to “accomplish something” (15), and assures him that handling a twenty-five year old mortgage is “an accomplishment” (73). Clearly, she notices the vast difference between Willy’s exaggerated claim of having earned “two hundred and twelve dollars” in commission and the actual amount of “seventy dollars and some pennies” (35). Yet, she merely tells him: “That’s very good” (ibid.). In addition, in order to preserve her husband’s pride, she never confronts him with the suicide devices she discovers in the cellar: “How can I mention it to him? (...) How can I insult him that way?” (59-60). One may thus argue that Linda’s sense of blind loyalty to her husband contributes to his destruction.

It seems that for a woman to be valued in a patriarchal society, she must deny her own desires. In *Journey*, O’Neill presents Mary as an object of exchange between men, much like Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879). She leaves her father’s home and ventures into marriage with Tyrone, but unlike Nora, she never manages to break free. It appears that Mary was reduced to an obedient child in her father’s home as well; she repeatedly refers to her genteel upbringing: “I was a very pious girl” (104). She recalls putting all her dreams on hold after marrying Tyrone: “I had two dreams. To be a nun, that was the

more beautiful one. To become a concert pianist, that was the other” (106). Obviously, society’s view of women and marriage thwarts Mary’s quest for selfhood, and she never fulfils any of her dreams: “For a time after my marriage I tried to keep up my music. But it was hopeless” (106). Tyrone disapproves of Mary’s quest for freedom outside the frame of marriage. He expresses his disillusionment with his wife’s dreams and hopes for herself, and claims that the idea of becoming a concert pianist was an idea put in her head by ignorant nuns flattering her: “They are innocent women, anyway, when it comes to the world. They don’t know that not one in a million who shows promise ever rises to concert playing (...) And the idea that she might have become a nun. That’s the worst” (140). Obviously, Mary’s aspirations are nipped in the bud. Her crippled fingers stand out as a strong indication of the disruption of woman’s sense of autonomy caused by marriage and motherhood.

It is noteworthy that Miller provides no information on Linda’s background. While Willy quest for ancestral origins is a major focus of the play, Linda is presented as having no past except the one she shares with her husband. Willy is preoccupied with the male lineage and yearns to introduce his sons to their Uncle Ben: “I want [my boys] to know the kind of stock they spring from” (48). The female line, however, is given no attention at all, as Kay Stanton argues: “Mother Loman and her stock and Linda and hers seem to have had no bearing on the production of the boys” (130). (Similarly, in *Buried Child*, Vince seeks his male roots, and by the end of the play, his mother’s identity remains unknown.) Miller’s refusal to provide information about the past of his female protagonist serves to illustrate that Linda’s sense of self depends solely on Willy. Even Linda herself appears to define her own identity in relation to her husband. She regards the two of them as a kind of symbiosis: “I know every thought in his mind” (60). It appears that none of her problems belong entirely to herself; they are all part of her husband’s suffering. Within the institution of marriage, Linda has become self-sacrificing and accommodating. Throughout *Salesman*, Miller’s stage directions remain crucial; they provide small, but important details regarding the relationship between husband and wife: “*She is taking off his shoes (...) [she’s] taking the jacket from him (...) LINDA is filling his cup when she can*” (13, 14, 72).

The traditional figures of the authoritarian husband and the loyal, dutiful wife portrayed in *Journey* and *Salesman* are not found in Shepard’s representation of gender in *Buried Child* and *True West*. Unlike Mary and Linda, neither Halie nor Mom are portrayed as submissive servants of men. On the contrary, the asymmetric relationship between husband and wife as depicted by O’Neill and Miller is reversed in the two plays by Shepard. Yet, critics tend to see Shepard’s female characters as weak and powerless in relation to their

husbands (see Auerbach, Falk, Whiting). For instance, in her discussion of *True West*, Doris Auerbach argues that “[t]he father’s mythical western world of manliness, rootlessness and violence is pitted against the world of mom and her kitchen” (57). It may be true that the desert is presented as a male landscape and not as a woman’s territory; nonetheless, it is significant to note that Mom seems to be the only character of *True West* who is capable of adapting to contemporary society. Despite her brief appearance, she serves to illustrate that by the late 20th century women are no longer defined in relation to a husband, and no longer relegated to the private sphere. During most part of the play Mom is out in the world, vacationing in Alaska. The male members of the family, on the other hand, are faced with crisis. Due to his inability to deal with modern civilization, the Old Man has retreated to the desert and withdrawn from the public sphere. Similarly, Austin and Lee seem more or less trapped in their mother’s kitchen, traditionally a woman’s territory. Quite ironically, freedom, mobility, and independence - characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity - come to represent Mom rather than the Old Man, Lee, or Austin. Auerbach also seems to reduce Mom to a “remote figure” who “has only survived by emotionally withdrawing from the field of battle” (59). On the contrary, Mom’s withdrawal from her family can be interpreted as a strategy for gaining agency over her own life. In other words, Mom preserves her sense of autonomy by rejecting the traditional female role as wife and mother. She is the only member of the family who is able to successfully break all family ties and start a new life. The curse of ancestry that destroys the relationship between fathers and sons in an endless cycle of destruction, Mom is not a part of.

Even though she is the only female family member among six males (Dodge, Tilden, Bradley, Ansel, Vince, and the dead baby boy), the wife-mother figure in *Buried Child*, Halie, is a crucial character. While the husband-father holds a low profile in the family, Halie is the one ultimately in charge. Her domineering behavior toward Dodge resembles qualities embodied in the system of the patriarchy: the rule of men within family and society. Thus, Halie comes to represent the very anti-thesis of Virginia Woolf’s “The Angel in the House.” The major power imbalance between husband and wife in *Buried Child* is suggested by the fact that Halie and Dodge inhabit different floors in the house. While Dodge is situated downstairs, Halie occupies the top floor. She emphasizes her authority and control by confirming: “It so happens that I have an over-all view from the upstairs” (75). She also asks her husband: “What’s it like down there, Dodge?” (64), and thus calls attention to his subordinated position. In much the same way as there is an enormous geographical distance between Mom and the Old Man in *True West*, Halie and Dodge reflect a mutual desire to

avoid each other, both physically and emotionally. Rather strikingly, Shepard notes in the initial stage description that the stage set should consist of a staircase with no landing (63). Such information indicates Halie and Dodge's inability to connect. One may argue that like Maggie and Brick in Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Halie and Dodge merely "occupy the same cage." For most of the first act, Dodge is located in the middle of the stage area, while Halie functions only as an off-stage voice. Dodge begs her: "Don't come down!" (64). His refusal to reply to Halie's questions and comments accentuates the distance that characterizes their relationship. When Halie returns to the family home in the final act, Dodge literally attempts to hide from her: "DODGE *pulls the rabbit fur coat over his head and hides*" (113). In the final act of *Buried Child*, it is indicated that the relationship between husband and wife lacks positive human attributes:

HALIE: Dodge, if you tell this thing - if you tell this, you'll be dead to me. You'll be just as good as dead.

DODGE: That won't be such a big change, Halie (123).

Like Mom in *True West*, Halie has created a new life outside the family home. She insists: "I'm not unaware of the world around me!" (75). When she returns from the outside world, dressed in yellow and with her arms full of fresh flowers - signalling her encounter with the world outside - Halie may be sharply contrasted with the castrated men of her family who, compared to her, seem trapped in an eternal battle in the domestic realm. She tells them: "The sun's out in case you hadn't noticed" (115), once again emphasizing her connection to the exterior world. Appalled by the men of her own family, Halie seeks more suitable male companionship company and finds it in Father Dewis. As David DeRose sees it, Halie attempts to "repopulate her world with heroes to replace the monsters to which she has given birth" (100). However, Father Dewis is never presented as a heroic character; the sexual relationship he shares with Halie truly questions his position as a representative of the church. Her infidelity is hinted from an early point, when she belittles her husband by talking candidly about one of her past lovers: "A wonderful man. A breeder (...) He knew everything there was to know" (66). Dodge confirms the possibility of his wife's affair when he says: "There's life in the old girl yet!" (88). When Halie spends the night away, and returns in the morning with Father Dewis, no doubt about her infidelity remains. Unlike Mary and Linda, who are fully devoted to their men, Halie is portrayed as a betrayer of her husband. Some would probably argue that Shepard's decision to leave Halie out of the play for the entirety of Act II indicates that the conflicts will take place with or without her. On the contrary, Halie is the one who exerts absolute domestic authority, and she suggests that the house would not be in

disarray if she were home: “You can’t leave this house for a second without the Devil blowing in through the front door (...) I never should’ve left. I never, never should’ve left!” (114, 119). The fact that Shepard allows Halie to deliver the first and last words of *Buried Child* stands out as a strong indication of her dominance within the family.

The Myth of the Nurturing Mother

Critics have called attention to the limited representation of women in both *Journey* and *Salesman*. It appears that in a patriarchal culture, women fall into two categories. Except for Charley’s secretary, women in *Salesman* are either “homemakers” or “call girls” (Murphy 156). Similarly, Marilyn Maxwell argues that the female characters of *Salesman* are either presented as “the saintly, loyal nurturer” or as “the sullied chippie” (274). The studies of Ann C. Hall and Dana Kinnison examine the Madonna/whore syndrome in *Journey* and *Salesman* respectively. Apparently, these critics agree that Mary and Linda come to represent the maternal stereotype, while Miss Forsythe, Letta and The Woman in *Salesman*, as well as Jamie’s prostitutes in *Journey*, are presented as objects of men’s sexual contemplation. Clearly, Happy’s view of his mother as “somebody with character, with resistance” (25) differs greatly from his view of the girls he sleeps with: “I just keep knockin’ them over and it doesn’t mean a thing” (ibid.). As mothers, Mary and Linda are expected to live up to the stereotype of the nurturing, protective mother; anything else is culturally unacceptable for a woman. In my opinion, however, neither Mary nor Linda succeeds mastering her role as mother according to societal expectations and culturally constructed myths.

Myths concerning motherhood are widespread. For instance, womanhood and motherhood are often considered synonymous. This is an idea the American feminist and writer, Adrienne Rich, strongly objects to: “Motherhood (...) is one part of female process; it is not an identity for all time” (36-37). Another common preconception is that all women instinctually and happily embrace motherhood and all it has to offer. In *Journey*, however, Mary’s ambivalent feeling toward her role as mother is a major focus of the play. Her sense of motherly protection and care for Edmund is undoubtedly sincere. She tells him “*tenderly*”: “All you need is your mother to nurse you. Big as you are, you’re still the baby of the family to me, you know” (43). Shortly afterwards, she “*puts her arms around him and hugs him with a frightened, protective tenderness*” (49). Nonetheless, Mary’s sentiments toward Edmund are tainted with contempt. She repeatedly insinuates that he is responsible for her fragile health: “I was so healthy before Edmund was born. You remember James. There wasn’t a nerve in

my body” (89). Edmund’s birth has marked her, and he is a constant reminder of her daily struggle. She bursts out in front of him: “I never knew what rheumatism was before you were born. Ask your father!” (119). She even declares: “I never should have born him” (91). For Mary, love and contempt function side by side, as Rich argues: “Love and anger can coexist concurrently; anger at the conditions of motherhood can become translated into anger at the child” (52).

The relationship between Mary and her first-born son, Jamie, is characterized by a lack of communication. While she prefers to keep Edmund under her wing, she is never seen expressing love or concern for Jamie, but rather feels detached from him: “It’s hard to believe, seeing Jamie as he is now, that he was ever my baby” (111-112). She bears a great deal of grudge against him, and blames him for the death of her second-born child, Eugene, who caught measles after Jamie entered the baby’s room: “I’ve always believed Jamie did it on purpose. He was jealous of the baby (...) I’ve never been able to forgive him for that” (90). More importantly, Mary holds herself responsible for her son’s death: “I let him die through my neglect” (112). Self-blame also comes to characterize Mary’s feelings toward Edmund: “He was born nervous and too sensitive, and that’s my fault” (91). Thus, Mary experiences that “anger at the conditions of motherhood” becomes “translated into guilt and self-laceration” (Rich 52). As Mary sees it, she has utterly failed in her role as mother: “I knew from experience that children should have homes to be born in, if they are to be good children, and women need homes, if they are to be good mothers” (90). Mary is aware that her role as a wife and mother is anchored in the home; however, she was never able to provide the setting upon which her roles are founded. Her motherly inadequacy is also communicated through her husband and sons. Tyrone’s idealization of his own mother - “A fine, brave, sweet woman. There was never a braver or finer” (151) - suggests that Mary has not lived up to his expectations. Mary’s morphine addiction stands out as her greatest violation of the norms of feminine behavior, and thus of her role as a mother. Edmund states: “It’s pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother!” (123). According to Hall, the divisions between the maternal stereotype - the Madonna - and its polarized extreme - the whore - become blurred due to Mary’s addiction to morphine (40), as Jamie’s statement serves to demonstrate: “Christ, I’d never dreamed before that any women but whores took dope” (166). Mary clearly fails to live up to Jamie’s stereotypical conception of motherhood as well.

Mary is intricately involved in the problematic father-son relationship, and attempts to negotiate the conflict between the two parties. She has developed certain strategies to end the argument between Tyrone and Jamie, and on a number of occasions, she plays the role of the

peacemaker. She ventures into their discussions, comments on their standpoints, and attempts to clear up possible misunderstandings. She uses humor in order to ease her husband's mind; when he starts attacking Jamie verbally, she "*coaxingly*" tells him that he "must have gotten out of the wrong side of the bed this morning" (22). She then changes the subject. Shortly afterwards, she "*tactfully*" (23) avoids yet another conflict between father and son. Mary must reconcile her two roles - loyal wife and protective mother - in order to sustain the domestic peace. Nonetheless, it seems that Mary's main intention is to ease her husband's mind:

MARY

Now don't start in on poor Jamie, dear.

Without conviction.

He'll turn out all right in the end, you wait and see (18, emphasis added).

Mary seems more able and willing, however, to adapt to her role as loyal wife than to her other role as nurturing mother. She places her husband's welfare very highly, and expects her sons to do the same. She demands Edmund to obey his father: "Don't call your father the Old Man. You should have more respect" (45). Similarly, she disparages Jamie for his lack of respect towards Tyrone:

Stop sneering at your father! I won't have it! You ought to be proud you're his son! He may have his faults. Who hasn't? But he's worked hard all his life. He made his way up from ignorance and poverty to the top of his profession! Everyone else admires him and you should be the last one to sneer - you, who, thanks to him, have never had to work hard in your life! (63).

It is significant to note, however, that Mary bears a great deal of resentment against her husband, and under the influence of morphine she seems to "forget" her sense of loyalty toward him, as Tyrone confirms: "it's the poison talking" (144). Critics tend to overstate Mary's powerlessness within the family realm and thus underestimate her ability to exert agency. In some sense, by escaping into the morphine addiction and the memories of her past Mary takes control over her own situation. It marks a movement away from the male members of her family, which in fact recalls Mom and Halie in *True West* and *Buried Child*. More importantly, the morphine reveals the bitterness Mary harbors toward Tyrone. She scolds him for never providing a decent home for his family and she appears to hold him responsible for her inadequacy as a mother. She also subverts Tyrone by making it clear that she looks down on his peasant origins: "His people were the most ignorant kind of poverty-stricken Irish" (113). In Mary's opinion, Tyrone has failed living up to her father's financial prosperity. By constantly idealizing her own father she somehow criticizes her husband: "[My father] spoiled me. He would do anything I asked" (106). To some extent, by speaking her mind, Mary - like Woolf - manages to kill "The Angel in the House." However, even though

she verbally confronts her husband, she appears traumatized when she suddenly realizes that she has been disrespectful of him: “A look of terror comes into her eyes and she stammers (...) I don’t know why I - Forgive me for scolding you James” (70). Shortly afterwards, she vents her anger at him, but soon becomes shocked by her disrespect: “Again she bursts out pleadingly. Oh, James, please! You don’t understand!” (70).

Despite Mary’s glimpses of disloyalty to her husband, one may argue that in both *Journey* and *Salesman*, the patriarchy represents an obstacle to women attempting to fulfil their role as mothers. This is even more marked in Miller’s *Salesman*. It is quite evident that whenever Linda is seen talking to her two sons, the conversation centers on Willy; in other words, her role as mother appears to evolve around her role as wife. Quite surprisingly, most critics appear to overlook this notion. Clearly, Linda is unable to reconcile her two roles; on the one hand, she is expected loyally stand by her husband; on the other hand, she is expected to play the part of the protective, nurturing mother. However, when Willy and Biff experience moments of deep conflict, she is faced with dilemma. Like Mary, Linda attempts to negotiate the conflict between father and son primarily in order to ensure her husband’s well-being. She apparently plays the part of the protective mother by jumping to Biff’s defense: “Willy, [Biff] was just saying - (...) [Biff] didn’t say a word, Willy” (61-62). Even though she appears to defend Biff’s life choices in front of Willy, Linda’s sense of loyalty toward Willy can never be questioned; she instinctually and continuously takes her husband’s side. It seems that her defense of Biff is motivated by a desire to ease her husband’s mind. She tells Willy: “[Biff is] finding himself” (16). In a conversation with Biff, on the other hand, she appears to criticize his life choices: “Biff, you can’t look around your whole life, can you?” (45). One may argue that Linda’s role as mother is premised on her role as wife, and that patriarchal standards prompt her to take her role as wife more seriously than her role as mother.

A few critics view Linda as the moral center of *Salesman*. According to Stanton, “[t]he Loman men are all less than they hold themselves to be, but Linda is more than she is credited to be” (Stanton 135). For instance, she appears as the only character who expresses a deeper understanding of the dimensions of her world, and she is the one who conveys the moral message of the play.

I don’t say he’s a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person (56).

In a scene from the past, Linda speaks her mind and opposes to Willy's way of raising Biff. She seems to realize that Biff does not benefit from Willy's constant praise of him, and she obviously fears that Biff suffers from a lack of morality: "And he'd better give back that football, Willy, it's not nice (...) He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!" (40). However, her opinion is once and for all undermined by Willy: "*exploding at her*: There's nothing the matter with him! You want him to be a worm like Bernard?" (ibid.). Linda, "*almost in tears*" (40), exists the stage area. It appears that her sense of loyalty toward Willy prompts her from interfering with Biff's upbringing ever again.

Fully aware that her husband's happiness depends on Biff, Linda yearns to influence her son so that he hopefully can reconcile with his father. She adopts Willy's patriarchal favoritism of the first-born, and continually focuses her attention on Biff. Happy, already ignored by his father, attempts to reach out to his mother, but also she dismisses him:

HAPPY: I'm going to get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.

LINDA: Go to sleep.

HAPPY, *going*: I just wanted to tell you (68).

Also Biff, incapable of gaining his father's sympathy and understanding, seeks to bond with his mother, referring to her as "[his] pal" (55). He appears very protective toward Linda and strongly objects to his father's demeaning treatment of her: "Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya?" (65). He also attempts to make his mother aware of Willy's tyranny: "Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you" (55). Nevertheless, Linda unyieldingly stands by her husband. Even though Biff receives her attention, Linda always has Willy's best interest in mind when approaching him. Although she questions the ideal of masculine success - "Why must everybody conquer the world?" (85) - and becomes aware of her husband's downfall, she allows the culture of masculine performance to enter the family realm. In Act II, she actually asks Biff to perform to his father: "be sweet to him tonight, dear. Be loving to him (...) Just put your arm around him when he comes into the restaurant. Give him a smile" (76). Linda's piece of advice clearly echoes the Dale Carnegie ideology as well as Willy's advice to Biff about Bill Oliver in the previous act (cf. Brøgger 58): "Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up" (65). Even Linda, confined to the domestic sphere in her role as wife and mother, is unable to defy the powerful pressures that come from the outside world. Witnessing Biff's unwillingness to adhere to his father's beliefs and values as well as his deep sense of resentment toward his father's façade of false pride, Linda cuts him off: "Biff, dear, if you don't have any feeling for him, then you can't have any feeling for

me (...) You've got to make up your mind now, darling, there's no leeway any more Either he is your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here" (55). If Linda is to be viewed as a moral center of the play, it is unfortunately one of identification with the husband and patriarch to the extent that she is willing to disown both her sons: "Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! I don't want you tormenting him anymore. Go on now, get your things together!" (124). Her blind faith in her husband has unfortunate consequences for both of her sons, who always find themselves in the shadow of their domineering father.

While O'Neill and Miller through the characters of Mary and Linda appear to question the myth of the nurturing mother, Shepard's portrayal of motherhood in *Buried Child* and *True West* breaks even more dramatically with the image of the stereotypical mother figure. William Kleb argues that Mom in *True West* is named according to her function in the family; similarly, Hall states that Shepard depicts Mom as "a mother, not an individual" (105). In my opinion, this is an unfortunate formulation; Mom possesses none of the qualities traditionally associated with maternity. For instance, when she enters her house and notices that all her plants are dead, she reacts rather coldly: "Oh well, one less thing to take care of I guess" (54). In addition, when her sons start fighting and attack each other rather brutally, she appears remote from the whole situation: "You boys shouldn't fight in the house. Go outside and fight" (56). She even asks Austin "calmly": "You're not killing him are you?" (57), showing no sign of motherly love or protection. One may argue that Mom remains the most absurdist character of *True West*, and that her brief appearance ultimately serves to demolish the mythology of the stereotyped, tender mother, whose life is centered around her children.

Kleb refers to Halie in *Buried Child* as "The Terrible Mother" (122); similarly, Falk refers to her as a "whore-wife-mother" (100). Halie - like her husband - has withdrawn from her responsibilities as a parent. Motherhood is clearly a role she does not know how to play. The question Dodge poses - "You never saw a bitch eat her puppies" (112) - can in fact be linked to Halie, whose actions are partly to blame for the disintegration of her sons. In this respect, Halie is in some degree reminiscent of Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Not only are both women portrayed as controlling, talkative and obsessively preoccupied with the men of their golden youth, they also seek authority over the lives of their children and attempt to mold them according to their own desires. Halie needs someone to take care of her and Dodge in their old days, and she doubts that Tilden and Bradley qualify for the job. She argues: "[Tilden] can't look after himself anymore (...) Bradley can hardly look out for himself" (72). It seems as if Tilden and Bradley will forever

be living in the shadow of their dead brother, Ansel, who is the only son who is entitled to his mother's love. She worships Ansel and clearly categorizes him as her favorite son. Her clothes suggest her preoccupation with his death: "*She appears dressed completely in black, as though in mourning*" (73). Compared to Ansel, Tilden and Bradley barely exist in their mother's heart and mind: "Course then when Ansel died that left us all alone. Same as being alone. No different. Same as if they'd all died" (ibid.).

In *Buried Child*, motherhood is both a source of power and an element that reinforces the battle between husband and wife. In this play, motherhood is used as an avenue to power. For instance, Halie appears to use her son, Bradley, in order to prove her superiority over Dodge. Even though she is fully aware of Dodge's objection - "You tell Bradley if he shows up with those clippers I will kill him! (...) Last time he left me almost bald!" (67) - she continually asks her son to come over and cut his father's hair, which may be seen as an act of emasculation. In this way, Halie takes advantage of Bradley in order to assert her dominance over Dodge. Tilden also appears to function as an instrument in his mother's power demonstration; by entering a sexual relationship with him, Halie succeeds in usurping power from her husband and thus weakens his authority both as a father and as a husband. The baby boy she gives birth becomes a living proof of Halie's sense of authority over Dodge. Rich argues that motherhood can be seen as a site of resistance to the patriarchy: "Powerless women have always used mothering as a channel - narrow but deep - for their own human will to power, their need to return upon the world what it has visited upon them" (38). Similarly, in her discussion of *Buried Child*, Carla McDonough argues: "It is made apparent that Halie is the one ultimately in control of the family line, because the heritage of father and son must pass through the body of a woman - out of paternal control and into maternal control, a fact that raises male fears and results in numerous betrayals" (54). When Halie gives birth to a child conceived through incest between mother and son, she uses motherhood to threaten Dodge's patriarchal position. She has violated the patriarchal rule of "keep[ing] the male line pure and intact" (ibid.). Clearly, Dodge sees Halie's actions as obstacles to his position as family patriarch. He cannot allow his wife to be in control, which is why he kills the baby boy conceived without his own interfering, as Hall argues: "Halie may be the keeper of the family tree, but she cannot add new branches without the law of the father" (100). Halie has, nonetheless, succeeded in wresting power from Dodge, who acknowledges his defeat and evades his role as family patriarch. The conquered Dodge declares: "Halie's the one with the family album" (112).

In *Journey and Salesman*, Mary Tyrone and Linda Loman experience that motherhood serves to reinforce the patriarchal oppression they are victims of in their role as wives. Due to patriarchal norms, their role as mothers is continually undermined by their role as wives. Halie in *Buried Child*, on the other hand, uses motherhood as an advantage to usurp power from the patriarchal system. In all cases, however, the sons may be seen as victims of the inequalities of power in the marital system. In *Journey and Salesman*, the sons suffer because their mother's sense of loyalty toward their father always comes first. In *Buried Child*, on the other hand, the sons are neglected by their mother because she merely uses them as means to an end; in other words, the sons become caught in the crossfire of their feuding parents.

Conclusion:

Home and Society as Modern Wastelands

“I will always be a stranger who never feels
at home, who does not really want and is not
really wanted, who can never belong (...)”
- Edmund Tyrone in *Journey*

In his essay “The Family in Modern Drama”, Arthur Miller explores the issue of social alienation that characterizes a large number of European and American family plays, and he claims that “the world we live in is an alien place” (75). The playwright then touches upon the existential dimension of family drama: “I should like to make the bold statement that all plays we call great, let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single question. It is this: How may man make of the outside world a home? (...) How may man make for himself a home in that vastness of strangers and how may he transform that vastness into a home?” (73, 85). Indeed, *Death of a Salesman* shares with *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* the major theme of man’s alienation in the modern world; a futile search for a sense of belonging is at the core of all plays. We know that Willy Loman in *Salesman* is “only a little boat looking for a harbor” (76); similarly, Edmund Tyrone in *Journey* longs for “[t]he peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfilment beyond men’s lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams!” (156). As my preceding chapters serve to demonstrate, the characters of *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West* are perfect examples of maladjusted individuals of modern society. They are not at peace with their place in the world, but are rootless and restless and in desperate search for some kind of refuge. By exploring man’s struggle to adapt to the public world, or, in Miller’s words, his inability to find “a satisfying role in society” (74), all four plays raise important, existential questions.

An important trademark of American popular culture is the sanctity of the American home. Indeed, it is a common preconception that the word “home” carries connotations of refuge and sanctuary, and many associate it with roots and a sense of belonging. As Thaddeus Wakefield sees it, the American family [home] may be regarded as one of the most “sacred” institutions of society (5). In the opening of his study *A Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (1977), Christopher Lasch - a recognized American historian and social

critic - hints at the ideal function of the American family home: "As business, politics, and diplomacy grow more savage and warlike, men seek a haven in private life, in personal relations, above all in the family - the last refuge of love and decency" (x). Nonetheless, as my thesis argues, the public and the private arenas coexist and never can be regarded as functioning independently. In this manner, man's feeling of social alienation mirrors man's inability to find a sense of solace in the home sphere, and vice versa. Lasch's study argues that the family is besieged by outside forces and that the public conditions permeate the family environment: "Does the family still provide a haven in a heartless world? Or do the very storms out of which the need for such a haven arises threaten to engulf the family as well?" (x). In his view, "[t]he sanctity of the home is a sham in a world dominated by giant corporations and by the apparatus of mass production" (xxiii). In all the plays of my study, economic forces are indeed seen to invade the private sphere. For instance, the family house - the physical body of the home - is a market commodity, as suggested by Dodge: "[The house has] been a pain in the neck ever since the very first mortgage" (128). Also Willy notes: "Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it" (15).

Journey, Salesman, Buried Child, and True West may be interpreted as attacks on the competitive society and the American dream and their dehumanizing influence on the family. O'Neill's social philosophy - as expressed throughout his dramatic works - is rather bleak, and as Doris M. Alexander argues, it "sees no answer for man in a better society (...) All of O'Neill's statements on the future of mankind show profound pessimism" (354, 360). O'Neill himself insists:

This country is going to get it - really get it. We had everything to start with - everything - but there's bound to be a retribution. We've followed the same selfish, greedy path as every other country in the world. We talk about the American dream, but what is this dream, in most cases, but the dream of material things? I sometimes think that the United States, for this reason, is the greatest failure the world has ever seen. We've been able to get a very good price for our souls in this country - the greatest price perhaps that has ever been paid (qtd. in Bigsby and Wilmeth 302).

Also Shepard rejects the American pursuit of the material:

What is the American Dream? Is it what Thomas Jefferson proposed? Was that the American dream? Was it what George Washington proposed? Was it what Lincoln proposed? Was it what Martin Luther King proposed? I don't know what the American Dream is. I do know that it doesn't work, Not only doesn't it work, the myth of the American dream has created extraordinary havoc, and it's going to be our demise (qtd. in Roudané, "Shepard on..." 69-70).

Obviously, my playwrights view the rapidly expanding economy of competition and acquisition as the decline of American society - and thus the family. In fact, one may argue that through the motif of sterility, the atmosphere of decay, and the imagery of death that characterize *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*, the contemporary American society as well as the American family home are portrayed as a modern wastelands. Considering that a number of parallels may be drawn between the four plays of my study and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), the existential dimension of my plays may partly be discussed in relation to this poem. *The Waste Land* - along with the plays by O'Neill, Miller, and Shepard - portrays a profound sense of human despair and may be interpreted as a harsh critique of modern civilization. Humanity, according to Eliot, is heading toward apocalypse, much like the families of my study. The outside world, the family home, and the individual's mind may all be compared to desert wastelands.

The striking similarities between the ultimate vision of my plays and *The Waste Land* become evident in the playwrights' and the poet's depiction of the modern city. *The Waste Land* takes you on a journey into a barren, desolate city, populated by ghosts of the dead. Similarly, through the representation of the city in *Salesman* and *True West*, Miller and Shepard seem to suggest that modern urbanization constitutes a threat to humanism. The barren city may in all cases be interpreted as a metaphor for personal impotence. Both plays are in every respect critiques of the human costs of society's invasion of nature. In *True West*, rugged nature has become suburbia and valleys have become freeways, exemplified in this conversation between the two brothers:

LEE: Up here it's different. This country's real different.

AUSTIN: Well, it's been built up.

LEE: Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don't hardly recognize it (11).

In addition, due to the rapidly expanding modern economy, it appears that people no longer feel any spiritual connection to the land. Shepard sees the new West, as opposed to the old West, as the demise of the American culture. He notes, "For me, one of the biggest tragedies was moving from an agricultural to an urban-industrial society at the turn of the century" (qtd. in Bottoms 156). For instance, Lee in *True West* refuses to "eat offa' plate with the State of Idaho starin' [me] in the face" (10), because the state, traditionally associated with wildlife and cowboys, has become a commodity within the American consumption culture, as Paul Rosefeldt puts it: "[a] Western state has been reduced to a cheap imitation on a plate, [and become] a souvenir deprived of its symbolic aura" (52). According to Lee, the new West and its suburbs is a "[k]inda' place that sorta' kills ya' inside" (12). He compares his mother's

suburban home to a “rest home” (22). As a rest home may be associated with the final halt before death, one may argue that Lee’s comment suggests that the new West represents the decrepitude of American life. Lee becomes determined to flee modern civilization: “I’m clearin’ outa’ here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane” (56). Eventually, Austin too acknowledges that the modern city leads to a profound sense of disorientation and his own spiritual death:

There’s nothin’ down here for me. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a little life here then. But now – I keep comin’ down here thinkin’ it’s the fifties or somethin’. I keep finding myself getting off the freeway at familiar landmarks that turn out to be unfamiliar (...) Wandering down streets I thought I recognized that turn out to be replicas of streets I remember. Streets I misremember. Streets I can’t tell if I lived in or saw in a postcard. Fields that don’t even exist anymore (...) There’s nothin’ real down here, Lee! Least of all me! (49).

Salesman is also a play about the relationship between people and the land as well as the changing landscapes of the United States. In his discussion of the play, Steven R. Centola argues that “the once promising agrarian American dream” has been transformed into “an urban nightmare” (25). The shift from agrarian ideals to a capitalist, consumerist ideology is by many viewed as a progress; nonetheless, it may also be argued to have resulted in man’s alienation from the land. By the time *Salesman* is set, Brooklyn had become stifled with towering buildings, as a result of urbanization and the development of modern society. Willy laments: “They massacred the neighborhood” (17). Biff openly declares: “I hate this city (...) We don’t belong in this nuthouse of a city!” (58, 61). The land that surrounds the Loman residence is barren: “The grass won’t grow any more, you can’t raise a carrot in the back yard” (17). There is an obvious connection between the barren soil and Willy’s spiritual condition; the modern, sterile city represents chaos and disorder, exhaustion and frustration. Miller perfectly manages to capture the breakdown of modern civilization in *Salesman*. The scene in which Willy struggles in order to switch off the tape recorder in his employer’s office, suggests his inability to cope with modern, technological civilization. Willy’s desperate lamentation: “I am always in race with the junkyard! (...) All of a sudden everything falls to pieces” (73, 66), echoes Eliot’s portrayal of the western civilization as falling apart in *The Waste Land*: “[it] [c]racks and reforms and burst into the violet air” (1441). In much the same way as the narrator of *The Waste Land* is surrounded by garbage and rats - the detritus of modern civilization - Willy’s world is filled with mortgages, time payments, and a refrigerator that “consumes belts like a goddamn maniac” (73). The car - an emblem of American culture - eventually breaks down, evoking the fall of modern

civilization. The fact that Willy's life is ended in the car ironically illustrates his entanglement in American emblems of mobility. As Richard T. Brucher notes: "[A] slave to broken machines, Willy Loman seems to epitomize the victim of modern technology" (83).

The sterility of the American consumption culture - representing a sense of decay - is also portrayed in *Journey*, *Buried Child* and *True West*. Clearly, the exterior wasteland has entered the family arena as well. For instance, the summer house in *Journey* is described as a "shabby place" (64) that is filled with Tyrone's second-hand bargains: "everything [is] done in the cheapest way" (45). As in the case of *Salesman*, the automobile in *Journey* symbolizes the disintegration of modern civilization. Tyrone states: "Waste! (...) Something is always wrong" (87). Similarly, in *True West*, Mom's suburban home is filled with artificial objects, in Lee's words, "Just a lotta' junk (...) Just the same crap we always had around" (10). The synthetic grass on the floor of Mom's alcove (3) may be seen to symbolize the sterility of modern suburban civilization. The brothers' treatment of their mother's home is rather harsh; they destroy her kitchen, and by the end of the play Shepard refers to the now ravaged scene as "a desert junkyard" (50). The empty beer and whiskey bottles, the broken toasters, and the damaged typewriter evoke the detritus of modern, technological society and the American family home at one and the same time. Shepard also portrays the decay of modern civilization through the character of the Old Man; more specifically, through the story of his teeth. Austin notes: "First he lost his real teeth, then he lost his false teeth (...) Woke up every morning with another tooth lying on the mattress" (41). Megan Williams argues that "[t]he father in this story, with his rotting teeth and his alcoholism, is a literal house of decay. He symbolizes the type of waking death, where part of man dies and his body continues to live" (67). The putrid teeth in Eliot's *The Waste Land* may also be interpreted as a metaphor for the decaying modern civilization: "Dead mountain of carious teeth that cannot spit" (1440).

The atmosphere of decay is pervasive in *Buried Child* as well, reflecting the spiritual condition of the family. Typical features of the family home are for instance "old", "pale", "frayed", "faded", "old-fashioned", "brown", "dark" (63). Dodge's body - surrounded by "several small bottles with pills" (ibid.) - is a literal symbol of deterioration, as Halie points out: "You sit here day and night, festering away! Decomposing! Smelling up the house with your putrid body!" (76). Stephen Bottoms compares *Buried Child* to the gothic genre; the play is populated by grotesques and the mood is permeated with darkness and pessimism (159). The second-born son in this play, Bradley, corresponds to a central character in Eliot's *The Waste Land*: the Fisher King. Bradley's wooden leg and his spiritual and sexual impotence echo the wounding of the Fisher King and his lack of sexual potency, which leads to the

sterility of his lands. Barren, untilled fields also surround the family home in *Buried Child*, evoking the sexual impotence of its male inhabitants. The barren fields also function as a constant reminder of the corpse buried in the back yard. Paradoxically, the land that harbors the dead baby boy eventually produces great amounts of corn and carrots, and *Buried Child* in this respect once again corresponds to *The Waste Land*, which reads: “That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / ‘Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?’” (1432). Considering that the fresh vegetables feed off the decaying corpse in the ground, one may argue that the corn and carrots are inextricably linked to death. In fact, through a constant referral to corpses, the death imagery of *Buried Child* pervades the play from beginning to end. Dodge, who awaits death, refers to himself as a corpse (67). According to Halie, Ansel “felt like a corpse” (74) even when he was alive. The death-in-life imagery is also representative for some of the members of the Tyrone family in *Journey*. For instance, Jamie reveals that a part of him has been dead for a long time (169), Edmund suggest that he has “to go on living as a ghost” (133), and Mary hopes to find refuge in death: “I hope, sometime, without meaning it, I will take an overdose” (123). She is also described as “a ghost haunting the past” (155). The families of *Buried Child* and *Journey* are, like Eliot’s narrator, haunted by death-in-life: “I was neither / Living nor dead” (1431).

In *The Waste Land*, the environment is confining and imprisoning its inhabitants, and the motif of isolation is prominently present: “each in his prison” (1442). The sense of isolation also permeates all the four plays of my study. The family home is, it seems, synonymous with confinement. In both plays by Shepard, isolation is a major focus. The mid-Western farm of *Buried Child* seems remote from the world outside, and except for Halie, the family seems withdrawn from the public world, as Dodge declares: “I don’t even know who the neighbors are! And I don’t wanna know!” (70). Father Dewis - a representative of the exterior world - seems out of place on the family farm, and his statement, “This is outside my Parish” (126), serves to illustrate the immense distance between the family home and society. In addition, Dodge’s, Bradley’s, and Tilden’s treatment of Shelly - another representative of the world outside the family home - suggests that they do not know how to behave themselves around strangers, and once again the family’s detachment from society is being emphasized. Similarly, the Old Man in *True West* - located alone in the desert - seems separated from civilization. His sons, Lee and Austin, also seem detached from the outside world. When Saul Kimmer leaves Mom’s suburban home, the brothers’ involvement with the public world diminishes dramatically. The disconnected telephone by the end of the play (50) signifies the brothers’ retreat from the world outside. One may argue that the geographical isolation in

Buried Child and *True West* is an indication of a deeper emotional isolation; the characters appear to have retreated within their isolated selves. They seem trapped in a personal prison of their own, reminiscent of the same motif in *The Waste Land*.

The feeling of imprisonment in *Salesman* is exemplified by Willy's frustrated comment: "The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks" (17). In the initial stage directions, Miller suggests a stark contrast between the Loman residence and the city outside: the "*small, fragile-seeming home*" is surrounded on all sides by "*a solid vault of apartment houses*" (11). In many ways, the Loman residence seems isolated from the exterior world; nonetheless, the family is not protected from the enormous pressures from the world outside. In *Salesman*, it seems, isolation and invasion of privacy go hand in hand. The rapidly expanding city outside the Loman family home provides a feeling of suffocation: "The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood (...) Population is getting out of control (...) Smell the stink from that apartment house!" (17). Apparently, the exterior world invades the fragile home of the Loman family; it literally walks into their living-room when their neighbor, Charley, enters in the middle of the night: "I heard some noise. I thought something happened. Can't we do something about the walls? You sneeze in here, and in my house hats blow off" (42).

In *Journey*, the Tyrone family is presented as having minimal contact with the world outside. Except for their servant, Cathleen, no other character enters the household. Even though all the family members leave their homes in order to enter the world outside, the nature of their affairs turns out to be highly self-destructive: Mary heads for the drugstore to get more morphine; Edmund visits the doctor and learns that he suffers from tuberculosis; Jamie stumbles through the bars as well as the whorehouse; and Tyrone searches for some useless land on which he can squander his money. These trips are mentioned but not dramatized in the play, thus, for the most of the time, the Tyrones' isolation from the exterior world pervades the *Journey* from beginning to end. According to Mary, they are "cut off from everyone" (44). As illustrated by my analysis of the wife-mother figure, confinement to the domestic realm is a result of gender restrictions; nonetheless, the sense of isolation in *Journey* may also be argued to go beyond gender roles. The fog, which "*is like a white curtain drawn outside the windows*" (99), is an important symbol in *Journey*, adding to the motif of isolation; it separates the Tyrone household from the outside world and reinforces the sense of isolation. In addition, the approaching night - and the approaching darkness - further underlines the process of insulation, as Bryan Thiessen notes: "The night, and the fog which accompanies it, physically embody the sense of isolation that smothers the Tyrones' house."

Isolation also characterizes the family members' separation from one another. As the characters express a desire to avoid each other, individual seclusion is a dominant feature of the Tyrone household. Each character is absorbed in a world of his or her own and appears to isolate himself or herself from the rest of the family. Even though all four acts of *Journey* are structured around traditional family gathering times (breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime), the actual activities are omitted from the play, which can be interpreted as a sign of their inability to truly gather - and connect - as a family. The failure of communication which characterizes the Tyrone family serves to intensify their apartness. Incapable of connecting with each other, the Tyrones attempt to escape their problems by retreating into their inner selves.

The fog in *Journey* may also be interpreted as a symbol of escapism, and is first and foremost associated with Mary and Edmund. Mary states: "I really love fog (...) It hides you from the world and the world from you (...) No one can find or touch you any more (...) How thick the fog is. I can't see the world. All the people in the world could pass by and I would never know. I wish it was always that way" (100, 104). Similarly, Edmund argues: "I loved the fog (...) The fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here (...) That's what I wanted - to be alone with myself in a world where (...) life can hide from itself" (132-133). Clearly, in *Journey*, nature functions as a metaphor of the characters' existential struggle. Edmund retreats into the symbolism of nature:

The fog and the sea became part of each other. It was like walking on the bottom of the sea. As if I had drowned a long time ago. As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost (...) for a moment I lost myself - actually lost my life, I was set free! I dissolved in the sea (133, 156).

According to Doris Falk, Edmund experiences oneness with nature: "[i]f he cannot find a home with his family or with society, he can at least be absorbed into the processes of nature, especially those of the sea, where nature and the unconscious become symbolically one" (187). On the contrary, Edmund's transcendental experience in nature - an experience of nothingness - serves in my view only to accentuate his sense of alienation and despair. It recalls Yank in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922), who dies and "[p]erhaps (...) at last belongs" (308). In addition, Edmund resembles the drowned Phoenician sailor in Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool" (1439). For both men, the sea

stands for a spiritual death: “*Oed’ und leer das Meer*¹⁰ (...) Fear death by water” (Eliot 1431-1432).

The representation of nature in *Buried Child*, *True West*, and *Salesman* also serves to illustrate the characters’ emotional despair and their quest for escape. In *Buried Child*, the rain - often a symbol of life and growth - becomes an indication of Dodge’s tormented inner condition, as Halie insists: “It’s the rain! Weather. That’s it. Every time. Every time you get like this, it’s the rain. No sooner does the rain start then you start” (64). Also Willy in *Salesman* expresses his inner befuddlement through nature imagery: “The woods are burning!” (41). Tilden’s experience in nature suggests a feeling of nothingness as well as a desire to escape the problematic situation of his family: “I was back out there. And the rain was coming down. And I didn’t feel like coming back inside. I didn’t feel the cold so much. I didn’t mind the wet. So I was just walking. I was muddy but I didn’t mind the mud so much (...) I like it out there (...) Especially in the rain. I like the feeling of it” (75).

Similarly, the frequent references to nature in *Salesman* and *True West* give expression to the characters’ desire to escape from modern civilization. Willy longs for a rural existence: “before it’s all over we’re gonna get a little place out in the country, and I’ll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens...” (72). Lee and the Old Man in *True West* also desire to live in accordance with nature, and - like Willy - they hold an outdated view of the American West. One may argue that in case of both *Salesman* and *True West*, the longing for a life in the American countryside gives expression to unattainable dreams buried in the lost American past. The men clearly have an anachronistic vision of the world, or, in Rosefeldt’s words, “a nostalgia for the Pastoral Eden” (52). More strikingly, they hold a delusional view of the old West. The American frontier is rooted in a myth of the romanticized loner, and where the promise of an identity often remained far-fetched, as Lee states: “It’s easy to get outa’ touch out there” (56). In addition, the old West represents individualism and a survival-of-the-fittest mentality, which leads to an antisocial type of life and is thus inimical to family life. In this respect, one may argue that both the old and the new West generate chaos. Bottoms concludes that in Shepard’s play, “the American West - whether urbanized or wild - is an undifferentiated landscape of frustrated desire” (200), and in this manner, the characters are “trapped between equally deadening options” (202). Both the old and the new West may be regarded as amoral territories that contribute to the disintegration of the American family.

¹⁰ Cf. Eliot’s footnotes: “Empty and barren is the sea.”

The American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, speculates: “If the family were breaking up, one would think that this would be associated with a decline of the importance of the ‘family home’ as the preferred place to live of the population” (7). However, Parsons does not find this to be happening. He argues that the family home is still the most important “residential unit in our society” (ibid.). In the plays of my study, a strong ambivalence characterizes the family members’ feelings about the family home: they are unable to live within the confining sphere of the home, yet their attempts to move away from the family are rather unsuccessful. It appears that they cannot exist together; when one or more of them attempt to escape, they always return to the family home in the end. Tom Scanlan reflects upon such conflicting attitudes towards the family: “We strive for freedom, and are appalled by loneliness; we reject family structure and yearn for its security” (4). Leah Hadomi’s study, *The Homecoming Theme in Modern Drama: The Return of the Prodigal* (1992), as well as the study by Geoffrey S. Proehl, *Coming Home Again: American Family Drama and the Figure of the Prodigal* (1997), suggest - as the titles obviously indicate - that the majority of both European and American family plays portray the homecoming of one or several family members.

The four plays relevant for my thesis depict both fathers and sons that leave the family home and then return. According to Proehl, the term prodigality can be understood as “a movement in and out of the family structure that both husbands and sons share” (47). In *Journey* and *Salesman*, the fathers’ prodigality may be understood in terms of their itinerant occupations. Tyrone is a touring actor and Willy is a traveling salesman, but by the opening of the plays they have both returned to their respective families. Similarly, Proehl draws parallels between Edmund and Biff; while the former has returned from a voyage at sea, the latter has returned from a journey out West. Both men resemble the lonely drifter who yearns for personal freedom; however, they both return to their parents’ home in times of crisis, as Biff’s frustration testifies to: “I just can’t take hold (...) I can’t take hold of some kind of a life” (54). According to Hadomi, “Edmund returns to his home (...) in search of protective and redemptive shelter, but also out of a longing for home as a state of being” (37). The figure of the prodigal son can also be found in the two plays by Shepard. In *Buried Child*, Tilden returns to the family farm and his parents after a 20 year long separation, because, as he says: “I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t figure anything out” (78). Tilden’s son, Vince, also searches for his ancestral home, because he “has this thing for his family now” (86). Similarly, in *True West*, Lee and Austin leave their new habitats and head for their mother’s suburban home.

In Miller's opinion, "The great plays pursue the idea of loss and deprivation of an earlier state of bliss which the characters feel compelled to return to or recreate" ("The Family..." 80). He also claims: "Any play is a story of how the birds came home to roost" (qtd. in Roudané, "Conversations..." 21). As my thesis attempts to show, however, for the characters of *Journey*, *Salesman*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*, the return to the family home offers no consolation or refuge. In these plays, the family home has become a battleground: a scene for verbal warfare and violent outbursts. The fathers and sons - as well as the brothers - experience deep conflict, while the wife-mother is faced with dilemma. In *Salesman*, Biff's return intensifies the family crisis and worsens his father's spiritual condition, as Linda states: "It's when you come home he's always the worst" (54). Tilden in *Buried Child* is met with his father's cold shoulder: "Tilden, look, you can't stay here forever (...) You're a grown man. You shouldn't be needing your parents at your age" (71, 78). The homecoming is even worse in the case of Vince. He expects a warm welcome, but no one seems to recognize him: "How could they not recognize me! How in the hell could they not recognize me!" (97). Metaphorically, Vince may be argued to be the buried child of the play's title. In *Journey*, Edmund's return to his parents only serves to reinforce his feeling of not belonging: "I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong (...)" (157). In *True West*, neither the father nor the mother is present when their two sons return home. According to Hadomi, home is expected to be "a haven, a source of identity and warm and supportive relationships" but turns out to be "nothing more than an elusive, though necessary ideal" (48-49). Undoubtedly, Hadomi's statement may be applied to all the four plays of my study.

While a sense of placelessness describes the characters' relation to the exterior world, a sense of homelessness best describes their connection to the family home. As my analysis demonstrates, the family home in the four plays comes to represent the very opposite of "the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honor", which, according to Miller "all men have connected in their memories with the idea of family" ("The Family..." 73). In *Buried Child*, Shelly reflects upon the lack of life which characterizes the family home: "The feeling that nobody lives here but me. I mean everybody's gone. You are here, but it doesn't seem like you're supposed to be" (110). When Mom in *True West* enters her ruined suburban home, she bursts out: "This is worse than being homeless" (58). She then flees her broken home and retreats into a motel. It becomes evident that the lack of home is a major feature of the portrayal of the home in *Journey* as well. The word "home" is echoed throughout *Journey* (in fact, the word is uttered more than thirty times). It is important to note

that the setting in which the play takes place is the family's summer house, not their permanent home. Yet, Edmund argues: "it's the only home we've had" (45). Due to Tyrone's profession, the family has been forced to live in hotels without ever talking up permanent residence. The summer house has never met Mary's expectations of a home: "I've never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start (...) Oh, I am so sick and tired of pretending this is a home!" (45, 69). In fact, a sense of homelessness haunts the whole family.

The myth of the idealized, happy American family is perfectly captured by Shelly's idyllic first impression when approaching the family home in *Buried Child*: "It's like a Norman Rockwell cover or something" (83). Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) was a famous American painter, recognized for his stereotypical illustrations of American everyday life. He once stated: "The view of life I communicate in my pictures excludes the sordid and ugly. I paint life as I would like it to be"¹¹ One may thus argue that Rockwell helped sustain the myth of the idyllic American family home. In *Buried Child*, Shelly admits: "I thought it was going to be turkey dinners and apple pie and all that kinda stuff" (91). However, her illusions are shattered the very minute she enters the house: "[T]his isn't my idea of a good time (...) I'd rather be anywhere but here" (88, 94). In fact, the myth of the sanctity of the American family home is demolished in all the plays of my study. The Norman Rockwell-like exterior of American family life proves to be a mere illusion, exemplified by the endings of all plays. By the end of *Buried Child*, the family home has become the house of the dead. Dodge's body is to be found on the couch downstairs while the corpse of the baby boy now inhabits the top floor. In *Salesman*, the remaining members of the family are situated by the graveside, lamenting the loss of the husband/father. The brothers of *True West* are trapped in a battle that might lead to the death of one party. In *Journey*, the family is left in a state of paralysis, and the overwhelming silence indicates that there is no possibility of escape: "[Mary] stares before her in a sad dream. Tyrone stirs in his chair. Edmund and Jamie remain motionless" (179). Unquestionably, these plays serve to evoke the antithesis of the Norman Rockwell vision of the American family.

For the characters of my four plays, the family home does not provide a haven in a heartless world; on the contrary, it reflects and serves to reinforce the sense of alienation and despair they are already faced with in the public world. A feeling of homelessness characterizes the characters in both arenas: the public and the private. The world outside is a desert wasteland, and apparently, so is the family home - for much of the same reasons.

¹¹ <http://www.normanrockwell.com/about/quotes.htm>

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