Meaning Perpetually Deferred: Indeterminacy in Sam Shepard’s Buried Child

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Abstract
This article aims at applying Derrida’s idea on the Sam Shepard’s play, Buried Child. Derrida’s notion of désevénement, consisting of the words to désevénérer, i.e., to disturb the presence of any stable meaning so that meaning becomes a signifier which never reaches a signified. It is forever fallen into the trap of Z, causing the meaning to defer. Moreover, signified is always deferred, and we are just dealing with play of signifiers. This is actually what happens in Shepard’s Buried Child: identity, characters, and significant concepts (Buried Child) for them find an unstable and changing nature. Nothing is determinate about them.

Keywords: Identity; Indeterminacy; Signifier; Signified

1. Introduction

After the World Wars, a sense of skepticism and indeterminacy towards the objective reality and truth, thought to be attained by the heritage of modernity, became an obsession for the thinkers and philosophers questioning the nature of truth. One of these thinkers influenced is Jacques Derrida. With the advent of deconstruction, Derrida’s poststructuralist view
of the world challenges the very institutions of modernity through which objective reality and truth have been taught. Derrida sets against the structuralists’ view (a sign includes a signifier and a signified) of language by developing a coined word, *D* *e* *r* *e* *n* *c* *e* to which he refers as “to differ,” to be unlike and dissimilar in nature and “to defer,” to delay, maintaining that meaning is not present in itself but in the other words around and forever postponed. Meaning is trapped in a play of signifiers, forever delayed. What happens in Derrida’s *D* *e* *r* *e* *n* *c* *e* is best argued by Mark Currie in his *D* *e* *r* *e* *n* *c* *e* that, the *D* *e* *r* *e* *n* *c* *e* signifies that the relationship between the elements of a sentence is always in “motion,” and that the meaning of any sign comes from those elements and words preceding and those following the very sign (2004). Likewise, the text of the play, *Buried Child* by Sam Shepard has the same feature. His characters do not render a signified for their indeterminate personalities, changing from one kind of personality to another one. Therefore, identity, personality and the significant concepts for them become inherently indeterminate as this indeterminacy is a part of their floating nature.

Shepard’s plays have been studied from the point of view of psychoanalysis and Marxist approach, mainly considering the idea of Jacques Lacan and Marxists’ thinkers. Furthermore, his texts have been approached through the lense of cultural studies as well, regarding the idea of Michael Foucault and Greenblatt. How the condition of the family in America has affected the lives of his characters and how the giant of ideology keeps illusion alive in the characters of his plays, leaving them unstable and changeable have been the main concern of the previous researches done on Shepard’s works. However, the concept of indeterminacy regarding Derrida’s *I* has been neglected on which the researcher is going to work. *Sam Shepard: Casebook* (1988) by Kimball King is a collection of essays written on Sam Shepard by scholars identified with major critical appraisals of the author’s works. Kimball King has selected articles suggesting Shepard’s range and complexity, often focusing on his better known achievements, such as his Pulitzer prize-winning *Buried Child* and *True West*, the concern of this study. As a case in point, one of the essays included in the book is “Great Expectations: Language and the Problem of Presence in Sam Shepard’s Writing” by Ann Wilson, which goes over the problem of language not finding stability in Shepard’s plays. Signifiers are mobile and do not signify a fixed meaning. The next one is another article by Bruce J. Mann, “Character Behavior and the Fantastic in Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child*,” which explains the indeterminate and unpredictable behavior
of the characters in this play. Rereading Shepard: Contemporary Critical Essays on the Plays of Sam Shepard (1993) is an important collection of essays by key experts written on Shepard. One of the main issues around which this book is developing is Shepard’s relation to modernism and postmodernism. This book tries to answer some questions related to the discussion of this thesis such as “is he a postmodernist for whom essence is illusory, origins are irretrievable, an inner hermeneutical core of truth has been eclipsed by textuality and language”? The book seeks to bring a diverse range of viewpoints to the subjects, which are the concern of this study including indeterminacy and uncertainty.

The present study seeks to investigate the notion of indeterminacy in the text of the play, Buried Child by Shepard. It might be that many investigations have already been done on the playwright and the play named. However, one of the most significant aspects of these texts their indeterminacy considering Derrida’s Difference has mostly been overlooked. The characters in the play suddenly shift their personality from one type of character to another one, which is entirely different with their earlier conditions. They lose their identity to which they might never return. The researcher intends to illustrate the influence this concept (indeterminacy) might have on this work of Sam Shepard. Through reading this work, one might come across the following questions that the present article is going to answer:

1. Can Shepard’s Buried Child be considered indeterminate and why?
2. How is Derrida’s Difference concerning indeterminacy, operating in the play?

From all poststructuralist or postmodernist notions, the concept of indeterminacy might have been neglected to be paid attention to and applied in literary works. The present article puts its focus of attention on the very concept in order to demonstrate that the text of the play, Buried Child has an indeterminate nature. This study may have a great effect on our own literature since investigating a text and showing it as being indeterminate based on poststructuralist approach regarding Derrida’s idea is not so much well known in Iran and this study may pave the way for the literature-seekers to be encouraged to work on the same concept and approach.

1. Indeterminacy in the Sam Shepard’s Buried Child

Everything is unstable and unfixed about the play, Buried Child and surprisingly, those characters who are not seen in Buried Child fill more
spaces and play significant roles. One of these characters that is not seen but is talked of most is the buried child itself whose father's identity is not apparent. Let us go through the play and see the evidence. It is implied in the play that the mother of the family, Halie, once had an affair with someone unknown and it is not explicit who that man is. However, it has been a secret on which all the members of the family have made a "pact" since then not to divulge and has preferred to remain reticent about it. We are not sure who the man is. In some parts of the story, it can be inferred that the man is Tilden, the old son of the family, with whom the mother might have had an affair. Because if we go through the play we could see that Tilden cherished the child (who is said to have been killed by Dodge and buried somewhere), loved him too much, and spent most of his time with him and he was the one who treats the baby like his own son after Halie gets pregnant out of nowhere. As Dodge fully explains it,

Tilden was the one who knew. Better than any of us. He'd walk for miles with that kid in his arms. Halie let him take it. All nights sometimes. He'd walk all night out there in the pasture with it. Talkin' to it. Singin' to it. Used to hear him singing to it. He'd make up stories. Even when he knew it couldn't understand him. Couldn't understand a word he was saying. We couldn't let the thing like that continue . . . Everything was cancelled out by this one mistake. This one weakness. (Shepard, 1997, p. 124)

As we can see in this part of the play, the child is assumed to be so much loved by Tilden when all the others ignore him, regarding him illegitimate. He always told him stories even though he knew the child would not understand them. He loved him as his child and when Vince, who claims to be his son, enters the house, he even does not recognize him as his son since all his attention is where the child is buried, in the backyard. He goes out several times to find the corpse of the child to at least relieve himself from the pain of his being away from him. The above-told-brief story by Dodge, as argued by Lyons, in which Tilden, having had a sexual affair with the mother, takes the place of the father to the "unnamed son" for a short period and hence reduces the authority of the "patriarch." But, the text removes Tilden from the position of the "father in a different sense (1993). One of these senses is through offering us the other men in the play who can be considered as the possible fathers. One of these men is deemed to be Dodge, the father of the family.

As for Dodge, the same case exists. Dodge's speech is full of contradictions. At some points of the play Tilden say, "I had a son once but
we buried him” (Shepard, 1997, p. 92), suggesting that his mother’s child is also his. Nevertheless, Dodge immediately dismisses such possibility remarking that, “that happened before you were born! Long before! (Shepard, 1997, p. 92). Earlier, Dodge had claimed the child as his own, stating that his “flesh and blood’s buried in the back yard” (Shepard, 1997, p. 77). In the third act, he changes his story once again, “Hailie got pregnant again . . . We had enough boys already. In fact, we hadn’t been sleeping in the same bed for about six years . . . Hailie had this kid. This baby boy. She had it . . . . It wanted to grow up in this family. It wanted to be just like us . . . . It wanted to pretend that I am his father . . . . Tilden was the one who knew better than any of us” (Shepard, 1997, pp. 123-124). Dodge not only rejects that the buried child is his but also makes us suspicious that Tilden might be as a possible father of the child, the idea Dodge had previously denied. Dodge also in some parts of the play says that Bradley is not his son and his child is buried outside. Again, we are not sure that it is Dodge’s child as he himself says that it is buried outside or not as he says that we had not been sleeping for six years when the child was born. Even the identity of Bradley is not clear .Whose son is he? In one scene Hailie says that the house, which has been covered with “corn husks” scattered around by Tilden, should not be “in disarray” because Bradley “can’t stand when one thing is out of place. The slightest thing. You know how he gets” (Shepard, 1997, p. 76) and it is better to be cleaned up before he comes. However, Dodge gets angry and says that he was not born in this house and does not belong in this house and proceeds that Bradley even “is not my flesh and blood! My flesh and blood’s buried outside in the backyard” (Shepard, 1997, p. 77). Is he right or not? If yes, how is it possible to have the child while they had not been sleeping for six years? If no, why does he say the child buried outside is his? Is the buried child Dodge’s? Or is Bradley not really his son? Who is really who in this play? Are we to believe them?

As the play goes on, we see that even father Dewis can be given a chance to be the father of the child. At the beginning of the play when Vince enters the house and asks Dodge for the grandma, Hailie, who has left the house to meet Father Dewis and promised to come back soon, Dodge replies, “don’t be worried about her. She won’t be back for days. She says she’ll be back but she won’t be”. At this time, she starts laughing and ironically says “there is life in the old girl yet!” (Shepard, 1997, pp. 87-88). When she, in mourning clothes, goes out to meet Dewis and is supposed to return soon, she comes back after a day in yellow clothes with roses in her bosom while
both she and Father Dewis are drunk. They are so drunk that they do not first notice any changes in the house, and even do not see Shelly as a stranger. They are talking to each other and are involved in their talk about their sin that they cannot see the chaos in the house. They are talking of a sin they have committed whereby they might be punished. It seems that they are very happy of what they have done. What is it? They might have an illegitimate relationship out of which a child is born and they are preoccupied with the thought that they would be punished by God for their wrongdoings (Shepard, 2005, p. 114):

HALIE: Oh father! That’s terrible! That’s absolutely terrible. Aren’t you afraid of being punished?
DEWIS: Not by the Italians. They’re too busy punishing each other.
HALIE: What about God?
DWEIS: Well, prayerfully, God only hears what he wants to. That’s just between you and me of course. In our heart of hearts we know we’re every bit as wicked as the Catholics.
HALIE: Father, I have never heard you talk like this in Sunday sermon.
DWEIS: Well, I save all my jokes for private company. Pearls before swine you know.

What we have here is just the guess based on the evidence we can perceive in this play. Father Dewis and Halie have spent a night with each other and they are so drunk and giddy that they cannot pay attention to their surroundings. What was she doing in Dewis’s house last night? They seem to have committed a sin in which we might guess that they have had an illegitimate affair, whose consequence might be a child buried now and this sin is between father Dewis and Halie. What else can this sin be? It is indeterminate and not certain. We have to come up based on what we have in the play. In some parts, she asks help from him, converses with him in a very enthusiastic tone, and even puts roses on Dodge’s blanket as if he was dead and after her husband’s death she has already chosen another one as his husband. The child’s identity is floating, or better to be said, that his father’s identity is doubtful and uncertain as a signifier whose signified is not to be determinate as held by Derrida. Again, we are not sure of the father’s identity.

There is an implication that the child may have also been the result of an incestuous relationship between Ansel and Halie who seems to have idolized her youngest son. She deeply remembers how he loved and respected her and how his life was destroyed after marriage to a girl following which he immediately passed away. To her, she was a great basketball player and a
brave soldier. However, Bradley casts doubt on his being a basketball player. It seems that father Dewis confirms what Halie says about the greatness of Ansel. Halie decides to convince, along with father Dewis, the City Council to build a statue in memory of Ansel in order to idolize his existence. She shows how much she has loved him. Is Ansel, who is so much loved by Halie, the father of the buried child? Again, Shepard puts us in an uncertain situation. Who is his father?

We are left in an undecidable situation as to who might be the father of the child Halie had an intercourse with. All mentioned characters are involved simultaneously and can be reckoned as his father and none of them at the same time can be. We are caught in the indeterminacy of the text to find out a signified for the signifier and trapped in the play of signifiers and signs as told and explained by Derrida. The father’s identity of the child changes as soon as we put our finger on it. It is always delayed by having us refer to another sign.

It seems that Dodge has killed the child (according to his confession) by drowning him. He explains to Shelly that they had a very good life. Everything was fine with them. He proceeds that “we were a well established family once. Well established. All the boys were grown. Me and Halie here were pointed toward what looked like the middle part of our life. Everything was settled with us” (Shepard, 1997, p. 123). Then suddenly and out of nowhere, she got pregnant and since then our life was ruined and the born child had been living with us. That child had taken our happiness from us and I could not tolerate such a child to live with and consequently, “I killed it. I drowned it. Just like the runt of a litter. Just drowned it” (Shepard, 1997, p. 124). Since then it has remained a secret among the members of the family. Nevertheless, when Vince, Tilden claimed son, returns and Shelly interferes in their secure home, the place of which they are all afraid someone will enter and disturb their serenity on which the hidden secret has been founded, everything collapses. Although some of them, especially Dodge, is eager to disclose the secret, Shelly paves the way more through questioning them, and makes them confess. However, even in his or her confession, better to say, father’s confession no name or idea has been put forward who the child’s father might be. He just says that Halie suddenly got pregnant without naming the possible father. Father’s identity is not determinate even in their confession. It changes hand as the play progresses and even when we are happy that finally the identity of the child’s father would be determined, nothing comes out. Tilden, Dewis, Dodge, and Ansel
..., who is the father? Comprehensively, the identity of the child “moves restlessly from signifier to signifier along the body of Buried Child, never “finding full and present” destination, just as language itself can never be apprehended as full presence or definite meaning” (Wilcox, 1988, p. 109). Thus, it is undecidable and indeterminate to choose decidedly, which one is the true father among them while all at the same time can be candidates for being the real father. Both ways the text can be interpreted and if we come upon to interpret each as the father of the child each interpretation causes another interpretation to emerge and that interpretation by itself will produce another interpretation. It increases different layers of meaning to come up.

Another interesting phenomenon occurring in this play is when Vine (Tilden claimed son) with his girl friend Shelly on the way to New Mexico stops by to visit his grandparents. When they enter the house, no one recognizes Vine. He calls Dodge his grandfather but Dodge denies that he is his grandson. He says that he does not know anybody by that name (Shepard, 1997, p. 89):

DODGE: Who are you to expect everything to be different? Who are you supposed to be?
VINE: I'm Vince! Your Grandson!
DODGE: Vince. My Grandson.
VINE: Tilden's son.
DODGE: Tilden's son, Vince.
VINE: You haven't seen me for a long time.
DODGE: When was the last time?
VINE: I don't remember.
DODGE: You don't remember?
VINE: No.
DODGE: You don't remember. How am I supposed to remember if you don't remember.

Dodge does not know Vince. He claims to be Dodge’s Grandson but he even does not know him and is asked by Dodge their last meeting, he himself does not remember the day. Both are acting in an uncertain way. Shelly says to Vince, “this isn’t going to work out” and lets go out because “he doesn’t even know who you are.” Nevertheless, Vince does not listen and continues calling Dodge his grandfather, virtually making him mad and even Shelly again becomes doubtful about whether they have come to the right house? Shelly doubts and says that they perhaps have come to the wrong house. Dodge persistently rejects to have a Grandson. However, Vince holds that this is the right house and this is my Grandfather. Later on, Tilden comes back from the yard with vegetables in his hand, claiming to
have been there. Nevertheless, it seems that even Tilden does not see him. Vince several times calls him “dad?,” and says, “it’s Vince. I’m Vince.” He does not recognize him as his son and proceeds that once he had a child but he is dead now buried under the earth.

Vince is so much shocked and he tries everything to attract Tilden’s attention that he is his son but he does not react as if he is nothing to them. Vince asks, “how could they not recognize me! How in the hell could they not recognize me! I’m their son” and Dodge as watching TV answers, “you’re no son of mine. I’ve had sons in my time and you’re not one of ‘em” (Shepard, 1997, p. 97). Neither Dodge nor Tilden recognizes him as a member of the family. He claims Dodge his grandfather and Tilden his father but they refuse to know him. His identity is indeterminate and unstable. Even readers of the play are shocked who he is. Once in the play he calls Tilden his father, Tilden is surprised to be called father and answered, “me?” After having been disappointed at being recognized by the family, Vince goes out to buy Dodge drinks in order to catch his attention. After a day he comes back drunk and unstable. He has gone crazy and now he does not recognize himself as no one recognized him previously. They are even afraid of him and silent for a while until Shelly breaks the silence and says (Shepard, 1997, pp. 125-126):

**SHELLY:** (after silence) Vince?
**VINCE:** Who? What? Vince who? Who’s that in there?
**VINCE:** (looking in at DODGE) What? Who is that?
**DODGE:** It’s me! Your Grandfather! Don’t play stupid with me! Where’s my two backs!
**HALIE:** Vincent? Is that you, Vincent?
**VINCE:** (from porch) Vincent who? Who is this! Who are you people?

He does not know anybody now. He even does not know Shelly, his girl friend. He completely forgot what had happened yesterday when he got two bucks in order to buy Dodge drinks. Even when he is recognized by Halie, he does not know anybody now. He has gone completely mad. He has forgotten his own identity. Who is he now? He was at the beginning Vince but now he does not recognize himself. His identity is like a signifier that even he is at a loss to control and put a name or signified (one single stable meaning) on it since his identity is floating. It seems that his identity is like a metaphor changing the meaning and making us unable to choose one single meaning for it.
Another indeterminate thing about Vince and his identity is that, as is
told, Vince might be Tilden’s son but it is not clear who his mother is
because Tilden does not have any child. As Orr (1992) points, “we might
also assert another possibility that Vince himself is the buried “child” since
the identity of his absent mother is never explained” (p. 142). We might
guess that it may be Halie. In addition, Vince may be that buried child who
has returned from the journey and that is why no one recognizes him as
Tilden’s child but Halie, because he is an illegitimate son of Tilden and it is
a secret, which should not be divulged. Therefore, they are not to recognize
him. Just Halie who might be his mother, recognizes him. Even Shepard
himself never gives us a clue that who is who in this play and leaves us with
a series of indeterminate and unreliable stories. Is Vince the claimed buried
child? Is he Tilden’s son? Is Halie his mother? If not, who is his mother
then? Does Tilden have a wife? Everything is uncertain and vague.

At the beginning of the play, we hear Halie upstairs talking about her
dead son, Ansel, who after Tilden “turned out to be so much troubled.” She
puts all her “hopes on Ansel” (Shepard, 1997, p.73). She thought that Ansel
would become an all American because he was very smart and could earn a
lot money and take care of them if he had not married a catholic girl. She
could be alive now and be an all American and bring glory for his country.
She has already come down and is going to meet father Dewis and his son
Ansel in order to convince the city council to build a statue of Ansel with a
basketball in one hand and a rifle in the other hand because as the mother
says and father Dewis agrees, he was a great basketball player and soldier
but he died on his honeymoon in a motel room and she continues praising
him.

Even here Halie is so much obsessed about Ansel that brings the name of
Father Dewis to emphasize her speech and she herself seems to have been so
much in doubt about her own talk. This is actually, what they believe Ansel
to be but as the play goes on, Bradley puts doubt on the existence of Ansel as
a basketball player. He says, he never played basketball. Even so, she gets
angry and retorts that she was a great basketball player and played better
than anyone else, and even father Dewis affirms what she says. The
following is what happens between them when she is talking of putting up a
statue for Ansel to Dodge but Braxle interferes (Shepard, 1997, pp. 116-
117):

HALIE: (to DODGE) Ansel’s is getting a statue, Dodge. Did you know that? Not a
plaque but a real live statue. A full bronze. Tip to toe. A basketball in one
hand and a rifle in the other.
BRADLEY: (his back to HALIE) He never played basketball!
HALIE: You shut up, Bradley! You shut up about Ansel! Ansel played basketball better than anyone! And you know it! He was an all-American! There is no reason to take the glory from others.
Dewis: I remember Ansel.
HALIE: Of course! You remember. You remember how he could play.
(Shakes toward SHELLY) Of course, nowadays they play a different brand of basketball. More vicious. Isn’t that right, dear?
SHELLY: I don’t know.

We are left confused about the identity and personality of Ansel. Was he a basketball player? Are we to believe Bradley or Halie? His being and what he did when he was alive are in doubt that even Shelly gets dizzy of the situation and what is going on in the play. His identity is in doubt and floating. In the play just Halie and Father Dewis talk about Ansel and his successful life both as a soldier and basketball player with which Bradley disagrees and rejects the idea of Ansel ever being a basketball player. Not surprisingly, as is it extracted from the text, as Wilson says, Buried Child, on its simplest level is an exploration of identity in which the characters finally remain unidentified (1998). Or As Mann (1988) maintains, “We are not able to recognize them ……, and this exacerbates our feeling of uncertainty and indeterminacy of the Buried Child” (p. 92).

2. Buried Child as a Mobile Signifier

Tilden once had a strong love toward the child who now is dead. This detachment from the child has made him unstable and bewildered. He searches for the child in the backyard where he assumes the child is buried. At the beginning of the play, he is absent and Dodge and Halie are very worried about his whereabouts and where he might have gone. They are also well aware of Tilden’s affiliation with the dead child and that after his death he has undergone a drastic change. He has once been caught up for his behavior and put into prison. He does not have a stable character after that. We realize that his being makes them worried because they also fear that he finds out the place of the buried child. However, the presence of this child is delayed and forever postponed until the end that we have the bones of a child not the living body of it. He does not find the real child but a dead body who may or may not be the wanted child. During the course of the play, we see that his presence (child) is always delayed. Even if we take the yard as the place of the hidden secret, until the end it is not revealed, which is the identity of the child. Tilden’s first appearance in the play is with arms
loaded with corn that Dodge gets shocked and “goes into a violent, spasmodic coughing attack as TILDEN enters from stage left, his arms loaded with fresh ears of corn.” Tilden “stops center stage with the ears of corn in his arms and just stares at Dodge until he slowly finishes his coughing attack. Dodge looks up at him slowly. He stares at the corn. Long pause as they watch each other” (Shepard, 1997, p. 69). When he is asked about the place he had picked up the corn, he says: “in the back yard”. Dodge and Halie are shocked and say that from 1957 on, they have not planted any corn. Moreover, Halie, who is now upstairs, says that she does not see any corn out in the backyard. However, Tilden insists that there is corn. Halie comes down and sees the corn scattered everywhere and condemns Tilden of whether having stolen the corn or lied about it. Dodge defends Tilden that he does not lie. Tilden neither has stolen the corn nor has lied about it as he himself says because he is so much afraid of being kicked out. The corn is a “mystery” to him. This “mystery” could be the buried child whom Tilden is after. Accordingly, the corn is to be symbolized as the buried child. When he is after corn, which is a mystery to him, he is, in fact, after the child for whom he is searching but instead finds the corn, which is the emblem of the child. It was not the child but the corn. Then he continues his search for the child. For the second time, he goes out and comes back with lots of carrots in his hand and he gets them to Shelly to peel them off. They are again surprised that where he has brought the carrots from. He has been looking for the child in the backyard. However, this time carrot has come out instead of the child. Carrot becomes the symbol of the identity of the child. As Lippman (1984) holds that “the progressions of the earth” and whatever comes out of it that Tilden actually “carries in his arm reflects” the movement of the “search for the identity of the child” (p. 77). The appearance of the child is delayed this time as well. This time, Tilden suddenly “walks on from stage left just as he did before, his arms are full of carrots. DODGE, VINCE and SHELLY stop suddenly when they see him. They all stare at TILDEN as he crosses slowly center stage with the carrots and stops. DODGE sits on the sofa exhausted” (Shepard, 1997 p. 91). We see sign substitution and deferment of signified and meaning. First Tilden brings corn which is substituted for carrot. Then there are potatoes and other vegetables... and in the end, we have the bones of the child. Signs refer to each other and substitute each other. These signs change their place and sit on the other ones. They always defer meaning and we are not sure what they refer to. Moreover, we are caught up in a figurative system of language in which one thing stands for something else. First, we have corn, which stands
for child as supported by the fact that Tilden is searching for the child. We are dealing with a metaphorical system in which one thing stands for something else. The others, each in turn, change their places and substitute for something else. We have play of signs and signifiers in which meaning is constantly deferred without sitting on a signified. It flies the moment the signifier decides to sit on a signified since it refers to another signifier and continues forever. As Wilson in her essay, Great Expectations: Language and The Problem of Presence in Sam Shepard’s Writing states about the importance of sign in Shepard’s plays that, “the project of making fully present the signified which is common to Shepard, is marked by failure from the outset because the sign protects the signified as the ideal beyond knowledge. Put simply, once the signified is known, it ceases to be the signified because it is now the signifier “standing for something else” (1998).

This movement of vegetables in the play can be read as an exchange of meaning among signs. Vegetables become a metaphor for the presence of the child which never ends. Signified is always deferred. Every vegetable Tilden brings to the play depicts a chain of sign substitution as mentioned earlier. The movement of these vegetables and whatever has been brought up to the play among the characters can be read as an exchange of meaning since these vegetables has a special meaning for each person. For Tilden they have a metaphoric meaning, which suggests the existence of the buried child. For Shelly, they have a literal meaning as the things they are, carrot to be peeled off. For mother, they are a secret, which must not be revealed to taint her character. For father, they are also a secret but he is indifferent to it. He does not care if it will be revealed. Meaning is caught up in a chain of sign substitution. For each person vegetable has a special meaning and is constantly deferred to pinpoint the exact meaning and its meaning changes as soon as it has passed down to the other character.

3. Conclusion

At the end it is concluded that the text of the play of Buried Child has an indeterminate nature in which the characters of the play fall into Difference of meaning changing their personality from one type of personality to another one and it continues without finding a definite meaning for their floating signifier (identity). We are just facing with the play of signifiers which are forever floating. Likewise, the identity of the characters in Buried Child is never stable and fixed. As Biggsy (2004) says, “the characters in the plays of Shepard are not stable and cannot be easily defined. Even when
Shepard speaks of his characters, he believes that they are not to be fixed and this is what makes his characters on the move” (p. 168).

References


