



RESEARCH PAPER

**Bridging the Gap between Past and Present: Post-War Effects and Reconciliation in Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article is an attempt to analyze how traumatic experiences of the past shape the materiality of human conditions in the present in Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976). Tate's family thinks that they're trapped in a curse that causes emotional, financial, and psychological disturbances. In reality, they are unaware of the fact that the curse is a traumatic memory of Weston. Weston as a father and husband remain detached, alienated, and aloof from his entire family. He becomes violent when the war memories remind him of his physical injury that caused impotency. He thinks that he has lost all of his power as a husband, father (upholding patriarchal beliefs), and war veteran. The text, *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) has been analyzed through the theoretical lens of *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) by Judith Lewis Herman. The theory states the stages of recovery from a traumatized past. Also, how the traumatic incidents shatter the concept of a happy family; if not forgotten.

**KEYWORDS** Damages, Family, Traumatic, Violent, War

**Introduction**

The idea of 'Curse' goes back to the Greeks who strongly believed in being cursed by the gods as a result of their evil deeds or sins. Some examples of curses can be found in Greek tragedies. In *Antigone* (441 BC), the power of the curse pervades both the house and the characters' innards. The brooding presence of the curse in the house and the ways the characters are related to it has an enormous dramatic effect in respect of the characters' psychologies. In *The House of Atreus* (2005), there is a hereditary curse that engulfs families for several generations with a vicious cycle of murder and revenge.

In *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), the curse doesn't dwell in the house neither the family is cursed by the gods. It's just a traumatic memory that engulfs Tate's family. A dysfunctional family, as they struggle amongst themselves for food, freedom, and meaning in their run-down lives. The family members always think that they are trapped in a never-ending curse. Another reason for the instability of Tate's family is the main fatherly figure and war veteran, Weston. Weston remains lost in the traumatic memories of the war and behaves abnormally with his family members. Throughout the play, aggression and violence are displayed by him. Being a father, he fails to be a role model for his son Wesley, he remains drunk and doesn't open new doors for his children. This is revealed at the beginning of the play when Weston breaks down the door of the house whereas Wesley tries to fix it back. At the beginning of the play, he breaks the door of the house and his son is seen struggling to fix it. This act reveals Weston's reluctance to look forward to the future. It also shows he doesn't want his kids to have any prospects.

As suggested by the title of the play, the curse doesn't dwell in the house but inside the minds of members. The characters feel trapped. According to the family members, the 'inherited' curse unites them but still, they remain fragmented emotionally and psychologically. They feel insecure, prefer to be isolated and estranged from each other, and find no release from the curse. During an argument about the starving class and if they are a part of it, Wesley urinates on Emma's posters causing her to storm off, threatening to take the horse and run away. Judith Lewis Herman (1992) defines the consequences of traumatic memories which "destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation" (p. 37). It's the 'curse' of man's doing in the past which reoccurs in present and generates insecurities. Therefore, the family members are not able to withstand the destructive forces and think that they cannot break the curse.

## **Literature Review**

The idea of shattered families and escape from past memories have been found in Eugene O'Neil's *Long day's Journey into Night* (1956). O'Neil's character, Mary Tyrone shows unwillingness to come out of traumatic memories, "The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us".

On the contrary, Tennessee Williams in *A Street Car named Desire* (1947) discusses Blanche as a traumatic character who is in search of direction and empathy from others just to get rid of her past. Similar views have been shared by McDonnell (2016) with reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) where "Sethe attempts to live in a fantasy where her horrifying experiences never happened; rather than act or engage, Sethe holes herself up alone in her house with a sublimated representative of the Real, of her trauma; rather than seeking the aid of the community, Sethe isolates herself in her house, cutting ties even with the only remaining member of her family." (p. 12). Hence, all of the characters prefer to be escapists rather than realists.

Cathy Caruth (1996) holds the belief that traumatic memories are precisely literal and unchanging. It depends on the will of a person if he wants to get out of those memories. Sometimes such people remain rigid in their views and do not will to change themselves.

In another study, McNally (2003) observes reaction of traumatic memories, "precisely literal precisely literal were, the more likely the imagery exaggerated the severity of what had actually happened" (as cited in Horton 2010). In other words, the person relives the memory in different forms. The more it feels real, the more it is likely is to depart from the historical event.

Another study finds by Wilson (1987) comments on the similar point that "persons with PTSD are sometimes quick to react with irritability, hostility, anger, cynicism, confrontation, and anxious agitation at annoying circumstances" (p. 27). This can be clearly seen in the character of Weston in *Curse of the starving Class* (1976) where he acts in a violent way.

Alder (2013) comments on the major distortion of emotional ties within families is "with the failure of fathers, from some warped notion of masculinity to provide emotional sustenance for their families. Hung upon money, power, success, they are afraid or unable to say, let alone show, that they love..." (p. 409). Somewhere Weston's love lies for his family but being stuck in turmoil, he couldn't realize his responsibilities being a father.

## **Material and Methods**

This research employs a qualitative research design and analytical in nature keeping in view the textual discussions. Using an inductive approach, this study takes the investigation through the lens of Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) with reference to the play *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976). The study is carried out using descriptive method to highlight the plight of Shepard's traumatic characters. Explanatory method of data analysis has been used to explain the complex post-traumatic effects and the

stages of healing in the play. All the psychological interpretations have been employed with reference to textual discussions. Therefore, the focus of this study is more on the subjective approach rather than clinical.

## **Results and Discussion**

*Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) is the first play from Shepard's 'family trilogy' revolves around the postwar boom. It narrates the background of WWII and the economic expansion when the families were greatly affected psychologically and financially. Also, the play depicts the postwar human conditions characterized by alienation and traumatic remembering of the past. Ultimately, the situation led Tate's family towards deterioration. *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) is the representation of familial ties in a more expanded way. Shepard presents a family faced with disintegration. Things are falling apart in the private sphere of the lives of the character. It shows detached connections within a family and a house where parental figures are unable to nurture their children. Everything becomes sterile and fruitless.

Shepard gives an overview of the entrapment of the characters through the description of the house having a distorted view without any doors and walls. It seems like a place of confinement that is covered by a curse according to the family members. By this description, Shepard highlights the important role of family members in building and maintaining the house but the play starts with a broken door. Emotional unavailability and past traumas make the family members think that they're a part of the starving class. Tate's house is an example where parental figures feel estranged and isolated as they live in delusions.

Weston's violent attacks are the reflection of his past which he carries along with himself. His family considers him a 'maniac' but he realizes that he cannot move on until or unless he leaves it behind. Weston feels "good to be numb" (Shepard, 1976, p.170) and Ella feels like a foreigner in her own house. They don't own the house but live in it as if they are visitors. Weston as an outrageous man remains "absent from his home ninety percent of the time" (Shepard, 1976, p. 178) and his presence is only felt during his violent attacks. This statement is further supported in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), "If the perpetrator of the trauma is a family member, home may be the most unsafe place" (Herman, 1992, p. 114). The home turns out to be an unsafe place not only for Weston but for his children as well. The children, Emma and Wesley try to pull back the strings of familial ties. In an attempt to sell and destruct their land and house, Ella and Weston create a barren and deserted world that is deprived of peace and comfort. Instead of creating harmony in their house Ella and Weston try to get rid of the house either by trying to sell it or running away from it.

The house becomes a place having psychological, emotional, and spiritual deformities. In her attempts to escape from the land, Ella falls into trap of Taylor's tricks. Ella is cheated by Taylor; Emma follows the perfect self-employment and later on involves herself in crime, Weston dreams about a new life in Mexico. As he says, "That's where everyone escapes to...I could go down there and get lost" (Shepard, 1976, p.194). Instead of accepting reality, all the family members try to escape from the curse. Ella keeps away her children from confronting reality and makes them accept that they're engulfed in a curse from which they can't get out. This can be seen with the reference to the clothes they wear. Emma's new dress represents her new prospects but Ella stops her from doing it by saying "go and change your clothes" (148). This clearly shows that she's been playing a major role in diminishing the prospects of her children by plotting seeds of curse into their minds.

Ella, a mother, and a wife has been seen showing devotion toward her family. She blames everything on the curse. Her responsibility is to keep the family united instead of urging them to live in isolation. Ella states "You know what this is? It's a curse. I can feel...It's tiny little swimming things just making up their minds without us. Plotting in the womb. Before that even, in the air... we pass it on. We inherit it. And pass it down. Just goes on and

on like that. Without us" (Shepard, 1976, p.174). In the play, the curse is presented as an abstract force that invades the entire house. Even if Emma thinks about her plans, she's rebuked by her mother who claims that she is infected with the curse. Ella thinks that Emma's independency and self-definition are the results of that curse. But that was all Ella's unempathetic behavior and sense of disconnection with her children.

The family is dysfunctional and they lack affection and love. No character has ever shown concern for each other. This could be an indication of the repression which they had been enduring for so long. They think this 'curse' is inherited after seeing all the violence and desperation in the house. They become more destructive towards everything. Wesley brings an infected lamb with Maggots to the house which he thinks is cursed as the family members and the house. As Wesley talks to the lamb, "you're skinny and starving but it makes no difference because someone's starving more than you" (Shepard, 1976, p. 156). This shows the mindset of the family that how seeing a helpless lamb suffering brings satisfaction to them. They think that they are not the only ones who are suffering but others too.

### **Weston's Traumatic Memory**

Shepard's plays progress from a depressed phase to the revelation of a violent past. Weston thinks that he has gotten violence from his forefathers therefore, he is unable to resolve the familial issues. In reality, he doesn't realize that his bleak past is the major cause of his mental disturbance. He is portrayed as an irresponsible father of his children, Emma and Wesley, and the one who is "psychologically and emotionally unfit to be responsible for his actions" (Shepard, 1976, p.178). Weston's figure represents the return of a man from his violent past as his son gives a description of him in the beginning, "Foot kicking door. Man's voice. Dad's voice...wood splitting...bottle crashing...glass breaking...fist through the door. Man cursing. Man gone insane. Head smashing. Man yelling. Man throwing wood. ...Planes still hanging. (Shepard, 1976, p.138). Having worked as a war pilot, he tends to lose his capacity for love and affection. Manguen defines this as 'moral injury' which is "an act of serious transgression that leads to serious inner conflict because the experience is at odds with core ethical and moral beliefs" (1). As the story progresses, he becomes more exploitative and non-sociable till he gets back to his real place by the end, to where he truly belongs.

Weston's disturbed mental state and entrapment in trauma have been shown through the image of a lamb with infected maggots. The presence of the lamb is unbearable for Ella because it is infected with Maggots. She doesn't want the infected lamb in the house because the lamb reminds her of Weston's condition. The same he is infected with the traumatic memory. Weston ignores all the familial responsibilities due to psychological disturbance. Herman (1992) writes, "In a vicious cycle, combat veterans with unsupportive families appear to be at high risk for persistent post-traumatic symptoms, and those who have post-traumatic stress disorder may further alienate their families" (p. 46). Being a wife, Ella becomes unsupportive when it comes to resolving the psychological conflicts of her husband with empathy. She remembers his violent behaviors and says that he isn't able to look after his family, therefore, leaving him alone in psychological turmoil.

The broken door of the house symbolizes not only chaos and broken relationships but also a destroyed present. Weston who is supposed to be the protector of the house, not the destroyer; acts like an intruder. He destroys the house not only physically as well as emotionally without fulfilling his responsibilities. Shepard has unfolded the war background of Weston through the initial monologue of his son Wesley. "I was lying there on my back...I could feel this country like it was part of my bones...Even tractors sitting in the wetness, waiting for the sun to come up. I was looking at the ceiling at all my model airplanes hanging by all their thin metal wires" (Shepard, 1976, p.137). This can be an indication that Shepard has given a voice (through Wesley) to the voiceless (Weston) because Weston lives a fragmented life. Further, he thinks that his father's nature would be germinated within him as mentioned in a reference, "And every time I put one thing on, it seemed like a part of him was

growing on me. I could feel him taking over me" (Shepard, 1976, p.196). He tries to carry his old self of Weston by wearing his old clothes. This relates to the two aspects of Wesley. Firstly, being a son, he tries to take up the responsibilities of his father as shown in the play where Wesley fixes the damaged door. Secondly, he also thinks that the curse won't be overcome because the outrageous behavior of his father had a great impact on him.

Wesley waits for the return of his father not from a place but a traumatic past. It also presents that Wesley has insecurities regarding his family. As he thinks that like his father, he'll be a failure. He describes this as "I saw myself infected with it. I saw me carrying it around. His poison is in my body... I didn't ask for it but I got it" (Shepard 167). Emma and Wesley have been shown to follow the same pattern as their father. The house lacks the presence of a mother and father. Such absence allows different strangers to enter and invade the house.

Weston recalls the repressed war memories as "I was in the war. I know how to kill. I was over there...I've done it before. You just make an adjustment. You convince yourself it's alright. That's all. It's easy. You just slaughter them" (Shepard, 1976, p. 170). He is unadjustable within his family because of the psychological effects that war has left upon him. The bloodshed and atrocities that he witnessed or committed or if he suffered at war still haunt him. Herman (1992) refers to it as 'revenge fantasy' which is "a mirror image of the traumatic memory, in which the roles of perpetrator and victim are reversed" (p. 135). This makes a person revengeful instead of sympathetic. He tries to take revenge on each one of the people around him because he has suffered in his time just like Weston does.

Weston remains 'drunk' just to escape from the traumatic experiences and prefers to be in a 'numb' state. As alcohol is an integral part of Shepard's writings that "quenches only the desire to forget, avoid and appears to symbolize a lack of communion. Alcohol also tends to blur the boundary between the real and the dream" (Flath, 2014, p. 34). This has been shown in the beginning through the conversation between Ella and Wesley, "he's been drinking that much? Not that. His skin" (Shepard, 1976, p.136). By observing the behavior of veterans, Herman (1992) defines excessive use of alcohol as "an attempt to obliterate their growing sense of helplessness and terror" (p. 32). Behind the outrageous behavior of Weston, there lies his weaknesses and insecurities which he tries to overcome by maintaining a violent image. Shepard portrays how the real self is concealed by a fabricated self. Weston hides all of his insecurities in a hard shell. This might lead to the notion that no one should question Weston about his past.

Weston suffers from detachment, estrangement, and rootlessness which ultimately lead to damage to the family but he is unable to sense all that. He isn't even able to differentiate the interior and exterior of the house, "Is this the inside or the outside ... Even with the door out it's still the inside (to the lamb)" (Shepard, 1976, p. 156).

Through the opening and closing of the refrigerator's door, Shepard has revealed not only the deprivation of food but also the deprivation of love and care. The refrigerator plays a major role from the start till the end and all the characters have been shown depending on it. Therefore, it becomes a fifth member of the family who witnesses the devastation, chaos, and vulnerability of the family members. Instead of sharing with each other, they talk to the refrigerator when it comes to pouring out feelings. This clearly shows the failure of the family to unite. The family members solely depend on the refrigerator despite having emotional bonds because the refrigerator doesn't reply to them back. They speak to it whatever they want instead of confronting family members. As highlighted at several points, their general conversation leads to heated arguments which the family tries to escape. The refrigerator has been used as a metaphor for Weston as well. Being the owner and breadwinner of the house, he has to bring food and feed his family. The act of looking over and over again in the empty refrigerator refers to the absence of a father as they look for their breadwinner.

Weston doesn't strive to come out from the trauma as he prefers to live in fragmented phases. Emma (Weston's daughter) is the one who doesn't want to acknowledge the curse as she says, "We don't belong to the starving class! There is a starving class of people, and we are not part of it!" (Shepard, 1976, p. 141). The family members are not ready to confront the bleak realities of their financial condition. They have been seen as escapists instead of realists.

### **Remembering and Mourning: "Through the Flesh and Blood"**

Weston in *Curse of the Starving Class* is the epitome of the western male who remains detached, alienated, and aloof from his entire family. Weston's long ambiguous monologue unfolds his tragedy. "Something brought me straight up off the ground and I started yelling my head off... Every time I cut a lamb, I'd throw those balls up on top a' the shed roof. And every time he'd come down like a cannonball express on that roof. And every time I got that feeling" (Shepard, 1976, p. 183). The war hasn't only affected him psychologically but physically as well. As several times in the play, he talks about 'manhood'. His physical damage has been unfolded through the reference of an Eagle who comes down for the 'fresh remnants of manlihood'. Herman (1992) mentions one of the reasons that can lead to successful healing is only if victims "discover some meaning in their experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy" (p. 53). In the case of Weston, he doesn't find a way out of his tragedy, in fact, he pours out his suppression. As Wilson reflects on this by stating that "under conditions of stress, the organism energizes itself to cope with the need or perception to react in a situation of threat or danger that poses a challenge to well-being, coping resources, and adaptation." (13).

Every time Weston recalls that story, he is struck by the chilling memories of war as if he was still there. The flashbacks make him frustrated and outrageous. Instead of accepting reality and taking over his responsibilities as the breadwinner, he commits violent acts. His violent behaviors and his attempts to conceal his weaknesses show how he upholds patriarchal beliefs. Violent acts of Weston reveal his act of revenge as well. To forgive others, first, he needs to forgive himself. Herman (1992) adds to this notion,

Since revenge can never change or compensate for the harm that was done. People who commit acts of revenge, such as combat veterans who commit atrocities, do not succeed in getting rid of their post-traumatic symptoms; rather, they seem to suffer the most severe and intractable disturbances (p. 135).

Herman (1992) suggests reconstruction of repressed memories relies on attention, trust, and facilitation from other people. Victims should be encouraged to talk about their dreams, struggles, and conflicts before the traumatic events. In the case of Weston, he doesn't get attention from his family members, and most of the time he's ignored. Further, trust issues and insecurities have been shown the root cause of not recovering. This result in different defense mechanisms; repression and displacement as opted by Weston.

Re-telling the past demands the presence of a person that Weston lacks. Weston can see his reflection in the lamb that is infected with maggots. There could be a possibility that the infected lamb made him realize his spiritual demise. As this can be clearly seen within his monologue to the lamb at the beginning of the third act, "Maggots go away if they're properly attended to. If you got someone around who can take the time. Who can recognize the signs?" (182). He realizes that his family is non-cooperative. The way his family treated the lamb he will be treated the same way. And if he won't be changing himself then he'll be dead one day just like the lamb. This state has been identified in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), "Returning soldiers have always been exquisitely sensitive to the degree of support they encounter at home" (Herman, 1992, p. 51). Weston's condition is as same as the infected lamb in the house. His monologue indicates that he needs affection and care from the side of the family so that his present life won't be infected with 'maggots' (the curse of his past) anymore. Weston creates his own space by talking to the dead lamb because "When trust is lost, traumatized people feel

that they belong more to the dead than to the living" (37). Shepard symbolized his characters with animals like Eagle, cats, Lamb, etc. because they had animal-like characteristics instead of acknowledging themselves as human beings. According to Maguen (2012) atrocities are most associated with re-experiencing and avoidance, rather than with hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD, which follows logically given that morally injurious events are more guilt and shame-based than fear-based" (p. 2).

By recalling the entire incident and repressed memories, Weston realizes that it's more than mourning. His dialogue, "I got the new door up" (Shepard, 1976, p. 182) highlights the notion of re-entering the past and along with that entering a new horizon with a better future. He tells Wesley that he has decided to stay within the house. His act of walking around the house and in the orchard shows his side of realizing his responsibilities being the 'owner' of the house and reconciling with the present. Shepard's writing holds up ambivalent situations in the way he draws the sketches of everything. Weston's feeling of 'owner' holds a double connotation. Not only, Weston disowns the house by the thought of selling it but disowns his family and its responsibilities too. Recalling the events made Weston realize that he knows everyone "through flesh and blood...it was good to be connected by blood and we could never escape that" (Shepard, 1976, p.186) and he was escaping for so long.

Further, he brings the artichokes into the house by saying, "Is everybody hoping for a miracle? ...there're no more miracles! It's only me! Mr. Slave labor himself comes home to replenish the empty larder!" (Shepard, 1976, p. 157). At the first moment, Weston was more concerned with searching for another piece of land instead of bringing food for his family. His self-realization makes him aware of his responsibilities as a father and he was carrying along his past as a war veteran not as a father. Herman (1992) suggests that each victim has to find his "own way to restore sense of connection with the wider community" (p. 53). In the case of Weston, he couldn't reconnect himself with the community and his family that he lost due to war. Even he admits before Wesley after self-realization that he "ignored some of the chores around the place...But I brought you some artichokes back, didn't I...You couldn't be all that starving! We're not that bad off" (Shepard, 1976, p.192). The act of bringing artichokes to the house was an act of compensation for being absent from all the responsibilities and not providing his family with the necessities and love. Therefore, Weston opted for a constructive defense mechanism; sublimation by redirecting his energy from negative impulses and turning them into productive use by doing household chores and bringing food to the house.

As mentioned earlier, Weston's psychological disturbance refers to the reversed role or 'mirror image' in which a person becomes vulnerable instead of being down to earth. Herman (1992) sheds light on the difference between those veterans who didn't develop post-traumatic stress. Less traumatic stress has been found in those veterans who "approached the war as a dangerous challenge to be met effectively while trying to stay alive, rather than as an opportunity to prove their manhood or a situation of helpless victimization" (p. 42). This can be analyzed through behavior and coping strategies during the war. Weston suffered because he was trying to prove his 'manlihood' by violent attacks and recalling violent war stories. He could have been less damaged if he dared to face failures or wounds.

The same reference has been found in the lines where Weston reconciles with the past. "That's the trouble with too much comfort. Makes you forget where you come from you're going into a trance that you'll never come back from. Your body's being mesmerized. You go into a coma" (Shepard, 1976, p. 190). This refers to the reconstruction of memory which is considered to be an integral part of the healing process. Victims always remain 'dissociative' if they never try to unfold the past which Herman (1992) terms as 'pre-narrative'. She further adds to it,

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory,

and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery (p. 1).

Weston recalls his lost memories through the 'flesh and blood' which clearly states all the atrocities he witnessed at war. But later on, he realizes that this is not something that he has to carry along with himself. If he has suffered at a certain period, then all of the things aren't supposed to be implemented upon his family members. This leads him to self-realization that unintentionally he was making his family suffer the same as he has been going through or still going on.

### **Reconnecting with the Present: "I am Reborn"**

*Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) highlights the hope that lies within the reintegration of familial bonds. Weston emerges with a new self by reconciling with the past. The notion of being 'reborn' refers to the inner strength of a man. It always lies within him instead of looking for it somewhere else. Franzen (2008) observes that depression has been found in individuals who have sleep disorders. Weston was suffering from insomnia so he decides to fall asleep on a 'hard table', "I'm sleeping! I'm sleeping right here. I'm falling away" (Shepard, 1976, p.171). That's what he needed for so long because "chronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of physical calm or comfort. Over time, they perceive their bodies as having turned against them. They begin to complain, not only of insomnia and agitation" (Herman, 1992, p. 62). Weston explains how a 'hard table' enabled a sense of self within him.

Shepard symbolizes the coping strategy and state of contentment with the reference of a 'hard table.' The hard table symbolizes the hard times of life from which Weston was running away for so long. By sleeping on the hard table, he realizes that calm and peace can be found in rough situations too, "That's why you need a hard table once in a while to bring you back. A good hard table to bring you back to life" (Shepard, 1976, p.190). He suffers from insomnia as the reference can be found where Ella tells how he stays out throughout the night and comes back in the morning frustrated. Once he gets a long sleep on a hard table, he becomes fine as sleep is considered a stress reducer which Weston was lacking for so long.

Weston's outcome of the prolonged trauma was less damaged because somehow, he didn't confine himself within the house. Despite having psychological disturbances, he maintained a connection with the outer world. Herman (1992) suggests the possibility of a successful healing process, Recovery, therefore, is based upon the "empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation." (p. 94).

Weston regains his new self by walking around in the house being 'naked' and wearing a 'birthday suit'. Though he was present in the house before but in a 'numb' phase as admitted by himself in the beginning. After recalling the memory, he walks around the house because he's no more sleepwalking. After the long sleep, he comes to terms with everything. This shows as if he awakens from a horrible dream. "I don't have to pay for my past now! All that's behind me now! It's all over with because I've been reborn!" (Shepard, 1976, p. 192). Herman (1992) elaborates this as "reclaiming the world" (p. 141) that was lost due to a traumatic event. Further, she suggests that once the survivor mourned the old self then a new self must be developed along with new relations.

Shepard has knitted *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976) in the psychological web. Weston's reference to taking a 'hot bath' felt to him like "peeling off a whole person" (Shepard, 1976, p. 185). This has given a sense of rebirth to Weston. By the end of the play, Weston realizes the remedy of trauma "I kept looking for it out somewhere. And all the time it was right inside this house" (Shepard, 1976, p. 194). He explains that losing oneself or escaping is not the solution to recovery. To accept and face the stark and harsh reality is to regain self. As Weston

"assumes the role of nurturer, cooking full breakfasts and doing everyone's laundry through which he once again establishes a connection to the family" (Adler, 2013, p. 113). Along with it, he realizes how his family has been affected by his failures. Also, he tries to find new forms of engagement with the children, Emma and Wesley.

### **Conclusion**

The research concludes that Tate's family found closure in the form of Weston's reconciliation with the past. Weston preferred to move forward in life after seeing the drastic consequences of traumatic memories. This made him realize all the damages which he did to himself and his family. Soon after this realization, he felt that he is ready to speak the truth and confront the past without the fear of consequences. He recognized that the past cannot be undone and that revenge (violent attacks and frustration) can only bring harm to him. Moreover, the findings suggested that history needs to be rediscovered properly to claim the past. The reconstruction/reliving of traumatic memory helps the victims to mourn and reconnect back to normal life. Weston realized his responsibilities as the breadwinner of the house rather than someone trapped in lost memories. Therefore, there was a need to break the silence just to save the family. Only through this way Weston rebuilt the familial connections.

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