

Comparative Analysis of Psycho-Sexual and Personality Disorders in Mourning Becomes Electra and Buried Child

Ms Aqsa Nazir¹

1 Assistant Education Officer District Bhakkar. Email: aqsa.english1122@gmail.com

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Abstract

The psycho-sexual and personality problems depicted in two classic contemporary and postmodern American plays—"Mourning Becomes Electra" by Eugene O'Neill and "Buried Child" by Sam Shepard—are thoroughly compared in this study. This research attempts to investigate the manifestation and significance of psychosexual and personality disorders, such as fixation of abnormalities, dependency during psychosexual development, passivity, relationship problems, maladaptive thought patterns, borderline personality disorders, and avoidant personality disorders, within the context of their respective narratives by exploring the complex psyches of the characters in these dramatic works. The intricacies of the characters' identities and the effects of disorders on the lives of modern and postmodern people are revealed through the application of psychoanalytic and psychosocial frameworks, such as Sigmund Freud's psychosexual development stages, Heinz Kohut's self-psychology, Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, and other pertinent theories. Psychosexual and personality disorders have been extensively highlighted and represented in modern and postmodern literature, comparatively limited attention has been given to their treatment, therapeutic intervention, and possible psychological resolution. Psychosexual and personality problems have affected mental health, positive relationships, social connections, job growth, academic achievement, self-esteem, and identity in both contemporary and postmodern society. It's critical to understand that people of many ethnic and religious backgrounds can be impacted by these problems. This study uses a comparative approach to show the thematic similarities and differences in how psycho-sexual and personality disorders are portrayed in literature. "The Buried Child" explores the effects of repressed trauma, the breakdown of familial relationships, and the quest for self-identification, "Mourning Becomes Electra" provides a nuanced examination of Freudian ideas, such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes.

Research Background

Psychosexual and personality disorders are significant areas of interest in psychological and literary research as they do have a significant impact on one's identity, interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation and functioning in society. Modern studies suggest that personality pathology is often accompanied by problems in establishing satisfactory relationships, loneliness, decreased social support, and social dysfunction. A systematic review of the 70 studies identified higher loneliness, relationship dissatisfaction, and lower perceived social support among individuals with a personality-disorder diagnosis and/or traits (Barnett et al., 2024). Likewise, studies of BPD show that it can impact social and occupational functioning, highlighting the broader impact of psychological disturbances beyond the lived experience and into their life and relationships with others (Dhar et al., 2023).

Psychosexual difficulties also closely relate to personality functioning, emotional experience and interpersonal relations. New studies show that symptoms of problematic sexuality and sexual dysfunction can emerge in conjunction with pathological personality traits, especially when traumatic experiences, maladaptive personality functioning and problematic sexual behaviors converge (Ciocca et al., 2023). Childhood sexual abuse and adverse childhood experiences were

identified as important factors in relation to sexuality and personality pathology, as part of a systematic review. As a similar example, sexual dysfunction is often linked to psychiatric disorders, and sexuality is not always independent of overall psychological functioning (Herder et al., 2023).

The psychological aspects of literature are more of a factor in the works of Sam Shepard and Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill is a pivotal figure in modern American drama, and Shepard is an important voice in postmodern American theatre. The background of the present study highlights the dramatists as being the writers whose portrayals emphasize psychological and personality related conflicts in troubled American families and relates these conflicts to the collapse or distortion of the American Dream. O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* is a modern American American family tragedy, based on the classic story of the House of Atreus. O'Neill does not present fate in the traditional Greek context of theology, but rather in the context of psychological and biological concepts of cause and effect. The Mannon family thus becomes a major literary site of study for repression, guilt, desire, revenge, psychological breakdown and bad relations between people.

The psychological struggles of the Mannon family are manifested in characters whose desires and attachments grow more destructive and harmful in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Christine's relationship with Captain Brant, Orin's psychological torment, and Lavinia's emotional alienation illustrate the ways in which sexuality, family relationships, guilt and psychological conflicts become entangled. The background talks about how Orin has been psychologically damaged by the war, and Lavinia is suffering from psychological disintegration and loneliness; Christine's relationship with Brant is adding to the destruction of the family. Previous studies have also explored *Mourning Becomes Electra* based on psychoanalytical theories, such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes, which help explain the fateful circumstances of the characters' lives (Meldy et al., 2020).

In Sam Shepard's play, *Buried Child*, the psychological disturbance is instead represented in the collapse of the American family. The setting of the study reveals the play as a play of a dysfunctional family which is characterized by dishonesty, estrangement, decay, violence, incest, death and failure of family members to act fulfilling their expected roles. The rural setting of the play and the social and cultural disillusionment that it depicts bring together individual psychological issues with social and cultural disillusionment. Shepard's characters have a conflicted sense of self, isolated sense of self, harmful relationships, and unfinished family life. These attributes align with modern psychological research, which indicates that interpersonal issues may be manifested as loneliness, interpersonal instability, poor social relationships, and difficulty forming meaningful relationships (Dhar et al., 2023; Barnett et al., 2024).

The present study to analyze *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child* comparatively using psychoanalytical approach with a particular focus on psychosexual conflict and personality disorder. The focus of the study is on the psychoanalytical concepts of Sigmund Freud and the self psychology theory of Heinz Kohut with regards to repression, desire, identity, narcissism, self-fragmentation, loneliness and the lack of interpersonal dynamics. The background literature especially points to Kohut's notion of "self-fragmentation" and psychic dependence on the environment as pertinent for modern characters, and emphasizes the role of narcissistic issues, voidness, sadness, hopelessness, addiction, and aggression in O'Neill's dramatic portrayal. Stigma, impaired relationships and social difficulties are also found to be significant aspects of personality pathology in modern research (Stiles et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2023). An examination of the two plays will be used to show how O'Neill and Shepard depict psychological disturbance in their respective historical and theatrical settings, and to highlight common themes of dislocated identity, challenging sexuality, dysfunctional family relations, and self-destructive behavior.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research is to study the comparison of causes and impacts of psychosexual and

personality disorders on the individuals and families of modern and postmodern ages through the comparative analysis of the plays “Mourning Becomes Electra” and “Buried Child”. A thorough comparative study of the plays will be made to analyze the effects of disorders on human behaviors and conduct. Meanwhile hindrances and solutions to the problems will be tried to address so that disrupted and torn fabric of individual, family and societal relationships may be prevented from further damage.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the impact of psychosexual disorders on Family relationships through the selected text
2. To analyze the effect of psycho-socio disorder on the characters of the selected plays
3. Compare and contrast the psycho-sexual and personality disorders present in the chosen text

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How do personality and psycho-sexual disorders tear the fabric of nuclear family and family relationships?
- 2) How a Modern Man is a masked man who leads a life of temporary desires with multiple psycho sexual and personality disorders?
- 3) What are the key similarities and differences in the psycho-sexual and personality disorders exhibited by the characters of modern and postmodern individuals?

Significance of the Study

The study is important because it will investigate the psychosexual and personality disorders and their impact on the individual, the family and the society using the case studies of Mourning Becomes Electra and Buried Child. It identifies issues of psychological conflict, dysfunctional relationships, repression, feelings of loneliness and self-destructive behaviour. The study also raises awareness of these 'sensitive issues' that might be given less consideration in societies like Pakistan. The study is based on the psychoanalytical approach, which is intended to enhance understanding of these disorders and their portrayal in literature and society.

Literature Review

Eugene O'Neill, Sam Shepard

Eugene O'Neill was one of the most highly ranked Dramatists of Modern American theatre, and Sam Shepard an outstanding Dramatist in Post-modern American theatre. The psychoanalytical disorder and personality disorder were both present in the modern and post-modern era among people, respectively, reflected by both writers. They depicted through their writing that these disorders occur owing to the shattering of the American Dream. At a time when there was a great and serious obstacle in the way—Reardon (205)—Eugene O'Neill set out to "make substantial drama in America. By the time of his debut playing in 1916, the American theatre was a quarter century behind the European theatre in the development of some of its early master playwrights. Twenty years later O'Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature – America had outplayed all other nations in the world with drama. In his earliest plays, O'Neill was very much aware of the one act form (Reardon, 206).

O'Neill highlighted two elements of his dramatic structure: characterization and conversation in his naturalistic atmosphere of the drama in Mourning Becomes Electra. He also created characters with psychological depths and thought-provoking brains that would deliver the dramatic hot moments well. O'Neill's work inspired a great change in American theatre, most noticeably in the 1920s and 1930s, when American drama Greater emphasis was placed on the psychological, symbolic, expressive and tragic elements. O'Neill's impact as a dramatist and his commitment to portraying themes of survival, psychological tension, and human struggle continue to resonate in

new interpretations of his works and interpretations of the overall Dr. O'Neill Foundation (Eugene O'Neill Foundation, 2026). He tackled popular topics and brought ingenuity, authority, vigour and passion into American drama. Prior to O'Neill, there were famous American playwrights; but commercial theatre excluded plays that failed to adhere to a play format that was created from the Elizabethan play and the "well made play". The problems with O'Neill's tragedies is not that they'mped with strict Aristotelian and ritualistic models of tragedy, but they were constructed from classical models of tragedy and psychological elements. In contrast to *Buried Child*, *Adrift* offers an American family home in turmoil, with its hidden motivations, self-destructive behavior, isolation, and other unspoken elements, all serving as a commentary on the decay of the American Dream. It's an emotional world – much like a family would be, in rural America, and a world through which Shepard's memories run from his father's family. This play then becomes a critique of American identity and domestic relationships, rather than personal and familial ones. In turn, recent 2026 critical engagement with *Buried Child* also recognizes its importance - as An Icon of the American Dream (Rick On Theater, 2026) - as a surrogate for failed family relationships. But inevitability is always a possibility in O'Neill's tragedy, as humans are given the credit as the actors who suffer because of pride, psychological conflicts, and the results of their own choices (Falk, 4).

Mourning Becomes Electra and Buried Child

Orestes and Electra are retold in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the story of the tragic Agamemnon, tragic Clytemnestra. The first two plays of the Aeschylean trilogy are presented almost as in a modern form, and the concept of the Furies/Eumenides is given an even more curious contemporary twist. In its classical form the concept of Nemesis has been revarnished in the biological/psychological concept of cause/effect, only it's a little more current than classical Nemesis. This is not an illustration of the Greek theological issue of fate. The son of the victim (Mannon) from the Mannon family turns vicious towards the remaining family members for revenge. Captain Brant is redirected and becomes the pawn of his own passion and Orin starts to lose his mind before killing himself. Lavinia sends her mother off to commit suicide. Orin dies and Lavinia withdraws from the world and enters the house, never to come out again because the idea of simply dying never appeals to her.

Shepard's play, *Buried Child*, is a crisis in the American family. Certainly the backdrop is set in 1970s America and the playwright's surroundings certainly influenced the family drama. The piece is based on a home in which the principles and standards have been destroyed, and the family have risen above society. There are no efforts made to remodel the family, the members do not get along. All attempts are ineffective since family members are unable to fulfill their intended duties, and the family splits up in futility. The qualities of a person are split between their childish innocence and limited reality, which result in a lack of happiness. As a result, all the characters in this play attempt to bring harmony and integration into the family, but fail and the family disintegrates. All the characters ignore their responsibilities because they are unable to provide any support. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Buried Child*, by Sam Shepard, has seven characters that examine family relations in the literary pantheon of Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller.

Psychoanalytic and Self-Psychological Perspective

This healthy intellectual heritage of both European and American history helped to furnish a favorable climate for experimental modernism in American theatre. American literature was shaped by three factors in particular: The American literary revolution of the men of Laama, Theodore Dreiser, H. L. Mencken, Sherwood, Anderson, and others; The influence of the Ibsen and Post Ibsen European playwrights; The revolutionary movement of the Laama Experimental Theatre, to which Shepard was connected initially.

Kohut discovered through self-psychology that the main issues facing contemporary characters were caused by self-fragmentation and a person's dependence on their environment psychologically. O'Neill spoke about the issue of narcissistic disorder 20 years prior to Kohut. Multiple characters depict the narcissistic issues, the sufferings and actions resulting from narcissism. A tendency to self-splinter, loneliness, emptiness, depression, and despair, as well as addictive behaviors and violence are a few of these. There is a connection between the work of Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard. The text may be interpreted in various ways (e.g., feminist, formalist, socialist or psychosexual). The research will take a self-psychological perspective on both the plays, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child*. The text is analyzed with the help of leading self-psychology theorist Heinz Kohut. The material is looked down through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory and Heinz Kohut's theories on self psychology and psychosexual diseases.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is conducted through the exploratory qualitative research design that is adopted to examine and compare the psychosexual and the personality disorders found in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Sam Shepard's *Buried Child*. A qualitative approach is suitable because the study is not one that involves counting numbers, but the psychological conflict, behavior, family interaction, identity, relation passion, desire of characters. The study examines the impact psychosexual disorders have on an individual and whether they impact on any family relationships; the study also examines if there are differences and similarities between the representation in the chosen two acts.

Sample of the Study

The main body of texts is two American plays, *Mourning Becomes Electra* by Eugene O'Neill and *Buried Child* by Sam Shepard. The study is limited to one text by each writer. The texts are chosen because they are psychological conflicts, disturbed family relations, psychosexual issues, personality issues, and psychological/psychosexual conflicts caused by modern and postmodern social issues which influence the individuals. The analysis is centered on particular characters whose actions and relationships draw the reader's attention to psychosexual conflicts and personality-related issues.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based mostly on a combination of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the work of Heinz Kohut, the self-psychologist. Freud's theory is the primary approach towards a study of psychosexual disorders, and Kohut's theory is in the context of personality disorders. The Freudian psychoanalysis theory puts a focus on early childhood experiences and the unconscious mind playing a significant role in shaping personality and behavior, according to the study. The concepts he developed around the Oedipus Complex, the Electra Complex, the id, the ego, the superego, repression and unconscious conflicts serve as a foundation for his understanding of the characters' motivations and relationships in both plays.

The familial relationships between Lavinia and Ezra Mannon, Christine and Orin each carry a complex of unexpressed desires and confusions, inherent in Freudian theory. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the transferences among these, Lavinia and Ezra Mannon, Christine and Orin offer specific disjointed wishes and anxieties, as Freudian theory would predict. The research paper outlines various examples of Lavinia's complicated relationship with her father and the fascination with him as her father, which can be explored through a psychological lens. *Buried Child* is based on a family dynamic that has become dysfunctional and a hidden agenda, which alludes to other psychological conflicts. Dodge's lack of interest, insensitivity and isolation are considered symptoms of psychological issues, as are Halie's complicated relationships with her sons.

The second key framework is that of Heinz Kohut, who has made a contribution to the understanding of personality disorders and disturbances of the self. Building upon the previously leg Systemic emphasis on aggressive and sexual drives, Kohut combined the self with psychological development. His theory took a holistic and dynamic approach to the self, which has been characterized by inter- and intra- dependencies resulting from internal and external influences, as well as a focus on an individual's quest for self-actualization and psychological wholeness.

For this analysis Kohut's view on the fragmented or weakened self is of special relevance. The paper explains how there is a relationship between social/cultural disruption, bond loss, and psychological distress and self-fragmentation. The characters of *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child* are considered through this framework, as the characters' psychological experiences manifest issues of identity, self-cohesion, narcissism, loneliness and quest for meaning.

Supporting Theoretical Perspectives

As a reference for the theoretical base of the study Freud and Kohut are mentioned, but in support of their theories, Carl Jung and Erik Erikson, as well as Karen Horney are discussed in this paper. Erikson's theory highlights relationships within a social context and life stage-related tasks. In the research paper, Lavinia's issues of identity and intimacy are connected to E. Harlman Erikson's theory on development and Vince from *Buried Child* is connected to stagnation, isolation and symptoms affecting his personality.

Karen Horney's theory also helps in the analysis of the theory presented herein as per her three personality types: Aggressive, Compliant, and Remote personality. This study use of these categories in the characters of the two plays. Lavinia's personality type is aggressive, Christine's is compliant, Dodge's is remote and Bradley's is aggressive. Horney's concept provides an understanding of the role of anxiety, validation, emotional distancing, control and interpersonal conflict in the functioning of personality-related behaviour.

Data Collection

The two chosen plays have been adopted as main textual source material for the study. The dialogues, actions of characters, relationships, psychological conflicts, interactions in the family and scenes involving psychosexual and personality disorders are highlighted in the texts. The textual interpretation is supported by secondary material in the study such as the relevant critical discussion on O'Neill, Shepard, psychoanalysis, and self-psychology, which contextualize and give theoretical support to the textual interpretation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Selected texts are performed textual analysis with close reading method and qualitative thematic method. First, passages associated with psychosexual and personality related problems are unearthed. Next, the passages are rendered in the light of Freud's ideas of unconscious conflict, psychosexual development and familial desire and Kohut's ideas of self-cohesion, narcissism, fragmentation and psychological dependence. Erikson, Jung and Horney are used where applicable as a support for the ideas. The conclusions of the research for *Mourning becomes Electra* and *Buried child* are discussed to show the significant differences and commonalities between the portrayal of psychosexual and personality disorders.

Comparative Method

Using a comparative method, the research looks at the portrayal of psychosexual and personality disorders in modern and postmodern American drama. Its psychological conflicts, family relations, self-questions, negative behaviours and reactions to social and familial pressures are the characters' subject of comparison. By making this comparison, the research can determine what psychological disorder is depicted differently, and what is the same. The research is specifically sets out to

compare and contrast with the selected texts the psychosexual and personality disorders found in the texts.

Scope and Delimitation

The study is limited to the two plays that are selected and concentrates only on the psychosexual and personality disorder in each of the two plays through the characters. The theory selected for the study of psychosexual disorders is Freud's theory and the theory chosen to study the personality disorders is Heinz Kohut's self-psychology. The study does not try to make clinical diagnoses of the fictional characters; these characters include their behaviors, relationships, conflicts and their psychological states and may only be interpreted as literary representations using the selected theoretical frameworks.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of *Mourning Becomes Electra* by Eugene O'Neill and *Buried Child* by Sam Shepard showed that the facets of psychosexual self disorders and personality disorders are tightly connected to the unresolved desires, family conflict, emotional frustration, identity problems, self fragmentation, and breakdown of family and social relationships. The results were viewed in the context of the psychoanalytical and personality theory applied in the paper and mostly represented by the theories of Sigmund Freud, Heinz Kohut, Erik Erikson and Karen Horney. The two plays convey both of these psychological struggles in different contexts of modernity and postmodernity, and both share the same theme of the negative impacts of poor family dynamics.

A psychosexual conflict and family relationships in Mourning becomes Electra

The analysis shows the presence of psychosexual conflict in the relationships between the Mannon family members. Orin's interactions with his mother Christine suggest an Oedipal interplay from a Freudian point of view. Orin has a strong emotional bond with his mother, and is mentally preoccupied with her, impacting his relationship with Hazel. Lavinia's close connection with her father, Ezra Mannon, and his antagonism to her mother can also be shifted onto the context of the Electra Complex. The study finds that all these relationships are direct reflections of the unfulfilled desire in the family and the unspoken psychological conflict.

Lavinia's loyalty to the writer Ezra is important as well because her emotional bond with her father increases her feeling towards Christine. This passionate fixation is reflected in her denial that she doesn't love and protect her father. Conflict escalates post Christine's relationship with Brant and Ezra's death. So it can be inferred from the analysis above that the following factors are to blame for the psychological degradation of the Mannon family: suppressed emotions, undone wishes, envy and familial competition. Orin's psychological state deteriorates further post Christin's tragic death. He is attached to his mother, feels guilty and frustrated, which makes him feel like everything is meaningless.

Personality Dysfunction and Family Disintegration in Buried Child

The characters' behavior is determined by a highly dysfunctional family structure that is dictated by the acts of the characters and is revealed by the analysis of *Buried Child*. The situation between Halie and Tilden, and the discovery of the buried child becomes major conflicts in the family's inner dynamics. The secret in the family creates guilt and anxiety and often leads to poor relations between members of the family. This family dysfunction is pointed back to the demise of the nuclear family and corruption of the American Dream in the research paper.

The characters illustrate various psychological and interpersonal problems. Dodge's behavior is emotionally detached while Halie's is manipulative. Halie's relationship with Tilden also impacts her relationship with the rest of the family. It is suggested in the research paper that these inadequate relationships have a negative impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of the family.

Another problem with Bradley is his aggression and domination over his family. His violence towards Dodge and threatening attitude to Shelly show the damaging effects he has on interpersonal relationships in the play. Vince is ostracised and feels out of place in the family. The experiences add to the concept of disrupted identities and families in the play.

Self-Fragmentation, Identity and Psychological Disturbance

The results also suggest that psychological illnesses in both plays are linked to disintegration of the self. One way to appreciate the significance of disruption of familial and social ties on a subject's sense of self is through reference to Heinz Kohut's self-psychology. In the chosen plays, there are indications of psychological disorientation, identity crises, loneliness and lack of coherence.

The theme is also elaborated through Erikson's psychosocial theories in the development of characters. Lavinia's experiences are obvious as an issue of identity and intimacy, Vince is an obvious instance of isolation and problems in him being part of the family. From such analysis it can be seen that the development of personality is also not only affected by the early psychosexual experiences but also with the ongoing interpersonal and social experiences.

The term "self-fragmentation" can be seen in the Mannon family. Family members struggle with developing meaningful relationships and their yearning for love leads to frustration, anxiety, feelings of being separated and to acting destructively. At the conclusion of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Lavinia is the one remaining member of the immediate family and so decides to go it alone in the Mannon house.

Neurotic Personality Patterns and Interpersonal Conflict

An alternate analysis of the personality patterns represented in the two plays is offered by Karen Horney's theory. The paper use the concepts of the three personality orientations (aggressive, compliant, remote) from the Horney's theory to the selected characters. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Lavinia is related to the aggressive personality because of her need for control and domination. Her actions indicate a need for control of events and people around her.

Dodge's withdrawal and emotional unavailability is indicative of the remote personality type that he embodies in *Buried Child*. Distance may be his way of dealing with the trauma he is carrying and/or family dynamics that are unresolved. Compared to Bradley, the other one is more aggressive and controlling ones. The various personality orientations provide examples of how anxiety, emotional insecurity, a need for validation, and control factors into family conflict.

Suicidal Frustration, Guilt and Self-Destructive Behavior

Another significant discovery in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is self-destructive behavior. Analysis links suicide to un-met of psychosexual conflicts, guilt, emotional frustration and non-development of healthy relationships by characters. The increasing toxic emotional situation stems from the relationship between Christine and Brant, as well as Ezra's death and Orin's strong bond with his mother.

After Christine has passed away, Orin's mental anguish plays a larger role. He cannot form a solid relationship with Hazel because of his emotional bond to his mother, and his feelings of guilt that prevent him from being with her. His self-destructive pattern is attributed to his psychological fragmentation and purposelessness in the research paper.

This is another way of dying that Lavinia experiences. She lives to see another day, but refuses to allow for ordinary happiness and separates herself within the Mannon home. The killings and suicides are not seen as separate incidents, but a result of the psychological and emotional devastation in the Mannon family.

Modern and Postmodern Individual: Alienation and the "Masked Man"

The analysis also shows that the psychological struggles referred to in the plays are not only about single characters, but are also about the state of Modern as well as Postmodern people. The modern individual is focused on competition, status, the secret and masking of problems, writes Sirgi. These conditions help to perpetrate confusion, emotional withdrawal and social isolation.

This concept of the “masked man” is very important, as the characters tend to overlook their emotions, desires, guilt) and even put on front, an act that can just as easily be called hiding their personal failures. The study ties today's and post-moderns life with the growing competitiveness and social pressure in society that brings an increase in psychological isolation and weakening interpersonal relations. Individual isolation is also described as a result of the development of industrial and digital society.

This is congruent with Jung's notion of the persona. The study states that an overdependence of the social “mask” can create a lack of personality. People can try to act a certain way to please social norms and become an incomplete person. In both plays it is therefore possible to consider the characters as people in flux, wrestling with inner dichotomies at the same time as keeping up with their public face.

The Broken American Dream and Family Disintegration

One major discovery in the film *Buried Child* is the connection between psychological disruption and the collapse of the American dream. The study sees the play as the repression of traditional concepts of social stability, happiness, family and prosperity. There are broken expectations, lying, fighting and confusion in the family.

Dysfunctional family is then a symbol of the overall collapse of social stability. Ideal family failure and failure of the American Dream go hand in hand, as the study makes its point. The main characters look for happiness and stability, but these two are unable to find them because of the social climate and family lives that expect them. There is also an idealization of Ansel and her belief in family ideals further emphasized by Halie's depiction, as this highlights the divarication of ideals and social expectations from one's family life. The study concludes that the individual level is not sufficient for analysing problems in PS. They are also associated with culture failures, disintegration of families, social insecurities, and wrecking of old value systems.

Psychosexual and Personality Disorders from Individual to Societal Level

The results show that mental illnesses are not just personal but affect the social environment and family. When unfulfilled desires and the inability to form healthy relationships become problems, the influence of the Mannon family is ultimately derailed in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The other family members—Ezra, Christine, Orin and others—suffer from frustration, emotional disaffection and psychological conflict, while Lavinia is isolated after the deaths of the other members of the family.

In *Buried Child*, the theme of family dysfunction is manifested through the secrets, mistrust, emotional isolation, aggressiveness and lack of respect for family standards that enclose. The study relates these issues to the cultural and moral shift of contemporary and postmodern America and the breakdown of the American Dream.

The analysis therefore lays out a trajectory of transitions from individual psychological conflict, to family dysfunction, to social fragmentation. Anxiety, frustration, alienation, anger, guilt, emotional isolation are not character specific, but rather apply to the stability of the family and the culture.

A Comparative Analysis of The two plays

The comparison is to display the similarities and differences between *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child*. Both plays show families in which there are emotional alienations, psychological conflicts, emotional problems, secrets, frustrations, and dysfunctional relationships. In both, the individual's psychological difficulties have a negative impact on their family life.

There are differences in the nature of these conflicts between the two works, however. The psychosexual conflict in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is emphasized through the repression, Oedipal and Electra conflicts, feelings of guilt, revenge, destructive behavior, adultery, and death of the Mannon family. The psychological conflict is tightly connected with desires that were never satisfied within the family, and neither of the characters manage to get away from it.

Buried Child, written by Sam Shepard, portrays a fractured postmodern American family marked by buried secrets, trauma, emotional distance, aggression, unclear identities, and the loss of the American Dream. The family now is a veranda symbol of social and cultural disintegration. Both Eugene O'Neill and Sam Shepard employ the concept of a dysfunctional family for the sake of a more psychological and social crisis. O'Neill focuses on repressed desires, guilt and psychosexual conflict, but Shepard focuses on the death of traditional American ideals, family dysfunction and fragmentations of identity caused by trauma. It concludes that there is an interrelation of psychosexual and personality disturbances at the individual, familial and social level of humanity. This observation reflects the central theme of study which is that psychological conflict has a destructive influence on man's behavior, the relationship between the members of a family, and the values of the society.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that basic underlying elements between psychosexual and personality conflicts in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child* are dysfunctional family relationships, repression, guilt, trauma and emotional isolation. Both O'Neill and Shepard struggle with psychological conflict both through repression and in various unexpressed desires in relation to others, as well as through family conflict, family disintegration, and the presence of hidden trauma that is not shared. This reading is aligned with the recent scholarship that keeps seeing psychoanalysis as a valuable lens through which to view the literary representations of psychic struggles and experience. As proposed by Enckell (2024), psychoanalytic ideas have the capacity to produce meanings through the literary interpretation, and as shown by Zolkos (2024), unresolved trauma has the capacity to be passed on from family and culture. The results of this study suggest that psychological disturbances depicted in the two plays are inextricable from the family or social context in which the characters find themselves.

In explaining the importance of unfulfilled relationships in bringing about psychological conflict in the family, one example may be cited that is frequently used in analysis of *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The conversation that can take place between Christine and Orin, and Lavinia and Ezra, may be explored in light of the concepts outlined in Freud's study, Oedipus and the Oedipus complex and the Electra and the Electra complex. As a chain of jealousy, guilt, repression, revenge, and stifled emotions take hold, the Mannon family spirals toward ruin. More recent studies in family psychology in drama also focus on the relationship between the psychological attributes of characters and dysfunctional family structures. It seems that in this context the above result of the present is more than a matter of the psychological bizarre-relics of the individual characters; the psychological condition of every character is interconnected with that of the family as a whole system.

The Suppressed Finding of *Buried Child* is also the insight that psychological disturbance comes from a lack of transparency, deeper past, aggression, emotional detachment and the breakdown of the family dynamics. The secret of the buried child is the family secret, and Dodge, Halie, Tilden, Bradley, Vince, each show a variety of psychological and interpersonal dysfunctions. Familial disintegration, dysfunction, instability, isolation and multigenerational trauma are identified as central psychological factors of Shepard's play by recent research done by Al-Hablawi and Azeez (2025). Their study, based on the combination of Freud's remembering-remembering repeating and working-through principles and the family systems theory by Bowen, illustrates how an unmet member of a family can be affected by the actions of other members of the family. In the same fashion, recent studies focus on the symbolic depiction of family disintegration, concealment of

verity, seepage of familial bonds and erosion of cultural value in *Buried Child* (Sivakami & Kalaiaresi, 2025). The present study builds on these analyses by demonstrating the psychological and social aspects of familial collapse: with their alienation, lack of trust, and disregard of meaningful relationships, these characters grow disjointed at the individual level. Therefore, the repressive history of family folklore is not just confined to family biographies but continues to shape the current actions, identities and relations between familial entities.

The second important point to be considered is the connection between trauma and a fragmented and a cohesive identity. The use of Kohut and Erikson to understand that effects parts of the characters' lives, such as Lavinia's and Vince's struggles with identity, intimacy, belonging and psychological stability. Trauma scholarship in recent years also highlights the interplay among traumatic experiences, disrupted identity, memory and psychological disruption. Literary studies of trauma have revealed that fragmentation can also be a mechanism that allows literature to depict ruptured subjects and unsolvable traumas (Cheng & Shao, 2023). Unresolved traumatic experiences can also endure across generations and become “haunted” in relationships with intimates and relatives, Zolkos (2024). The next observations confirm the present results: the psychological problem of the characters are not the case of simply personal inadequacies, but results from contexts of deprivation, conflict, oppression and troubled relationships in Families. *Buried Child* focuses on the dysfunctional family as its centre, and how the loss of emotional and psychological stability in the family, further strains the characters' agony and internecine warfare, recent research suggests (Mahal, 2025). The psychological if not dualistic division between these two plays can then be read as a dialogue between individual suffering and more general familial suffering in which unexpressed and/or unhealed family conflicts determine the characters' personal identities and behavior and thus have a psycho-social impact on them.

The two plays are discussed again, as periods of psychological illness at both the individual and literary level - periods of rupturing and rupture of relationships, unprocessed trauma, disaffirmation of cultures and identity crisis. This comparison will then demonstrate that in both the O'Neill and the Shepard's work, the dysfunctional family is used as a psychological instrument to expose the ill effects of fractured human relationships, both in modern tragedy and in post-modern drama. Our recent research regarding *Buried Child* focuses on the oppressive nature of patriarchal authority leading to disintegration, identity crises, and alienation, which reminds us that psychological suffering goes hand-in-hand with other ideologies and factors affecting a person's social environment (Mechta & Kaced, 2025). Based on the Berardinelli's recent research, in which connection is drawn between the ideological control, family life, cultural myths, American Dream and resistance, protagonists' internal intuitive interrelationships are closely intertwined with the other factors of the social and cultural power present in the scene (Al-Khafaji, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The present comparative study finds that both *Mourning becomes Electra* by Eugene O'Neill and *Buried child* by Sam Shepard offer valuable literary depictions of psychosexual and personality disorders, characterised by the combination of family dysfunction, unfulfilled appetites, repression, trauma, guilt, identity confusion, alienation, and self-split. The study reveals that the psychological struggles of the character(s) exist in relation to their families/society and are not the same as, nor are they understood without, other theories such as psychoanalytic theory of Freud, of Kohut self-psychology by others, and of Erikson's psychosocial theory, as well as others' theories of Jung, Adler and Horney. Within its themes of psychological conflict — Oedipal and Electra dynamics, repressed desires, jealousy, guilt, adultery, revenge, murder, suicide, and the eventual isolation of Lavinia — *Mourning Becomes Electra* offers a glimpse into the tortured

layers of hidden motivations and emotions that emerge in the aftermath of tragedy. The study especially demonstrates how childhood experiences, which remain unresolved, and lack of parental relationships is responsible for psychological problems which affect Orin and Lavinia. The family is presented by Shepard in a fractured way, and in his portrayal of *Buried Child*, the secrets, history buried, emotional distancing, aggression, identity issues and the lack of the American dream have taken their toll on family life. The central theme of the buried child is identification by the study of the loved one's lying hidden broken history as an unresolved conflict and the characters' inability to develop healthy relationships gives a broad reflection on the psychological impact of the family syndrome. The contrast in results also proves that the psychological issues that are highlighted in both plays also have a social dimension, which can create alienation, frustration, anxiety, disintegration of identity and a weakening of social connection in the family and society at large. Kohut's idea of the fragmented self is the most important as characters in both plays suffer from a sense of loneliness, emptiness, despair and an ongoing quest for meaning and identity. The authors also find that the forms of psychological disturbance in the modern and postmodern settings are different, and both settings exhibit parallel agonies in respect of the failure of family system, deluded longings, and emotional and social disturbance. The study asserts that the narrative of *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Buried Child* is not exclusively one of troubled individuals, but also an insightful portrayal of the psychological effects of the overall deformity of families and evolving social climates. The conclusion of the study highlights both the plays' illustration of "disintegration, alienation, enfeeblement," and their inability to satisfy desires, as individual, family, and cultural fragmentation become intertwined. The lifelong obsession of the two forces O'Neill's modern drama and Shepard's postmodernism to peripheral sites, and the family serves as the focus for the two to illustrate psychologic damage or social breakdown, and the fact that unresolved experiences can haunt and impact character, family dynamics, action, and the potential for happiness.

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