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**Memory and suffering in American Drama: Eugene O'Neill's
Desire Under the Elms (1924) and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*
(1978)**

Presented by:

IRID Sabrina

SLIMANI Souhila

Supervised by: khelifa Arzeki

Board of Examiners:

Chair: Mrs. LARABI Sabeha, MAA , Department of English UMMOT

Supervisor: Mr. KHELIFA Arezki, MAA, Department of English UMMOT

Examiner: Mr. HATEM Youcef, MAA, Department of English UMMOT

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Abstract

This dissertation is entitled *Memory and Trauma* in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* (1924) and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1979). It tackles the issue of timelessness and duration of both trauma and memory. It considers the way into which the characters in both plays endure timeless moments of trauma, failure, loss and paralysis but also a moment of awakening, self-realization and spiritual fulfillments outside the chronological time. We have analyzed the theme of memory by referring to Henri Bergson's theory of *Matter and Memory*. We have examined the memory and past experiences as witnessed by the characters in both plays by emphasizing on how they tell about their past experiences and their memories through images, remembrances and flashbacks. Bergson's concept of Duration allowed us discuss and justifies the issue of timelessness. The analysis of the moments of duration in the two plays elucidates their important role in shaping and redefining the real self and identity. In addition, our study explored the theme of trauma by referring to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory which allows us to demonstrate how the state of experiencing traumatic moments keeps its survivors prisoners of their past, and also how it explains the characters failure to understand and forget their sufferance.

I. Introduction

This piece of research is an attempt deal with the theory of memory and suffering. We intend to look into the way O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978) explore the issue of trauma in postmodernist American society.

Indeed the quest for memory and suffering has become topics explored by psychologists, historians, sociologists and anthropologists. Their multiple studies demonstrate and explain that traumatic experiences generally elicit intense psychological, emotional, spiritual and mental responses. Memories of these experiences usually come back through various forms creating the same emotional intensity present at the moment of the trauma. Indeed, human history is sustained by atrocities. For example, the second world war played a major role in shaping American political culture.

The second world war (WWII) made his victims face incredible dark moments. In addition to the account of the survivors, the trauma and memories of the war are now explored in a wide variety of ways: in literature, films, social, historical and cultural studies. Over the past decades, the memory of the WWII has not only become a common cultural consciousness but also a cultural property shared by people all over the world. As living memories of the war die out with the generation that witnessed the event, practitioners of memory work have focused on the transmission of memory to the next generations.

To relate this to literature, our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, and beliefs.

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* reflect the miserable life of the Americans due to the fragmented family and the loss of American dream. Memory and suffering are directly present in this plays through the characters' life experience.

A- Review of Literature

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* has been regarded as a play which suffered from generalizations and misunderstandings. Indeed, it fulfilled the promise of O'Neill's early career and was the first important tragedy to be written in America which reflects the destructive American families and their living under disillusionment, disappointment and suffering. Therefore it has received more attention and literary criticism from different perspectives.

Wayne Narey claims in his book *Eugene O'Neill's attic Spirit: Desire Under the Elms* (1992) that O'Neill was influenced by the Greek tragedy. The models for O'Neill's tragedy are Hippolytus and Medea of Euripides

the Hippolytus is the more apparent source, as the plot of *Desire* follows the same triangular conflict and revolves around an incestuous crisis between mother and son....by the father's remarriage. Little credit, however, has been given to the Medea as an influence upon O'Neill's play; yet both are works of passionate hatred as well as love, and both center upon tragic victims rather than tragic heroes and like the Hippolytus and Medea, *Desire Under the Elms* is, first and foremost, a story of possession¹.

Travis Bogard in his *Contour in Time* affirms that O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* is seen as a realistic narrative of life on a mid-nineteenth-century farm. The play presents a convincing account of its characters moving in time. It is a work written in the best tradition of American realism

It is full, but not cluttered with detail. It is credible; and it produces that sense of local and particular inevitability that, in realistic drama and fiction, detailed psychological portraiture can sometimes evolve.²

Sabareen Fathima in *The Impact of Psychoanalysis on Eugene O'Neill's Desire under the Elms* declares that *Desire Under the Elms* is an amalgamation of the incognizant Oedipus complex projected by Sigmund Freud. It is also considered as the most paradigmatic masterpiece being symptomatic of O'Neill's menacing Oedipus complex. Her article

intends to investigate O'Neill's inner world of Oedipus complex, and trace the underpinnings behind his conceptions of subconscious drama.

In psychoanalytic theory, the term Oedipus complex implies to the emotions and abstractions that the mind deposits in the subconscious, in preposition to a dynamic suppression, that persistently contemplates upon a boy's ambition to sexually possess his mother, and exterminate his father³.

Chatterjee, in James R. Fleming's *Cross Cultural O'Neill: A Bengali Desire under the Elms* affirms that there is something elementally human and universal about the play. It is beyond the immediate exigencies of plot and narrative, an exploration of the inherent love-hate relationship between human beings and the natural order of things. He claims:

This is a universal theme that all cultures of the world have pondered. And in this regard, *Elms* is a meditation on a fundamental conundrum of human existence, cultural and historical specificities notwithstanding. This is primarily what attracted me to the play⁴.

Buried child is an important play which also attracted many scholars and critical views. Criticisms are carried from different perspectives and angles. From post-modernism literary movement, Seyed Mohammad Hosseini-Maasoum Mahnoosh Vahdati discusses in his journal *The Postmodernist Rendition of Myth in the Selected Plays of Sam Shepard* that *Shepard plays seek to depict the undeniable effects of postmodernism on the lives of Americans*. America as myth or idea supersedes its identity as a geographical reality, whether envisioned as a desert paradise, a purifying wilderness, a theocratic garden of God, or the redemptive West. Shepard in his plays consists of the reflection on the traditional meanings of myth and their obliteration in the postmodern societies he says:

Through his plays, Shepard tries to depict the significance of myth in a society where social cohesion has given its place to indeterminacy and doubt, and to demonstrate that identity and meaning lies somewhere in the past⁵.

He asserts that in the post modern world the individual has two possibilities either to adapt himself with the norm of society or to would be destroyed under the rigid pressures of

new law ; postmodern nation society pushes the individual to become violent, depressed, and pessimistic.

Another critique made for *Buried Child* was lead by Benjamin Oipari in his journal *silencing the family secret in Sam Shepard*. In his work, he argues that Shepard deals with the American family and the failure of relationship among those who should be closed and enter-related emotionally and physically. Shepard's *Buried Child* is the second in his trilogy of family plays, bookended by *Cruse of The Starving Class* (1977) *True West* (1980) which are concerned with the themes of infanticide, incest and it has understandably undergone considerably psychoanalytic criticism of Freud oedipal theory; for instance, as Mathew Roudane writes:

one need not to be a devout follower of Freud to respond to the oedipal demotion in the play...the buried child and buried truth of the past, repressed through years of denial, rejection and indifference, are the greatest source of disconnection of family (cited in Oipari) ⁶

An additional critique made to Shepard's *Buried Child* coined by James F. Schlatter in his book *in Some Kind of a Future: The War for Inheritance in the Work of Three American Playwrights of the 1970s*, where he denounce that he believes that a careful reading of the family plays of the three representative playwright of 1970s; Lanford Wilson, Preston Jones and Sam Shepard- can help to demonstrate the confusion image of America which it bears in itself during the decade of diminish national spirit and deteriorating moral certainty. And he shows that this family play reveals and calls for an urgency to "come home" to America to confront the bankrupt dreams of national pride. However there are certain plays that are not constructed as bitter confrontations or moral inquests but rather as solemn meditations on the waste life of American culture and on the prospect of its imminent death or possible survival. Such as the plays of Wilson's *Faith of July*, Jones's *The Oldest Live Graduate*, and Shepard's *Buried Child*.

For such writers the “coming home” draw unpredictable psychic journey which reawaken the painful memories and dreads, he claims:

I would argue that the elegiac ally mood or stoic lyricism of which I spoke is not an attempt by Wilson, Jones, or Shepard to romanticize the past, but the expression of an embarrassed sadness which cannot find its voice except in oblique images of nature, the land, and the distant past. The scent of dust and ashes hangs in the air, and spiritual entropy weighs life down and saps its vitality. Colonel Kinkaid, West on, Dodge, and Sally clutching her shoebox remain so deeply connected to the land that they cannot separate themselves from it, physically or spiritually⁷.

William W. Demastes, in his book *Understanding Sam Shepard's Realism* claims that Shepard in his early works mirrors clearly the experiment era innovation of the turbulent era in American theater. And recently, he adopts a traditional bent which makes him to lose his vitality; Shepard clearest vitalizing fusions is surfacing in his work of realism which gives a new life to and demonstrate the flexibility of the realist form and at the same time making his work more accessible to a wider audience, he argues:

He has chosen realism as an ironic means to illustrate the disintegration of causal threads espoused by the old realism or naturalism, which simultaneously illustrates the disintegration of family foundation⁸

Buried Child blend of real and unreal still caused some confusion, and leave the plot with many confusion and contradictory ends.

B- Issue and Working Hypothesis

From our review of some of literature about Shepard’s *Buried Child* and O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*, one can argue that many studies and critics dealt with this two plays as they have received various interpretations from different perceptives. However, little focus has given to the analysis of the themes of memory and suffering in both plays. In this dissertation we attempt to add perspective while analyzing the two plays. Our study shows correspondences between the selected and established significant continuities within the American dramatic tradition. It has also taken a closer look at the relevance of psychology in the two works. Indeed, it analyses the notions of memory and suffering as they are articulated

in the two plays. Our focus in this dissertation is to show that the themes share the idea of its presence and that surviving traumatic events in the actual time detach the character from their present world taking them back into moments, days and years, to a given time in the past which permits them to endure and to re-experience past experience. On one hand these experiences can be a moment of trauma, failure, loss and paralysis, and on the other hand, they can be a moment of awakening, self-discovery and revelation.

First, from psychological perspective, we intend to present how a psychic traumatic event involves one experience or repeating events with the sense of being overwhelmed that can be delayed by weeks, years, or even decades as the person struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances that prevent past memories from being separate from the present ones. In this analysis, we will focus mainly on the study of four aspects. We start by discussing the dislocation of traumatic events and its belated impact, and then we will explain how to survive a trauma and its contributions (historically, politically and ethically). Additionally, from a philosophical perspective, we will demonstrate how memory can be capable to keep both past and present experiences mixed within an individual's psyche. In this analysis we will concentrate on the study of three main ideas. First, we will consider the idea of memory and personal introspection and how the individual is controlled by superficial self. Then, we will carry on with the idea of deep-seated self revealed by psychological duration and its images without the possibility of achieving identity Élan.

C- Methodological outline

At the methodological level, our dissertation will be composed of four sections. It contains general introduction in which we give a general idea about memory and suffering in American theatre by referring to O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978) in which we have reviewed some works. Then, we have raised the issue and working hypothesis. In methods and materials section, we provide a brief summary of

Henri Bergson's theory of *Memory and Duration* and Cathy Caruth's theory of *Trauma*. And an overall synopsis of the two plays. The result section contains the findings of our research while the discussion will be devoted on the studying of the use of memory and suffering in the two selected work. Our dissertation ends with a general conclusion that restates the main issues discussed in this piece of research.

Endnotes

¹Narey Wayne, *Eugene O'Neill's attic Spirit: Desire under the Elms*. The Eugene O'Neill review; vol.16 No.1(spring 1992) , pp-49-54.

²Travis Bogard, *Counter in Time the Triumvirate: in Desire Under the Elms*. Oxford university press, 1972.ed, 1988

³Sabareen Fathima, *Impact of Psychoanalysis on Eugene O'Neill's Desire under the Elms*. Irwle vol. 11, No.I, january2015 (pp 3)

⁴James R. Fleming, *Cross Cultural O'Neill: A Bengali Desire under the Elms*. *The Eugene O'Neill review*, vol.24, No. 1/2(spring/fall 2000) pp 61-72

⁵Dr Seyed Mohammad Hosseini-Maasoum Mahnoosh Vahdati, "The Postmodernist Rendition of Myth in the Selected Plays of Sam Shepard", Department of linguistics and Foreign Languages. Payame Noor University, I.R. Iran. Vol.2 No. 21; November 2012(pp 246)

⁶Benjamin opipari, *shame: Silencing the Family Secret in Sam Shepard's Buried Child*, Penn State University Press. *Style, New Psychologies and Modern Assessment* (spring/summer2010), Available on : <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.44.1-2.123>. assessed 09-12-2016, 17:09 UTC. pp

⁷James F.Schlatter .Some Kind of a Future: The War for Inheritance in the Work of Three American Playwrights of the 1970s .*South Central Review*, Vol.7, No. 1 (Spring, 1990) pp 10

⁸William W. Demastes. *Understanding Sam Shepard's Realism* .*Comparative Drama*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Fall 1987), pp. 229-248

II. Methods and Materials

A. Methods

The materials selected to study and analyze the concept of Trauma and Memory concerns Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978) and Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* (1924). As for methodology, we will appeal to Cathy Caruth's theory of *Trauma* and Henri Bergson's theory of *Memory and Duration*.

Cathy Caruth's *Trauma* Theory

Trauma theory is a literary theory developed by Cathy Caruth as its leading pioneer, emerged during 1960's from different sectors of social concern: the fact of being against the violence that children and women submerge in (rape, incest and battering); the identification of post traumatic stress disorder in Vietnam that suffered from the war; and self consciousness of psychic scars resulted from the torture and genocide, especially in regard to holocaust. It touches different works from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, history, neurology and literature. In her books *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth defines psychic and its various symptoms; she explains the victim's inability to understand a traumatic experience, and claims a possibility for cure and adjustment through an integration of the traumatic experience into a narrative speech which, in some cases, may lead to inherence i.e., the contamination of the listener to what can be said by a traumatized person in an indirect and surprising ways.

Trauma can be defined as an experience of violence that is emotionally, psychologically and physically painful, wound and distressing. It controls an individual's capacity to cope with his life after the trauma, to remember and articulate narratives. Various types of traumatic experience such as intentional violence, witnessing violence,

discrimination, death, Poverty and ensuring chaotic life which is related to chronic fear and anxiety, build up serious long term effects on the health and life of its survivors. People who undergo through the traumatic psychic shock and disillusionment develop pathology known as “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), which attempts to define a response, sometimes delayed to the shocking experience. In the sense, Cathy Caruth asserts that:

The overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, intrusive Images (hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares) and thoughts, the one Who has lived through them¹.

Reading trauma begins with the recognition of something endless. Every reading contains the compulsive repetition of some words, phrases, scenes and figures. Survivors of trauma are generally possessed by them, and feel destroyed, defeated and weak by their uncontrollable and unconscious return. This phenomena dose not only serves as a record of the past but registers the experience in its fragmentation. It unsettles the individual and forces him to rethink and feel the same suffering continuously.

In addition, another impact of trauma is the inability to remember and to understand what has really happened. Caruth mentions that: *“The truth of the traumatic events may reside not only in its brutal facts but also in the way [...] their occurrence defies simple comprehension”*². Therefore, the essence of trauma lays in the fact that fact that its reoccurrence is tied with a question of the truth. What constitutes it comes precisely from its enigmatic nature. In her article entitled *“Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle”*, Dori Laub suggests that the traumatic reenactment of the event carries with the *“Collapse of Witnessing”*³, which resulted in the impossibility of understanding the truth of the event. Caruth extends in her explanation that *“in its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evokes the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence”*⁴, what constitutes this incomprehensibility is the fact that the individual is not fully conscious at the moment, *“because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and*

memory are temporarily destroyed”⁵. Thus, the event is not assimilated fully immediately by a direct acquisition rather through a process of discovery but only belatedly in the repetitive unconscious and unwilling symptoms⁶.

Trauma is an isolated experience. The understanding of its history in its belatedness can be achieved only by the listening of another. Caruth argues that: “*The interpretation of [trauma] into a speech is [...] a means of passing out from the isolation imposed by the event*”⁷. Furthermore, she adds that: “*The transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others’, knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall*”⁸. What Caruth implies here is that testimony may result in the elision and distortion of the event’s true history, but the importance of its integration into another’s knowledge may be the right way to cure and forgetting. She asserts that: “*Beyond the loss of precision, there is another more profound disappearance the loss precisely of the event’s essential incomprehensibility*”⁹. While the survivor enters and integrates his trauma into a speech, he will disfigure its original truth. This is not a problem according to Caruth because it is this loss of precision that will bring the loss of the enigma of the survivor’s story, which constitutes the essence of this trauma.

Moreover, trauma requires integration for both Testimony and Cure. However, this process may lead to inherence. Caruth introductory essay of the second chapter to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* quotes Van Der Kolk’s and Van Der Hart’s words asserting that: “The amnesiac reenactment is a story that is difficult to tell and to hear.”¹⁰ Inherent in Caruth’s theory is the belief that trauma experienced by someone may be transferred to another. To make this clearer, one can refer to Ruth Leys’ statement in which she stated that: “*The basic model for the transmission of trauma is the face to face encounter between the victim, who enacts or performs his or her traumatic experience, and a witness who listens and is in turn*

contaminated by catastrophe”¹¹. Accordingly, the fact of listening to the unspeakable is the dramatization of the listener. Additionally, Caruth claims that is at the same time a kind of testimony of other’s trauma, the reenactment of his trauma will be in form of a double telling of the unspeakable truth. The trauma is made of the repeated suffering the survivor recognizes through the voice of the other. This voice ties the listener to its own trauma. Therefore, the pain that speaks is not precisely that of the listener,” *but the wound, the trauma of another*”¹².

The explosion of trauma work in literary is largely due to the path breaking works of Cathy Caruth. However, many other scholars have been of a great help to the advance of this field of study. Shoshana Felman has been working creatively on the borders of trauma, literature and psychoanalysis. Her engagement with trauma studies began with her book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, written with collaboration of the psychoanalyst Dori Laub. The latter portrayed how the victims of the Second World War and the Holocaust work with their after war trauma through their testimonies. Besides, she demonstrates the importance of testimony in opening the possibility for a new life after trauma¹³. In addition, Judith Lewis Herman has changed the way people think about and treat traumatic events and trauma victims thanks to her book *Trauma and Recovery*. Her analysis focused on the study of the vast literature of combat veterans and Victims of political terror, as well as domestic violence, to demonstrate the parallels between private terrors such as rape and public traumas such as terrorism¹⁴.

Henri Bergson’s Theory of *Memory and Duration*

The theory of *Memory and Matter* was coined by a French philosopher Henri Bergson, his theory of *Perception and Memory* still stand with the most comprehensive and potentiality accurate account phenomenon and being validated in contemporary neuroscience research. Bergson’s theory of *Perception and Memory* involves interaction of mind and body in independence from each other.

In his multiple philosophical texts, Henri Bergson created a variety of theories associated with memory. In his work *Time and Free Will (1889)*, he pioneered the concept of Duration which comes as a reaction against scientific time. To explain the difference between time and space, and where he takes free will determinism, he invented the notion of Images in his book entitled *Matter and Memory (1896)* where he tackles mind-body dualism or materialist idealist debate. An Image holds in its essence an essential character, that of being psychological and subjective. He pointed out that an actual act of perception always occurs in the flow of time, which involves automatically one's Memory.

Bergson demonstrate in his book *Memory and Matter* the deep seated self, which is for him usually hidden from our awareness but not as mechanism as it is for Freud and it cannot be analyzed. On contrary, any analysis of our deep self would miss it because it is a symphonic, creative and holistic flow that does not accept linguistic distinctions. For Bergson we know reality and ourselves through intuition that is holistic rather than non-conceptual, he asserts that:

[Intuition] is the way of understanding life from inside by connecting to the river of life directly¹⁵.

Bergson introduced two ways of capturing reality: intellectual and intuitive. The former refers to the chronological way of conceiving time, while the latter defines the psychological way of perceiving it, which is Duration. Duration resides in the present. In this respect, he asserts that: “[duration] is the form which the succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former”¹⁶. It is also the preservation and prolongation of the past into the present moment. He added that “Duration can be defined as the dynamic temporality of one's psychic experience that exists within the self in relation and in response to temporality in general”¹⁷. It is the coexistence of the past, present and future times within one single moment in the human mind, apart from

the external linear time. While the intellect tries to specialize time by separating it into its artificial units, such as hours, minutes and seconds, intuition tends to connect different moments of one's consciousness into one single entity. Psychological time does not function as a linear pattern, but as one simultaneous pattern. The past affects the present, and the present functions with the future.

In addition, the two important concepts of Bergson's book *Memory and Matter* is the notion of Duration that consist of two dimensions, the phenomenon accruing simultaneously: qualitative and quantitative aspects, he stated that:

Time loses its nature as a mathematical quantity and becomes a quality in which our experiences become inseparable from how we perceive them: our emotions, values and past experiences color our present experience. It is only in the moments of real duration, of immediate experience that the self experiences reality, yet this reality is not one of permanent or eternal forms, but one of immanent flow¹⁸.

In the continuous flow of duration, one minute can be felt as if it was longer than that, because it has some sort of particular significance in one's consciousness. Bergson also mentioned that the circular dimension of duration results in the continuous interaction and manipulation of the three times all together. It becomes a moment of transcendence which creates a moment of awakening, epiphany, self realization and spiritual fulfillment, it is critical to Bergson to return to the subjective experience of time to exercise our free will when we chose spontaneously action.

Along with his notion of Duration, Bergson introduced the concept of Images. He related this word Image to the senses. In this respect, he wrote:

Here, I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another¹⁹.

This idea of images is highlighted by purpose of clarifying the distinction he makes between soul and body. The body is a performer which is placed between objects which influence it

and upon which it reacts. It receives movements from the external world, and transmits them to internal motor mechanisms. This process is related to the existence of an independent memory which gathers images as they successively occur along the course of time. The body is only a mere image among other images. It coexists with them without being the center or the end of the universe. However, what differentiates the body from other images is its ability to react or no. Bergson asserted that an individual comes to know about his body as an image not only from without by “perception”, but only from within by “*affections*”²⁰. These affections are the product of a mixture between external excitations and the movements of the body. Each of them invites the body to act with at the same time a will to wait and do nothing.

Furthermore, Bergson gave an unconventional meaning to memory. He argued that memory is not only a faculty of repetition or reproduction and it cannot be conceived only as a weakened form of perception. Accordingly, he suggested that the past survives under two distinct forms: in motor Mechanisms and in independent recollections. The first implies that the recognition of a past action lies in the action itself. It is related to a certain kind of automatic behavior that humans acquired through repetition. It will be imprinted on the memory after passing through different successive phases. It can be characterized as a habit since it is learned by the repetition of the same effort. This type of memory is rare and exceptional. It depends of our will to recollect it or not. However, the independent recollections or personal memory is spontaneous. It records images and events of the daily life as they occur in time and space without neglecting any detail. Regardless of utility or practical application, it stores the past by the mere necessity of its own nature²¹. It simply takes place at every moment of duration, and pictures the past with its outline shape and color. While the first one is build up by repetition, the second is incapable of being repeated, but it recalls an image.

The practical function of memory is the use of past experience for present action.

Bergson says that the primary function of memory:

Is to evoke all those past perceptions which are analogous to the present perception, to recall to us what preceded and followed them, and so to suggest to us that decision which is the most useful. But this is not all. By allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it frees us from the movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity. The more of these moments memory can contract into one, the firmer is the hold which it gives to us on matter: so the memory of a living being appears indeed to measure, above all, its powers of action upon things and to be only the intellectual reverberations of this power²².

The recognition of an experienced perception needs the association of the past with the present action. Indeed, the images stored by the spontaneous memory or what Bergson calls a memory by excellence, tend always to associate the past with the present perception. As Bergson confirmed that “*every perception is prolonged into a nascent action, while the images taking their place and order memory, the movement which continues them modify the organism and create in the body new dispositions towards action*”²³. What makes of this memory a specific of its own is the fact that it always accumulates within the body a certain type of mechanism which stands it ready to react to external present objects.

B. Materials:

Summary of the two plays

a- Eugene O’Neill’s Desire under the Elms

Eugene O’Neill’s Desire under the Elms is a play written in (1924). He wrote it in style of Greek tragedy to which he added a modernist touch. O’Neill’s tragic play is based on Euripides’ Greek tragedy: *Hippolytus*. The play opens in Cabot farmhouse in New England. It portrays the abandonment of the farm by two of Ephraim Cabot’s sons who hate him for being greedy and using them as if they were slaves. Simon and Peter Cabot free themselves from all what ties them with their father and leave to the west-the golden gate California- hoping to be wealthier there. The youngest son Eben feels the farm to be his birth right

because it belonged to his mother. He stole his father's money to buy the shares of his two half-brothers.

After a while, Cabot comes back to the farm with Abbie, a new young and beautiful wife. She is also a stubborn and possessive woman who seduces Eben by promising him to give him a love of mother and lust, so she starts an adulterous relationship with him, aiming to bear his child to guaranty his future ownership of the farm after the death of Father Cabot. When Eben discovers her true nature, he decides to leave her since she does not love him. Abbie kills the infant to prove him her love before admitting his deep reciprocal love to her and decided to pay for the crime he had not done.

b- Sam Shepard's Buried Child

Sam Sheppard's *Buried Child* is a play written in 1978. It reflects the fragmentation of the American nuclear family in a context of disappointment and disillusionment with American mythology and the loss of American Dream.

The play opens in Illinois, in Dodge's house where the atmosphere surrounded by melancholy and unhappiness. The family is disunited and in a total disorder ; the grandfather Dodge boasting alcoholic ,the grandmother Halie betrayals her husband with a clergy man and their sons; Ansell, Tilden who suffer from psychological trauma from his past and Bradley who lost one legs to chain, Vince Tilden's son whom no one of them recognizes in the beginning, he brings his girlfriend Shelly who is unable to understand the madness and the mess in which she finds herself , She discovers their secret - A years ago, Dodge commits the murder of unwanted new baby born in the family who is the son of Halie and Tilden, by drawing and buried him in the farm - which leads to the disaster of the family.

Endnotes

- ¹ Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," *trauma: explorations in memory*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1995), 151.
- ² *Ibid.*, 153.
- ³ Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- ⁴ Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153.
- ⁵ Ruth Leys, "The Pathos of the Literal and the Crisis of Representation" in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: university of Chicago press, 1995), 4.
- ⁶ Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction", in *trauma: Explorations in memory*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1995), 4.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁸ Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past, 153.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ¹¹ Ruth Leys, "The Pathos of the Literal", 268.
- ¹² Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: the Wound and the Voice" in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*; Johns Hopkins, (1996), 8.
- ¹³ Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- ¹⁴ Judith L Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: basic books, 1992).
- ¹⁵ Ran Lahav, a philosophical exercise: Bergson's intuition. Available on: <http://www.Youtube.com/watch?V=SDLzFNgnNic> Assessed 14/04/2016.20:05.
- ¹⁶ Henri Bergson *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. February 1888, 100.
- ¹⁷ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1896. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott palmer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911), 125.
- ¹⁸ Henri Bergson *Time and Free Will*, 168.
- ¹⁹ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²¹ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 1.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 228.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 93.

III. Results and Discussion

Our work takes into report the idea of memory in O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* in relation to Henri Bergson's theory of *Memory and Duration*, and the idea of *Trauma* as it is detailed by Cathy Caruth. After discussion we reached the following results.

The characters' present moment of both O'Neill and Shepard is haunted and condemned by their past .they live timelessness through the power of memory which consolidate their present and past time into single moments of pure duration .the past as stated by Bergson is not re-enacted according to the role of chronological time, but psychologically where all the times are tingled all together (past, present, future), O'Neill's verdict concerning the American family is just as dark and cynical as Shepard's

In addition, the characters of the two plays live states of present timelessness because of the traumatic past that comes repeatedly unconsciously and in an uncontrollable way to hunt them. These characters are victims of hard psychological trauma because of their unexpected confrontation with incest act and distracted family. Cathy Caruth explains that trauma defines a state of psychological upheaval as an outcome of a sudden encounter with unusual shocking events.

At the end of our discussion, we have concluded that both O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* are a reflection of chaos, failure and loss of the American dream in the modern world. As of work of the traumatic, enacted through the power of memory it highlights well the issue of timelessness.

Chapter One: Memory and Identity Loss in *Buried Child* and *Desire Under the Elms*

Our purpose in this chapter is to explore the theme of memory and duration in *Desire Under the Elms* and *Buried Child*. In an attempt to relate the two plays to philosopher Henri Bergson's theory of *Matter and Memory*. Bergson developed his theory during the beginning of twentieth century to overcome the traditional idea of sequential memory, trying to demonstrate timelessness. Thus, our concern is to investigate these memory and time concepts in relation to major characters in both plays: Eben and Ephraim Cabot in *Desire under the Elms*, and Dodge and Halie in *Buried Child*. We will deal with the way in which the authors shaped and interpreted the experience of memories and flashbacks, to bring about past's intrusion and about interaction between internal and external chaos in context of 1920's American universe. Our study will refer to the moments of duration within the characters' minds, and demonstrate how these moments play an important role in shaping, reconstructing and redefining their identity.

a- Memory and Identity Loss in *Desire Under the Elms*

- **Ephraim Cabot:**

The importance of memory in O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* lies in its suggestive descriptions of the inner life, personal introspection (thought and feeling) and the world around its characters through acts of remembrance and flashbacks that control the present moments. For each individual, the field of perceptions and memory is set in a different way. Each is aiming at a self discovery and creates a moment of awakening and epiphany through the personal introspection which does not include any respective of time and place as Kant had stated that introspection is limited to knowledge of the phenomenal self: "*I know myself by inner experience only as I appear to myself*¹". Ephraim Cabot drops memories of his past experiences in a form of interaction between external and internal images, creating a Bergsonian universe. Cabot's monologue in Part II Scene ii illustrates well every experience

Cabot has gone through when he has been moved by his desire for Abbie. He tries to reach her by informing her about his past harsh life, and by noticing God's harshness to him, "*God hain't easy An' I grewed hard*"². Those memories and re-experiencing of his past makes him conscious of his hard life under the mocking of folks and neighbors which impacted on his personality to be so hard as "*A Stone*" and like god's harshness up on him.

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* reveals the psychological essences of the characters in the play. Ephraim Cabot thoughts and personal perception transported him from the present to his painful past by some sort of images, from which he has a self recognition and felt sense of failure in his life. He recalls the many years of suffering, his three sons and two first wives, and his hard job on his stony and sterile farm. He says:

This place was nothin' but field o' stones...ye kin read the years o' my life in them walls, every day a hefted stone, climbin' over the hills up and down, fencin' in the fields that was mine, whar I'd made thin' grow out o' nothin'³.

Cabot realizes the cruelty and bitterness that that farm has caused to him, physically, emotionally as well as to his family. All of his sons and wives want to possess the farm and no one cares for him; they just wait for his death. According to Bergsonian concept of mixed time that function simultaneously makes Cabot mindful about his past and present situation, for the past had never been separated from the present, "*they coveted the farm without knowin' what it meant. It made me bitter 'n wormwood. It aged me.*"⁴ Such memories become a moment of transcendence and revelation of his real self so that when Abbie tackles the subject of inheritance, he declares he would set fire on it and turn it back to God. He says:

no, I calc'late not. If I could, I would, by the Eternal! 'R if I could, in my dying' hour, I'd set it afire an' watch it burn- this house an' every ear o' corn an' every tree down t' the last blade o' hay! I'd sit an' know it was all a-dying with me an no one eles'd ever own what was mine, what I'd made out o' nothin' with my own sweat 'n' blood! Ceptin the cows. Them I'd turn free⁵

O'Neill's play is primarily concerned with the problem of man's identity in time and space. To illustrate this issue, O'Neill refers to the past of characters via remembrances

that accentuate their ability to discover their deep seated selves. Memory is present in the form of personal recollections in the play; to remember means to retain and recall past experience. Just like narration, memory is an active and conscious process, a process of selection. According to Bergson,

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act sui generis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past- a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of camera⁶ ...

The practical function of memory is the use of past experience for present action. When an individual remembers, he tries to recollect past experiences and memories. He detaches himself from his present in order to suit himself amidst the memory of the past. Alongside, he will focus and select the memories which are according to him most useful. Ephraim Cabot brings himself to the realm of his past to recall a very specific period of his life experience since his arrival to the farm. Ephraim's flow of memories match well with Bergson's idea of selection. He selects multiple events of his past and re-arranges them into a chronological order of time. He calls back his life's story in form of sequential images that are not told at once, but rather one by one. In O'Neill's plays, the representation of memory and time is constrained in linearity especially in the passage of Ephraim's memories that are always remembered and described in association with time and place. *When I come here fifty odd years ago ... I was just twenty...the place was nothin' but field of stones...*⁷. He tells how strong he was and how he found the place full of stones and sterile land. This memory is directly followed by another one about his despairs and his abandonment of the farm and going to west where there was gold. While Cabot passes through those brief moments of duration, he carries out a sort of a self discovery. They consist of self-awareness imposed on his sense of his identity. He notices that, *"twas' arter I'd been here two year. I got weak-despairful-...goin' west"*⁸. Then, he narrates about his loneliness and failed marriages with his two first wives, *"All the time I kept getting lonesome. I tuk wife. She bore Simon and*

Peter.....we was married twenty years....I tuk another wife- Eben's Maw...after a matter of sixteen old years she died"⁹. He went fore and aft from past to present until he finally meets Abbie "*then this sprin' the call come ...I sought you and I found ye! Yew my Rose o' Sharon!his*"¹⁰. Cabot's memories and evocations of his past and family miserable peasant life with his sons and wives cause him a feeling of loss and failure.

Cabot: "No, I hain't. my mind's clear's a well. Ye don't know me, that's it".

Abbie: Mebbe.

Cabot: ...she bore Simon and Peter... she never know me...I tuk another wife...she never knowed me...¹¹

O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* portrays the family destruction and conflict of American society. While reading the play one may say that family is disunited; the play depicts the lives of the characters through personal struggle and search for identity just as is the case with Simone and Peter who escape from their past looking for a good future as it is symbolized by their flight to California, "*voyagin'on the sea! Whoop! [...] livin' free! Whoop!*"¹² O'Neill describes powerful and patriarchal effect of a strong father upon his son, Eben. In *Desire under the Elms*, the father is the threat, who despite his age controls the property, the women and the labor of his sons. He oppresses the whole family; he is cruel, harsh and unable to relate to his sons. As a result, there has always been a fight between them, "*Ha Eben's a chipo' yew- spit 'n' image- hard 'n' bitter's a hickory tree! Dog'll eat dog. He 'll eat ye yet, old man!*"¹³. This troublesome family atmosphere makes Ephraim live isolation and loneliness. He is always feeling alone, and his house always cold, "*It's allus lonesome cold in the house- even when it's bilin' hot outside. Hain't yew notice?*"¹⁴. Ephraim is bound to have a complete loneliness. Edward. L Shaughnessy remarks in the quotation below that Ephraim is solitary:

O'Neill gives us a portrait of partners in sin who work out their redemption and who, within a modern context, evokes echoes of classical tragedy... O'Neill formed a story in a typical tragic patter: his characters follow a course of sin and redemption in recognition of error and the assumption of responsibility"¹⁵.

Eben and others hate him; there is no emotional bond between them; there is only hatred and resentment. To Bergson, all these memories about his past provoke in him a kind of regret, suffering and feel a crushing failure and felling of nothingness.

Cabot's free will of completing his hollow feeling is turned down by Abbie who is an exemplar of unethical woman. She manipulates both Ephraim and his son Eben. According to Bergson Abbie is unable to understand Cabot's inner suffering of alienation and isolation because her free will is controlled by her blinded desire for Eben and the farm, her superficial-self dominates her organic unity. She is incapable to comprehend and to get about Cabot's hope to end his lonesome. However, his perception of the present reality via his memories about Abbie's acts of incest does not enable him to achieve a change in magnitude and grow into an autonomous self. At the end of the play Ephraim determines to flee the haunted house to try to make a new life for him, reasoning that his past failure might be immolated into oblivion,

t' hell with the farm. I'm leavin' it! I've turned the cows an' other stock loose. I've druv 'em into the woods whar they kin be free! By feein' 'em, I'm freein' myself! I'm quittin' here today! I 'll set fire t' house an' barn an' watch 'em burn , an' I 'll leave yer Maw t' haunt , an' I'll will the feelds back t' godI'll be a-goin' to Californi-a¹⁶

- **Eben**

O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* tells the story of Eben Cabot who is suffering from the past experience and possessed by his mother's memory. It makes him plunge into timelessness duration, tingling all the time (past, present and future) in a way similar to the Henri Bergson exploration of the concept of Duration. Explaining the difference between time and space where the act of perception always occurs in the flow of time, Bergson affirms that through memory one can decipher his conscious states and provoke the qualitative progress due to his tragic past failure. For instance, Eben wishes to possess the farm and avenge from

his father. O'Neill illustrates the concept of duration well through Eben's mind who goes from past to present then further to future. This occurs in forms of flashbacks about his mother; his affection and pity always come back to him in sort of images:

They was shores t' do, wa'n't they? it was on'y arter she died I come to think o'it. Me cookin' _doin' her wor_ that made me know her, suffer her sufferin' _ she'd come back to help _ come back t' bile potatoes _ come back t' fry bacon _ come back to bake biscuits _ come back all cramped up t' shake the fire, an' carry ashes, her eyes weepin' an' bloody with smoke an' cinders same's they used t' be. She still comes back _ stands by the stove thar in the evenin' _ she can't find it natural sleepin' an' restin' in peace. She can't git used t' bein' free _ even in her grave.¹⁷

Those memories makes him aware about his present situation as well as about what might happen within his future, if he does not react. He will probably end like his mother who lost not only her land but also her identity. In this respect, E. Andrew Lee writes:

The dead mother has lost not only her life and land, but also her name, stripped of any identity outside of her maternal role. Furthermore, the mother's ghost seems strangely tethered to the Cabot farm, unable to leave the site of her subjugation and enjoy eternal rest until her vengeance has been exacted¹⁸.

O'Neill makes use of the mother archetype to probe into Eben's personality. The origin of Eben's problem goes back to his early childhood. Eben's mother always played an active part in his identity quest although she does not exist physically. She does not appear in the play. Eben narrates his infantile remembrances about his mother and father, his fondness for his mother and his hatred for his father for having enslaved her. Eben says to his two brothers: "*Didn't he salve her t' death?*"¹⁹

Eben experiences moments of duration occur repeatedly in his life. On the one hand, he often endures remembrance moments that inform about every change in his identity (personality); whenever a past experience evolves, a change in his personality evolves as well. Those moments of suffering and harshness he witnessed have become moments of realization about his failure and weakness. O'Neill mirrored those moments in order to communicate the inner consciousness of Eben, and how those moments act towards the emergence of a new

self. Therefore, he takes revenge from his father through his wife, Abbie. He loved his step-mother to avenge his mother and bring peace to her grave,

Eben: Maw! Maw! What d'ye want? What air ye tellin' me?

Abbie: she's tellin' ye t' love me. She knows I love ye an' I'll be good t' ye. Can't ye feel it? Don't ye know? She's tellin' ye t' love me, Eben!

Eben: Ay-eh. I feel- mebbe she-but-I can't figger out-why when ye've stole her place-here in her hum in the parlor whar she was-

Abbie: she knows I love ye!

Eben: I see it! I see why. It's her vengeance on him-so's she kin rest quite In her grave!

Abbie: vengeance o' God on the hull o'us! What d'we give a drun? I love ye, eben! God knows I love ye

Eben: an' I love yew, abbie!-now I kin say it! I been dyin'fur want o' ye-every hour since ye come! I love ye!²⁰

But though Eben takes revenge from his father, he continues to experience moments of present failure and a feeling of nothingness, for he cannot gain back what belonged to his mother and him. O'Neill meant that the main source of Eben's tragedy has to be sought in his psychological quest for his mother. Believing he is the only heir. Therefore he is seeking to get back the farm that Cabot dishonestly grabbed from his mother, "*Yew've no right! She wa'n't yewr Maw! Didn't he steal it from her? she dead it's my farm*"²¹. Relating this to Henri Bergson, memory and vigorous introspection are very helpful to decode the conscious state of any individual and provoke the transcendental moments. Eben's memory and remembrance have created in him feelings of regret and provoked the qualitative personality progress or what Bergson called the *change in magnitude*. Eben has gone through various conscious states, yet he has never succeeded to regain his mother's farm.

The memories of Eben's mother continue to occupy his mind, light up the fire of vengeance towards his father as an enemy by sharing his wife as he had shared the prostitute Min with his father and his two brothers; one fact which shaped Eben's real self and identity. Cabot caused his mother to suffer and Eben sees his father as rival,

His complex drives from the unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother and is enlarged by arrival of Abbie. Both men strive for her, influencing Eben's inner conflict and his outer conflict, presented by the hostile treatment of the father figure. He sees Ephraim as a rival and wants to eliminate him, ultimately rejecting him as a father Eben's inferiority to the mother and her

strong influence over his life is what moves him on and shapes him into a man he is²².

The return of Cabot with his new wife Abbie dives Eben into his past when he was beside his mother. When Abbie introduces herself as his step mother, we may have felt then like he is a wounded animal. It is at that moment that Eben is conscious that he might fail to win back his farm, for she is another competitor. To impose himself, he has claimed that, *“this was her hum, this was her farm!”*²³

Desire under the Elms portrays a period of transition of old times to new ones. The new age is related to California and its gold. Therefore, the three sons rebel against their father. Peter and Simon have no ties to the farm except sentimental memories of many years of hard work. Peter says: *“He salved himself to death, he’s slaved sim ‘n’ yew t’ death_ on’y none o’ us hain’t died_ yit”*²⁴. They prefer to flee than staying whereas Eben chooses to fight though he is not for fight. He has an assertive love for the farm and his mother, *“No. I’m fightin’ him_ fightin’ yew_ fightin’ fur Maw’s rights t’ her hum!”*²⁵

At one moment in the play, Eben too plays a thought of going to the west – California – just as Simon and Peter and his father once did, but he realizes the hardship of life there. Horst Frenz writes in his book *Eugene O’Neill’s Desire Under the Elms and Henrik Ibsen’s “Rosmersholm”* that: *“Cabot’s and Eben’s attempts to tear themselves from the farm are bound to fail to leave their farm and to join the new age”*²⁶

One of the tragic elements in *Desire under the Elms* is the haunting past. The past determines and controls the tragic action. It controls the present and creates the future. Throughout the whole play the presences of Eben’s mother dominate and occupy the stage. His desire to possess the farm and to revenge are two factors that O’Neill set to determine Eben character and personality to illustrate his identity. The image he has about his father is one of greed, lust and domination; and his mother is rather kind, soft and lovable. Haunted by

his mother's memories and his feeling of painful sorrow about her death, Eben has perceived the present reality of impossible achievement of qualitative progress. He realizes his love to Abbie and fails to understand her when she said that she would kill the child to stay with him. Thus, he shares guilt and is taken to jail with Abbie. The result is that his superficial self has prevented him from achieving identity comfort.

2-Memory and Identity Loss in Buried Child

- **Dodge:**

Shepard's *Buried Child* notifies the story of Dodge's family buried secret. That is not kept buried any longer due to the past experiences that return to the present time in form of flashbacks to characters mind most often. Relating this to Bergson concept of Duration that dwells in the present time, he asserts that: "[Duration] is the form which the succession of our conscious state assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former"²⁷. These memories and personal introspection help the characters to reveal and awaken their consciousness states, for the purpose of provoking qualitative progress or what Bergson calls "a change in magnitude". A change in magnitude is explained as a change of the actual identity situation. In *Buried Child*, Dodge experiences several consciousness states in relation to his murder secret of an unwanted born baby.

Sheppard explored this notion of memory through his character Dodge from the beginning of the play. His wife Halie reminds him about the horse racing they used to watch before to get married:

Halie: "they used to race on New Year's! I remember.

Dodge: they never race on New Year's!

Halie: sometimes they did

Dodge: they never did!

Halie: before we were married they did

Dodge: before we were married they did²⁸

As a reader we may notice that Dodge does not want to remember the past though Halie's memories are right. He tries to deny it in the beginning. When she talks about their sons Ansel, Bradley and Tilden, he disagrees, "[Bradley] is not my flesh and blood! My blood's out there in the backyard!"²⁹. Connecting this to Bergson *Concept of Images*, where he pointed out that any actual act of perception always occurs in the flow of time, which involves automatically one's Memory. The fact that Dodge listens about the family past makes him hesitate to accept the past. He remembers the family incest between his wife and his son, his own blood. This has caused him a sense of crushing failure and feeling of nothingness. Every time he reminds his past life, he is controlled by the authentic self, because he remembers a lot of things which he should have hidden from a society. Thus, he wants to keep his poisoned past buried from every stranger because it would bring a shame to his family and its honor, "Tilden, you leave that girl alone! She's completely innocent."³⁰

To discuss the timelessness of Dodge and the way his past controls his present psychic state, it is important to introduce Bergson's idea of the relationship between the past and present, specifically, how the process of recognition takes place. Bergson pointed out that "*the totality of past memories belongs to the past and remains motionless while the present is of a constant movement*"³¹. And this does not mean that the past has ceased to exist.

Indeed, in *Buried Child*, that is what happens in Dodge's mind; his three sons are that matter of his recognition which makes him go through past times to present then further to future. Sheppard portrays this perfectly in the conversation between Dodge and Tilden in Act I when he rejects his wife's words and feeling about her dead children and the past

Tilden: you shouldn't told her that

Dodge: What?

Tilden: What you told her. You know.

Dodge: What do you know about it?

Tilden: I know. I know all about it. We all know.

Dodge: So what difference does it make? Everybody knows. Everybody forgot (...)

Dodge: I don't want talk about it! ³²

From here, one can deduce Dodge's suffering from his past experience and memories. The past haunts his present moments. Though he buried it; past re-enacts in form of flashbacks and memory images. The evidence is that Dodge's repetition of the same sentence throughout the play, "*I don't want to talk about it*"³³. To keep the family secret, he decides to forget "*I don't want to talk about anything! I don't want to talk about troubles or what happened fifty years ago or the racetrack or Florida or the last time I seeded the corn! I don't want to talk period. Talking just wears me thin.*"³⁴ Benjamin Oipari claims in his book entitled *Shame: Silencing the Family Secret in Sam Shepard's Buried Child* that:

To preserve the system, family members stifle talk of their terrible past. No one wants to be reminded of the event ... He wants to keep the event buried deep in the past so that the family can live a normal life"³⁵

In this context, Dodge's refusal of tackling the subject of the past makes him advance further into his consciousness according to Bergson. The psychological Duration frees his deep-seated self which would help to decide of future life. According to Bergson, future is full of successful opportunities. That is what makes Dodge feel happy when he appeases into self-forgetfulness. He thinks of drinking and buying wine "*whiskey*" and lying on sofa watching TV and sleeping. But, when Tilden has brought the corn at home, he reminds him of the last time he planted the corn in the nineties, "*There hasn't been corn out there since about nineteen thirty five! That's the last time I planted the corn out there!*"³⁶ The more memories of the past are present, the more they shape his personality. Throughout these memorable moments, he experiences present failure, nothingness and paralysis as well as moments of revelation of true inner consciousness and new self. From Bergson's opinion, the only way to destroy the identical élan of Dodge is oppressive society and its 'as made world'.

Past is always within the present of the individuals. The past controls them. Dodge's past becomes Vince present after he passes his wells to him. As Peter Hinton asserts:

The problem of the past are always with us in the present, and we pay for the sin of our fathers forever because the past has made the present, the past in some way the present.³⁷

Shepard evocation of the mixing time is to continue revealing and focusing on deeper failures of the characters. Past and present fuse into one another in the working of human mind to show the deep-seated self and shape its identity as John Lock also found that identity is the extension of consciousness backward in time. In Act III, Dodge remembers and goes backward his past when he had a well-established family, and enjoyed prosperity in his farm:

Dodge: I don't remember any pact. See we were a well established family once. Well- established. All the boys were grown. The farm was producing enough milk to fill lake Michigan twice over. Me and halie here were pointed toward what looked like the middle part of our life. Everyting was settled with us. All we had to do was ride it out. Then Halie got pregnant again. Out the middle a nowhere, she got pregnant. We weren't planning on havin' any more boys. We had enough boys already. In fact, we hadn't been sleepin' in the same bed for about six years³⁸.

Such memories and past experiences make him aware of his present loss; thus, he acts to establish his new self. According to this point, Sheppard has always been deeply interested in the way people construct reality and identity through past experiences in forms of images.

Shepard uses the character Shelly as a mean to reveals the family secret and memories of everyone. Starting with Tilden's memories, she reminds him about his past experience and mistakes of his young that led him to failure, to committing incest relationship with his mother and having a baby, "*I had a son once but we buried him.*"³⁹"; Dodge stops him, saying, "*You shut up about that! You don't know anything about that!*"⁴⁰ But Tilden has an urge to confirm its truthfulness to Shelly, "*We had a baby. Little baby. Could pick it up with one hand. Put it in the other. So small that nobody could find it. Just despaired we had no service. No hymn. Nobody come*"⁴¹. Though Dodge refuses to discuss the subject of the buried child openly in the beginning, he later tells the whole story and truth of the dreadful secret to Shelly, the outsider. He has informed her about the abnormal relationship between Halie and Tilden, and of the baby born he called "*it*",

Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He'd walk for mils with the kid in his arms. Halie let him take *it*. All night sometimes. He'd walk all night out

there in the pasture with **it** talkin' to it. Singin' to **it**. Used to hear him singin' to **it**.
He'd make up ...this one weakness⁴²

Dodge had murdered and buried it, "*I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter. Just drowned it. There was no struggle. No nose. Life just left it.*"⁴³ Thinking about past suspended him to this personal introspection and to this tingle of having mastered the flow of time; therefore, it has liberated his deep-seated self which tells the hidden truth in order to reach probably happiness once it gets out him:

To get to the bottom of it. (*To Shelly*) That's it, isn't it? You'd like to get right down to bedrock? Look the beast right dead in the eye. You want me to tell ya? You want me to tell ya what happened? I'll tell ya. I might as well. I wouldn't mind hearing it hit the air after all these years of silence.⁴⁴

Dodge memories come back in Act III with a kind of regret and feeling of failure in the process of constructing a nuclear family. He is as patriarchal as is Ephraim Cabot in O'Neill *Desire under the Elms*. The incest relationship between a mother and son has ruined both family lives. Eben with his step mother and Tilden with his own mother,

Where are you going! Upstairs! You'll just be listenin' to it upstairs. You go outside, you'll be listenin' to it outside. Might as well stay here and listen to it. (*Halie stays by stairs. Pause.*) Halie had this kid see. This baby boy. She had it. I let her have it on her own. All the other boys I had had the best doctors, the best nurses, everything. This one I let her have by herself. This one hurt real bad. Almost killed her, but she had it anyway. It lived, see. It lived. It wanted to grow up in this family. It wanted to be just like us. It wanted to be part of us. It wanted to pretend that I was its father. She wanted me to believe in it. Even when everyone around us knew. Everyone. All our boys knew. Tilden knew⁴⁵.

This leads to failure and loss of American dream of a happy and prosperous family. Past destroys the present life of Dodge and prevents him from living in peace and planning for any future. The bones of baby that Tilden got in his hands at the end of the play reflect the family demise. As a confirmation, Robert B. Heilman in *Shepard's Plays: Stylistic and Thematic Ties* (1992) wrote:

The skeleton gives physical reality to a destructive family life, and at the same time, we assume, its being brought to light exorcises a dark past⁴⁶.

Throughout the play, Dodge explores one of the cruel past in the family. In Bergsonian context, *Buried child* is concerned with actions and reactions between soul and body. It epitomizes an interaction between the inner self and the outside worlds of its character. It is a tragedy of images; images that the character Dodge perceives. Bergson asserts, “*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body*”⁴⁷. In a sense, the body receives movements from the external world, and transmits them to inner self. To quote Bergson ideas, he claims

Here, I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. All these images act and react upon one another⁴⁸.

This process is related to the existence of an independent memory which gathers images as they successively occur along the course of time. Dodge objects like corn, carrot and potatoes remind him of his old time when he used to work in the farm and of his crime. These memories create a time of awareness about his non belongingness along with a lurking sense of non-existence and identity loss.

- **Halie**

Shepard family is dysfunctional and it does not bear a specific name as *Benjamin Oipari* claims “*the unnamed family in Sam Shepard’s Buried Child*”⁴⁹ The past in Shepard’s *Buried Child* is obvious throughout the play; it experienced a horrible past death of Halie’s sons and an act of incest. Memories come back to revive the same emotional and traumatic intensity of the moment of occurrence. Memory preserves and prolongs the individual past into the present. Bergson proclaims in *Memory and Matter* that:

Duration can be defined as the dynamic temporality of one’s psychic experience that exists within the self in relation and in response to temporality in general.⁵⁰

That is the case of Halie, for she always cares about her family, husband and sons; she takes care about Dodge and his health, “*Dodge, if you don’t take this pile nobody’s going to force you. There’s no honor in self-destruction. No honor at all*”⁵¹. And she defends them, “*...thinking up mean, evil, stupid things to say about your own flesh and blood!*”⁵² Halie’s Memory maintains a pleasant facade most of the time, ignoring the harshness and nastiness around her. Halie’s remembrance of the good and pleasant past time is simply due to her personality. Since her youth, she has been unfaithful and had many dates as shown in the following conversation:

Halie’s voice: I went once. With a man. On New York year’s.
Dodge: oh, “a man”
[...]
Halie’s voice: long before. Was escorted.
Dodge: to Florida?
Halie’s voice: yes. Or it might’ve been California. I am not sure which.
Dodge: all that ways you were escorted?
Halie’s voice: yes.
Dodge: and he never laid a finger on you I suppose? This gentleman breeder-man.
Halie? Are we still in the land of the living?⁵³

Halie breaks up the chain of chronological order and relate it to what Bergson calls time duration, disturbing any linear narration.

He was blind with love. Blind. I knew. Everyone knew. The wedding was more like a funeral. You remember? All those Italians. All that horrible black, greasy hair. The rancid smell of cheap cologne. I think even the priest was wearing a pistol. When he gave her the ring I knew he was a dead man. I knew it. As soon as he gave her the ring. But then it was the honeymoon that killed him. The honeymoon. I knew he’d never come back from the honeymoon. What’s this in my house! What’s all this mess? Corn husks? And you, Dodge. You encourage him!⁵⁴

While Halie passes through those brief moments of duration, she accomplishes self discovery that consists of her identity. Referring to Bergson theory in *Matter and Memory*, we know reality and ourselves through intuition just as Halie. He asserts that: “*[Intuition] is the way of understanding life from inside by connecting to the river of life directly*”⁵⁵.She

uncovers her self-awareness that awakens in her inner world a feeling of failure to protect her son from the death and change his fate.

Halie has always been dreaming about the glories of the past and uses Ansel's death to justify her family demise and failure.

Ansel could've been a great. One of the greatest. I only regret that he didn't die in action. It's not fitting for a man like that to die in motel room. A soldier. He could've won a medal. He could've been decorated for valor⁵⁶.

The fact of hiding behind Ansel means that Halie is conscious of her misbehaviors like the adultery with her son and her affair with the priest Dewis. From this, we can say that Shepard's *Buried Child* develops in its characters a psychology of mixture of time. Bergson calls it, "time duration" or "timelessness. Her memories are not described as events experienced only in the past but they are also parts of her present and future. This recall of memories reveals her deep-seated self as being dominated by her superficial self. Therefore, she experiences a moment of nothingness and ruin. Her bad mother role evokes torture, punishment, humiliation and collapse to her, "I've never should have left! I never, never should have left!"⁵⁷. This leads to a world of nostalgia; she seems to love her sons as they were in the past. She is scornful of their present selves. Shepard illustrates the life of his characters by making them revive and re-see their past experiences in a disordered manner; there is no chronological order. Joining this to Bergsonian theory of *Matter and Memory*, we can argue that there is no chronological order in the act of remembrance and that a psychological time does not function as a linear pattern. The past affects the present, and the present functions with the future. The duration consists of two aspects, a quantitative and a qualitative one. Bergson asserts that:

Time loses its nature as a mathematical quantity and becomes a quality in which our experiences become inseparable from how we perceive them: our emotions, values and past experiences color our present experience. It is only in the moments of real duration, of immediate experience that the self experiences reality, yet this reality is not one of permanent or eternal forms, but one of immanent flow.⁵⁸

Halie memories do not follow any linear reasoning; she goes to past, turns to present and projects herself into future. As an illustration, she compares between now and then when she says that,

Everything was dancing with life! Colors. There were all kind of people from everywhere. Everyone was dressed to the nines. Not like today. Not like they dress today. People had a sense of style. Shepard portrays her ⁵⁹

The family past and her adultery make her behave with hopelessness and despair. She has been crippled by the murder of her baby, and the dreadful secret that Shelly reveals. She hides the incestuous relationship by behaving in a superficial way, by cultivating a false image of an ideal woman. However, all this personal memories and thoughts push her into a moment of consciousness via the process of time duration to discover her deep self. Bergson demonstrated that the deep-seated-self is usually hidden from our awareness. The haunting past ruins not only the present but also the future. Halie fails in her marriage. Shepard mirrored the whole American society, with its fragmentation of social world, the decay of relationships, and the loss of an organic connection between man and his environment.

Conclusion:

Dealing with the issue of identity loss and memory, we discussed some parallels between Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* where we explored the theory of *Memory and Duration* by referring to Henri Bergson. Our study has shown correspondences between the selected and established significant continuities within the American dramatic tradition. It has also taken a closer look at the relevance of psychology in the two works.

Shepard's work shows similarities with O'Neill's one. Both authors thought about the motif of patriarchy which symbolizes the presence of a family's secret, and to the haunting past related to the child murder of both texts. Both Ephraim Cabot and Dodge are patriarchal fathers who have a power over their wives and sons. However, they fail in a process of

establishing a nuclear family due to the incest relationship between a mother and her son 'Halie and Tilden' and between a step-mother and a son 'Abbie and Eben'.

Both of the plays deal with the problem of the past; the characters experience moments of duration where they re-experience their past and suffer from it. The guilt both families experience surfaces gradually to reveal the secret buried in the bosom of each family. In both plays, Abbie and Halie are portrayed as unfaithful women that would reflect the modern American society. Both plays also present sons who rebel against their father; the father is presented in *Buried Child* and *Desire under the Elms* as an obstacle and rival between their mothers. Tilden and Eben suffer from the Oedipus complex, and have brought about failure and loss.

Endnotes:

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⁷Travis Bougard, O'Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931: *Desire under the Elms*. The library of America; *literary classics of United States, 14 East 60th street, New York, New York 10022.* (pp 348)

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¹¹Ibid., 348, 349

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Chapter Two: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

1. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in *Desire Under the Elms* and *Buried Child*

In this second chapter, we intend to explore another theme which is trauma in both works of playwright, Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard. We will discuss the trauma as experienced by the main characters in *Desire Under the Elms* and *Buried Child*. We project to illustrate that the experiencing of traumatic past continues to impact and haunt the present moments of the characters. They live a state of failure, loss, despair and confusion as a result of the traumatic shocking events they experienced within their family relationship. They often revive the trauma that return unconsciously in form of images, thoughts, figures, behavior, and reactions. Then we will explain the character's torments due to their inability to understand, to remember what really happens and to forget the trauma. And to clarify the importance of integrating the trauma into narrative speech that provides the testimony and liberation of the individuals from his pain.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have seen or lived through a shocking, scary, or dangerous event¹. In this issue, we have to deal with Caruth's theory (trauma) where she describes trauma as a "shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time."² The victim of a traumatic experience—whether this experience was physical, psychological, or emotional—will often try to repress the memory of the trauma, sealing it off into the past, but this often proves impossible for the victim.

A- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in *Desire under the Elms*

This dissertation employs a psychological methodology, including an examination of how attempts to repress traumatic memories ultimately fail, resulting in a gothic "return" of

the repressed past. *Desire under the Elms* is a play which lays itself to this kind of investigation, for it has always been condemned for its obscenity and immorality where incest, adultery, betrayal, oedipal vengeance, and infanticide are treated so frankly³. O'Neill has in a genuine way explored his characters' traumatic memories. In this field, we will try to analyze one character to understand post traumatic stress disorder.

- **Cabot**

Ephraim Cabot is the most traumatized character that suffers from past memories despite the fact that he is powerful and controls everything in both the farm and the house. From this point, we can say that Cabot was grown in a hard nature which led him to be hard like stone, but, he feels disgusted and lonesome even if he is surrounded by his family. He is a drunken, violent; "fallen father" who appears terribly lost and most importantly traumatized. These psychic states have direct relation with memory/remembrance of his past. Therefore memory/remembrance of the past has assumed a terrific role in his overall psychic and emotive states, and plays a determining role in this disorder. Caruth writes that trauma cannot be defined by events that caused it. It consists, "*solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it, to be traumatized is to be possessed by an image or event.*"⁴ In this sense, we can say that Cabot is traumatized and possessed by past events and images; he is possessed by the farm in which he worked hard until he has become old.

Cabot has outlived two wives; one marriage lasted twenty years, and the second, to Eben's mother, lasted sixteen years. We do not know how the mother died, but we may infer that her death was due to Ephraim Cabot's personality. This fact brings him to be traumatized. Ephraim Cabot associates the evil he feels in the house with something dropping from the trees; their significance is made clear and psychologically plausible. He sees them like his two

dead wives and he blames them for his sadness. He thinks that the two trees prevent him to be happy⁵.

His traumatic disorder in Part II, scene ii is revealed by his desire for Abbie; he narrates about his hardship past. Ephraim says, "*When ye kin make corn sprout out o' stones, God's livin' in yew!*"⁶, he tells her of his journey west. But that easy way had no salvation in it, and he returned to the stony farm. Ephraim has always been lonesome and for a third time the voice in the wilderness has led him to Abbie. But he realizes that Abbie has not understood him, perhaps has not even heard him as she yearns for Eben. He leaves her and stumbles through the night to the barn, "*whar it's restful—whar it's warm*"⁷ From this analysis we can notice that Cabot's declaration to Abbie comes unconsciously since he knows that she doesn't listen to him. In this context, Caruth asserts that: "*The traumatic nightmare, undistorted by repression or unconscious wish, seems to point directly to an event, and yet, as Freud suggests, it occupies a space to which willed access is denied. Indeed, the vivid and precise return of the event appears, as modern researchers point out, to be accompanied by amnesia for the past*"⁸.

Cabot all through *Desire under the Elms* feels that something is wrong: "*It's allus lonesome cold in the house*"⁹. This idea is intensified by the contrast between the cold house and the warm cows. Cabot's uneasiness increases as the play progresses. At the end Cabot wants to give up the farm to escape its air of disaster¹⁰.

B. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in *Buried Child*

- **Dodge:**

Trauma and the complex and deformed ways in which the past haunts and defines the present moments constitute the central issues of Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*. The play's characters stand as a perfect example of traumatized individuals. The traumatic moments are compulsive repetition and comebacks unconsciously into someone's mind. Cathy Caruth's

trauma definition, “describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon.”¹¹ It leaves the survivor shocked, frightened, confused and disturbed. One can say that Dodge, Halie, their sons, Tilden and Bradley, and Vince are victims of psychological traumas because of the incestuous act, a physical and psychological violence.

From the title and the very beginning of the play, Shepard gives a sight of melancholy and pain as he introduces to the readers the major character who is a witness of a past tragic event. Dodge is the first member to experience a family traumatic ruin and destruction. Trauma accumulates serious long term effects on the health and life of its survivors, and Dodge, through shock and disillusionment, develops pathology which is known as “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) Shepard wrote, “...Dodge. I don't know what in world's come over you. You've become an evil, spiteful, vengeful man. You used to be a good man.”¹² He is incapable to stay alone home, “You are supposed to watch out for me...I don't want to wake up and find you not here¹³. After experiencing traumatic past events that repeat themselves unconsciously and in an uncontrolled way, he is unsettled and frightened because of the pain and remembrance of his son Bradley. The only matter that keeps him to remember and have contact with his past is his inability to understand what had really happened to him. Shepard's *Buried Child* does not separate past from the present; it returns repeatedly to the character' mind in various forms. Indeed Dodge's behaviors are abnormal as in the way he behaves toward Shelly when she holds his cap,

(The second she [Shelly] touches his head, Dodge jerks up to a sitting on the sofa, eyes open. Shelly gasps. Dodge looks at her, sees his cap in her hands, quickly puts his hand to his bare head) *who the..! that sonofabitch cut me! Hey! That's my hat!* (he glares at Shelly then whips the cap out of her hands and puts it on...)¹⁴

He is unable to remember and understand the way he behaves; it shows signs of what is known as Post traumatic stress disorder. Post traumatic stress disorder is essentially the past

which is continually intruding into the present, in both intrusive and constrictive ways. When Tilden enters home with fresh ears of corns in his hands, Dodge remains trapped between the truth of his traumatic past memories and his intrusive images. It is obvious that the corn reminds him about his traumatic past deeds from the way he stares at it and reacts unconsciously, for all his words are full of question marks. He asks Tilden many question “*where’d you get that corn? You picked all that? Where’d you picked it?*”¹⁵ Without understanding what is going on and as a survivor of trauma, he feels defeated and powerless and crumbling from inside “*Goddamn corn...*”¹⁶

Shepard’s *buried child* deals with the problem of the past that reenacts and returns constantly. The past memories are associated with trauma due to the shocked experiences. In this sense, Cathy Caruth asserts that: “*The events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images [hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares] and thoughts, the one who has lived through them*”¹⁷. Interpreting trauma begins with the recognition of an endless fact. Every interpretation contains the compulsive repetition of figures, scenes, words and behaviors. In Shepard’s work, it is Dodge to whom the notion of past problematized at every return; therefore, the pain and traumatic events of his past alienate and separate his family members.

Shepard’s *Buried Child* examines the failure of American to find comfortable roles, self-images, and modes of action in a traumatizing contemporary world. Benjamin Opiari, in his analysis of *Buried Child* testifies that:

The family members in *Buried Child* suffer from a host of disabilities, both physical and emotional. Tilden is a slow-witted man in his forties with the emotional age of a young adolescent.... His brother Bradley has an amputated leg. The frail father Dodge’s heavy reliance on alcohol further debilitates his already weak body. Collectively, these traits would present a problem to any family, but in fact they are only a minor sideshow to the primary systemic dysfunction engendered by the single traumatic¹⁸.

Dodge experience moments of timelessness and the ache and concussion he endures are due to the incestuous act of his wife Halie and son Tilden. He submits to the multiple traumas which make him paralyzed and prisoner of his past. Dodge images and flash backs persist

repeatedly throughout the conversations. His way of laughing, answering and acting along the text represent the way that the experience of his traumatic adultery repeats itself. Speaking about Halie, he says, *“Don’t worry about her. She won’t be back for days. She’s absconded. She says she’ll be back but she won’t be. (start laughing) there’s life in the old girl yet!... Halie is out with her boyfriend. The Right Reverend Dewis. He’s not a breeder-man but a man of god. Next best thing I suppose”*¹⁹. Caruth explains that *“... the repetition the heart of catastrophe... emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot leave behind”*²⁰.

Repetition is one of the fundamental features of post traumatic stress pathology. The most moving pictures of repetitive unwilling traumatic symptoms can be finding in the life story of Dodge. The incest reappears by bringing the same intensity of pain and hurts, his reaction is offensive since the arrival of Shelly and Vince home. When Vince calls him *“grandpa”* it transports him to his traumatic experience in compulsive and in an uncontrolled manner *“Stop calling me grandpa will ya! It’s sickening I’m “nobody’s” grandpa!”*²¹ He is terrified by the idea of being his grandfather and manifests inability of remembering what had really occurred to understand the truth of his trauma. The hysterical thoughts and images point to his traumatic experiences and to his desire to deny them. Caruth explains that, *“The trauma... in its unexpectedness or horror cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge that cannot...become a matter of intelligence and thus continually returns at a later time.”*²² In this case Dodge hallucinations are constituted by his failure to control and integrate his traumatic memories into consciousness.

Dodge’s testimony is the core of Shepard’s play. It is characterized by its vivid remembrance and is illustrated in the way Dodge denies and rejects the past of his family. The family would never grow up to become a perfect one.

Post traumatic pathology is pathology of history. Suffering is resulted by the inability to comprehend, remember and witness trauma through its integrations to a coherent narrative; the sufferer, like Dodge, cannot relate his images and flashbacks to the incestuous act and feeling of shame he has endured. Caruth quoting Dauri Laub suggests that survivors of trauma fail to remember the shocking events they experienced. It is only through its later reenactments in dreams, flashbacks or hallucinations that they may be able to reconstruct the history of his trauma. In fact, Dodge's traumatic history can be reintegrated only through the belated symptoms he develops.

Dodge inability to forget is approved in his use of the word "never", as a result of his failure to understand the nature of what had occurs. Remembering trauma means remembering the obscurity that constructed it; thus, leading to its incomprehensibility. He declares to Shelly "*That isn't me! That never was me! This is me. Right here. This is it. The whole shootin' match, sittin' right here in front of you. That other stuff was a sham*"²³. Calling to Cathy Caruth's reading that it is necessary to forget traumatic events: "*It is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it [trauma] is experienced at all.*"²⁴. What Dodge has experienced is too awful to contemplate or even remember. His unforgettable experiences keep him always thinking about what he had passed. However, he has always tried to converse and address others about his trauma.

- **Halie:**

A trauma interpretation of Shepard's *Buried Child* highlights the psychological trauma of the American family which witnessed moments of infidelity, betrayal fear, ruin and madness. Shepard portrayed the example of shocked and traumatized individuals. For instance, Halie's past experiences return over and over unknowingly in a sudden way to put her in front of the intense situation of the past. Halie suffers from the unhealthy relationship with her husband Dodge. He is harsh, cruel and rude with her, "*I don't know what's come*

over you, Dodge. I don't know what in the world's come over you. You've become an evil, spiteful, vengeful man. You used to be to be good man"²⁵. Relating this to Cathy Caruth, Halie memories and re-experiences of past appear in an unconscious way in forms of reaction which leave her emotionally wounded and lost.

Much, much more vicious. They smash into each other. They knock each other's teeth out. There's blood all over the court. Savages, barbaric...They allow themselves to run amuck. Drugs and women. Women mostly. Mostly women. Girls. Sad, pathetic little skinny girls²⁶.

Halie's story weighs up the post traumatic stress disorder which comes in reaction to the death of her son. According to Cathy Caruth,

The precise definition of post- traumatic stress disorder is contested [as] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of hallucinations, dreams, thought or behavior stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experiences,... this simple pathology belies a very peculiar fact: the pathology cannot be defined ... by the events itself, which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatized everyone equally...²⁷

So, Halie who speaks about Ansel represents a natural response to the overwhelming separation and death of her sons. These responses take the form of repeated hallucinations. She is shocked by the way he died, "*Ansel could be a great man. One of the greatest. I only regret that he didn't die in action ...die in a motel room. A soldier. He may won a medal*"²⁸ . This past horrible experience haunts her present moments, for it returns to Halie's mind in compulsive and in an uncontrollable manner. It is apparent that Halie fears of losing another son, "*we don't want to lose him. I couldn't take another loss*"²⁹. She has not ceased to re-live the same pain and intensity.

Shepard portrays Halie's inability to understand her experience. In reality, Shepard lamented the typical human inability to acknowledge the cruelty of an incestuous act that leads to destruction, In this context, Caruth explains that, "*In its repeated imposition, the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence.*"³⁰. It is similar to the case of Halie, who does not have

capacity to understand and evoke the truth “*Everything running down the hill. It’s kind of silly to even think about youth*”³¹. She fails in her attempt to bear witness, and thus to transform the trauma into something comprehensible. She compulsively re-enact the death of her two sons, Ansel and the buried baby.

Throughout *Buried Child*, family is damaged by the traumatic event. Tilden and Bradley are not able to grow up like men. “*Tilden can’t look after himself anymore...Bradley can hardly look after himself...after Bradley loss his leg*”³². Halie also endures with painful awareness that she has had a bad influence on her Tilden. He was a victim of domestic violence and or sexual abuse, and this has affected his adulthood in various ways. Cathy Caruth writes,

The psyche's awareness of the threat to life – is not caused by a direct threat or injury, but by fright, the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly. It is not the direct perception of danger, that is, that constitutes the threat for the psyche, but the fact that the danger is recognized as such one moment too late. It is this lack of direct experience that thus becomes the basis of the repetition of the traumatic nightmare: These dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis. The return of the traumatic experience is not the direct witness to a threat to life but rather the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to master what was never fully grasped in the first place³³.

She feels guilty; however, she is unable to understand what has really occurred with her. Shepard introduced another pattern of “post-traumatic stress disorder” in *Buried Child*: it is silence. Psychological trauma always results in hopelessness and silence. After the delivery of the unwanted child and its murder; the whole family falls into isolation and immobility. When Dodge tells his dramatic story to Dewis and Shelly in the final act, it has almost become subject to derision and ridicule, and Halie’s silence remains permanent one,” *Dodge, if you tell this thing- if you tell this, you’ll be dead for me. You’ll be just as good as dead...I’m not listening to this! I don’t have to listen to this!*”³⁴. She continues not willing to tell because of her post traumatic pathology, which may basically be bound up with her lack of self control.

2. Process of Discovery and Cure in *Desire under the Elms* and *Buried Child*

Shepard's *Buried Child* and O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* characters witnessed approximately the same traumatic experiences within the same fact. Each one in his subjective world has reacted differently to brutal events that involved ultimate fragmentations. All of them tend to integrate their trauma into a testimonial behavior. Indeed, the testimonies of both characters in *Buried Child* and *Desire under the Elms* show their hopelessness demand for others to listen to them. As it is implied in Caruth's perspective, their testimonies may provide clarity to the enigma that characterize their experiences and help them to cure and forget.

A_ Integration of Trauma into a Narrative Speech and Cure in *Desire Under the Elms*

- **Cabot:**

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* is composed in remembrance of the past, that spook the life of the character and traumatize them. In order to forget the traumatic experiences of the past one have to narrate it, relating this to what Caruth calls a *Loss of Precision* after the trauma has been acknowledged and narrated out loud. Just like the case of Cabot who integrate his sufferance that he has submitted by the farm to Abbie "...[farm] it made me bitter 'n wormwood. It aged me"³⁵ this leads him to forget and get over his trauma, as Caruth assert that:

The transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and others', knowledge of the past, May lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall³⁶

Cabot narration of his misery reflects his change from a normal individual to a traumatized one. His testimony clearly demonstrates that he, as a witness of the cruelty of a hard god and loneliness "god's hard, not easy ! god's in the stone !all the time I kept gettin'

lonesomer.”³⁷. He succeeded to get his trauma out into narrative speech. This implies that his trauma does not only come out as a result of his unexpected confrontation with pain and his disastrous survival.

B_ Integration of Trauma into a Narrative Speech and Cure in *Buried Child*

- **Dodge:**

Dodge changes his decision to keep the family secrets buried and wants to tell his past experience, which fact constitutes his initial departure from his trauma. He looks for survival through his narration and revelation. Observes the need of testimony for survival, She declares that the survivors “*Do not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories, they also need to tell their stories to survive*”³⁸. Vocalizing the traumatic emotions into a speech is fundamental for the survival of the victim. This may be the process of cure. As well as trauma require the process of integration for the aim of testimony and cure. Yet Dodge asserts that he no longer mind of hearing his secret, his traumatic speech constitutes his unconscious endeavor to distance himself from the incest so that he would be able to figure out between past and present lives “*...I wouldn't mind hearing it hit the hair after all this years of silence.*”³⁹

The interpretation and integration of trauma into a speech narrative is essential for the survivor to separate themselves from it. Caruth explained that the listening of another helps the traumatized to reconstruct the history of his traumatic experience...it will help him to heal and possibly to forget⁴⁰. This is reflected in Shepard's character Dodge who narrates his past memories to Shelly “*I remember the whole thing from the start to finish. I remember the day he was born*”⁴¹. He understands and discovers that his traumatic problem must be verbalized and acknowledged. Dodge's understanding of its history in its belatedness can be achieved only through the listening of other. Now, he speaks it out to an outsider, “*I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter. Just drowned it. There was no struggle. No noise. Life just left*

it''⁴². This narrative act turns his trauma into narrative memory that allows his story to be communicated and to be integrated in history. The listeners Shelly and the Priest Dewis provide him with a possibility for cure, forgetting and liberating himself from shocked and traumatic events of his past.

- **Halie:**

The integration of trauma into narrative story in Halie's case seems to be a successful move. Her testimony is very important in Shepard's play. She looks for the way to tell her trauma through narration, yet she dives in deep silence and isolation. The fact of articulating the traumatic emotions is essential in the life of its survivor's because this can transform to the healing process. Cathy Caruth affirmed that "*The trauma require integration, both for the sake of testimony and for sake of cure*"⁴³. This is obvious in the character of Halie in her evocation almost throughout the whole play her dead son Ansel as being hero and smart to Dodge as well as to the priest Dewis,

[...]I've talked to father Dewis about putting up a plaque for Ansel. He thinks it's a good idea. He agrees. He knew Ansel was his favorite player. He even recommended to the city council that they put up a statue of Ansel. A big, tall statue with a basketball in one hand a rifle in the other. That's how much he thinks of Ansel ⁴⁴

The retelling of her experience repeatedly is a claim to a discovery belatedly which achieved by the presence of listener as Cathy Caruth argues that: "*The interpretation of [trauma] into a speech is [...] a means of passing out from the isolation imposed by the event*"⁴⁵. She managed to integrate years of trauma, pain and suffering into narrative that provide her a cure and liberation.

In order for human spirit to survive in peace, trauma must be acknowledged, communicated and verbalized. Its transformation into narrative memory is fundamental for the survivor to move on from it. at the end of the play, when Dodge uncover their secret to the stranger he liberates not only himself but also Halie and their sons for they are all dramatized

and shocked by the events of their past. This fact leads Halie to be open hearted with her past and discover her trauma that is not tied only to Ansel but also to her buried and murdered child by Dodge,

I don't understand it. I just don't understand it. He was the sweetest little boy! There was no indication. There wasn't a mean bone in his body. Everybody loved Vincent. Everyone. He was the perfect baby. So pink and perfect⁴⁶.

Conclusion

From the above issue of trauma and post traumatic stress disorder, we concluded that there are some similarities between Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard where we explored the theory of *Trauma* by referring to Cathy Caruth. In *Desire Under the Elms* and *Buried Child* we journeyed inside the traumatic psyches of the characters. O'Neill's verdict concerning the American family is just as dark and cynical as Shepard's.

In these plays, both playwrights seem to hold the perversion of family psyche by betrayal and incest. The characters' past traumatic and shocked events continuously possessed and intruded into their present and future, as the case of Cabot and Dodge who lived situations of painfulness, loss and despair; the result of the shocking events they experienced. Both O'Neill and Shepard explored the issue of past and memory that comes back to the character's mind in a compulsive repetition and uncontrolled return in different forms (flashbacks, behavior, images, and thoughts). As Halie's and Abbie's past reenacts repeatedly in form of figures which make them revive the same intensity and pain, without understanding or remembering what has really happened despite their inability to forget the trauma.

The two analyzed works included also the process of discovery and cure as a way by which the characters would have liberated themselves from the traumatic events and confronted the external world after having integrated their traumatic experience into narrative speech. Dodge when he informed Shelly and Dewis about the buried son, and Cabot told

Abbie about the story of his life. As survivors and witnesses of their families' destruction and ruin, they have become able to understand the truth.

Endnotes

- ¹ www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml
- ² Cathy Caruth . Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. (pp 61)
- ³ Safi Mahmoud Mahfouz. Tragic Passion, Romantic Eloquence, and Betrayal in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*; *Studies in Literature and Language*. Vol. 1, No. 3, 2010, (pp 04)
- ⁴ Elissa Marder, Trauma and Literary Studies: some " *Enabling Questions*". (2006), pp 2.
- ⁵ Travis Bogard, Contour in Time. The Triumvirate: In *Desire Under the Elms*. Oxford University Press, 1972. Ed, 1988 (pp3)
- ⁶ Eugene, O'Neill: *Desire Under the Elms* in *The Complete Plays, 1932-1943*. Travis Bogard, ed. New York: Library of America, 1988.(pp348)
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 350
- ⁸ Cathy Caruth."Recapturing the Past: Introduction," *Trauma:Exploration in Memory* , 1995 (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press) .pp152
- ⁹ Eugene O'Neill. *Desire Under the Elms* , 166
- ¹⁰ Horst Frenz, Eugene O'Neil's "*Desire under the Elms*" and Henrik Ibsen's "*Rosmersholm*". *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*, Universitätsverlag WINTER GmbH. Bd. 9 (1964), pp. 160-165. Available on: <http://WWW.jstor.org/Stable/41155279>. Accessed in: 09-04-2016 12:43 UTC. (pp 161)
- ¹¹ Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press). pp11
- ¹² Sam Shepard, "*Buried child*". Vintage books united states. Ed. Division of random house, Inc. New York, February 2016.(pp 24)
- ¹³ *Ibid.*,27-29
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*,36
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*,15
- ¹⁷ Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past", 151
- ¹⁸ Benjamin Opipari, Shame: Silencing the Family Secret in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*. *New Psychology and Modern Assessments*, Penn State University Press. Vol. 44, No.1-2, pp123-138. Available on <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.44.1-2.123>, accessed: 13-05-2016, 10:02 UTC(spring/summer2010), pp3
- ¹⁹ Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*.37
- ²⁰ Cathy Caruth, "*Introduction: the Wound and the Voice*" Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996), 2.
- ²¹ Sam Shepard, *Buried Child*,43
- ²² Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past", *Trauma Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153
- ²³ Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*.70
- ²⁴ Cathy Caruth. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 17
- ²⁵ Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*.24
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77
- ²⁷ Cathy Caruth," *Trauma and Experience: Introduction*" in *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995),4.

²⁸Sam Shepard. *Buried Child.*, 20

²⁹Ibid

³⁰Cathy Caruth, “*Recapturing the Past: introduction*”, *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995),153.

³¹Sam Shepard, *Buried Child.*, 7

³²Ibid.,19

³³Cathy Caruth, “Parting Words:Trauma, Silence and survival” *intervalla: platform for intellectual exchange 2*, “Trauma, Abstraction, and creativity” (20-33). Vol.2. Cornell University 2014-2015 (pp23).

³⁴Sam Shepard. *Buried Child.*84

³⁵ Travis Bougard, O’Neill Complete Plays 1920-1931: *Desire under the Elms*. The library of America; *literary classics of United States, 14 East 60th street, New York, New York 10022.* pp349

³⁶Cathy Caruth, *Recapturing the Past*, 153

³⁷Eugene O’Neill: *Desire Under the Elms*, 348

³⁸Dori laub, “Truth and Testimony: the Process and the struggle “ in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed Cathy Caruth (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 61

³⁹Sam Shepard, *Buried Child* ,38

⁴⁰Cathy Caruth, “*Recapturing the Past*”, 153.

⁴¹Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*, 84

⁴²Ibid., 85

⁴³Cathy Caruth, “*Recapturing the Past*”.153

⁴⁴Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*, 20

⁴⁵ Cathy Caruth,” *Trauma and Experience: Introduction*” in *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (Baltimore the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995),10

⁴⁶ Sam Shepard. *Buried Child*, 88

IV. General Conclusion

This research has led us to discover that both Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard share the same aspects in analyzing the idea of timelessness in their respected plays *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) and *Buried Child* (1978). The study was carried out from two different perspectives. We have relied on Henri Bergson's theory of *Memory and Duration* to show how characters plunge into moments of timelessness through the power of memory. Then we considered the theme of trauma to discuss the characters' endurance.

Throughout our dissertation, we reached the conclusion that O'Neill and Shepard used memory and duration in their plays as a form of control, for the memories is highly selective. In fact, *Desire Under the Elms* and *Buried Child* draw upon the memories of the major characters: Dodge and Cabot, focusing on the shutter of their families. It is a literary representation of the loss of American dream during the twenties. The plays mirror a past perception in the form of images through interaction between the internal and external worlds. Therefore, one can notice the close relationship between the memories and the bodies of the characters. Because memory brings the past nearly in its exactness, the pain of years ago is felt again like a nearby pain.

Moreover, it has been deduced that the two playwrights react to the past, family demise, incest, death and failure of American Dream. Re-experiencing trauma gives birth to "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder". Through the play's characters, O'Neill and Shepard illustrated the continuity effects of a traumatic encounter on an individual's psyche. Trauma comes back to individual's mind through memories in a compulsive repetition and uncontrolled return.

That is what makes the characters of *Desire under the Elms* and *Buried Child* confront a failure to understand or forget the crime, adultery, violence and the destruction they

witnessed. The major point which holds memory in permanent active role in both plays is its ability to shape personal identity.

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Enclosed Declaration [*Authors' engagement*]

We, Mr/Mrs/Miss.....anddeclare on our honor to have written this work without any external help nor to have taken it from any other resource than those cited within. All the texts, published or not, including the electronic versions, are referred to as such. This work is not submitted to any other board of exam in a similar form, whether in Algeria or abroad, at the university or at another institution, by ourselves or by another.

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1-.....

2-.....