

# An Althusserian Reading of Sam Shepard's *The God of Hell* and *True West*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates how the plays of The God of Hell and True West depict the unconscious process of the ideological forces during which the identity of an individual is constructed with the contact they have with the ideologies at work in the society. Althusser, the French philosopher and critic, features the base as one of three processes (economic practice, politico-legal practice and ideological practice). Focusing on how ideology manifests itself within society, Althusser attempts to develop a systematic theory of how a supposedly abstract system maintains itself through its living inhabitants. Using Althusser's theories, it is realized that these plays are critique of the ideological consciousness and the way ideology as a form of false consciousness dominates the lives of people. In The God of Hell and True West, it has been shown that total observation and sense of fear are the tools through which the power holders of these dramas shatter characters' personality and cause them to be like mechanical creatures who automatically observe the determined rules.*

**Keywords:** Ideology, Interpellation (Subject), Ideological States Apparatuses (ISAs) and Symptomatic Reading

## INTRODUCTION

Sam Shepard is considered as one of the foremost living American playwrights whose plays deal with modern social concerns. He is also the author of several books of short stories, essays, and memoirs. He has won eleven Obie Awards, New York Drama Critics' Circle for Best Play, Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Off-Broadway Play and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Buried Child* (1978) in 1979. His works include over forty one-act plays and full-length dramas which the majority of his plays deal with the betrayal of the American dream, the search for roots, loss of identity and the deterioration of the family structure. His interest in legends and myths of American West can be found through his many dramas, which have references to a jazz, songs, lyrics, Hollywood films, drugs, and other elements of American popular culture.

Shepard's plays analyze the American society, the nature of western relationship, the nature of violence, and search for love and personal identity. People are dreaming about success and ideal states. *True West* (1980) highlights the struggle between the dual natures of two brothers in American society. It focuses

on shifted nature of violent American Institution over American family. *The God of Hell* is Shepard's brilliant work in the first decade of the twenty first century. It was first performed at the Actor Studio Drama School Theater in New York in 2004. The setting of the play is political and critical toward American government and society. In *The God of Hell* Shepard portrayed a Wisconsin dairy Farmers Frank and Emma live in rustic isolated place where they breed heifers. But their peace has been destroyed by Mr. Welch, a mysterious government employee in pursuit of Frank's friend, Haynes.

This study investigates the relationship between the society and the people under ideological analysis to uncover the unconscious layers of the text in which the ideological structures play significant roles. These Ideological States Apparatuses (laws, education, Hollywood, cultural institutions, Family institution, etc.) and Repressive States Apparatuses (security guards, police etc) shape the identity of a person in society. People in the society are under the control of higher power and dominant ideology and this ideology

works unconsciously in the society and people think that what is said and shown to them is true. In *The God of Hell and True West*, the researcher is to find out how ideologies are operating in the society and how the characters internalize them and see them as truth. The characters in these two plays are under the dominance of ideology and accept their current situation as it is.

Sam Shepard's *True West* and *The God of Hell* have been studied from different perspectives. This study attempts to discuss these works in the light of Althusserian ideology and explores how is formed the new society in America. Shepard is one of the greatest American playwrights who has written many outstanding plays for years and is famous for his family plays. On the other hand, Althusser is one of the greatest structuralist Marxists whose ideas about ideology and the way it works in the society have inspired many thinkers. Applying the ideas of Althusser to the works of Sam Shepard would be new and interesting.

## METHOD

Althusser was one of the most influential Marxist philosophers of the 20th Century. He considered as a Structural Marxist, although his relationship to other schools of French structuralism is not a simple affiliation, and it is said he is critical of many aspects of structuralism. Althusser revolutionized Marxist theory, defining and elaborating more on the nature of ideology and the cryptic mechanism whereby ideology exerts impulsive forces on the 'subject' through different social practices. In *Essays on Ideology* Althusser questions "why subjects are obedient, why people follow the laws and why there is not a 'revolt/revolution' against capitalism" (6). His view of ideology and ideologies comes out of his understanding of the relations between State and subject (between government and citizens). In Marxist theory, people in each society are divided into different groups or 'classes' based on their economic status. The most powerful of these classes is called the 'dominant class' that seizes the authority of the State too. Because of having such a position, which enables it to exploit the other classes of society in the direction of their own interests, it is also called the 'ruling class', or 'the exploiting class.'

Marx believes that the dominant class is "the class which is the ruling material force of society" and "is at the same time its intellectual force" (*The German Ideology* 656). Later, Althusser explains that the dominated classes can struggle against the dominant class within the ISAs "by the use of the dominant ideology itself" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", 693). This aspect of social relations has significance role for Althusser.

According to Althusser, the main target of ideology is in "constituting concrete individuals as subjects" (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 116). So pervasive is ideology in its constitution of subjects that it forms our very reality

and thus appears to us as 'true' or 'obvious'. Althusser gives the example of the 'hello' on a street: "the rituals of ideological recognition [...] guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (117). Through 'interpellation,' individuals are turned into subjects (which are always ideological). Althusser's example is the hail from a police officer: "'Hey, you there!'" (118).

Althusser admits; nevertheless, "That an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born, is [...] the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all." (119) even before the child is born, it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. He argued that the process of interpellation works best when it is invisible, when individuals accept cultural notions as though they are obvious, or natural, when it seems natural, for instance, that men act one way and women act another. At best, interpellation works when individuals give no thought to being interpellated in the first place.

According to Marx a person's aspirations, choices, intentions, preferences, judgments, and so forth are the products of social practices; and Althusser in *Essays on Ideology* argues "it is society that makes the individual in its own image" (100). Within capitalist societies, the human individual is commonly regarded as a subject capable of being a self-conscious and responsible agent whose actions can be explained by his or her beliefs and thoughts.

Althusser suggests that many of our roles and activities are given to us by social practice. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" he asserts "our values, desires, and preferences are inculcated in us by ideological practice, the sphere which has the defining property of constituting individuals as subjects" (99). The state which is in the hand of the dominant class actualizes its power and dominance through different apparatuses which constitute superstructure. Superstructure is divided into Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). Ideological state apparatuses (ISA) consist of one of the two sets of institutions through which the ruling class maintains its economic dominance. It is through these institutions that ideology takes the form of a material entity and exerts its hegemony on the members of society. Althusser divides them into the following groups:

The religious ISA (the system of different Churches), the educational ISA (the system of different public and private Schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc) (*Lenin and Philosophy* 143).

Althusser also recognizes the role played by what he termed the “Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)” (167). According to Althusser, the basic function of the RSA (heads of state, government, police, courts, army, etc.) is to intervene and act in favor of the ruling class by repressing the ruled class through violent and coercive means.

The difference between the RSAs and ISAs is that the former functions “by violence”, while the latter functions “by ideology” (*Lenin and Philosophy* 142-3). To be more specific, the RSA “functions massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology”. For example, the Army and the Police also function by ideology both to guarantee their “cohesion and reproduction”, and to legitimize their repressing actions. On the other hand, the ISAs function massively and predominantly by ideology and secondarily by repression. For example, schools and churches, and families use different “methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc.” to force the defiant members of society to act within the framework of the dominant ideology. In this way, the RSAs and the ISAs work together to preserve the order of a social formation (145).

Althusser based his reading of Marx’s *Capital* on distinguishing “two texts” within it, the one that expresses the author’s conscious intention, and the other which contradicts the first one and must be regarded as a meaning that the text unconsciously expresses independent from the intention of the author. The relation of these two texts is that “the second text is articulated with lapses in the first” (Ferreter, 57). In other words, in a symptomatic reading, the reader must not simply interpret the text using his own ideas or that of the writer as the criterion, because the consciousness of both of them is determined by ideology, and they cannot perceive reality from a wholly detached perspective. Rather, the reader must uncover “the set of ideas indicated by the gaps, contradictions, and other logical flaws in the text and of reading the text against these ideas” (57). In this way, the reader discovers the “unconscious” aspect of the text, and interprets it on the basis of the new meanings it discloses - the meanings that point to the existence of the ideology in which the text is produced.

#### **IDEOLOGY HAILS AND INTERPELLATES INDIVIDUALS**

*The God of Hell* (2003) is Sam Shepard’s brilliant play in the first decade of the twenty first century. Emma and Frank are a peaceful, quiet, respectable couple who raise heifers on their Wisconsin farm. Soon after they agree to let Frank’s old friend Haynes stay in their house, he is on the lam from a secret government project involving plutonium; they’re visited by Welch, an unfriendly and violent government agent from hell. His aggressive patriotism puts Frank, Emma, and Haynes on the defensive; he tries to intimidate and terrorize the innocent mid-westerners. The plot is

regarded as a shift from the treatment of American families’ disconnection to social and political concern of modern age.

To work out the logic of Althusser’s theory of ideology in Shepard’s drama, it seems necessary to consider the historical and political dimension of his work in relation to the history of Shepard’s own society and thought. Shepard’s description of his writing technique suggests that the motivation for his characters and his plots comes from a deeply rooted subconscious. The themes that persist in Shepard’s work obviously mirror his opposition to government’s policies after the horror of 9/11 and Iraq war. Shepard has said that this play, written after the horror of 9/11, is his reaction to the policies of President George Bush and his vice-president Dick Cheney, expressing his anger at the politicians who slide nation into a state of devastating war.

*The God of Hell* describes a picture of contemporary man beaten down by the political and social forces, based on man’s failure to communicate with other men. Shepard’s father was a farmer and teacher who served in the United States Army Air Forces as a bomber pilot during World War II. He knows how much war would be destructive and violent. The rise of panic and tension in America after 9/11 had an impact on people and scholars. Living in this environment affected Shepard’s conception of the class system, where people had to fit into that system. *The God of Hell* was Shepard’s shout of complaint, protest and call to arms over the Gorge Bush administration’s policies of domestic control and torture after 9/11.

The main character of the play, a perfectly harmless Wisconsin farm couple, Frank and Emma preoccupied with raising heifers, watering their plants. They are host of the frightened Haynes, but they have not seen each other for a long time. Whether Haynes is a scientist doing a research or works for the government is not clear, something which makes Emma think that he is “Running away from something, maybe?” (*God of Hell*, 6). Later we will get, he is escaping from some unnamed governmental crisis into hiding in the farmhouse basement. While Emma is cooking bacon lonely in the kitchen, the voice of a stranger named Welch is heard; he appears with a “dark suit with American flag pin in his lapel, short cropped hair, crisp white shirt, red tie” (*God of Hell*, 6) Soon Welch as a mysterious salesman wants to subjugate every one. The play shows how the government, represented by Welch, is trying to force a new national identity on the American citizens. Frank and Emma, an old traditional couple who live a quiet peaceful farm life, are destroyed after their national identity is usurped.

The political kind of interpellation makes ideological subjects out of independent individuals through their subjections to a unique and perfect Subject. It persuades them of the existence of a complete Subject whom should be looked up to have a more ideal life. In

this way individuals are free only in the sense that they show their submission to the unique Subject. For Althusser, ideology and ideological subjects are the inevitable realities of being in a society, it “leaves no room at all for autonomous, non-ideological thought and action” (Bertens, 88). Worth noting is the idea that it is impossible to hold some ideological belief and to know that they are ideological; the moment this recognition happens, ideology ceases to be ideological because “ideology never says I am ideological” (Eagleton, 61).

As Althusser maintains, the raw materials out of which *The God of Hell* is produced are ideological materials. Central to the application of these ideological materials is the ideological representations through the main character in the play. As a result, Haynes and Frank bear a close resemblance to the so-called Althusserian subject as they appear to be an ideological product of their society. They desperately obsessed with finding a meaning for their life and their fragmented being. They seem to have problems to come in terms with themselves at the end, they feel a deep lack in their spilled self, which according to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan leaves them ‘incomplete’. They are far away from their family background and deserted in misery.

The search for freedom and identity in its different forms and tenets is the central theme running through *The God of Hell*. In this play, Shepard paints a frightening picture of the human being pressured by the forces of society to the point wherein he loses his individuality and becomes a drugged member of the social machine. Emma’s denial of stranger man in her house highlights the fact that this event brings the unwilling disastrous result, be it physical or spiritual. By the entrance of Welch, Haynes’s instable sense of identity tests itself when he tries to terrify Emma and Frank with the possibility that He may be taken away by the strangers who carry American flags for the purpose of revealing the fact that Haynes tries to escape from outside and the government’s agents. Welch attempts to demolish the fake sense of identity this scientist has adopted. Haynes, Emma and Frank are accused of some crime, including disloyalty, betrayal of America and escaping from secret national project:

Welch: You’d think there would be a flag up or something to that effect. Some sign some indication of loyalty and pride.

Emma: Loyalty? To Wisconsin?

Welch: (pacing through room) Nothing in here either. Not even one small token in the home. No miniature Mount Rushmore, Statue of Liberty, no weeping bald eagles clutching arrows. Nothing like that. We could be anywhere... (*God of the Hell*, 15)

Haynes: I’m not going back, you know.

Welch: Let’s not start off on the wrong root, buddy-boy.

Haynes: I’m not going back!

Welch: (chuckles) I’m afraid you’re going to have to now. You’re contaminated. You’re a carrier. What’re we going to do about that? We can’t have you free-ranging all over the American countryside like some kind of headless chicken, can we? You’ve already endangered the lives of your friends here, not to mention the Midwest at large. Now, that was pretty selfish of you, wasn’t it? Poisoning the Heartland?

Haynes: You can’t take me back there.

Welch: Oh, come on now, “Haynes”—you were getting along so well. You can’t just walk out in the middle of a project like that. You don’t want to be known as a quitter, do you? Besides, we have a brand-new mission for you. Something of extreme, International urgency. I’m sure you’re going to want to be a part of it. (43)

Haynes’s inability to justify, decline, or resist these accusations reminds the reader of the idea that either he is extremely the convict for the accusations or an absolute selfless person who does not have any hint of awareness of his own self and identity which has already been violated or has not been assigned upon yet.

Even at the end of Scene 3 before taking Haynes and Frank away, they confess their discomfort and reveal their misery, criticize the way their own selves have been formed by the same chaotically established disciplines of the society. They have no choice. They cannot flee. They accepted what Welch said.

Welch: You’re going to like Rocky Buttes, Frank. Whole different landscape. Wide open. Just like the Wild, Wild West. Not a tree in sight. Endlessly flat and lifeless. (Welch opens door and escorts Haynes and Frank out to the porch. Emma stands in the room, helpless.)

Frank: Have they got any pasture out there, Graig?

Haynes: Buffalo grass. That’s about it.

Frank: How are we going to feed my heifers?

Welch: Just keep making your way down across those frozen fields. My people will pick you up on the road. You see the headlights? They’re waiting for you. Keep in step now. Don’t forget to keep in step.

(Frank and Haynes go of past the windows, maintaining their little pathetic march.

Welch comes back into the house and speaks to Emma (59).

Frank and Haynes accept their destiny, having no hope for their future. It can be said *The God of Hell* is not just

about authority breaking the will of a person, but that the characters reveal something on Shepard's attitude toward the question of identity. *The God of Hell* is a political play about the need for resistance and it pictures victimization and domination of innocent people. Emma wants to stand on Welch's will and power but she is so weak to resist. She was not able to encourage Frank not to follow him, Frank does not do anything to protect himself. If Frank has been a self-possessed man prior to their arrival, he would have tried to stand against the Welch. Shepard, through *The God of Hell* has written a play about the power of authority to break human will. Although Emma and Frank were warned about the imminent by Haynes, they were somewhat paralyzed by this and as a result, incapable to protect themselves.

### Welch as the Representation of Repressive State Apparatus

In every society, the dominant class is the owner of state power. The state which is in the hand of the dominant class actualizes its power and dominance through different apparatuses which constitute superstructure. Superstructure divides into Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). ISAs are all multiple, distinctive, relatively autonomous cultural institutions and RSAs contain the Government, the Police, the Army, the Prisons, the Court, which constitute an organized whole whose different parts work through the politics of the dominant to keep the power of the state. The distinction between RSAs and ISAs is that the Repressive State Apparatus functions by violence, while the other one functions by ideology.

The role of Welch in *The God of Hell* is highly significant in all aspects. He can act as the representation of Repressive State Apparatus. The character Welch enters the play unexplained, and is important figure before he even appears physically on the stage. Haynes knows this figure is chasing him, but Haynes's panic could be aimed outside at anything his little world.

Haynes: The stranger.

Frank: You got me. I didn't see him. I was down feeding my heifers. Haynes: She didn't say?

Frank: Not really. Just asked her a bunch of strange questions about the house. Haynes: What kind of questions?

Frank: Nothing, really. I mean—how many rooms there were. Stuff like that.

Haynes: That's strange, isn't it?

Frank: What?

Haynes: A stranger coming by.

Frank: Not really. We're out here in the boondocks. Sitting ducks for solicitors.

Haynes: Oh, really? (*God of Hell*, 18)

The many roles played by Welch, have great implication to the play. When he goes to influence

Emma and Haynes and Frank, He scares them in the most terrifying method, attempting to crush the nominal scale of self-respect and dignity that Haynes and Emma may have. During the action of the play, He seems to have significant power over the other characters, especially Haynes and Frank at the end. Welch threatens Emma saying "You didn't think you were going to get a free ride on the back of democracy forever, did you? What have you done to deserve such rampant freedom? Sooner or later, the price has to be paid. Do you think? Our day has come" (*God of Hell*, 42). Freedom and democracy turn to be a tool in the hand of the new government that chooses who deserves them and who does not; banning free countries from liberty becomes the new democracy of the United States. When Frank is threatened by an ominous and omnipotent power, no doubt, his sense of individuality and self-esteem tend to disappear and he sold all his heifers by Welch subjugation. Frank could not resist to save his own farm and heifers. He put his hands up at the end and follows Welch's command and rules. Innocent people, such as Frank and Emma, are misled by the new American identity. Welch is able to convince them that the government is more knowledgeable than they are.

*The God of Hell* is a good example of a work with the internal conflict in plot whose relationship is not obviously said in the first glimpse. Macherey believes that a literary work contains more than one meaning that its author intends to create and Ferretter defines it as:

"Symptomatic reading is a question of bringing to light the set of ideas indicated by the gaps, contradictions and other logical flaws in the text, and then of reading the text against these ideas. In Althusser's psychoanalytic metaphor, a symptomatic reading reconstructs the unconscious thoughts of a text, and interprets it on the basis of these thoughts (63).

In *The God of Hell* words are used not to tell the story, but to suggest that the story is hidden. By ridiculing the old values and individuality, it tries to make people conscious of the possibility of going beyond everyday conventions and communicating more authentically. One of the dominant themes of the drama is to emphasize the importance of refuting the imposed identity as well as resisting against the strict pressures of the power which cannot stand individuals' autonomy. The effort of the author is portraying a negative picture of authorities to prove that it is the society's dominant power which seizes people's individuality and forces them to conform to all norms of social formation. This play should be considered not only as a creation of an individual mind, but also as a product of conflicting social and historical factors.

The play dwells upon the unconscious of the text whose main message is that the dominated group can be as exploitive as the dominant class and create another social pressure in the lives of independent individuals who challenge the cruel power. There are some layers of meaning which can be obtained by studying the social and governmental act. Thus, to achieve the authentic knowledge of the text, the reader should find "the cracks in the façade". He should concentrate on what is untold in the text, or according to Bertens, "what the text represses rather than expresses" (92).

### TRUE WEST AND POWER RELATION

*True West* is another drama in two acts by American playwright Sam Shepard. Some scholars and critics consider it the third play of a Family Trilogy which includes *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) and *Buried Child* (1979). Austin, a successful young scriptwriter, attempting to finish work on an artistic project, he hopes to sell to Saul Kimmer, a Hollywood producer. His mother is on vacation in Alaska and he is staying in her house to take care of her flowers and plants. Lee, his older brother who makes living by stealing and gambling returns from desert unexpectedly. From the opening moment of the play it is clear that the two brothers are in the manifestation of the struggle between the clashing lifestyles of the Old West and the New West. While each brother openly hates the other's life-style, they secretly envy each other too. When Saul accepts Lee's project about old style western script, Austin gets drunk and upset, gives up his work and yearns for the desert.

As it mentioned before, according to Althusser, the State which is in the hand of the dominant class actualizes its power and dominance through different apparatuses which constitute superstructure. Superstructure is divided into Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). Althusser divides ISAs into the following groups:

"the religious ISA (the system of different Churches), the educational ISA (the system of different public and private Schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), the cultural ISA "(Literature, the Arts, sports, etc). (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 143).

*True West* at first, Austin was the literate, polite, neat and responsible father. He was a very successful screenwriter and trusted son of family to look after the house when his mother is away. In contrary his brother Lee was reckless, dirty, wild, villain and a thief. However at the end we consider they have reversal characters. In this play, Hollywood Institution, as a

symbol of ISA, injects his rule and favor to others. Saul Kimmer is a Hollywood producer who chooses Lee's western screenplay than Austin's Love story. What Austin disdains harshly as being "the dumbest story ever" (*True West*, 32), in Saul's opinion is something that will sell and he can make more money. Saul, as a businessman and producer, picks up what he likes to make movie.

Saul here chooses Lee's screenplay and calls it "the ring of truth". Hence, he says this is Lee who narrates good story about our land America. Austin and his screenplay are expelled and he is pushed to despair and destruction. He admits his destiny and accepts his older brother's lifestyle to experience his attitude to be like him. He even admits that Lee has always been his hero, he takes the challenges of stealing some toasters in order to prove himself to Lee.

Althusser states that our identities are to a degree fixed by interpellation. Interpellation refers to the way one is "hailed" by the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA): in other words, "the way one is repeatedly recognized in accordance with one's social position (sex, race, income, etc.)—by many people in one's society, particularly those in positions of power.

The recent times are faced with the dilemma of the notion of the reality; media and information culture are developed and individuals' existence even their dreams and memories belong to common mediated background, and because of that, human beings tend to content themselves the fake reality. Shepard reminds his audience this hazardous situation and brings about his favorite theme of individualism and self-isolation of the present time. Mass media have given the individuals the illusion of social life within their isolated home. In *True West*, Shepard uses the dysfunctional family to prove ambivalence identity and the fact that nobody in this world can escape, change or compromise in order to fit in the pattern of the society to strange brother, Austin and Lee brought to gather by chance

Austin: He is not gonna change .Let's leave the old man out of it.

Lee: He's not gonna change but I will. I'll just turn myself right inside out.

I could be just like u huh? ticting around dreamin' stuff up. Getting pat to

Dream. Riddin back and forth on the freeway just dream in, my fool here Off (20).

In this play characters Lee, Austin and Mother do represent their self-isolation and search for identity with more or less intensity. The isolation is either forced on them by society or it is selected by them on their own. Austin's isolation is the outcome of too much reliance on others in the society. He was betrayed by

his producer. Lee's loneliness is not the fault of him but of the society and cultural interaction. Austin's reward for too much trust is that he is deceived by not only a slick man like Saul Kimmer but his brother too.

In *True West* Shepard has formed characters that are troubled for forced reasons leaving them amidst of threats at the end. In case of the brothers in *True West*, this control is far further than individual control and sounds extensive, the entire world has turned unfriendly to them leaving them with nowhere to go, nothing to confirm their being and identity, and even no feeling of easiness in their mind concerning themselves and the world. The society and family bring them lost identity and never save them from harm momentarily. At the beginning Lee tries to find a place for himself in the house of his mother but by the end of the play, self-rejected and alone, he is more isolated than ever like other characters of the play.

## CONCLUSION

To work out the logic of Althusser's theory of ideology in Shepard's drama, it seems necessary to rake out historical and political dimensions of his work in relation to the history of Sam Shepard's own society. Shepard's description of his writing technique suggests that the motivation for his characters and his plots comes from a deeply rooted subconscious. The themes that persist in Shepard's work obviously mirrors political and social crises such as after September 11<sup>th</sup> and dysfunctional family. The role of the victim and the aggressor supporters that the themes in his works are related with one meticulous aspect in Shepard's country, America, and family and cultural heritage.

As a result, Haynes and Frank bear a close resemblance to the so-called Althusserian subject as they appear to be an ideological product of their society. This search for self and identity in its different forms and tenets is the central theme running through *The God of Hell*. In this play, Shepard paints a frightening picture of the human beings pressured by the forces of society to the point wherein they lose their individuality and becomes a drugged member of the social machine and state.

By sympathetic reading of *The God of Hell* it has been proved that in this play words are used not to tell the story, but to suggest that the story is hidden. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, it tries to make people conscious of the possibility of going beyond everyday verbal communication conventions and communicating more authentically. One of the dominant themes of this drama is to emphasize the importance of refuting the imposed identity as well as resisting against the pressures of the power which cannot stand individuals' autonomy. The effort of the author is to portray a negative picture of authorities to prove that it is the society's dominant power which seizes people's individuality and forces them to conform to all norms of social formation. This play should be considered not

only as a creation of an individual mind, but also as a product of conflicting social and political factors.

In *True West* Lee, Austin and Saul are the products of a system of discourses and relations, and always likely to change according to the conditions. Each character in this play tries to set up his power system in his discursive space where he can dominate and apply power to each other's but they fail at the end. They do this by utilizing a variety of strategies, methods and tactics including subjugation, victimization, questioning, policing and surveillance. However, because of the dynamic and fluid nature of power, the one who gains power in one situation becomes a victim in another situation as the play progresses.

Moreover, Shepard in *True West* positions his characters in a self-isolated and unbalanced world where they were subjugated by different institutions to launch hegemony over them.

The human being in modern life has become a victim of frustration, loneliness, loss of communication and isolation. Sam Shepard, the American playwright reflects exactly this state of human being in *The God of Hell* and *True West*. All characters do show their self-isolation and search for identity with more or less intensity. They are reproduction of ideological state apparatuses in surveillance of repressive state apparatuses. In these plays it has been shown that total observation and sense of fear are the tools through which the power holders of these dramas shatter the characters' personality and make them mechanical creatures who automatically observe the determined rules.

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