THE ANALYSIS, REHEARSAL, AND
PERFORMANCE OF THE ROLE OF SHELLY IN
SAM SHEPARD'S BURIED CHILD

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by
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Approved by

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Vince and Shelly on the front porch, Act II.
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Special thanks to director Patrick Moore and the cast he assembled for Buried Child.
NOTE

A complete copy of this thesis, "The Analysis, Rehearsal, and Performance of the Role of Shelly in Sam Shepard's Buried Child," is located in the Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Village Voice on October 27, 1975, called Sam Shepard "the most promising playwright in America today."¹ Four years later he fulfilled this prophecy by winning the Pulitzer Prize for Buried Child.

Sam Shepard was born in Chicago in 1943. Soon after his birth, his family moved to a town just outside of Los Angeles. In the early sixties, Shepard moved to New York where he got an acting job with Bishop's Company Repertory. While living and acting in New York he began to write. His first works to be produced were Cowboys and Rock Garden in 1965. Since then Shepard has written over one hundred plays.²

Aside from being one of the most influential young playwrights of today, Shepard is a trained actor and


musician. He appeared in the film *Days of Heaven* and sometimes makes appearances in his own plays.³ He played the tenor sax in a production of his *Mad Dog Blues* in 1971.

Now having returned to California, Shepard lives outside of San Francisco in Mill Valley. Much of his work is premiered at the Magic Theatre in Mill Valley where he is resident playwright.⁴ For the past few years, Shepard has been working closely with director Robert Woodruff. Shepard likes Woodruff because he directs his plays without adding "meaning" to them. Shepard dislikes those who try to find meaning in his work, saying, "It does not mean anything, but is like poetry or music and works on the emotions more than the mind."⁵ Woodruff says of Shepard's plays; "When an audience leaves one of Sam's plays they're probably really confused. They've just had several hundred images thrown at them--flash, flash, flash! and they can't synthesize it all. But the ultimate result is that perhaps they'll see the world a little differently, from a different perspective. The plays are almost assaultive, without being hostile, and they're full of holes and contradictions

⁴Ibid.
⁵Ver Meulen, pp. 79-81, 85-86.
that you just can't fill in."6 However, despite their initial confusion, people keep returning to watch Shepard's shows. Ross Wetzsteon, of The Village Voice, explains that Shepard's popularity is due in part to the endings of his plays. "Shepard's plays are remarkable for the stunning impact of their endings, endings which open up rich possibilities of release and liberation."7 But Shepard himself may come closest to explaining his uniqueness. In an interview with Victor Fascio, of The Village Voice, Shepard surprisingly admitted that he rarely went to the theatre, because most plays bored him. Then Fascio asked him, "What do you look for when you go to the theatre?" Shepard replied, "Something I've never seen before . . . moments I've never seen before."8 Indeed, anyone who has experienced Shepard's work would agree that he incorporates "never seen before" moments and characters into his own plays. His ability to create unusual characters and unique situations coupled with the immediacy of his writing, produces exciting theatre. Ross Wetzsteon deliniates more precisely Shepard's writing style: "One of Shepard's greatest gifts as a playwright has always been his ability to skip this process of mediation, to create situations and characters

6Ver Meulen, pp. 79-81, 85-86.


8Oppenheim and Fascio, pp. 81-82.
which express his personal obsessions without the necessity for translation, which exist first wholly on their own terms, and which then unfold their broader implications by virtue of their powerful particularity."\(^9\) Although Wetzsteon made this observation of Shepard's writing in 1976, it is even more applicable today after Shepard has written *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child*. The characters (particularly the female characters) in both of these later works are more accessible because he has surrounded them with a "naturalistic" reality that justifies their actions. Up until writing *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* the bulk of Shepard's female characters were one dimensional caricatures. Marilyn Stasio of *Afterdark* wrote, "The two spirited young girls in the recent *Buried Child* and *Curse of the Starving Class* are a promising sign for the future; but the typical Shepard woman is a macho fantasy in a variety of clichéd guises: earth mothers and sex goddesses, sunbonneted wives and devouring cunts, who all put the hero off his quest and slow his journey into maturity."\(^10\)

Shelly of *Buried Child* and Emma of *Curse of the Starving Class* are Shepard's first fully fleshed out, non-cliché

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\(^9\)Wetzsteon, p. 71.

women. Both characters make choices and perform actions that Shepard had formerly reserved for his male characters. In fact, Shelly and Emma, in their separate situations, are depicted by Shepard as the only survivors. Because of their decisions, they escape their situations while the other characters remain trapped.

The character of Shelly is Buried Child is the basis for my creative thesis project. This study will describe and record the processes I went through to create the role of Shelly. I will discuss the role as it developed through four major phases: analysis of the play, analysis of the role, rehearsal of the play, and the play in production.

On February 5, 1980, Ohio State University's Theatre Department produced Sam Shepard's Buried Child. It was directed by Patrick Moore in Stadium II Theatre with the following cast:

Dodge: Chris Merrill
Halie: Ionia Zelenka
Tilden: James Cobb, Jr.
Bradley: Martin Merritt
Shelly: Susan Warren
Vince: Joel Hammer
Father Dewis: Jonathan Putnam
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Although Sam Shepard never specifically states that *Buried Child* is set in the late 1960's, if one does some calculating according to given dates and ages, the resulting date is around 1968 or 1969. (This result is obtained by taking the year 1935, the final year that corn was planted out back and presumably the year that the "buried child" was born. According to incestual case studies between mothers and sons, a son is usually seduced by the mother around age 14 or 15. Had Tilden been 14 when Halie seduced him in 1935, Tilden's birth would have been in 1921. If 1921 is added to Tilden's current age of 48, the resulting year is 1969.)

At first glance the late sixties may not seem pertinent to this script. After all, Dodge, Halie, Tilden, and Bradley are fairly isolated from current events in the sixties. However, the two characters that have not been isolated in this "Illinois Bible-belt," Shelly and Vince, 19 and 22 respectively, are greatly influenced by this time period. With the sixties came the idea of "do your own thing" which happens to be precisely what Vince
and Shelly are doing. He is a jazz musician, more specifically an alto sax player. Vince and Shelly have been living together for a short time, a way of life that became more practiced and accepted in the sixties. Another important influence of this time period that motivates Shelly is the need to question the establishment. This need to question may be the major contributing factor as to why Shelly questions Dodge about the discrepancy of the photographs upstairs and what is going on in the house now. Shelly, perhaps more than Vince, is a product of the sixties--she is trendy in her clothes, she is nomadic, she hasn't been with Vince very long, and she says that she doesn't even know him that well. Shelly is that young woman of the sixties who lived and traveled with musicians, smoked pot, questioned the establishment, and then survived the resulting answer.

The specific time for Buried Child is not as influential to the characters as is the general time. Buried Child opens on a Sunday morning either in late summer or early fall. (Shepard never specifies the particular season, but if one is to believe that corn and carrots are being harvested, the time is probably late September or early October. Another given fact in the script that supports the time being late September or early October is that Shelly and Vince enter wearing jackets, which suggests that the evening weather is probably chilly.) By the second act
when Shelly and Vince enter, it is evening of the same Sunday. It is early Monday morning when the third act begins. The play adheres to the neoclassic unity of time, because it occurs within a twenty four hour period.

Geographically, Buried Child is set on an isolated farm in Illinois, somewhere in that vast farming, "Bible-belt" region between Chicago and St. Louis. It seems somewhat ironic that Shepard selected Illinois as the setting for Buried Child's macabre situation, since the cliché for the midwestern farm family is wholesomeness--"turkey dinners and apple pie." Shepard had some concrete support for his location. Dr. Alan Woods, dramaturge for Buried Child, found sociological studies that reported the rate of isolated midwestern farm women committing acts of violent crime and passion was unusually high in the 1920's and 1930's. This abnormality was due in part to the severe winters which resulted in longer periods of isolation for women on these already remote farms. Another explanation offered for this behavior among the farm women was the economic depression of the 1930's. Whatever the reason for the womens' behavior, Shepard seems to be using Halie as an example of one of these women. Halie's seduction of Tilden would have fit, timewise (1935) into the era of abnormal behavior for isolated farm women.

Dr. Woods found another study that further supported
Shepard's placement of *Buried Child*. This study dealt specifically with a small rural community in Illinois during the 1960's. The study reported that the farm people of this community welcomed the chance to seriously discuss their personal problems with outsiders. However they did not speak seriously or discuss their own problems with neighbors or insiders of the town. Shepard's characters in *Buried Child* exemplify this study. The family members refuse to discuss the subject of the buried child openly, but Dodge tells the entire story to Shelly, an outsider.

The house that *Buried Child* occurs in is an old two story farm house with a screened-in-porch in front. Shelly tells the audience that the house looks like a Norman Rockwell painting. (I played this line referring to the outside of the house, because the stage setting was anything but Rockwellish.)

The particular living room that *Buried Child* takes place in is described by Shepard as being old and worn. In fact, he goes into quite a detailed description of the word "old": "old wooden staircase, old dark green sofa, old brown T.V., and an old brown blanket."\(^{11}\) This old living

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\(^{11}\)Sam Shepard, *Buried Child and Seduced and Suicide in Bb*, (New York: Urizen Books, Inc., 1976), p. 11. Further references, marked by page number, will refer to this text.
room in the farm house provides the environment for the three acts of *Buried Child*.

There are two other rooms that maintain a presence all their own during the entire play, even though their interiors are never seen by the audience. The first and most important room is Halie's upstairs room. The room's presence is ominous, suspended above the living room and physically in a position of observation. Halie states that she has an over-all view from the upstairs. Halie's room, whether she is in it or not, seems to have a powerful control over her two sons, Tilden and Bradley. Tilden takes the corpse up to the room at the end of the play and Bradley looks to the room and calls for his mother in both his entrances. Likewise, Vince, on his entrance, goes immediately up the stairs to Halie's room. Shelly visits the upstairs room and the pictures in the room prompt her to question Dodge. Halie's room sustains the presence of the past in the house. It was the room where an incestuous relationship occurred and it contains the pictures of a wholesome past.

The other room that can be reached from the living room and also exists clearly although it is never seen by the audience, is the kitchen. This room is significant because it leads a character "out back." Tilden must go through the kitchen to get to the backyard to do his
digging. Dodge had to have carried the dead child through the kitchen to bury it "out back." Vince kicks Bradley out of the house, throwing his leg through the kitchen--"out back."

Shepard creates his environment not only through his setting, but through his character's dialogue. He has a special talent for writing speakable dialogue that defines his characters. Shepard's male family characters in Buried Child speak a clipped, realistic, fairly concise prose that adds another dimension to the environment. Jack Richardson states that, "Shepard is able to stretch the imagination of his audience to such lengths because he has found a language that serves equally well as a vehicle for the antic or the ordinary. In Buried Child, for example, the figures of everyday speech--the bromides, exclamations, and metaphors of middle American life--are arranged in such a way that they take on a fresh, almost frantic meaning. Characters reach exquisite moments of bafflement and mutual misunderstanding without ever abandoning the flat tones of ordinary banter."12 The tight-lipped Midwestern farmer way of speaking Shepard writes in Buried Child is exemplified in Dodge and his sons, Tilden and Bradley. All three men speak in simple sentences, often in phrases, and are as stingy with their words as possible.

Dodge is the only exception to this "tight-lipped" game and the exception comes when he tells Shelly (the outsider) the family secret.

Halie's speech patterns and language provide a contrast to the men in her family. Halie's language rambles on and on through the first and third acts, sometimes talking to herself, often vocalizing her inner thoughts and imagined ideas. This characteristic could possibly be a manifestation of the isolated woman during the 1920's and 1930's; speaking, but not being spoken to by the men in her family.

The striking contrast that Vince and Shelly's language presents to the family's language is its straightforward honesty. Where Dodge and Halie have formerly been suppressing undercurrents of hatred in tight-lipped everyday talk, Vince and Shelly enter wondering where everyone is and what is going on. In fact, Shelly's direct, honest, way of questioning and answering never deviates throughout the play. Mel Gussow of the New York Times says, "Buried Child is one of Mr. Shepard's most accessible works, principally because we view the family through the eyes of an impressionable outsider . . .".13

Shepard also defines his environment through mood. He opens act one of Buried Child in a dark, dingy, living

room of an old farmhouse. It is a gloomy, rainy, Sunday morning with a raggedy thin man sitting on a worn green sofa covered with an old brown blanket. He smokes cigarettes from which he pulls the filters and cautiously drinks whiskey from a hidden bottle. The dialogue begins, not with Dodge, but with Halie, his wife, who is upstairs. Essentially, the audience hears a nagging voice not yet connected with a body. In this opening scene, Shepard succeeds in setting up a hauntingly comic, fairly suspense-filled atmosphere. But more importantly, he establishes a tension that shoots through the entire script—a tension that is the result of guilt and alienation.

_Buried Child_ is classic in its structural unity. The play takes place within a twenty-four hour time period, the set remains constant for all three acts, and the plot revolves around a single course of events.

One thing that is unusual structurally about _Buried Child_ compared to other contemporary plays is that the inciting incident in _Buried Child_ occurs 34 years before the beginning of the play. However, Shepard comes even closer to the classic structure if one considers when Sophocles set the initial incident for _Oedipus the King_ (20 years earlier than the beginning of the play). There are other parallels between _Oedipus_ and _Buried Child_. For instance, both authors take their audiences backward in time, unraveling earlier events while simultaneously moving
forward through viewing-time.

Act one of *Buried Child* is primarily devoted to exposition. The audience is introduced to the core family members, their relationships are defined and firmly established. There is some mention of the family secret, but only enough is said to arouse curiosity and suspense.

Act two, much like the preceding act, deals with exposition. Two new characters are introduced; their relationship is established, and then their relationship with the individual family members is begun. The character, Shelly, is defined early in this act and in turn she provides a gauge, through her reactions, for defining all the core family members. Near the end of the act, Shepard finally begins to zero in on the secret of the "buried child", through Tilden.

Not until the third act does Shepard, through the character of Shelly, start the series of conflicts that lead toward a climax. Shelly aggressively questions Dodge, then Halie and finally attacks Bradley, leaving Dodge to unravel the story of the family's guilt-ridden past. After this, the plot would seem to reach a plateau, instead, Vince spectacularly re-renters and sets up another conflict over control of the farm. Vince wins the conflict and again the play levels off temporarily until Tilden unexpectedly enters with the remains of the "buried child."

Not only does Shepard fill *Buried Child* with on-stage
action, he also fills his act breaks with implied action. There are two off-stage scenes in *Buried Child* that occur in the hours that elapse between the first and second acts and between the second and third acts. Bradley finishes cutting Dodge's hair and cleans up the living room in the first off-stage scene. But the second off-stage scene in which Shelly is involved is more important to the action of the play. This scene involves Shelly's escape from Bradley, her hiding outside while Bradley drags Dodge to the stove and props him up against it and Bradley eventually falling asleep on the sofa. With this accomplished, Shelly comes back inside the house, goes upstairs to Halie's room and falls asleep. The next morning Shelly examines the old family pictures and religious crosses on Halie's wall, she tiptoes downstairs so not to awaken Bradley, and goes into the kitchen looking for some kind of breakfast to fix for Dodge. All she can find is bouillon, so she boils water and fixes that.

The action during this second off-stage scene, specifically the action of Shelly examining the pictures in Halie's room, is the motivation that prompts her to question Dodge concerning his family's past during the third act. Without this off-stage scene, Shelly would have no reason to question Dodge. More importantly, this off-stage scene sets up the character of Shelly as being an aggressive examiner and gives substantive support for
her being the motivator of the entire third act.

To insure her survival, Shelly is forced to establish a variety of relationships with the family members. In each relationship, she must play the "adaptor" role. My final step in analyzing the play is to describe the principal characters in *Buried Child* and their relationships with Shelly.

**Dodge**—Shepard says Dodge is in his late seventies, a very thin and sickly looking man. He used to work his farm actively, raising corn, wheat, and cattle, but now Dodge is almost a total invalid, confined to the sofa in the living room. He has a horrible cough that he irritates by drinking whiskey and smoking cigarettes. Even though Dodge's body is deteriorating, his mind is still active, ferociously manipulating others to secure his wants, he retains control over the farm during his waking hours.

Dodge's fondness for Shelly occurs soon after their initial encounter. Dodge watches Shelly closely and is genuinely impressed with Shelly's spunk. (She demonstrates this quality first in defying Vince and wanting to leave, then her, "I'll do whatever I have to do to survive" speech verifies Dodge's attraction for her.) Dodge, realizing that he is growing increasingly weaker, seems to intuitively know that Shelly will prove to be a good ally and would protect him if need be. He is also physically attracted to her.
There is also a notable difference in Dodge's language when he is speaking to Shelly. His sentences and thoughts become more complex and longer, particularly in the third act, when she has established that she is on his side.

_Halie—_Halie is 65 and Shepard says she should have "pure white hair." She has been a farmer's wife for about 50 years, so this puts Halie at the age of 15 or 16 when she married Dodge. Halie seems to be in fine physical health, but she is mentally unstable. Her entrance in act one supports her mental instability—it takes Halie a full ten minutes to realize and adjust to the reality of the situation (corn husks strewn about the floor). Bradley has taken over the household chores, which is another fact that supports the idea that Halie has a mental problem. In spite of her mental problems, Halie likes to assume she has control over the household. She uses Bradley as a control over Dodge, but Dodge eventually wins every battle by using knowledge of Halie's promiscuous nature as a weapon in their arguments. Because Dodge denies Halie the control she wants at home, she leaves home to find control over other men; thus her affair with Father Dewis.

There is an instant hostility established between Halie and Shelly in the third act. Halie immediately responds to Shelly's presence in the house by saying, "There's a stranger in my house." (p. 58) Then later she
asks, "What are you doing with my cup and saucer?," (p. 58) though she never inquires about Shelly's name or reason for being there. She sees Shelly as a threat, someone who could possibly take her own place in the house, so mostly Halie tries to ignore Shelly.

Tilden--Tilden is in his late forties (48). He is Dodge and Halie's oldest son and Shepard says, "something about him is profoundly burned out and displaced." (p. 16) Shepard also states that Tilden should be wearing heavy construction boots, which give a hint as to Tilden's occupation in New Mexico before he returned home. Halie and Bradley mention that Tilden was an All-American full back, so he is a large man. Physically, Tilden appears healthy enough, but like Halie, he seems mentally disoriented. Mostly, he is childlike in his thinking and in his language. But oddly enough, he has a strong will or capability of achieving his wants. He gets the whiskey from Dodge, he gets the coat from Shelly, and he gets the baby.

Shelly's relationship with Tilden, much like her relationship with Dodge, begins early after their initial meeting. Shelly senses Tilden's mental trouble, so she talks to him gently as one would a child (short sentences, simple questions and simple answers). She is cautious, but gentle with Tilden, offering to help him with the carrots. In turn he responds immediately to her generosity;
he gets her a stool to sit on, he hands her each carrot to cut, and he talks openly to her.

Bradley--Bradley is five years younger than Tilden (43). Shepard says, "he is a big man, wears black janitor shoes, and has a wooden left leg. His arms and shoulders are extremely powerful." (p. 28) Based on what the other characters say about Bradley, he seems to be the unwanted and unloved child in the family. Dodge hates him and Halie implies that he is not very intelligent. Probably most importantly, Bradley feels rejected because of the affair that Halie and Tilden had and this rejection is the basis for his hatred of women. Bradley has tried to compensate for his parent's attitudes all his life, assuming responsibility for the farm and its chores; he probably keeps the family solvent. Though physically and mentally strong when his wooden leg is strapped on, the reverse is true when the leg is removed.

Bradley's relationship with Shelly is one of extreme hostility. He immediately assumes that she is a whore and wants violent control over her. Shelly, in act three, learns through Dodge that Bradley is helpless without his leg. She uses this knowledge to gain control over Bradley. She captures his leg and uses it to defend herself.

Vince--"Vince is Tilden's son and he is about twenty two years old," says Shepard. (p. 29) For our production,
we decided that Tilden married the Catholic-Italian woman that Halie speaks of in the first act. Vince is the son of that marriage. He carries a black saxophone case with him and speaks of playing it late at night, so it is probably safe to assume that he is an aspiring jazz musician. Vince is physically and mentally fine when we meet him in act two, but when he returns in act three he seems mentally displaced.

Vince and Shelly's relationship has not been a lengthy one when we meet them in act two; however, there is already an established trust between them. Shelly is very generous with Vince, staying in a lone farm house with two men that she scarcely knows. She remains loyal to Vince long after the situation warrants.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF SHELLY

Shelly's background or pre-show history is not as fully drawn as the other characters in *Buried Child*. She was originally from Los Angeles; she met Vince in the East and is now traveling west with him. Many questions remain about Shelly's background: Why was she east? Where did she meet Vince? Were they in school? By leaving so many unanswered questions concerning Shelly's past, Shepard establishes a character that is truly an outsider. Shelly is the reactor/motivator in the situation and is therefore the agent through which the audience views the play.

My analysis for the role of Shelly began with finding the facts that Shepard included in the script about her. Then I moved to the actual text of *Buried Child*, looking for what Shelly said about herself and what the other characters said about her. (This was an important step in analysis because of the discrepancy found between a character's lines and how other characters perceive the initial character's actions.) Next, I divided the text into action segments\(^1\) and determined my intention for each

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action segment, which led to the discovery of Shelly's major objectives. Finally after having gone through the script several times, I decided to score some of Shelly's more difficult scenes. Scoring for subtext and movement gave me a beginning base for thoughts and movement in early rehearsals.

Once the initial script work on Shelly was completed and I was familiar with her wants and intentions, I then felt I could piece together a pre-show background for her. This step was important to go through because it gave me, as the character Shelly, a sense of completeness. Even though Shelly still remained an objective outsider for the family and the audience, I was aware of her past and how it influenced her actions during the play.

At the top of act two Shepard says that, "Shelly is about nineteen, black hair, very beautiful. She wears tight jeans, high heels, purple T-shirt and a short rabbit fur coat. Her makeup is exaggerated and her hair has been curled." (p. 29) The only specific character stroke that Shepard directly deliniates for Shelly is that he says she laughs frequently. Shepard particularly specifies laughter for Shelly in four places in act two. Shelly enters laughing, at times uncontrollably. She laughs at her own joke to Dodge; "Kill two birds with one stone, you know?" (p. 32) She laughs shortly after Tilden's entrance involving the carrots; "I love vegetables." (p. 38) She
laughs at Dodge's description of her slinking up to a counter and getting two bottles for the price of one. A common characteristic for Shelly in all four instances is that she is nervous about the situation. Nervousness coupled with fear produces laughter in Shelly. Her entrance is marked with uncontrollable laughter caused by her nervousness about meeting Vince's family. The silent interrogation of Dodge's stare produces a short-lived laugh. Tilden's appearance and his sudden entrance complete with carrots evoke a disbelieving laugh that turns into anxious laughter over the holding of the carrots. Even when Dodge insults her, Shelly responds with fearful, disbelieving laughter. Shepard only specifies these four early instances for laughter, but he continues to put the same pressures on Shelly in later scenes, thus she continues to respond with laughter. Shelly's laughter is very important to her character. It is her insulation against the situation and a symptom of her ability to disguise her fear. Thus, her laughter, more than any other characteristic enables Shelly to survive the encounter.

The process of writing down everything Shelly says about herself and what others say about her proved to be beneficial in pointing out early subtext. Early in act two, even though Shelly says that she is not scared, Vince reassures her several times that there is nothing to be scared of; "Don't be scared. Take it easy." (p. 34-35)
Later Shelly admits that she is afraid; "I'm fuckin' terrified! I wanna go!" (p. 36) The only other time Shelly's subtext runs counter to her lines occurs later in act two when Vince is leaving to get Dodge's bottle. Vince asks Shelly if she will be all right while he is gone and she says, "I'll be fine. I feel right at home now." (p. 43) Obviously, Shelly is being a bit sarcastic because of her earlier protestations.

Of all the characters, Dodge's descriptions and comments about Shelly were the most helpful. Dodge immediately seems to identify with Shelly's aggressive strength. For the most part, his descriptions coupled with Shelly's own peculiar brand of honesty helped me put her together. Dodge calls Shelly a "smart-ass" and a "fireball, a regular fireball." (p. 35) He says, "She could get me a bottle. She's the type of girl that could get me a bottle. Easy. She'd go down there. Slink up to the counter. They'd probably give her two bottles for the price of one. She could do that." (p. 39) "She's a beautiful girl. Exceptional." (p. 40) Even Halie in the third act is surprised by Shelly's strength. She says, slightly taken aback, "Well that's a firm stand. Its good to have a firm stand." (p. 60) But Shelly's own line, "I'll do whatever I have to do to survive. Just to make it through this." (p. 39) is probably the best indicator of her strength of will. Shelly also tells how she copes with her own fear and
nervousness--in defense of her cutting carrots, "Something to keep me busy, so I wouldn't be so nervous." (p. 41) Shelly is aware of what she must do to maintain self-control. This is a woman who possesses a lot of self-awareness, a woman who is fairly self-sufficient, a survivor.

Bernard Beckerman's concept, action segment, can be simplified to be the smallest unit of a script that contains a beginning, a middle and an end. When directors use this concept they assign a function to each action segment. The function of each action segment is something concrete that the director must direct for in that segment and that function must relate to the super objective or spine of the play. My intent in dividing Buried Child into action segments was not to direct the play, but by breaking the script down into smaller parts, it was easier for me to determine Shelly's immediate intentions, segment by segment. The immediate intentions supported her major objectives. Unlike the other characters in Buried Child, Shelly is forced to react to several surprise situations which change her objectives. By dividing the script into action segments I knew exactly what I needed to do to support each objective and I knew exactly when my objective changed.

I divided the entire script of Buried Child into 33 action segments. Since Shelly is only involved in the second and third acts, the corresponding action segments
are 11 through 31. A copy of the Buried Child script with marked action segments and numbers appears in the appendix. Listed below are Shelly's intentions for action segments 11 through 31.

Action Segments:

Act II

11. I want to delay the visit with Vince's family as long as possible.
12. I want Dodge to answer me and welcome me like a "Grandpa" should.
13. I want to convince Vince to leave.
14. I want to take the pressure off Vince. (I change the subject to the carrots.)
15. I want to keep busy until we leave so I won't be so nervous.
16. I want to cooperate with Dodge's (getting the bottle) and Tilden's (cutting carrots) wishes insure my security while we're here.
17. I want to leave with Vince.
18. I want to find out why Tilden doesn't remember Vince--something to keep me busy until I can leave.15

---

15Shelly has more than one objective in some action segments. She is the reactor, not the motivator in these action segments, so it becomes necessary for her to adapt to the initiator of the action.
I want Tilden to talk.
I want to leave.

19. I want to stand up to Bradley.
   I want to divert Bradley's attention to Dodge.
   I want to get out alive and unharmed.

Act III

20. I want to establish Dodge as an ally.
    I want to obtain information about the family.
    I want to find out the truth about the baby.

21. I want to keep Dodge as a friend.

22. I want Halie to help me.

23. I want to explain my presence to Halie--both
    attempts are blocked by Halie.

24. I want to explain the situation to Halie, I
    want her help.

25. I want to fight for my own mental control
    and I want control of the situation. (In
    denying that she is crazy, Shelly has challeng-
    ged the family to tell their secret.)

26. I want you to tell me your family secret.

27. I want to defend Dodge as he tells the story.

28. (Vince returns) I want to escape with Vince.

29. same as 28.

30. same as 28.

31. I want to escape with or without Vince.
Once I had established Shelly's intention for each action segment, her larger objectives were easier to determine. Shelly's four major objectives were: to have a pleasant visit, to leave with Vince, to survive, to escape.

Shelly's first major objective when she arrives is to meet Vince's Grandpa and Grandma, have a nice visit, and eat a big turkey dinner with apple pie for dessert (shown in action segments 11 and 12). Shelly's ideal objective has disintegrated by action segment 13. Her stereotypic farm family does not exist and what does exist scares her. Shelly's second objective, therefore changes to "wanting to leave with Vince," and all her intentions support this objective until Bradley's entrance in action segment 19. In 19, Bradley threatens Shelly's safety, thus introducing her third objective of "wanting to survive." Shelly's "survival" objective is sustained through segment 28 (Vince's return). Everything Shelly does or says between segments 19 and 28 supports her survival. Once Vince has returned with the car, Shelly's fourth objective becomes "wanting to escape."

As mentioned earlier, Shelly's background is rather sketchy in Buried Child. My decisions about Shelly's pre-show life are based on phrases she offers about herself. She says she is originally from Los Angeles and she says that she has trouble relating to Vince's idea of wanting to get to know his family. Based on this information and
Shelly's appearance and reactions during the play, I came up with this pre-show biography. Shelly is the daughter of wealthy parents that live in Los Angeles. She was never particularly fond of her parents, so she was happy to be sent east to school. She is only nineteen years old, so she has just completed her freshman year of college. Toward the end of the Spring semester, she met a jazz musician, named Vince. They dated for awhile and then decided to live together for the summer. A couple of weeks before the Fall semester began, Vince decided he wanted to take a trip to New Mexico to see his father, so he and Shelly left for a visit. While they were crossing Illinois, Vince decided to stop and visit his grandparents.

The last phase of the analysis process for Shelly, was to score some of her difficult scenes. The first scene I scored was Shelly's scene with Dodge near the beginning of act two. Shelly has all the lines in the scene because Dodge refuses to speak to her. I began scoring the scene after Shelly calls, "You better get down here!" (p. 32) to Vince.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Subtext</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y: Just a minute!</td>
<td>I'm looking at the pictures.</td>
<td>facing u. at banister rail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm looking at the pictures.</td>
<td>I have to deal w/ this guy alone, I'm nervous and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Subtext</td>
<td>Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: We just got here.</td>
<td>I have to explain who I am. I haven't stolen anything.</td>
<td>hands up--open palm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pouring rain on the freeway so we thought we'd stop by.</td>
<td>no, that's not the way to put it.</td>
<td>point out window to rain, then to Vince on &quot;we'd&quot;. Cover face w/ one hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean Vince was planning on stopping anyway. He wanted to see you.</td>
<td>pause for answer--What's wrong with him, where's Vince?</td>
<td>Take a couple of steps in to Dodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he hadn't seen you in a long time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were going all the way to New Mex.</td>
<td>I've got to get away from him, his stare frightens me.</td>
<td>Begin moving bit by bit along b. rail to get away from Dodge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see his father.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess his father lives out there.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We thought we'd stop by and see you on the way. Kill two birds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Subtext</td>
<td>Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with one stone, you know?</td>
<td>pause, wait for response. He can't even take a joke.</td>
<td>At foot of stairway by now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean Vince has this thing about his here. This is really family now, I guess making me nervous.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it's a new thing w/ him. I kind of find it hard to relate to. But he feels it's important. You, know.</td>
<td>Look from where Vince is back to Dodge during speech.--backing up to front door.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean he feels like he wants to get to know you all again. After all this time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vince, will you come down here please!</td>
<td></td>
<td>At door.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eventually this scene went through several changes during the rehearsal process which will be explained in Chapter IV, but this initial work gave me a place to start during the first rehearsals.

My score for the conversation scene that Tilden and Shelly have close to the end of act two, was mostly concerned with subtext, since Shelly's movement in the scene was fairly limited to sitting on a stool. Here is part of the score for that scene.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Subtext</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T: Where was it I saw him last?</td>
<td>You're his father--you should know. But he's like a child. I must explain things slowly.</td>
<td>cutting carrots stop cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've only known him for a few months. He doesn't tell me everything.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: He doesn't? S: Not stuff like that.</td>
<td></td>
<td>cutting the carrots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: What does he tell you?</td>
<td>What does he mean? I can't tell him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Subtext</td>
<td>Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: You mean in general?</td>
<td>I don't really want to tell him what we talk about because he wouldn't understand--more questions He tells me all kinds of things.</td>
<td>stop cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Yeah.</td>
<td>He's persistent. What can I tell him?</td>
<td>smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Well,--</td>
<td>I don't want to make him feel bad though.</td>
<td>cutting carrots stop cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I mean I can't just come right out and tell you how he feels.</td>
<td>Make him think it's a secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: How come?</td>
<td></td>
<td>smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Because it's stuff he told me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Line | Subtext | Movement
---|---|---
privately. |  |  
T: And you can't | right | shake head no
tell me? |  |  
S: I don't even | You can't tell a stranger a secret. |  
know you. |  |  

My initial scoring for this scene was very close to the way the director wanted the scene performed, so there were no major changes.

I scored some scenes in act three for subtext, but movement was difficult to score in act three on paper because of the complexities of moving with a leg.

The scoring work done before rehearsals began was most beneficial because it gave me beginning thoughts and movement to support my lines.
CHAPTER IV

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

The rehearsal process for Buried Child was an exciting time, due in part to the volatile nature of the show, but also because of the director, Patrick Moore, and the cast he had assembled. The director knew exactly what he wanted from each scene in Buried Child, but he was never "iron fisted" about how the actor arrived at the final product. His flexibility permeated the blocking and working rehearsals and gave the actors the freedom to share ideas of character and business with each other, ask one another for reactions and even to work scenes before and after scheduled rehearsals. This type of freedom in rehearsals can be accomplished if the actors are hard working, fairly independent, and secure in their own work; and Patrick Moore chose such actors for Buried Child.

Shortly after Buried Child was cast in late November, we met for our first read-through on December 3, 1979. Since we were looking at a three week Christmas break, the director asked us to have several things done by our next rehearsal, scheduled for January 2, 1980. Lines were
to be learned, a character analysis sketched out (including everything the character said about himself and everything others said about the character), and all of us were to be prepared to discuss our character's relationship with each member of the family. (Much of my analysis reported in Chapter II was done over the Christmas break.)

By the time January rolled around everyone in the cast was anxious to be finished with stationary analysis work and begin working rehearsals, but for two days (January 2 and 3) we shared our analysis work with each other and read through the script. A lot of helpful information surfaced for everyone during both days of discussion. We went from person to person discussing his or her motivation, intentions, and relationships. While listening to Ionia Zelenka's discussion of Halie, I realized that Shepard had designed many parallels between the characters Shelly and Halie. These parallels were very important, establishing a conflict between both characters. Because Shelly has many of the same characteristics that Halie possesses, Halie automatically sees Shelly as a threat; as a replacement. This is the basis for Halie's hostile agression against Shelly in act three. The first similarity that Ionia and I found between Shelly and Halie was that both were originally from large cities and neither was familiar or accustomed to farm life when first introduced to it. Shelly immediately recognizes Halie's look
of displacement in the pictures upstairs; "She looks
lost standing out there. Like she doesn't know how she
got there." (p. 54) probably because she identifies with
that same displaced feeling.

A second similarity is that Shelly, like Halie, is
a romantic. Both have ideal dreams of what they want to
occur. Halie fabricates and lives in a dream about an
ideal son and Shelly has an ideal image of a Norman Rock-
well farm family. Even though Shelly says that she finds
it hard to relate to family and home life, she is anxious
to become involved with her idea of an ideal home and farm
family, anxious because she probably doesn't have a close
family relationship and home of her own. This family/home
dream of Shelly's is probably the underlying reason for
her thinking the house belongs to her in act three. Shelly
answers Dodge's question, "Whose house did you think it
was?", with "Mine. I know it's not mine but I had that
feeling." (p. 53) She continues talking to Dodge telling
him that the house seems very familiar to her, but that
he doesn't seem to fit into it. Shelly is enacting part
of a self-fulfilling prophecy. She is claiming the house,
but not the family because they are not her ideal family.
Halie immediately recognizes Shelly's claim on the house
as soon as she enters in act three. Halie re-stakes her
claim on the house as soon as she can by referring to Shelly
as a "stranger" (p. 58) and as a "pathetic little girl."
(p. 59) She coldly asks Shelly, "What are you doing with my cup and saucer?"

A third similarity, is that Shepard gives both characters a parallel action in relating with Tilden. Halie gave Tilden a child, a soft baby that he touched and carried. Shelly gives Tilden her rabbit fur coat which is a substitute for a soft touchable baby. In fact, Shelly is a replacement of Halie in Tilden's eyes. She is capable of offering Tilden a comfort and nurture that Halie is no longer able to offer him. This action is further proof that Shelly could possibly replace Halie. Even though Halie does not see Shelly give Tilden the coat, she is aware of Tilden's shift in allegiance. She tries to make light of Tilden's shift by referring to ball players (Tilden) running amuck because of drugs and women (Shelly) and she refers to Shelly as a "pathetic little girl." (p. 59)

The character discussion that occurred during the first two days of rehearsal proved to be very helpful, particularly helpful to me in understanding Shelly's relationship with Halie.

Both days after we read through the script, the director gave everyone a specific question to consider. The question that he posed to me was, "How soon does Shelly feel at home in act three?" The next day I returned with my answer, "Immediately." Shelly feels at home as soon as she enters act three. She has slept upstairs, she has
made a cup of bouillon for Dodge and she even admits to Dodge, "Last night I was scared. Now I'm not scared."

(p. 52) Through answering the question, I saw the connection that the director wanted me to make. Up until then, I had been questioning Dodge too timidly in act three. Once I had answered his question, it was obvious that Shelly has to begin the third act with a lot of strength and that my timid questioning was inconsistent with her other actions.

Since character work and scoring had been done and lines had been learned over break, blocking the show took only two days. The director told us to move as we needed to. This resulted in letting us find the broad movements and crosses that defined our character relationships. The director only designated specific blocking in scenes where the movement was particularly difficult; the final scene in act two (Bradley's hostile treatment of Shelly), the scene in which Shelly defends herself with the leg, and the scene in act three that follows Vince's return (Shelly's escape to the porch, Vince's entry from the porch to the house, and the taunting fight between Bradley and Vince). These scenes were so tightly blocked that the movement closely resembled choreography.

Instead of giving notes after these early blocking rehearsals, the director gave us questions to think over and answer. These questions mostly pertained to scenes where objectives were not yet clear. One such scene was
the opening of act two, Vince and Shelly's entrance onto the porch. The director posed objective questions to Joel Hammer (Vince) and me. "What does Vince expect of me?, What do I expect of Vince? What does Shelly expect of me? What do I expect of Shelly?" After rehearsal, I wrote these answers. What does Vince expect of me?--He wants me to make a good impression on his family. He wants me to be quiet. What do I expect of Vince?--I want him to laugh with me because I'm nervous and not ready to meet his family and the stories and laughter are a way of stalling for more time before going in. Once Joel and I had articulated the answers to the questions the intentions we wanted to accomplish were more distinct, thus making the subtext more playable.

The other question that the director asked me after the first day of blocking was, "Why is Shelly interested in the pictures in Halie's room?" I answered that she wanted to find out what happened to Tilden and Bradley. In the pictures they looked fine, but I wanted to find out what happened in the meantime to make them look like they do now? The director was trying to get an answer from me that more directly involved Shelly. After rehearsal I wrote this concerning his question. "Shelly feels a pull for the farm. She says she feels she belongs and knows her way around here. So perhaps she wants to find out about the family before she gets sucked in and can't
leave." The director told me this objective joined with my other answer was a more playable objective because it was a more immediate intention that directly related to Shelly's future. The most notable change that the articulation of this objective brought about was an urgency and pressure in the questioning of Dodge about the pictures. This urgency of questioning also supported Shelly's strength in the third act.

After the blocking of the show was completed, we began act runthroughs. The usual procedure was to run the act once, take notes, then run it a second time trying to incorporate the notes, then take notes a second time. The early experience of running the entire act without stopping prompted some honest reactions. Everyone was off book well enough to concentrate on seeing and hearing for the first time. A couple of those reactions occurred January 9, during the second runthrough of act two. The first one happened when Bradley entered and asked me if I were on vacation. I usually whispered "no." But during this particular runthrough, as he asked the question he nodded his head in affirmation of his question. In response I shook my head no, while he was still nodding yes. The second reaction occurred soon after the first one. Bradley had just told Shelly, referring to Dodge that, "We could shoot him. What about drowning him?" (p. 50) Then he laughed and kicked at Dodge. Shelly responded with,
"Shut up!" Before this runthrough I had shouted the "Shut up" from the stool I was sitting on, but this time I stood up and then said, "Shut up." Bradley stared at me and everything was silent until his focus made me sit down again. In standing up, I had physically threatened Bradley's power, which he had to regain. We kept both of the reactions through out the run of the show.

Our first runthrough occurred on Sunday, January 13 and it went fairly well. The director was primarily taking notes on technical problems such as cleaning up the blocking and low volume, so that was what fourteen of my fifteen notes were concerned with. Aside from the technical notes, I thought of an idea that would set up, early on, the hostile relationship between Shelly and Malie. Ionia and I worked it that evening after notes. On Malie's entrance she had been crossing into the base of the stairway, looking at me, then crossing to Bradley and covering his leg. My idea dealt with changing her look to me after she crossed to the stairway. If she tried to illicit a response from me during her look, I would begin to offer an explanation for my presense, but she could silence me with a wave of the hand before I could speak. We incorporated the moment the following evening. The director liked it and we kept it.

We ran Buried Child again on Jaunary 16, incorporating the new blocking the director had given us in the previous
rehearsal. This was an encouraging rehearsal. The new blocking was solid, relationships were definable, and builds were beginning to emerge. About this time I was beginning to see that my initial analysis and scoring work on Shelly and her relationships was paying off. The majority of my notes were technical, dealing with blocking, pacing, and volume. The only scene that consistently frustrated me was the opening porch scene of act two. Joel and I tried several ideas and new approaches to the scene, but we kept the same objectives that we had set earlier. We tried beginning the scene off stage, running and giggling onto the porch (which we kept throughout the run). We also tried doing the scene using the image of being stoned, which worked the best for us as actors. If Vince laughed with Shelly in the beginning of the scene, it gave Shelly a reason for sustaining her laughter as long as Shepard prescribed. But if Vince began the scene insisting that Shelly stop laughing, there was no reason for Shelly to continue laughing as long as the script dictated. When the director watched the scene, he decided that he did not want Vince to laugh. He wanted me to keep the same objective, being nervous and wanting to not meet the family, but he wanted me to push the nervousness up to a hysterical laughter level. So we worked the scene in that direction for the run of the show. During the entrance, Vince played the objective of wanting me to stop laughing, and I
continued to laugh hysterically because of being nervous. (Looking back, the problem in playing the scene that way was that there was no support from Vince in my continuing the laughter for the length that Shepard had written it. Vince got bored and irritated with the laughter, and therefore the audience got bored and irritated with the laughter.)

We had a long working rehearsal of act two the following night, Thursday, January 17. This was an important rehearsal because it involved several changes for me in one particular scene; the scene close to the beginning of act two where Dodge awakens, stares at Shelly, and will not speak to her. According to my previous scoring (see Chapter II, pages 28 through 30) I had been playing that I was nervous and frightened of Dodge. He would not speak, so I kept talking. During this rehearsal the director told me that about midway through the scene, I needed to try to set up a friendlier conversation with Dodge; one that would support Dodge and Shelly's upcoming alliance. While working the scene, Chris Merrill, who played Dodge, and I came up with several new things. He began trying more physical things that I had to react to, such as slapping my hand with his baseball cap and throwing the filters off his cigarettes at me. I divided my focus between Dodge and the room later in the scene and began playing a subtext that approximated, "I really can't believe Vince would even want to stop here. This place and
this old man is so weird." After rehearsal, I re-scored the scene.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Subtext</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ye: Just a minute.</td>
<td>I've got to be nice to this old guy--con-vince him I'm not a burgler.</td>
<td>turn back to Dodge shrug shoulders and smile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm looking at the pictures.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pouring rain on the freeway so we thought we'd stop by.</td>
<td>sotto voce--&quot;no&quot;--that sounds like we're embarrassed.</td>
<td>hand to forehead, using this as a rest stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I mean, Vince was planning on stopping anyway.</td>
<td>pause: Is he hard of hearing? say next lines louder, slower</td>
<td>walk closer to sofa and touch back of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He wanted to see you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He said he hadn't seen you in a long time.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dodge hits me w/ cap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We were going all the way through to New Mexico. To see you know anything about that? I guess his father lives out there? So-- We thought we'd stop by and see you on the way. Kill two birds with one stone, you know? What next-- I can't believe this! giggle He's not going to talk to me-- forget it-- No, I'll keep talking so I won't get so nervous. I mean Vince has
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Subtext</th>
<th>Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>this thing about his family now.</td>
<td>I can't believe this</td>
<td>cross to light-stand underneath it and make a circle.--giggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess it's a new thing with him.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I kind of find it hard to relate to.</td>
<td>laugh--why are we here?</td>
<td>stop circling hands on hips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But he feels it's important. You know.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Look directly at Dodge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mean he feels like he wants to get</td>
<td>I can't believe he wants to know you or</td>
<td>Keep looking at Dodge on &quot;I mean&quot;-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to know you all again. After all this</td>
<td>this place.</td>
<td>look to old T.V., old crate, for rest of sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Then back to Dodge on &quot;after all this time.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I tried the new scoring the following rehearsal and the scene worked much better. It also set Shelly up as a stronger person in the opening of act two.
On Sunday, January 20, we began a series of run-throughs that took us all the way to opening night, February 5. The director used the first two run-throughs during this phase of the rehearsal process to help us find the correct emotional levels for the characters. In the earlier corrective blocking rehearsals he let us play the emotions fully, but now he began pulling us back, particularly in act two. Many of my notes for act two included phrases such as: lighten up, keep lightness, less fear, cautious but interested. In fact, the director told everyone in act two to concentrate on the image of lightness moving to darkness. Thinking of this image caused me to add quite a few more laughs and giggles in reaction to Dodge at the top of act two; "There's still life in the old girl." (p. 33), "How am I supposed to remember, if you don't remember?" (p. 35), "She's a beautiful girl." (p. 35).

Monday, January 21, was a university holiday so we ran the show twice. The director's notes after the first run were still centered around checking emotional levels. However his notes after the second run were mainly concerned with timing of specific lines. I had a pause in the third act where nothing overt was happening. It occurred during my pressing Dodge for answers about Tilden and his story about the baby. Dodge kept evading my questions by asking questions.
Shelly: Last night. Was he telling the truth about the baby?

Dodge: What's happened to Tilden? Why isn't Tilden here?

Shelly: Bradley chased him out.

Shelly finally becomes very frustrated and answers Dodes question. I was taking a two beat pause before I answered, "Bradley chased him out. ", but nothing really was happening. After the director's note, to cut the pause, I still wanted to show Shelly's frustration, so I slapped the stove, sat and then answered, "Bradley chased him out." So actually I hadn't cut the pause; I filled it with action that was more descriptive of the frustration that Shelly was feeling.

The remainder of the week we worked on timing, finding the rhythm that Shepard wrote into the script. Shepard often uses stichomythia for building suspense or tension. An example of this device from the second act was:

Shelly: Can't we just go?

Vince: No! I gotta find out what's going on.

Shelly: Look, you think you're bad off, what about me? Not only don't they recognize me but I've never seen them before in my life. I don't know who these guys are. They could be anybody!

Vince: They're not anybody!

Shelly: That's what you say.
During the timing rehearsals, I had trouble finding
the rhythm for my last line, "That's what you say." (p. 42)
Not until we had a double-time rehearsal on Friday, January
25, did I really find the rhythm for that line. It simply
had to come very quickly and on top of Vince's line. For
the double-time rehearsal, we had to keep all objectives
and subtext as we had rehearsed, only speed everything up
to twice the normal pace. The double-time rehearsal helped
us to find the places in the script that needed a faster
pace. The entire first act was funny for the first time
during the double-time rehearsal and for the most part,
the director kept the faster pace for the first act during
the performance.

We returned to the regular pace during the next two
rehearsals, trying to keep the new rhythms we had discover-
ed, but spontaneity was a problem that plagued everyone
in the cast. The director gave a blanket note, "Keep the
rhythm and pace you found Friday, but also keep the
concentration that keeps you seeing and hearing for the
first time--eyeball stuff." Actually, we did slow the
pace down through the first light rehearsals--recapturing
honest reactions. By the middle of light rehearsals, we
had found the honesty plus the pace.

Dress rehearsals began on February 1 and the notes
the director gave during these rehearsals were very
technical, most of them having to do with pacing. The only
scene that was still a problem for me was the porch scene at the opening of act two. The problem did not lie in the objective work or the concentration, but had to do with where the scene took place, which was partially obscured from the audience. The porch was at the back of the stage, screened in, with a rail all the way around it. The whole scene was upstaged by the set, so on February 2, after the dress rehearsal, the director re-blocked the scene. There were two areas that were visible on the porch, on top of the porch rail or lying flat on the porch floor. The new blocking helped the scene because the extra movement supported the excessive laughter.

There was a small audience of invited students for our final dress rehearsal. We hoped they would show us where the laughs would be, but they were fairly quiet. However their silence was encouraging because they listened. The director told us during notes that we held their attention for two hours.
Shelly with Bradley's leg, Act III.
CHAPTER V

PERFORMANCE

Our production of Buried Child opened on February 5, 1980 and ran through February 16, 1980. Buried Child's transition from the rehearsal process to production was very smooth. In fact, the show in performance stayed very true to what Patrick Moore had directed and what we had rehearsed. We had a very consistent run. One factor that I believe influenced our consistency during performance was the number of runthrough rehearsals we had prior to opening--sixteen in all. The last five or six runthroughs were particularly solid. There were minor changes, but mostly the show was set.

In a conversation after the show closed, the director explained another reason for the show's consistency. He told me that Buried Child was a serious show with moments of comic irony. The comic moments emerge out of the situation and therefore the cast did not have to consciously play for or try different things to get the laughs in performance. The laughs were inherent in the situation.

Of course there were holds for laughs during the performance that were absent during rehearsal, but even
some of those holds had been anticipated by the director in rehearsal. He had directed specific takes to cover the hold for laughs after specific lines in the script. After Dodge's lines, "You two are not my idea of the perfect couple!" (p. 34) and "She's a beautiful girl." (p. 35), Joel Hammer and I were directed to look at each other and then back to Dodge. There were also some reaction takes that we had been playing in rehearsal that coincidentally turned out to be where audience response occurred. There was the initial surprise of the audience response, but we didn't have to adapt or hold for the response any differently than what had been rehearsed. Three examples of these responses occurred in act two. Soon after Dodge awakens, he surprises Shelly by pulling off his baseball cap and revealing a cut on his forehead. I had rehearsed the surprise of seeing the wound by taking a small step backward and vocalizing a short gasp. Every time Dodge removed his cap in this scene during performance the audience gave an audible gasp. Their response occurred simultaneously with my response. This same type of situation occurred later in act two when Tilden entered with the carrots. Joel and I had rehearsed a confused take, that served as a hold for the audience's laughter on Tilden's entrance. The situation occurred again while Vince was playing a tune on his teeth in an attempt to get Tilden and Dodge to recognize him. When Vince left Dodge and
crossed to Tilden and me, I began to giggle because Vince was playing "Camptown Races" on his teeth. Again my response was practically simultaneous with the audience's response. Thus, there was no hold for my next line, "He drives me crazy with that sometimes." (p. 40)

The character Shelly is the "outsider" or the raisonneur in the script; she, like the audience, is seeing and reacting to the situations for the first time. This is one reason why many of Shelly's and the audience's reactions are similar and occur simultaneously. Shelly often says exactly what the audience is thinking. Shelly laughs and tells Vince, "Maybe you've got the wrong house." (p. 36) when Dodge still refuses to recognize him. The audience was probably wondering the same thing and laughed after this line. A similar moment occurs when Tilden is standing center stage covered with mud holding carrots and looking lost. Shelly turns to Vince and says, "This is your father?" (p. 37) Again, the audience was probably thinking the same thing about Tilden, so they laughed when Shelly said the line.

There were, of course, some long laughs that occurred during performance that had not been anticipated. One instance occurred in act two when laughter erupted in the middle of my lines. I was standing between Tilden and Vince saying, "This is supposed to be your son. Is he your son? Do you recognize him?" (p. 37) Then I stepped
backward on to the platform realizing that Tilden truly
did not recognize him and continued saying, "I'm just
along for the ride here." (p. 37) This line always got
a laugh and I had to hold looking back and forth from
Tilden to Vince, until I could finish the line, "I thought
everybody knew each other!", which got another laugh. The
other times I had to hold for laughter all occurred after
lines that Dodge had given. Dodge tells Tilden, "Pipe
down would ya!" (p. 47) in act two while Tilden is telling
about his driving adventures. I had to wait until Dodge
and the audience settled down before I could continue my
conversation with Tilden. At the top of act three Dodge
says to Shelly, "You know what'd be good for me? A little
massage, a little contact." (p. 52) I focused on Dodge
until the laughter died and then said, "Oh no. I've had
enough contact for a while." (p. 52) Dodge got another
laugh from the audience after he told Shelly that "Bradley's
a pushover. All ya gotta do is take his leg and throw
it out the back door." (p. 52) Again I focused on him
taking sips of the bouillon until the laughter died and
then said, "You'd do that?" (p. 53).

The most unexpected response that occurred from the
audience was the cheering and clapping that followed my
line to Halie, "I don't like being ignored." (p. 61) I
had just broken Halie's cup and saucer and the audience
was very happy to see me come back at her. I held staring
at Halie until I could continue, "I don't like being treated like I'm not here." (p. 61) The audience's vocal approval of my action often continued through my capture of Bradley's leg.

Aside from the difference that holding for laughs caused between rehearsal and performance of Buried Child, there were only two conscious physical additions added during performance that had not been present in rehearsal. Both additions came out of playing the situation. The first addition occurred in act two after Dodge said, "Can you trust a man who keeps bringing in vegetables from out of nowhere?" (p. 43) [audience laughter] "Take a look at him." (p. 43) After Dodge said, "Take a look at him.", Vince, Dodge, and I all turned our heads simultaneously and looked at Tilden, which resulted in another laugh. The second addition occurred in act three. Bradley says, "If I had my leg you wouldn't be saying this. You'd never get away with it if I had my leg." Dodge interjects, "She's got your leg." (p. 65) After he said that, I snapped the leg to an extended position, looking like I was kicking it at Bradley's face. Dodge acknowledged the snap and then continued with, "She's gonna keep your leg too." Again, this reaction came out of playing and living in the situation.

The director gave notes on Wednesday of the second week of the run. Actually he just gave one note, "Pull
back to what we rehearsed, play the situation, and don't play for the laughs." I knew that I was guilty of extending my laughs and giggles in act two, particularly in the scene where Tilden arrived with the carrots and eventually left me standing alone with the carrots. On the subsequent night, I pulled back on my giggling in act two, particularly during Tilden's entrance. The director watched and told me that pulling back on the laughs paid off, that I was back to playing the situation. The problem of playing for laughs in *Buried Child* was not a huge problem, but it was an insidious one that several of us fell into without meaning to. The incident was beneficial though, because it taught me one has to be very tough minded about playing the situation in a play of this type.

The two week run of *Buried Child* was over too quickly. It would have been an interesting play to perform for an extended run. The situations within the play were penetrating and complex enough that they demanded absolute "seeing for the first time" concentration. This type of concentration often results in slight reaction changes that keep the play exciting to perform. Another reason for wanting to extend the run, a slightly selfish one, is that seldom does an actor or actress get to work with a cast that is so perfectly tuned to an ensemble performance and an extended run of this show would have been an excellent experience.
AFTERWARD

The experience of being able to perform the role of Shelly in Ohio State University's production of *Buried Child* was an exciting and beneficial one. I feel that I created a strong, complex character that illustrated my development as an actress while here at Ohio State. In creating the character of Shelly, I tried to apply all of the processes I have learned here at Ohio State. In analyzing *Buried Child*, it was of extreme importance to examine the play's environment, determining the time period, locale, and language, because all the characters were influenced by the environment in which they existed—the sixties time period, the "Bible-belt" farming region, and the "tight-lipped" way of speaking. Analyzing the relationships between characters gave me a basis for designing my movement and some blocking. But most importantly, I now have a process for researching a role and creating a character: charting out what the character says about himself and what others say about him, dividing a script into action segments to find character objectives, and scoring a role for subtext and movement. Being aware of these processes and being able to apply them has helped me become a more independent actress—an actress that can
come to a rehearsal knowing who her character is and what her character wants.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

This appendix is the working script of *Buried Child* with numbered and marked action segments. (See Note on page vi for location of complete copy of this thesis.)