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Author(s)	Morimoto, Michitaka
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The Structure of "Collaboration" in Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*

Michitaka MORIMOTO

Introduction

Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* was first performed in San Francisco in 1983. In the same year, Shepard directed the movie version of this play and acted the part of Eddie, the main character of this play, by himself. These facts show that he was more deeply committed to this play than his other works at that time. It is also notable that the woman, May, appears as the central figure in this play for the first time.

In the opening scene of this play, Eddie visits the motel where May lives alone after a long separation from him. Although they seem to be a natural couple at first sight, it gradually turns out that they are, in fact, brother and sister as the play proceeds. We can easily guess that their father seems to be the one on the stage as The Old Man. He sits on the rocking chair, watches the course of things and sometimes tries to talk to Eddie and May. But his attempt to talk to them is not successful. Strictly speaking, he is not on the main stage but on the "platform". That is, Shepard sets two worlds on the stage, the world of Eddie and May on the main stage and The Old Man's world on the "platform". We can guess that Shepard sets the situation in which The Old Man is only in their mind by using the "platform". Eddie and May try to explain their past, especially the stories of their father in front of Martin, May's boyfriend. They apparently give contradictory stories but we gradually find the complex situation caused by their father. He loves the two women, Eddie's mother and May's mother, and leads to the complex meeting of Eddie and May. They meet and fall in love without noticing the fact that they are, in fact, brother

and sister. In the end, Eddie and May are separated because they have to follow the same fate as their father and mothers.

In this paper, I begin with the analysis of the image of women in his plays. Then, I refer to the peculiar existence of *The Old Man in Fool for Love*. Finally, I'd like to pay attention to the monologue and incest. These are often seen in Shepard's family plays. Both monologues and incest are done by the man and the woman who are in the blood relationship. We can see the common structure here. So I regard the monologues and incest in *Fool for Love* as a kind of "collaboration". Furthermore, Shepard shows his interest in bloodline theme, especially the relationship between father and son in his family plays. In addition to this, I'd like to focus on the existence of the daughter in *Fool for Love*, and give a more detailed explanation of Shepard's interest in the bloodline theme.

Pitiful Women

Here I refer to the image of women in Shepard's family plays. The reason of this is the change of his style seen in *Fool for Love*. In this play, Shepard treats the woman, May, as the main character for the first time. Because of this change, it is worth while examining Shepard's treatment of women closely here.

At first, I observe the image of the mothers in *Fool for Love* as compared with the ones in his family trilogy, *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*. In his family trilogy, each mother goes out of the house at least once in the play. In *Curse of the Starving Class*, the mother, Ella, tries to sell her house at her own discretion and maybe has an affair with the lawyer to whom she entrusts the matter of selling the house. They go out of her house together. In *Buried Child*, the mother, Halie, also goes out of the house with the minister and she comes home in another dress. The change of her clothes shows the possibility of the sexual relationship with the minister. In addition, she is unfaithful with her husband by means of the incest with their son, Tilden. This can be regarded as a kind of affair, too. We shall return to the theme of the incest in detail later. In the case of *True*

West, we cannot see the definite evidence of Mom's affair. But her husband lives alone in the desert and she travels to Alaska alone which is not a suitable place for a woman to go to alone. So we can guess there is a possibility that she has an affair with another man. So, in Shepard's plays, the mothers are not faithful to their husbands in common and try to escape from their houses actively.

In addition to this, the image of the mothers in *Fool for Love* has a tinge of sadness. According to the stories of Eddie and May, both of their mothers wait for The Old Man who says coolly that he loves two women at one time. He spends some time with one woman and then suddenly disappears. Then he goes to the other woman and spends there for a while. He repeats the life of this cycle. As a result of this life, Eddie and May are born as the brother and sister whose mothers are different. His behavior causes the troublesome situation in which Eddie and May meet and fall in love without knowing the fact that they are brother and sister. To make matters worse, their love is a kind of incest. That is, they are the victims of their father's egoistic behavior.

But the two mothers are more directly at the mercy of this behavior. According to May, her mother cannot put up with the life of only waiting for The Old Man and traces him here and there. At last, she finds The Old Man's another life with Eddie's mother. In addition to this, May's mother is greatly shocked at the fact that Eddie and May fall in love without knowing their real relationship. Although she manages to stop their love, she feels the limitation of her power and tells Eddie's mother the whole story. Then, what is worse, Eddie's mother kills herself by shooting her head with a pistol. Like this, in *Fool for Love*, Sam Shepard describes the pitiful image of the women who are at the mercy of the selfish men.

Now, I'd like to focus on May, the main female character in *Fool for Love*. At first, I must refer to the relationship between women in other works of Sam Shepard. Although Leonard Mustazza says that Halie and Shelly in *Buried Child* are contrast, this lies outside the scope of this paper because Shelly is the girlfriend of Halie's grandson

and there is no blood relationship between them. And, in the case of Ella and Emma in *Curse of the Starving Class*, their relationship is also contrast, and, if anything, the daughter, Emma, inherits her father's temperament. They both show their violent aspect in common.

So, all these things considered, the fact that the mother and the daughter have a lot in common is notable in *Fool for Love*. For the most remarkable feature of May seems to be "the psychological inheritance" from her mother as Lynda Hart says.

But much more important is the psychological inheritance from father to son and mother to daughter. [...] May obviously resembles her mother in her dependence upon a man whom she cannot trust and who treats her badly. (Hart, 104)

Here I'd like to focus on the situation that May traces the same course as her mother did. Like her mother, May waits for the man whom she cannot trust in regard to love. Of course, the man is Eddie and they have repeated the meeting and separation for fifteen years, according to their stories. Although May swears at Eddie, it is obvious that she is impatiently waiting for him to come. This relationship has the same style between May's mother and The Old Man.

In May's case, the fact that the man she waits for and loves is her brother adds the more pitiful element. On the one hand she wants Eddie to stay with her, and on the other hand she refuses to stay with him. In her mind, these two feelings are complexly mixed. We often see the change of her feeling in her conversation. Sam Shepard is excellent in describing such people who have ambivalent feelings. Before *Fool for Love*, he shows an interest only in men's relationship. So, it is noticeable that May joins in this group and is treated as the same as men.

In fact, Shepard himself insists that he tries to write something about women in *Fool for Love*. Surely, in this play, May wins the main position of the play. However, it is also remarkable that when Shepard tries to write about women mainly, he cannot avoid treating them as the victims of men. So, his female characters seem to be more pitiful

than those in his family trilogy. Here we can see his thought of men and women. That is, he cannot describe women without considering them as the lower existence than men. In addition, it is also noticeable that the inheritance from mother to daughter is described more clearly in *Fool for Love*. We can say that this shows Shepard has stronger interest in the bloodline theme than before.

The Peculiar Existence of The Old Man

Then, I'd like to refer to The Old Man because of his peculiar existence in *Fool for Love*. Let us consider the following quotation.

He [THE OLD MAN] exists only in the minds of MAY and EDDIE, even though they might talk to him directly and acknowledge his physical presence. THE OLD MAN treats them as though they all existed in the same time and place. (20)¹

Here, we must notice Shepard asserts that the existence of The Old Man is limited in the minds of May and Eddie. At the same time, The Old Man himself behaves as if he were in the same dimension with May and Eddie. Shepard tries to find a way to describe such situation on the stage. Firstly, he sets the "platform" which is different from the main stage. For almost all through the play, The Old Man is on the "platform" and sits on the rocking chair. We can distinguish the "platform" by the color of the setting. The colors of it are limited black and gray. Secondly, Shepard uses the stage lighting carefully. For example, when The Old Man speaks, he comes into the spotlight and, on the other hand, the main stage gets dark.

Like this, this play fundamentally proceeds under the rule that The Old Man is in the minds of May and Eddie. Although The Old Man talks to Eddie or May and Eddie reacts to it, these acts can be regarded as the communication with the existence in their own minds. However, there is an exception to this rule. In the following quotation, The Old Man goes over the borderline between the main stage and the "platform". "THE OLD MAN'S left arm slowly descends and reaches across the table holding out his empty Styrofoam cup for a drink. EDDIE

looks THE OLD MAN *in the eye for a second, then pours him a drink, too. All three of them drink*" (47). In this scene, The Old Man who is so far on the "platform" steps in the main stage and approaches to Eddie and Martin, May's boyfriend. When the audience see this scene, they must be perplexed by the fact that the structure of the play enters a different phase. However, we can give an explanation for this scene by paying attention to the following statement of The Old Man.

THE OLD MAN. . . . I wanna' show you somethin'. Somethin' real, okay? Somethin' actual.

EDDIE. Sure.

THE OLD MAN. Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. (*he points at the wall stage-right. There is no picture but EDDIE stares at the wall.*) Ya' see that? Take a good look at that. Ya' see it?

[.....]

THE OLD MAN. Well, would you believe me if I told ya' I was married to her [Barbara Mandrell]?

EDDIE. (*pause*) No.

THE OLD MAN. Well, see, now that's the difference right there. That's the realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that? (27)

Here, The Old Man tells his son the story that he once married the famous woman and tries to make him believe it. In his theory, if one believes something in his mind, it becomes true. We can consider the scene in which the structure of the play is broken down as the effective setting. Shepard intentionally sets such scene in order to ask the audience whether the things on the stage are true or not. Here, let us consider the following quotation.

Eddie, like his father, is unable to remain faithful to one woman. . . . Further likenesses are reinforced by the camaraderie they share over the bottle of whiskey that is passed from father to son and is significantly the only action that demands a physical crossing of

the boundary between the play and the frame. (Hart, 104)

In this passage, Hart states Eddie's "psychological inheritance" from his father, The Old Man. So, the scene that shows the mixture of the two worlds is the evidence for the inheritance, or at least the similarity between Eddie and The Old Man.

And, Hart also analyzes The Old Man as follows. "The father in *Fool for Love* is the incarnation of the old man in *True West* whom we never see. As an interesting digression, he is also an almost exact likeness of Shepard's real father" (Hart, 101). What the passage makes clear is that the image of the fathers in his plays reflects Sam Shepard's antagonism or other feelings toward his own father. In *Fool for Love*, the image of the father is stranger than that of Shepard's family trilogy, because he describes the father as the peculiar existence, The Old Man. So Shepard finds the better way to describe the direct influence from father to son on the stage. For the setting which The Old Man is only in the minds of Eddie and May shows that they are influenced by the existence of him very much.

Compared with May's "psychological inheritance" from her mother, Eddie's one from his father is much stronger. The Old Man talks to Eddie again and again, and Eddie sometimes answers this appeal. Although May is also talked to by The Old Man, she does not show the reaction to it. While The Old Man speaks, May does nothing. We can see that she is just listening to The Old Man in silence. Anyway, these things are regarded as the psychological similarity between the father and the son, that is, between The Old Man and Eddie. In addition to this, when The Old Man cannot endure to listen to May's story about their past, he urges Eddie to be on his side many times by using the phrases 'male side' or 'our side'.

Then we must consider the existence of Martin, May's boyfriend. He never reacts to the behavior of The Old Man or Eddie's reaction to The Old Man through the play. He does not have blood relationship with anyone on the stage. He is in this strange space on the stage as the representation of the audience, so to speak. According to the exis-

tence of Martin like this, we can say that it is inevitable for the characters of this play to be in the blood relationship in order to understand exactly what happens on the stage.

Like this, we can see the similarity between Eddie and The Old Man. However The Old Man says another thing about this as follows.

Amazing thing is, neither one a' you look a bit familiar to me. Can't figure that one out. I don't recognize myself in either one a' you. Never did. 'Course your mothers both put their stamp on ya'. That's plain to see. But my whole side a' the issue is absent, in my opinion. Totally unrecognizable. You could be anybody's. Probably are. I can't even remember the original circumstances. Been so long. Probably a lot a' things I forgot. Good thing I got out when I did though. Best thing I ever did. (40)

In this passage, he insists that neither Eddie nor May resembles him in appearance, and that they resemble their mother for each. Certainly, we can understand the similarity between May and her mother. But it is a little strange that he insists that Eddie does not resemble him. That is, this statement of The Old Man shows that he tries to deny his behavior of the past which leads the incest between Eddie and May. He manages to purify his past by declaring that his two children do not resemble him. Furthermore, the reaction of Eddie and May to the statement of The Old Man is also remarkable. Let us consider the following quotation.

Spot rises on THE OLD MAN. Stage lights stay the same. EDDIE and MAY just stand there staring at each other through the duration of THE OLD MAN'S words. They are not "frozen," they just stand there and face each other in a suspended moment of recognition.
(40)

Here, Eddie, too, does not react to the story of the Old Man for the first time. So, their behavior here, especially Eddie's one, shows that they are angry about the irresponsible attitude of The Old Man to deny his past. This behavior of The Old Man is regarded as the evi-

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dence that shows the strong power of the blood relationship.

The image of "collaboration"

Finally, I'd like to consider the image of the "collaboration" done by men and women in blood relationship. This image is often seen in Sam Shepard's family plays. We consider the theme of incest as compared with *Buried Child*, and the monologue as compared with *Curse of the Starving Class*. Here we consider the father as the center figure of the "collaboration".

We shall now look more carefully into the theme of incest. In *Buried Child*, the incest seems to be done by the mother, Halie and the son, Tilden. And this leads to the another crime that Halie's husband, Dodge, kills and buries the child of Halie and Tilden. This is the source of the secret of the family. On the other hand, in *Fool for Love*, although the image of the incest is not so intense, it is one of the important elements of this play. That is, the fact that there is an incestuous love between Eddie and May exposes the fault of The Old Man in the past. In both works, the persons concerned with the incest ignore the existence of the father in the end. In *Buried Child*, the father, Dodge, dies and Halie and Tilden dig up the buried child and shut themselves up in the room. And in *Fool for Love*, as soon as Eddie and May realize that The Old Man does not admit his own fault in the past, they completely ignore the existence of him and embrace each other at this moment. We can point out that there is such similarity of the structure in both plays.

Then we consider the monologues in Shepard's plays. It is noticeable that the men and women who are in the blood relationship make up for the information of the past each other in the form of the monologues. I'd like to regard this structure as a kind of "collaboration". In *Curse of the Starving Class*, the father, Weston, tells the story about the lamb's castration in the form of the monologue. Then his wife, Ella, and his son, Wesley, continue this story in the form of the "collaboration" at the last scene. Here the most important thing is the structure that the mother and the son who are in the blood relationship try to com-

plete the father's story. Here also, the figure of the father is at the center of the structure.

In *Fool for Love*, after Eddie's monologue about their past, May's monologue continues. Especially, the monologue of female May is important in Shepard's plays because he treats the male characters mainly so far. These two monologues tell about their first meeting. Although this meeting should be their common memory, their stories are full of inconsistencies. For example, when May says, "There's nothing between us now", Eddie answers, "You know we're connected, May. We'll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago." (31) Like this, both of them deny the other's statement in their own monologues. In spite of this, the audience is gradually able to grasp the situation of their past by listening to their monologues. Their monologues give us some information about their father's behavior in the past. Eddie and May do not make up for the image of their father intentionally. However, for the audience, their monologues function as the "collaboration". And they make up the strange image of The Old Man.

Furthermore, Eddie expresses the similar opinion to that of The Old Man, as can be seen in the following quotation.

MARTIN. I don't know stories.

EDDIE. Make 'em up.

MARTIN. That'd be lying wouldn't it?

EDDIE. No, no. Lying's when you believe it's true. If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying. (45)

In this scene, Eddie tells Martin about telling a lie. His logic is similar to that of The Old Man about the realism, as I have mentioned before. Judging from this, we can guess that the contradiction between Eddie's monologue and May's one has its origin in this logic of Eddie. In fact, Eddie does not refer to the secret of his mother's suicide intentionally at first. He tries to hide his past, and, in this point, we can see the similarity to The Old Man.

Then, there is another noteworthy passage in *Fool for Love*. Let us consider the following quotation.

EDDIE. Well, see—(*pause, he stares at THE OLD MAN*)—our daddy fell in love twice. That's basically how it happened. Once with my mother and once with her mother.

THE OLD MAN. It was the same love. Just got split in two, that's all.

MARTIN. Well, how come you didn't know each other until high school then?

EDDIE. He had two separate lives. That's how come. Two completely separate lives. He'd live with me and my mother for a while and then he'd disappear and go live with her and her mother for a while.

THE OLD MAN. Now don't be too hard on me, boy. It can happen to the best of us.

MARTIN. And you never knew what was going on?

EDDIE. Nope. Neither did my mother.

THE OLD MAN. She knew.

EDDIE. (*to MARTIN*) She never knew. (48)

The last sentence of this quotation can be interpreted in two ways. In the quotation, it is clearly stated that Eddie says this sentence to Martin. But we can regard this line as the answer to the line of The Old Man. In this scene, Eddie has a conversation with Martin and The Old Man at the same time, although Martin and The Old Man do not recognize each other. For Martin, this Eddie's statement is the answer to his own line. However, the audience who know the whole setting of this play can understand this line's double meanings. Here also, we can see the mixture of the two worlds, the main stage and the "platform".

In addition to this, there is a noticeable statement of May about the bloodline theme. She says as follows.

I'm gonna' kill her [Countess] and then I'm gonna' kill you. Systematically. With sharp knives. Two separate knives. One for her and one for you. So the blood doesn't mix. . . . Right in the moment when you're sure you've got me buffaloed. That's when you'll die. (23)

Here, May refers to the Countess whom she regards as Eddie's lover. She declares that she wants to kill them because of the fierce jealousy. Furthermore, she says that she uses two knives in order to avoid mixing their blood. It is easy to understand this line as the metaphor of the sexual relationship between Eddie and the Countess.

However, there seems to be another important matter in this passage. Apparently, May denounces the relationship between Eddie and the Countess. But, we can also interpret this as a kind of masochistic exposure of their real situation. That is, here, May implies the danger of the mixture of their blood. Since they are, in fact, in the blood relationship, the mixture of their blood means the incest and this is the serious problem in regard to the social morals. They are in the troublesome situation. They notice the truth of their birth and recognize the fact that their love means the incest after they fell in love. At the same time, if they are not in the blood relationship, they cannot meet and fall in love. That is, May is in the ambivalent situation. At one hand, she notices the seriousness of the incest. But, on the other hand, she cannot feel the love without the very relationship with Eddie by the blood.

This situation resembles the last scene of *True West*. In this scene, the brothers collide with each other over the matter to get the position of their father symbolically. Furthermore, both scenes link to the fear of death. Judging from these similarities in both scenes, the image of the persons who have no choice is Shepard's favorite one.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the image of the incest and the structure of the play which is made up for by the monologues can be seen as a kind of "collaboration". Sam Shepard concentrates these two things on *Fool for Love*. Of course, Shepard treats these things in his other works, and especially he uses the monologues in almost all of his work. But only in *Fool for Love*, the same pair of man and woman commits incest with each other and makes up the story completely by the monologues.

Here, we must notice that when Shepard tries to write about the

relationship between man and woman, he uses the special relationship between brother and sister whose mothers are not the same person. We can consider this as the evidence that Shepard sticks to the bloodline theme. That is, by using these images, he manages to show both the fear of the mixture of blood and the strong power of blood by which the close relatives cannot help falling in love at the same time.

Apparently, the bloodline of The Old Man separates in two ways when he has the two children whose mothers are different. But, in the end, we can see the meeting of the two lines. Ironically, the meeting is in the form of the incest between Eddie and May.

Like this, the setting of *Fool for Love* shows Shepard's strong interest in the bloodline theme. Shepard shows his main interest is to write about men's relationship, especially about the relationship between father and son. So it is noticeable that he treats the female character mainly, unlike his family trilogy. He had to shift his way to write the dramas in order to describe the situation about the family more closely. This change shows that Shepard's strong interest in the bloodline theme.

Notes

- 1) Sam Shepard. *Fool for Love*, in *Fool for Love and Other Stories*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1984). All the quotations from the text are referred to this edition, and are followed by page-number.

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