

**RECLAIMING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY:
A KRISTEVAN ANALYSIS OF SUBVERSION OF SEXUAL
DIFFERENCE IN SAM SHEPARD'S THREE MAJOR PLAYS**

UDC 821.111(73).09-2 Shepard S.

Forough Emam

Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract. *The study intends to examine three major plays by Sam Shepard – “True West”, “Fool for Love”, and “A Lie of the Mind” – to explore the underlying causes of women’s subjugation from Julia Kristeva’s perspective, which is adopted here as the theoretical framework. Kristeva’s views on the exclusion of women from the symbolic order to maintain a gender hierarchy will be utilized to pinpoint the reasons behind men’s violence towards women. Moreover, we shall examine the struggles of female characters to liberate themselves from the oppression of the symbolic order by resisting the demands of patriarchy. The findings suggest that female characters’ attempt to delimit the definition of female subjectivity and motherhood is in line with Kristeva’s promotion of a new interpretation of femininity/maternity. In the study, we have come to the conclusion that, in accordance with Kristeva’s theories, the attempts of women to follow their desire and reconstruct female subjectivity is the ultimate strategy to disrupt patriarchal hegemony.*

Key words: *feminine subjectivity, maternity, femininity, patriarchy, symbolic order, Sam Shepard, Julia Kristeva*

1. INTRODUCTION

The preoccupation with the notion of ‘identity’ and a ‘fragmented alienated self’ constitutes a central theme in all of Sam Shepard’s works, in particular his three major plays, in which it finds a powerful expression. Given the fact that Shepard’s exploration of the concept of identity revolves around family, his female characters are predominantly portrayed as wives or mothers. While it may seem that Shepard is merely representing the adverse aspects of motherhood or female identity in his plays, further

Submitted October 19 2017, accepted for publication March 26, 2018

Corresponding author: Forough Emam

Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

E-mail: forooghemam@gmail.com

analysis indicates that Shepard is criticizing the status quo by representing the limitations of societal definition of maternity and female subjectivity¹. Whereas most scholars have emphasized the submissiveness and passivity of these female characters (Auerbach 1988; McDonough 1995; Volks 1994), none seems to have paid due attention to the socio-symbolic expectations of a society that stimulates these characteristics in women. Shepard utilizes his characters' fragmented identities to highlight the failure of patriarchy in creating an authentic and stable identity. This also demonstrates the gap between masculine and feminine modes of identity, and the extent to which patriarchal society's negligence of female subjectivity or sexuality can be problematic for human beings. Shepard's characterization of women as marginal is indicative of the exclusion of women in a society in which, according to Julia Kristeva (1986: 141), the economy of the patriarchal system requires that women be excluded from knowledge and power.

This study aims to examine female characters in Shepard's three major plays *True West*, *Fool for Love*, and *A Lie of the Mind* by employing Kristeva's account of the silencing and oppressing of women in a patriarchal society. In accordance with Kristeva's (Ibid.: 141) statement that sexual difference is crucial for men to maintain their self-image, and that they feel threatened when women seem to obtain the phallus either by expressing their sexual desire or wanting to enter the symbolic order without any intervention by men, the study discusses ways men use their power in the symbolic order to exclude women from having access to knowledge and/or power. Shepard, who used to believe that escaping from one's identity is futile, began to write about characters who are able to form a new identity and escape the past. While women may not be the protagonists of the plays, they struggle with the roles society traditionally has intended for them. In Shepard's three major plays, women, mothers in particular, attempt to construct a new self, either by leaving their homes or violent husbands or by redefining their identities.

By studying these three plays chronologically, we wish to demonstrate that Shepard's female characters gradually gain more control over their lives. By creating dynamic female characters, striving towards constructing a new self, Shepard reconsiders the possibility of change in a patriarchal society. We shall also discuss how women's reconfiguration of their own identities is in line with Kristeva's (1986) promotion of a new generation of women who want to be mothers but simultaneously keep their dreams and desire alive. The theoretical body delineated by Kristeva shall be employed to account for the underlying reasons behind the symbolic order's need to maintain the gap between the sexes for the sake of its unitary authority. Kristeva is known to have elaborated on the notion of patriarchal society in Western countries in *About Chinese Women* (1986), where she concludes that the meaning of womanhood is equated with motherhood in the symbolic order. By drawing on Kristeva's theories and views in *Stabat Mater* (1986) and *Women's Time* (1986), we elaborate on the attempts of women in these three plays of Sam Shepard at redefining their subjectivity and not limiting themselves to the role of motherhood.

¹ For another aspect of Shepard's representation of female characters see F. Emam and S. Ahmadzadeh (2017), "The Journey from Compliancy to Intimate Revolt: A Kristevan Reading of Sam Shepard's Three Major Plays". *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*: 164-171.

2. PATRIARCHY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Sexual difference, according to Kristeva (1986: 143), is an abyss defined by the different ways men and women have relations with the Law (political/religious). Kristeva claims sexual difference can be understood as the relationship between the subject and the symbolic order (Ibid.: 141). The symbolic order, similar to other signifying systems which are based on exclusion, difference and opposition, is based on the exclusion of women (Ibid.: 143). This elimination of the Other (i.e. women) would be to maintain the sexual difference and the Law in society. Since the unity of monotheism is ensured by having only one God/Law, the symbolic realm will fail to withhold the one Law if there is no desiring body as the other sex which is repressed. Kristeva argues the essence of patriarchal monotheism is to sustain the gap between the two sexes (women/men) in any way possible (Ibid.: 143). Since men need this sexual difference to maintain their self-image they feel threatened when women seem to obtain the phallus either by not repressing their sexual desire or deciding to enter the symbolic order without any assistance from a man. Men need women to conform to the narrow definition of female subjectivity in patriarchal society, and if women decide to go against the ideological rules, most men do whatever it takes to enforce the codes of this ideology among women. Women can only enter the symbolic order if their desiring body and *jouissance* are repressed; consequently, any indication of female sexuality needs to be subdued or destroyed in women (Ibid.: 141).

The contrast between the reality of women's lives and the ideological expectations they should meet is one of the main reasons for the violence against women by the male characters in Shepard's plays. In *Fool for Love*, when Eddie, who has left May for a long time, realizes that May is seeing someone else, he becomes angry and brings his shotgun to intimidate her. Eddie is evidently frightened by the possibility of a sexual relationship between May and some other men. He accuses May that she is having an affair to impress him with her sexual prowess. His comment "that's very impressive. I would've thought you'd be hung out to dry by now" (Shepard 1984: 35) indicates that he fails to tolerate her as a woman who responds to her own sexual desire. Jake's definition of May's subjectivity as a sexless person is being challenged, and Eddie is afraid of losing the upper hand in the competition of having the phallus. As far as violence against the other's sexual behavior is considered, in particular women, Henrietta Moore (1994: 151) claims that "what is crucial is the way in which the behavior of others threatens the selfrepresentations and social evaluations of oneself." Men's violence, therefore, results from their fear of losing their position in the symbolic order. Eddie's anger cannot be linked to jealousy, as he is already having an affair with another woman. He is simply fearful of May's ability to experience *jouissance*, a pleasure that must be repressed in women at all costs, and disrupt the hegemony of the symbolic order. He attempts to intimidate May with his gun so that she succumbs to his power and becomes dependent on him to possess an identity.

Similarly, Jake has beaten his wife to death because of the alleged affair she was having with one of her colleagues. His anger stems from his fear of losing the power and control he wants to have over his wife. Explaining to his brother the reason he became suspicious of Beth's infidelity, he reveals that Beth

starts dressin' more and more skimpy every time she goes out. Starts puttin' on more and more smells. Oils. She was always oiling herself before she went out Smell would wake me up.... She was in a dream, the way she did it. Like she was imagining someone else touching her. Not me. Never me. Someone else. (Shepard 1987: 8)

Due to the fact that Jake fails to consider Beth as a powerful and sexual person, he accuses her of having an affair, instead of realizing that the power in fact belongs to Beth. If Jake comes to the understanding that Beth is an independent woman following her personal desire, he will lose his sense of masculinity; since men are only able to maintain their position if women are excluded from access to power. The only way he can preserve his masculinity is to believe that Beth is involved with a 'man' who is providing her with this power.

Beth addresses this delusion when she tells Jake that what he is accusing her of is "all in [your] head. Some imaginary deal [you] cooked up in [your] head" (Ibid.: 8). The contrast between the reality and the way women are expected to behave in society unravels the real reason behind men's anger and frustration towards the women in their lives. Men attempt to preserve the gender hierarchy by using violence against women. Jake's beating is the outcome of his fear of the destruction of his self-image; Kristeva (1986: 141) argues that:

without this gap between the sexes, without this localization of the polymorphic, orgasmic body, desiring and laughing, in the other sex, it would have been impossible, in the symbolic realm, to isolate the principle of One Law-the One, Sublimating, Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interests of the community.

As the title *A Lie of the Mind* signifies, Jake fails to let go of the lies which limit the definition of womanhood, and therefore he leaves and "never looks back" (Shepard 1987:129).

In Shepard's plays, men's exercise of violence to maintain their sense of selfhood exposes their reliance on women, not vice versa. Similarly to Jake, who degraded his wife and finally left her when she stopped to "reflect the figure of man at twice its natural size", as Virginia Woolf (1945: 35) puts it, Baylor scolds the women who live with him. He tells his wife that living with women is preventing him from pursuing his personal preferences:

I could be up in the wild country humin' Antelope. I could be raising a string a' pack mules back up in there. Doin' somethin' useful. But no, I gotta' play nursemaid to a bunch a' feeble-minded women down here in civilization who can't take care a' themselves. I gotta' waste my days away makin' sure they eat and have a roof over their heads and a nice warm place to go crazy in. (Shepard 1987: 78)

He blames women for taking away his freedom; yet he ignores the fact that he needs them more than they need him. He maintains his distance from women by going out of the house and doing 'manly' tasks; however, he still needs them to be dependent on him to feel empowered by their weakness and dependence. He does not ask them to assist him with the chores, but keeps reprimanding them for staying home and for not being able to take care of themselves. By not allowing them to have access to the symbolic realm, he reinforces the sexual difference which leads to upholding the superior position of men, including himself.

The two young brothers in *True West* are similarly suffering from the pathology of the patriarchal ideology. From the very beginning of the play, Lee tries to intimidate Austin with his physical strength and dares him to fight with him every instance they quarrel. Moore (1994: 148) studies the interconnection between violence, sexuality and gender by examining “fantasies of power are fantasies of identity”. She is of the opinion that violence is “the result of a crisis of representation” and occurs when men “cannot control the definition of their own masculinity” (Ibid.: 153). Any form of physical violence, in this case male sexuality is crucial in identity formation as long as it is represented to other men and interpreted by them, can be understood as men’s attempts to demonstrate their sexual performance.

Both of the brothers feel insecure about their lives and attempt to reaffirm their manliness by exhibiting their physical strength which eventually leads to their ongoing fight at the end of the play. Their insecurity might be attributed to the realization that their father who is supposed to be the role model for them has ended up living in the desert. Lee confides to Austin that: “nobody can disappear. The old man tried that. Look where it got him” (Shepard 1987: 41). Lee, who resembles a cowboy and brags about the hardships he went through in the desert, feels diffident about his masculinity after seeing the success of his brother in Hollywood. As Bonnie Marranca (1981: 201) writes:

the heroism and strength of the cowboy is revered by Shepard [and his characters] but in actuality the men he creates are ineffectual, fearful, and emotionally immature. They show no strength of character or will, yet they are allowed to dominate because it is their due as men.

Given the fact that cowboys exemplify the hegemonic masculinity in the symbolic order, Lee’s fascination with classic American Western movies stems from his desperate need to feel connected to the idea of masculinity that the symbolic order stimulates.

Shepard argues that the aim of writing *True West* was to portray the conflict between “the physical wild man part and the reasonable, intellectual side” (Weber 2000: 37). Shepard’s claim indicates that there is no ontological definition of a male and the delusion of a unified masculinity contributes to anger and frustration in male characters. Men are experiencing the two-sidedness of their psyche, although this phenomenon is not compatible with the societal representation of male identity. Shepard’s analysis of this fractured subjectivity in male characters depicts the detrimental effects of patriarchal ideology of sexual difference on women as well as on men.

3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FEMALE SELF

The male characters silence or repress women to maintain the difference which is needed to uphold patriarchal society. The deleterious effects of the marginalization of women are evident in Shepard’s female characters.

Jake, the protagonist of *A Lie of the Mind*, has beaten his wife to death. His beating and degradation of Beth result from his suspicion that Beth is having an affair with a colleague. He fears that as an independent woman with a successful career as an actress, Beth would not need him anymore; yet, he needs her to be dependent on him. He believes that her career and therefore independency is taking her away from him: “It’s an excuse to fool around! That’s what it is. That’s why she wanted to become an actress in the first

place. So she could get away from me” (Shepard 1987: 11). Although it might be true that Beth is utilizing her work as an actress to “pretend [to be] somebody else” (Ibid.: 11), the underlying reason could be attributed to the fact that she is not receiving the love and respect she deserves from Jake. Beth wants to be sexually desirable, and even if this is the role that it is expected from a woman, she is being controlled by Jake. Jake believes that Beth is an oversexed person whose sexuality should be restrained by her husband.

As Kristeva (1986: 143) states the symbolic order excludes women “from the single true and legislating principle, namely the Word.” Jake, the representative of the symbolic order, achieves this aim by attacking his wife physically. Beth, who seems to be injured in the attack, has lost her ability to speak. The first sentence she enunciates after she regains the ability to talk is “am I a mummy now?” (Shepard 1987: 4). The pun on the word “mother” alongside her paralyzed situation signifies the equality of womanhood with passivity in the patriarchal society. Even though she is speech-impaired, she still expresses her inferior position in society. By demonstrating Frankie her non-existent scar, she is alluding to the exclusion of women from the symbolic order:

BETH: No brain. Cut me out. Cut. Brain. Cut.

*FRANKIE: No, Beth, look... They didn't they didn't operate did they?
Nobody said anything about that.*

*BETH: They don't say. Secret. Like my old Mom. Old. My Grand Mom. Old.
They cut her. Out. Disappeared. They don't say her name now. She's gone.
Vanish My Father sent her someplace. Had her gone. (Ibid.: 74)*

She begins to reclaim her subjectivity as her “aphasic language” (Gendrich 2004: 303) eventually begins to progress. In shattered speech, she states “if something breaks...broken. If something broken...parts still...stay. Parts still float. For a while. Then gone. Maybe never come...back. Together. Maybe never” (Shepard 1987: 47). The brokenness she refers to could be her incomplete identity in the symbolic order. She is emphasizing that if a woman does not transform the situation on time, she may never have a chance to become an autonomous person. By the end of the play, she becomes “an undeniably active force” (Crum 1993: 206), and by ultimately leaving the abusive relationship, she begins to reclaim her identity and to develop a healthy relationship.

The silencing of women in the symbolic order is demonstrated in *Fool for Love* by the manner in which Old Man and Eddie marginalize May’s account of events. Only men seem to possess the power of the Word in the play. Whereas Eddie portrays Old Man’s affairs sympathetically and presents him as a hopeless romantic, May’s version depicts the suffering both women went through. Old Man and Eddie have the power to eradicate the experiences of the women from the story. While May tries to subvert the situation by revealing the truth about Old Man, Eddie’s identification with his father makes it impossible for him to accept the truth. May, who is the main female character, has conflicting feelings about her role as a lover of Eddie. She, like her mother, is obsessed with being with a man even if he should not be willing to commit to the relationship. May continues to wait for Eddie to come back to her; yet, when he visits her, she tells him “I don’t need you” or “nobody asked you to come” (Shepard 1984:14). The moment he warns her that he would leave her, she clings to his legs and begs him to stay. Carla J. McDonough (1995: 72) is of the opinion that Eddie as well as May are “recapitulating a pattern of interaction they have inherited [from their parents] and upon which they have structured their identities.” While Eddie’s identification with Old Man grants him a

superior position in the symbolic order, May's identification with her mother simply triggers her psychological deterioration.

Denouncing the first and second waves of feminism, Kristeva (1986: 196) hopes the third generation will highlight the singularity of every woman. The third generation will also take into consideration the diverse desire of women. Kristeva hopes that the third generation will act responsibly in the symbolic order by criticizing and reevaluating it at the same time. They need to recognize that in the symbolic order, identity is based on difference (sex/race/nation), in a way that one is the opponent of the other. She believes the solution to this issue does not demand ignoring the division between body and the Law; women must remain in the symbolic order, but they have to refuse and submit to it simultaneously (Ibid.: 209).

Sally, Lorraine's daughter, has a minor role in *A Lie of the Mind*; yet her role in emphasizing the oppressiveness of the symbolic order is noticeable. She, unlike the other female characters in the play, is not married nor begets children. Her identity is surprisingly not attached to any man, and she does not appear to be anxious or embarrassed about being single. More significantly, she assists her family members, Lorraine and Jake, to realize that the identity society has constructed for them according to their sexes would not help them to enjoy a healthy fulfilling life. When Sally tells Jake that she is fearful of him since he reminds her of their father, it becomes the moment that Jake understands how his identity is adversely affected by his father. Consequently, he decides to visit his wife, Beth. Sally as well serves as a voice of reason for her mother. After confessing to her mother how once Jake and his father attempted to kill each other, she asks her "what're we doin' in here?" (Shepard 1987: 72). While she uses the pronoun 'we' to ask, she is clearly trying to help her mother recognize the lies of the mind and society that are the basis of Lorraine's identity. Lorraine, in response, admits that she fails to believe that she "fell for it all those years" (Ibid.: 72). She then decides to burn all the "junk" (Ibid.: 96) men have left for her and to go to Ireland to start a new life. When Lorraine begins to pack her suitcases, the stage direction states that there is another one "ready to go" (Ibid.: 84). It is perhaps Sally's suitcase, since Lorraine has just decided to leave her house. Sally's suitcase could point out to her preparedness to escape the patriarchal society as soon as she is offered a chance. Her preparedness also stimulates her mother to flee the house. Sally may not have a major role in the play, but even in her limited presence on the stage, she expresses her disagreement with the female identity as defined by the patriarchal society.

4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW FORM OF MOTHERHOOD

Female characters, in the beginning of the plays, seem to be submissive or passive. By employing these characteristics, Shepard is representing the reality of maternity in the symbolic realm. He is demonstrating how society's interpretation of the notion of motherhood can have destructive effects on a woman who must take the role of mother and consequently lose the opportunity to develop her individuality. Each of the three mothers in Shepard's plays demonstrate their commitment to their role as mothers by being dependent on men (husbands/sons), being obsessed with taking care of domestic chores, taking care of the physical needs of the husband and children as well as identifying with their sexual function.

Since procreation has a social value, women still hold a place in the symbolic order as mothers. Yet in a society where feminine identity equates with motherhood, a woman's maternal function is permissible if the jouissance of her female body is repressed. Hence, women's presence is not a threat and the social harmony can be preserved. This is the basis of the representation of motherhood in the symbolic order: the quasi-spiritual role that entitles women to forego their desire which eventually results in masochism (Kristeva 1986:176). Kristeva (Ibid.) denounces psychoanalysis for not introducing a new discourse of motherhood that finds a balance between motherhood and autonomous identity. She asserts that to define motherhood appropriately one should "listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today, through their economic difficulties and, beyond the guilt that a too existentialist feminism handed down, through their discomforts, insomnias, joys, angers, desire, pains, and pleasures" (Ibid.: 179). Kristeva believes in redefining motherhood in a way that does not demand from a woman to either be a mother or follow her desire. The ideal form of motherhood that Kristeva anticipates is a creative act that will not pressure women to feel guilty for pursuing their professional and personal desire (Ibid.: 184).

Lorraine identifies with her role as a mother simply as a caretaker. Throughout the play, she is incessantly doing chores that are associated with the role of the mother in the domestic sphere. Having her almost forty-year-old son in her care, she is obsessed with serving and nursing him. She is busy either cooking for him or cleaning after him. To express her commitment to her motherly role, she talks about how she "slaved over a blender tryin' to get [the soup] creamy and smooth" (Shepard 1987: 30), and tells Jake that "I fixed up your room, just like it used to be. I've been cookin' all your meals" (Ibid.: 53). After feeding him the soup, she immediately comes back into the room, wearing an apron, to take the sheets away, telling him "I gotta' go do this laundry" (Ibid.: 34). Lorraine's desperate attempt to force Jake to stay with her reveals her dependence on having a child to maintain her identity as a mother. Nevertheless, her dependence has been misunderstood by critics as being "domineering" (Hart 1987: 107; Kane 2002: 149) or "aggressive" (Lanier 1991: 411). Numerous critics even consider the relationship between Jake and Lorraine, which takes place in the bedroom, somewhat incestuous. Audra Blaser (2013: 97), for instance, believes that Lorraine attempts to hinder her son's leave by hiding his pants and Shepard's choice to set the fight in the bedroom implies that Lorraine is aware that her "societal value lies in her biological ability to reproduce, and subsequently care for her offspring." Her definition of selfhood, therefore, appears to be deeply connected with her sexual function. A woman's definition of self is dependent on her relationship with a man (father/husband); Lorraine has lost her husband and as a result is dependent on her eldest son, Jake, to uphold her role as a housewife-mother in society. When she realizes that Jake has run away to see his wife, she "shakes with the cold chills and her face is pale and sweating" (Shepard 1987: 64); yet her fear seems to be related to losing a man on whom she can depend rather than to worrying about her son's escape.

Meg's identity, like Lorraine's, is in harmony with what the symbolic order imposes on a woman after marriage. Besides procreation, she should fully take the role of a mother whose main concern is to look after the physical needs of her husband and children. Meg needs her children to be dependent on her to maintain her identity constructed on being a mother first. In Act Three, she tells Baylor that "Beth's still a baby" (Ibid.: 74), while her daughter is a grownup adult. Despite her effort to consider her daughter as a child to uphold her own identity as a mother, she becomes excited when at the end of the play her

supposedly very young child announces to her family that she is going to marry Frankie. Even though Baylor appears to be surprised by the announcement, Meg is “caught up in festive fervor” (Lanier 1991: 417). Having been raised in a society where marriage and bearing children are the ultimate aims of every woman, Meg’s happiness for her daughter expresses her belief in marriage as the path to finding a fine place in society. Meg is thoroughly immersed in her role as a wife who should take orders from the members of the family, in particular from her husband. A number of times in the play, Meg “kneels . . . in front of Baylor, finishes with his boots and starts pulling off his orange outer pants . . .” (Shepard 1987: 42) or “kneels and pulls Baylor’s socks off...” (Ibid.: 75). Shepard’s insistence on employing the word ‘kneeling down’, demonstrates that what Meg does is not precisely aiding her husband by choice but acting more like a servant. An array of critics have cited her submissiveness in the play as manifestation of Shepard’s misogynistic beliefs (Auerbach 1988: 61), yet Shepard is merely demonstrating what the patriarchal society demands from women as caretakers and wives. Even Meg admits that “the female one needs the other. . . . The male. . . . But the male one doesn’t really need the other. Not the same way” (Shepard 1987: 77). Thus, the passivity and submissiveness in female characters are what society expects from them.

The character of the mother in *True West* is as well simply defined by her relationship with her children. She is a nameless character, depersonalized only as Mom in the play. Like Meg and Lorraine, she still considers her sons as little children. When Austin and Lee are fighting violently in an attempt to kill each other, she simply tells them to “go outside and fight There’s plenty of room outside to fight. You’ve got the whole outdoors to fight in” (Shepard 1981: 57), as if what is occurring is a silly fight between two schoolboys. She does not enjoy an autonomous identity; she is simply understood through her relations with men, for instance her sons. Her concern for the concept of home is illustrated by her decision to leave her sons who are violently fighting with one another. She devastatingly says her condition is “worse than being homeless” (Ibid.: 58). Without children who need her help, the significance of home also loses its meaning. Before even Mom enters the stage, textual evidence illustrates that she is a woman completely obsessed with her domestic duties. At the beginning of the play, Lee warns Austin that Mom does not “like even a single tea leaf in the sink” (Ibid.: 5). She is also extremely attached to her house items. When Lee asks her to give him a number of the authentic plates and silverware, she says “couldn’t you borrow the plastic ones instead? I have plenty of plastic ones” (Ibid.: 56). As soon as a woman takes the role of mother, she loses the opportunity to develop her individuality, and her accomplishments are only limited to her domestic possessions.

While the mother figures in Shepard’s plays are portrayed as weak or passive characters throughout the plays, at the end of the plays they are the active agents who decide to take control of their lives and make a decision to either leave or alter the situation to their own benefit. They eventually come to realize that they are confined to these roles which fail to satisfy them personally, and consequently escape their self-destructive roles as mothers or wives by either fleeing from their houses or going through a metamorphosis.

The moment Sally asks Lorraine “what’re we doin’ in here?” (Shepard 1987: 72) appears to be the epiphanic moment that contributes to Lorraine’s realization of the futility of her role in society as a mother. At the end of the play, Lorraine burns the family house and leaves for Ireland to start a new life. The burning of the house can be understood as destroying the idea of motherhood and family structure. Having just

realized that the men she always desperately tried to take care of are not coming back to her, she tells her daughter:

All the junk in this house that they left behind for me to save. It's all goin'. We'll make us a big bonfire. They never wanted it anyway....That was just a dream of theirs.... They dreamed it all up just to keep me on the hook. Can't believe I fell for it all those years. (Ibid.: 96)

Her desire for beginning a new chapter in her life is illuminated shortly before setting the house on fire, when she confesses to her daughter that what she really wants now is “the wind. One ‘a them fierce, hot, dry ...those winds that wipe everything clean and leave the sky without a cloud.... Wouldn’t that be nice?” (Ibid.: 72). By destroying the house that has made her unable to pursue anything other than being a housewife or mother, she is eradicating her old identity. She does not look upset or terrified about burning the house, which implies her certainty that she is going to be fine without the chains of the past:

*SALLY. Well, we're not gonna' have any place to come back to, Mom.
LORRAINE. Who's comin' back? (Ibid.: 88)*

In contrast to Lorraine, Meg does not physically leave the house or her role as a mother. Her choice, however, seems to be more in line with what Kristeva hopes for in the third generation of feminism. Kristeva (1986: 184) believes that a woman does not need to leave her husband, children, or house behind to find her true identity. She can reconstruct her identity within the household. In Act Three, when Baylor asks Meg to assist him in putting on his socks, she “crosses slowly over to his socks, picks them up off the floor, holds them up in the air” (Shepard 1987: 78). She puts the socks on Baylor’s lap and calmly walks away, leaving Baylor to wear them on his own. She is consciously departing from her role as the servant-housewife. Rather than leaving her family and home, she explores another way to reconstruct her identity without escaping the reality of domestic life. She does not eradicate the role of motherhood from her sense of selfhood, yet attempts to find a balance between being a part of the family and enjoying her autonomy simultaneously. Her subtle change, while living under the same roof with her husband, could be what Kristeva hopes for in the new generation of women who would liberate themselves from the entrapment of patriarchal ideology without sacrificing their roles as mothers and wives. It implies that it is not motherhood per se or family structure that restrains women, but the societal perceptions that place a limit on women’s sense of selfhood. In the last part of the play, she sees the fire from the window, undoubtedly the burning house of Lorraine. Although it is impossible to see the fire, as they live in two different states, the fact that she notices the fire indicates her awareness of Lorraine’s method of handling the situation. Ann C. Hall (1993: 116) believes that “through this image, Shepard implies that the solution to both the problematic heterosexual relationships in the play and the mistreatment of women in particular is to begin anew, to destroy old forms and start again.” Unlike Lorraine, Meg decides to express her beliefs while consciously staying with her family.

Mom in *True West*, similarly to the other mother figures in Shepard’s plays, expresses her discomfort with her undemanding role of motherhood, and strives to find her identity outside the family structure. Even though a number of critics consider her as being “an anemic and emotionless little woman” (DeRose 1992: 112), “a zombie” (Auerbach 1988:

59), or a “flat, remote, [and] lifeless” person (Kleb 1981: 123), her limited space-time in the play is sufficient to point out how women react to the restrictions society imposes on them. While the men in the play drink or fight in an attempt to escape from the reality of their lives, Mom decides to leave the restrictions of her role behind by purposefully leaving her house to go to Alaska. The idea of leaving for Alaska has been mentioned by Shepard before in *Curse of the Starving Class* written in 1978. Wesley, the protagonist of the play, tells his sister that he is going to Alaska for “it’s full of possibilities. It’s undiscovered” (Shepard 1981: 163). Mom’s travel to Alaska suggests that, the same as Wesley, she wants to find the new aspect of herself that has been repressed throughout her life.

5. CONCLUSION

As the symbolic order could only maintain its unitary Law by eliminating women, who have access to jouissance with their desiring bodies, female subjectivity appears to have an extremely limited definition in a patriarchal society. Not unlike male characters, female characters struggle with the identity that the patriarchal society has imposed on them. Therefore, both sexes suffer psychologically in the symbolic order. The female characters in Shepard’s plays are at first predominantly focused on doing tasks that are expected from them: taking care of their families and households, not expressing their needs and wishes, and simply acting as sex objects. Yet throughout the plays, they gradually become aware of the female identity, as defined by symbolic order, and instead decide to follow their personal desire.

The female characters consciously opt for diverse courses of action to redefine their own identities in Shepard’s works. An array of characters choose to leave their abusive partners and decide to travel to another country, hoping to find a community which does not mistreat women or exclude them from society, whereas others leave their partners to begin a new relationship with men willing to accept the necessity of semiotic forces in both themselves and their female partners. Whereas all these measures are in line with Kristeva’s theories of female subjectivity and the means through which women could regain their individuality in the symbolic order, one of the mothers in Shepard’s final play (Meg) achieves what, according to Kristeva, is the best form of reconfiguration of womanhood: staying in the symbolic order and overcoming the obstacles that restrain the identity of a woman by following one’s desire. Shepard appears to have realized the methods of revolting against the repressive patriarchal society, not by leaving it all together, yet by trying to modify the conditions in accordance with one’s needs and desire.

REFERENCES

- Auerbach, D., (1988), “Who was Icarus's Mother? The Powerless Mother Figures in the Plays of Sam Shepard”, In: Kimball King, E. (ed.) *Sam Shepard: A Casebook*, New York, Garland: pp. 53-64.
- Blaser, A., (2013), *Beyond Bedrooms and Kitchens: A Critical Analysis of the Mother Figures in Sam Shepard’s Family Plays*, Master’s Thesis, Colorado University.
- Crum, J.A., (1993), “I Smash the Tools of My Captivity’: The Feminine in Sam Shepard’s *A Lie of the Mind*”, In: Wilcox, L. (ed.) *Rereading Shepard: Contemporary Critical Essays on the Plays of Sam Shepard*, New York, St Martin’s Press: pp. 196-214.
- DeRose, D.J., (1992), *Sam Shepard*, New York, Twayne.
- Gendrich, C., & Hattery A., (2004), “Borderless Academe: “Families in Crisis” and *A Lie of the Mind*”, *Theatre Topics* 14, Vol. 1: pp. 293-315.

- Hall, A.C., (1993), *A Kind of Alaska: Women in the Plays of O'Neill, Pinter, and Shepard*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press.
- Hart, L., (1987), *Sam Shepard's Metaphorical Stages*, New York, Greenwood Press.
- Kane, L., (2002), "Reflections of the Past in *True West* and *A Lie of the Mind*", In: Roudané, M. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: pp. 139-153.
- Kleb, W., (1981), "Worse than Being Homeless: *True West* and the Divided Self", In: Marranca, B. (ed.) *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications: pp. 117-125.
- Kristeva, J., (1986), "About Chinese Women", In: Moi, T. (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press: pp. 139-159.
- Kristeva, J., (1986), "Stabat Mater", In: Moi, T. (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press: pp. 161-186.
- Kristeva, J., (1986), "Women's Time", In: Moi, T. (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press: pp. 188-213.
- Lanier, G.W., (1991), "Two Opposite Animals: Structural Pairing in Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*", *Modern Drama* 34, Vol. 3: pp. 410-421.
- Marranca, B., (ed.) (1981), *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- McDonough, C., (1995), "The Politics of Stage Space: Women and Male Identity in Sam Shepard's Family Plays", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 9, Vol. 2: pp. 65-83.
- Moore, H., (1994), "The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences", In: Gow, P. & Harvey, P. (eds.) *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience*, New York, Routledge: pp. 138-155.
- Shepard, S., (1987), *A Lie of the Mind and the War in Heaven*, New York, New American Library.
- Shepard, S., (1984), *Fool for Love and other Plays*, New York, Bantam Books.
- Shepard, S., (1981), *Sam Shepard: Seven Plays*, New York, Bantam Books.
- Weber, B., (2000, February 27), "Spring Theatre/Visions of America: An Unusual Case of Role Reversals", *New York Times*: pp. 10, 37.
- Woolf, V., (1945), *A Room of One's Own*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

POVRATAK ŽENSKOG SUBJEKTIVITETA: ANALIZA SUBVERZIJE RODNIH RAZLIKA PREMA KRISTEVOJ U TRI DRAME SEMA ŠEPARDA

U radu se analiziraju tri velike drame Sema Šeparda – „Pravi Zapad“, „Ludi od ljubavi“ i „Varka uma“ – s ciljem da se bliže ispituju uzroci potčinjavanja žena. Kao teorijski okvir uzimaju se ideje Julije Kristeve o isključivanju žena iz simboličkog poretka da bi se održala hijerarhija polova kako bi se ilustrovali razlozi za nasilje muškaraca nad ženama. Ispituje se, takođe, borba ženskih likova protiv ugnjetavanja simboličkim poretkom kroz suprotstavljanje zahtevima patrijarhata. Zaključci upućuju na to da ženski likovi u navedenim dramama prevazilaze postavljene okvire ženskog subjektiviteta i materinstva, što je u skladu sa zahtevima za novom interpretacijom ženskosti/materinstva za koju se zalaže i Kristeva. U zaključku se navodi da je, u skladu sa Kristevinom teorijom, najbolja strategija za rušenje patrijarhalne hegemonije rekonstruisanje ženskog subjektiviteta prema željama samih žena.

Ključne reči: ženski subjektivitet, materinstvo, ženskost, patrijarhat, Sem Šepard, Julija Kristeva, simbolički poredak