

**CREATIVITY AND CONFLICT IN THE PLAYS
OF SAM SHEPARD: A CRITICAL STUDY**

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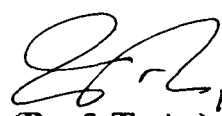
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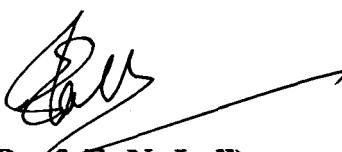
DECLARATION

I, **Mr. Jyotirmoy Prodhani**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents did not form the basis of award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institution.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English**.


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Dedicated to my father who valued art and education

Late Sibesh Ch. Prodhani

and

to my grandparents whose endearment made me ambitious

Mr. Pulin Das & Mrs. Tamal Kusum Das

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AC	<i>Angel City</i>
CM	<i>Cowboy Mouth</i>
GHD	<i>Geography of a Horse Dreamer</i>
MD	<i>Melodrama Play</i>
MDB	<i>The Mad Dog Blues</i>
OOB	<i>Off Off Broadway</i>
R & B	<i>Rock and Blues</i>
RTL	<i>Rolling Thunder Logbook</i>
SBF	<i>Suicide in B-Flat</i>
TOC	<i>Tooth of Crime</i>
TW	<i>True West</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Part I

DRAMA OF THE MARGIN: OFF OFF BROADWAY AND SAM SHEPARD

With the arrival of the Off Off Broadway theatre, America's search for a dramatic form of its own seemed to have been achieved. Ironically, America could not find its own dramatic form in the opulent corridors of the mainstream Broadway theatre. America discovered its own drama outside the Broadway. This dramatic form was evolved by a group of young playwrights who were displaced and culturally dislocated. Jerry Tallman, a regular drama critic who used to write in *The Village Voice*, had coined a new term to categorically define the works of these playwrights: he called them "Off Off Broadway". Michael Smith writes: "(These) plays are strikingly American and modern in style, frame of reference and sensibility; they could not have been written anywhere else or at any other time" (13).

Till the first half of the century drama in America has been a provincial extension of the European dramatic tradition. The twentieth century playwrights, therefore, did not have to struggle to invent a new language of their own. Playwrights like Eugene O'Neil, Thornton Wilder, Clifford Odets, Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and even Edward Albee, according to Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, followed a theatrical line originated by Ibsen, Chekov, and Strindberg (xii). Robert Brunstein, Dean of Yale Drama School remarked in 1954,

American drama often seems to be the most mundane form of legitimate culture since eighteenth century sentimental comedy, a form to which it has more than a little resemblance. Our serious drama is informed by a debased Freudianism and our comedies are set in motion by man chasing woman. (qtd. in Freedman 101)

Despite the important dramatists produced in America, like O'Neil, wrote William Herman, "America might just as well have been still imparting (its) plays from London"(4). The productions in the Broadway became typical: Light comedies, musicals (one of the indigenous forms of America) and the serious plays became predictable in themes; "war in horror", "family is destructive" and psychological explorations.

Writers of the first half of twentieth century had to invent or revitalize myths to construct a set of symbols for their works. Yeats had to re-establish the whole range of Irish mythology to create symbols for his poetry, Eliot had to draw on the fisher-king phoenix myth to establish "objective co-relative" for his *The Waste Land*, similarly the works of Ezra Pound was incomprehensible to the "uninitiated". But the playwrights of the Off Off Broadway did not have to pedantically search for myths and symbols. They picked them up from the American folk art and the characters emerged from America's own landscape. A group of plays were invented outside the Broadway with enormous variety and distinction which were characterized by new aesthetic theory and practice, social attitude and allegiance and which were, observed William Herman, at odds with the prevailing aesthetics of American theatre, social norms and cultural ideas in force (10).

The Off Off Broadway playwrights were not a product of a particular institution, nor did they emerge as a group with a well defined agenda as well as they did not have a common manifesto to doggedly follow. Their status as “disjunctive temporalities” was the factor that unified them. Their displacement onto the margin of cultural space provided them a commonality of identity and the similarity of sensibilities. They resorted to a set of symbols that formed the part of a new syntax. They shared common manifestations syntactically, contextually and theatrically. From a historical perspective, these plays had a unified style that made them more similar to, than different from, each other.

The birth place of such a powerful and one of the most significant art forms were the places which, apparently, could be associated with anything but theatre – the Cafes and the basements of churches. *Cafe Cino*, established in 1958 by Joe Cino at 31 Cornelia Street, New York, happened to have made the first production (*The Apollo of Bellac* by Jean Giraudoux, 1967) that set off the Off Off Broadway movement. This was followed by Judson Memorial Church’s *The Judson Poets’ Theatre* which became the “granddaddy of the Off Off Broadway Theatre movement” (Poland, xx). The two other first centres of the Off Off Broadway activities were *Cafe La Mama* established by enthusiastic Ellen Stewart who became the spirited guardian, janitor, fund raiser, tour manager, press agent as well as the conceptual leader of the artists that flocked her cafe. The fourth address of the Off Off Broadway was the *Theatre Genesis* at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery, founded by Ralph Cook in 1964 to “discover authentic theatre voices and develop them toward a kind of

subjective realism” and one of the most significant authentic voices they discovered was Sam Shepard who made his debut as a playwright in this theatre with *Cowboys* and *Rak Garden* on 16 October 1964. From there he emerged as, according to Leslie Wade, “the latest Great American playwright” (1).

These places were small and narrow with non-theatrical facilities, makeshift theatres in cellars, bars, lofts, storefronts and coffeehouses. Despite the tightness of space, stringent budget, technical limitations, and almost total absence of monetary gain, the playwrights enjoyed enormous freedom which the vast and wide spaces of Broadway could not give them. In order to find an alternative space drama activists finally located a new place in the Off Off Broadway.

Earlier, Off Broadway produced some of the outstanding theatre figures which include the names like Edward Albee (his *Zoo Story* was opened in 1960 with Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*); Jack Richardson (*The Prodigal*), Jack Gelber (*The Connection*), William Henley (*Mrs. Dally has a Lover*), Arthur Kopit (*Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama’s Hung You in the Closet and I’m Feelin’ So Sad*), William Snyder (*The Days and Nights of Beebe Forster Maker*), Kenneth H. Brown (*The Bug*) and Adrienne Kennedy (*Funny House of a Negro*). But such a formidable institution had to make premature closure forcing the arrival of the Off Off Broadway as an inevitable cultural event. Off Broadway could not deal with the practical exigencies – as the movement established, it was beset by the usual troubles; rent hike, unions, climbing of ticket price, decrease in audience and the gradual preoccupation with “hit psychology” primarily because even an average Off Broadway production involved

quite a considerable financial stake. Off Broadway, quite inadvertently became a follower of the Broadway system that made "super productions" with Hollywood cast and exorbitantly expensive settings. Off Broadway productions, in the mid-fifties, cost few hundred dollars but in the sixties Off Broadway required \$10,000 to \$40,000 as initial investment. As a result, soon the Off Broadway theatres were closed down. The movement lost its purpose, for it could not comfortably afford an unconventional or experimental project because of their commercial vulnerability. *The Living Theatre*, one of the pioneers of the Off Broadway movement, was closed for non-payment of tax in October 1963.

It was one of the *Living Theatre* productions that set forth the aesthetic foundation of the Off Off Broadway drama movement that followed. The *Living Theatre* moved to Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue and in 1959 it mounted a production of a new American playwright that was different in idioms and structure – *The Connection* of Jack Gelber under Julian Beck and Judith Melina. The play was a new experience for the audience. The form was unpretentiously indigenous and the language was contemporary. The play was produced under completely unconventional arrangement. Staging of the play at the second floor loft, with 160 numbers of audience it created, what Albert Poland observed, a "forced intimacy". The musicians were on stage and were not locked in a pit. Even audience became a part of the performance unlike the Broadway where the audience is carefully separated from the play and were made to observe the proceedings on stage against a curtain representing the fourth wall of the proscenium. Theatre became a ceremony of

renewal, for it repositioned drama as a “folk art”. Critics could no longer ignore the event. Even the mainstream periodical *Life* magazine carried out an article on the production. The play set off a new movement.

But when the *Living Theatre* was closed down, it left a promise for a new legacy in its wake. It created a new audience and it provided the impetus for a new theatre and playwrights as well. It marked the arrival of the Off Off Broadway.

The movement could form a group of loyal and devoted audience who enthusiastically became parts of the plays because they did not require any extra exposure to understand new symbols and language used by the playwrights. About the inter relationship between audience and the new playwrights, Smith writes, “They invented it because they were unwanted elsewhere; it invented them because it needed new plays. Neither would exist without the other” (1). The new dramatic syntax was predicated upon the ordinary American reality, one simply needed to be familiar with the general American sociology to decode the syntax which included the movies, pop corn, cokes, radio, TV, comic strips, cowboys, drugs, rock singers, jazz, Hollywood et al. Drama became aesthetically postmodern. The plays dealt with the people who were the Andy Warhol of dramatic characters. They were picked up from the world of mass media which formed the body of twentieth century folk art

Off Off Broadway used pop art as a catalyst to transform the artifacts of folk art into a symbol and to identify this not as a mere image but as a definite statement, where an object transforms into an adjective.

Hollywood movie, America's most far-reaching folk art, is used as a new cultural reference in the Off Off Broadway plays by turning it into an adjective to imply excessiveness, opulence, lavishness, hi-tech machismo, glamour as well as power. Thus the new theatre transformed the objects of folk life into new American literary dramatic symbolism with which the audience had no problem in understanding. Sam Shepard mastered this art intuitively. For a sensitive artist this was an effortless exercise to write such folk plays, for that is where existed the native roots. This art provided legitimacy to an intimate cultural identity of a nation.

Shepard is one of the most successful playwrights to give this reality a new dimension. That is why, Martin Esslin wrote, "Sam Shepard is contemporary American theatre" (qtd. in McBride, B. 2). His works are a cultural critique as they are artifacts that document the contemporary cultural history of America. His aesthetic orientation, remarked Leslie Wade, often signals wider dislocations in the social and political landscape for his works speak to an American experience that lies deep within the nation's cultural memory. Shepard therefore is always considered the most American of all contemporary dramatists. Wynn Handman, Director of American Place Theatre commented that Shepard "... is like a conduit that digs down into the American soil and what flows out of him is what we're all about" (qtd. in Jack Kroll 71). The Americanness of Shepard, like the Off Off Broadway artists, is constituted by an inherent paradox. He is American by not being American. He does not represent the civilized and refined America, as Paul Berman would say, "the America of Henry James" (215). Nor, is he a "naturalist" or "mystic" who would

write on the American landscape with abundance, impulses, and inspiration like Walt Whitman. Berman defines Shepard as the “primitivist without peer” (215). Shepard has been categorized by Wade as a “wild man rhapsodist”, an “outsider, a visionary on the edge of American civilization”. He has been a cultural renegade, a “bucking bronco” (Richard Gilman ix) who, through the rituals of rejection, could capture the nation’s collective dreams, its fears and desires. He has been designated, therefore, as a “National treasure” (Gordon Rogoff 117). Sam Shepard, a rebel from Off Off Broadway, becomes a cult hero of popular culture. Lynda Hart raises the issue of Shepard’s becoming O’Neil’s heir apparent and argues that Shepard’s “recurrent designation” as America’s playwright “should give us a pause”(81), for he has institutionalized a non-canonical art.

Leslie A. Wade focused on the aesthetics of Shepard’s works from a Bakhtinian perspective by studying the elements that characterize Shepard’s work. He focused on the element of explosion and disintegration in the plays and argued that Shepard’s plays as well as the Off Off Broadway venues that fostered his plays, gave expression to what Mikhail Bakhtin described a *heteroglossia* – the centrifugal impulse of unconventional art. Leslie Wade comments that this “manifests itself through irreverence, eruptive expression, unconventional stylistic practices, and multiple positioning”(23). The process involves a fundamental politics of opposition that affronts and resists the conservative forces that regulate social conversation, art and artist. Shepard’s is a theatre of counterculture that has heteroglossic expression, the anarchy of which challenged mainstream culture, contested its narratives, values

and modes of production. Wade made his observations mostly on the basis of Shepard's early one-act plays like *Learnus's Mother* (1965, produced in *Cafe Cino*) where his visceral theatrics and the end-of-the-world scenario appear to negate any form of cohesion or centrism. His plays contest the nation-state consensus and its media representations of the white middle class. One of the Shepard's significant productions that depicted his dramatic characteristics was *La Turista* at American Place Theatre in 1967 (4 March). This theatre, co-founded by Wynn Handman and Reverend Sidney Lanier in 1964, was, as described by Handman, "free from pressures of the market" (vii). It even offered its writers the option to bar critics from productions which Shepard opted for with a view to insulate the artist and his work from being controlled by the forces of canonical culture. The artistic struggle to achieve this insulation would form a major theme in a definite set of Shepard's plays which the present study focuses upon.

Shepard began his drama career in the early sixties which witnessed the arrival of a new generation with an exuberant national spirit which coincided with John F. Kennedy's becoming one of the youngest American presidents (1961-63) one who personified the new generation's idealism that revived the spirit of nationalism. Kennedy espoused hope, a vision of altruism and sacrifice against the complacency and consumerism of the late fifties. The assassination of Kennedy in November 1963 was a major blow to that idealism. This had affected a gradual shift of attitude from, what was called, "the constricted world view of the Eisenhower era" (1952-60). That was the time when the seed of counterculture was sown. Shepard remarked about the

time in one of his interviews to Robert Goldberg: "Well everybody suddenly felt liberated, and the restricted behaviour that was a tradition in this country for years was blown apart"(43). This was the time when the increasing power of corporate America posed a huge threat to an uncertain generation which had already expressed unwillingness to accede to the materialistic values of their parents. Despite the obvious material prosperity in which the post-war generation was reared, they were looking for an alternative vision, an alternative American dream.

That was the time when Shepard came to New York which itself was quite a huge cultural revelation for him. He spoke about the experience "when I got to New York, it was a mixture of being thrilled and awe-struck and scared all at the same time" (qtd. in Goldberg 43). Shepard candidly revealed the impact of the time in his plays. He says:

My plays were influenced by everything happening to me. A lot of them came out of fear and anger, because that's what was going on. There was an extreme kind of street paranoia in those days – the Kennedy trip, Malcom X, and the Panthers. The shit was hitting the fan and everybody had the sense that there was a flood coming. (qtd. in Goldberg 47)

Shepard also described his New York experience as "like being in a fun park" (qtd in Chubb 200). As a youth, Shepard followed frank hedonism and was engaged in the pursuit of the new and the exciting. His sex life during the time was indiscriminately active and was an active patron of drug culture. All these were the effective approaches of rejecting middle class values of societal propriety. This rejection of values was not only reflected in radical lifestyle of individuals, it was also

evidenced in the avant-garde art of the time. Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionism whom Shepard deemed a model artist, films of Kenneth Anger, pop art of Andy Warhol, music of John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Maya Deren who produced transgressive art in music, dance and other art forms which was characterized by spontaneity, playfulness and stark originality influenced Shepard. Andy Warhol's soup can paintings became a historic event of that period which established a new norm. This was followed by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenberg and Jim Dine's art where movement, sculpture, painting, and sound were blended into "non-matrixed" collage events. These champions of avant-garde art of the early sixties reconceptualized art practices, and they decentered aesthetic authority. Shepard was exposed to a huge explosion of counterculture art activity in New York which was the epicentre of this movement. Sally Banes, therefore, described New York as the major post World War II world centre of International art(4). Shepard absorbed the aesthetic outlook and expressed them in his work which turned his work, as Wade states, into "... bonafide products of a counterculture theatre"(12).

Shepard made his debut with two one act plays, *The Rock Garden* and *Cowboys* (October 10, 1964 at Theatre Genesis) which featured young protagonists of his age who would crudely reject the moral universe of parental values and would reflect the turbulent inner life of the playwright himself revealing the deep sense of angst that beset the writer.

He was born in 1943. His father Samuel Shepard Rogers, who was in service, took his family from one place to another. After having a short stint at Pasadena they settled in a small farming town Duarte, but as Duarte did not possess the facilities of "modern" living, they resided in a converted greenhouse in an avocado ranch where Shepard's father proved to be a poor farmer and rancher. But the intimacy with soil evoked a sense of belongingness in the mind of young Shepard. This is where he discovered the roots of his language. "To me", confided Shepard in his interview to Goldberg, "the biggest tragedy was moving from an agricultural to an urban industrial society. It was a great undertow that demolished the family feelings that were well rooted in America. You know the Ford Motor Company comes out with these little cars that suddenly allow kids who've been harvesting wheat all day to drive off the fuck off the farm to the city" (44). For him, "it's a deeply painful experience finding ourselves in these bodies that are essentially geared toward a rural civilization. It's as though we've been transported to another planet and didn't know how we got there." (Goldberg 44). This seemed to be a fatal ritual for the forceful burial of life. For Shepard this caused linguistic amnesia of a nation. Shepard believes, "language comes from the earth" (Goldberg 44). This traumatic awareness of lost innocence prompted him to write one of his monumental works *Buried Child* (1978, for which he won his Pulitzer Prize in 1979). His biographer Ellen Oumano mentions a scene in the Hollywood movie *Days of Heaven* (1978) where Shepard and Richard Gere were the major casts. Oumano compared Gere with Shepard when both of them gazed across a wheat field. Oumano writes, "accomplished actor as he may be, we know

(Gere) is seeing wheat; when we look in Shepard's eyes, something more is going on, he's doing more than acting, perhaps he's writing *Buried Child*"(3).

He married O-Lan Johnson in November 1969, whom he met at the sets of Café La Mama. He had a short romantic stint with a rock poet Patti Smith with whom he wrote *Cowboy Mouth* (1971). But he soon recovered from his infatuation and came back to O-Lan with whom he had his first child (son) Jesse Mojo. He finally found Jessica Lange who was, like Shepard, from a country background with whom he could share his own sensibilities. Both were married and both were artists (Jessica was working as actress opposite Shepard in *Raggedy Man* in 1981 when they first met each other). By 1983 they started living together, from this relationship Hannah and Samuel were born in 1986 and '87 respectively. Shepard now has settled with Jessica in Minnesota to, as Stephen Schiff would say, "raise cattle" (84).

As a man with intimate links with family and his social landscape Shepard became nostalgic when he saw the collapse of this social institution. Shepard's adolescence has been a mixed experience under the strictly disciplinarian and patriarchal attitude of his father who had a sad tale to tell about himself. Shepard explained to *New York Times*, "It was during the depression and my dad was forced to join the army so as to support his mother and younger brothers. As a kid I heard the stories and grew up knowing that my dad really suffered" (qtd. in Oumano 13). His father could not recover from the impact of the "good war" nor could he recover from his alcoholism and would leave his family many times until his wife let him to be alone in the desert as the colourful teller of fabulous tales. The impact of Shepard's

father haunted him throughout his dramatic career the shadow of which prominently figured in the character of Travis in *Paris, Texas* (the screen play which won the prestigious Palm d'Or at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival). Travis is a wondering father traversing the southwestern desert fueled by the limitless love for his wife, Jane and his son, Hunter. Even Lee and Austin's father in *True West*, and Dodge in *Buried Child* reflected Shepard's memories of his own father. (One of the most moving examples of father-son relationship is between Travis and Hunter in *Paris, Texas*. Hunter's final acceptance of father by imitating him is one of the most powerful moments in the play). His father allowed Shepard to a little Dixieland music on the radio while studying and was allowed to play the drum which Rogers used to play and eventually he started playing for a rock band. The *Holy Modal Rounders* which though didn't record much but had a cult fan following. It suited his needs. He became an insider to an alternative lifestyle from where he plucked symbols to construct the syntax that formed the narrative of his plays. He betrays a non-traditional texture in his plays which, from an Aristotelean perspective, could well be described as anti-plays.

Shepard is a playwright of Jazz and rock and roll. He used to sit with several free-form jazz groups (the free-form jazz stuff of Niles, the jazz musician, would frighten Louis and Pablo in *Suicide in B-Flat*); he would write scores for *Pecos Bill* and *Tooth of Crime*; he would accompany the bands to play the drum that played for his productions; besides, he would develop greater rapport with musicians than the theatre people of his productions. As Oumano observes that music clearly shapes and

distinguishes both his subject and style. Shepard talked at length about the connection between music and his writing process with the body of the text:

I've practiced Jack Kerouac's discovery of jazz sketching with words ... following the exact principles as a musician does when he's jamming. After periods of this kind of practice, I get the haunting sense that something in me writes but it's not necessarily me ... This identical experience happened to me once when I was playing drums with the *Holy Modal Rounders*. (5)

The narrative of his plays is structured through the manipulation of rhythm, as rhythm is what Shepard considers to be the agent of unification in a work of art because it is what that provides structure as well as form without which there is no life. In Shepard's family trilogy (*Buried Child*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, and *True West*) it's the rhythm of familial certainty that collapses leading to the crisis, so too in the plays like *Tooth of Crime*, *Suicide in B-Flat*, *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* et al. where the creativity of the artist is suddenly snapped following the abrupt distortion in the rhythm with which the artists grew up and constituted their respective universe of meaning. Shepard's characters mostly make abortive attempts to retrieve the buried rhythms of life by desperately capturing the nuances of fractured rhythms that accompany them through their bursts of monologues, sudden switchings, gearing down to quiet loneliness, and reinstallations of the mythologies. For Shepard words are tools of "imagery in motion" when rhythms create the inarticulated meanings which Oumano described as the glue that held together Shepard, the playwright, the musician, the artist, the screenplay writer, the movie star, the cowboy, the family man (6).

PART II

THEATRE AS DISCOURSE: THE POSTMODERN CULTURAL POLITICS AND SHEPARD'S POETICS OF CREATIVITY

"In other countries, art has a role and the artist a social position. Not in the U.S. Here", writes Michael Feingold with an uneasy concern, "art is understood, if at all, only as a commodity ... and artists don't exist until they become something else: celebrities" (xix). In the prevailing condition art becomes a commodity. As a commodity it enters market and it becomes a 'simulacra', to put it in one of the key terms of Baudrillard. In this new context, creativity, the fundamental basis of art, is redefined socially and culturally following its shift from its traditional praxis. Art becomes a victim of a particular mode of production in a particular socio-cultural reality. There is a peculiar distance between audience and art vis-à-vis the artist. It is the "sleep walkers" (Feingold) who keep the system running and who are only attached to the hypnotic media net of TV and movies. While talking about the role of TV in evolving the socio-cultural behaviour in postmodern America Feingold says, "Falling asleep with the TV on is one of the central images of our culture" (xvi). The obvious passivity of the audience is less significant for "art", because the audiences involvement itself is an insignificant criterion for such "art" to sustain and get recognized. It is the corporate sponsors and their endorsement that determines the status of art.

In the system, largely occupied by "sleep walkers", some "residual perceptions" (Feingold) still remain along its margin where the residents are wide

awake, and seriously respond to the issues that beset them. They are adequately distanced from their milieu that had enabled them to form a perspective to notice the things which are, for others, too obvious to be noticed. They notice drugs, crime, aggressive market and corporate manipulations; in cities as well as in suburbs they notice homeless people, the renegades and *inter alia*, the hypnotism of media. The awake ones form a community who together go to theatre where they produce a collective noise that wakes up others. This is what Shepard would call “controlled anarchy” (qtd. in Carol Rosen 93).

This provocation of noise does not occur in every theatre as it did not in Broadway. Provocation of noise requires free expression which is almost absent in Broadway, for there, as Feingold would point out, “art is embattled on the economic front as well as political”, which has led to the curtailment of the ambition of taking risk. Therefore a serious play cannot survive on Broadway “where nobody wants to be serious” (Feingold xix).

This limitation evokes a counter movement for alternative theatre which does not require huge resources. Their strength lies in their invincible passion and anger. This dramatic movement, the critics have defined as Off Off Broadway – the new theatre – which turns out to be the only source of hope for an embittered nation. Feingold, therefore warns: “if the theatre does not grow up, the American public does not grow up either” (xiii). American Theatre, according to Feingold, could not attain maturity as an institution by evolving a native tradition. And theatre too

reflected the nation's general "commitment to staying immature" – eager consumers of goods by being overgrown babies.

The new theatre captures this time of loss and despair, of confusion, of starvation, of homelessness, of oppression and violence. The collective reaction of this theatre to this reality makes it an angry time. Sometimes explicitly as in Antonin Artaud and David Mamet; sometimes subtly as in Sam Shepard, Lanford Wilson and David Rabe.

Drama is "inherently ideological" writes C.W.E. Bigsby (1), yet there is a critical reticence about drama in general and American drama in particular. Literary critics, cultural historians, social theorists who are engaged in studying the evolution of genres in discourse and ideology, find so little to say about theatre. Theatre's achievement has hardly been comprehensively analysed and the genre itself has been accorded a marginal position. Drama by virtue of its generic character incorporates a critical reading in the very process of its transmission and poses a challenge to the establishments through its direct communication with the implied audience.

Language is power, said Foucault and, according to Bigsby, shaping of that language into art is power and codification of that art in the form of literary history is a source of power (1). This is one of the central issues that Shepard addresses in his plays. In his plays, which are a kind of metadrama, Shepard tries to critically look at the position of art and artist against a cultural context of ontological complexity. The plays taken up for the present study deal with the position of the artist and his

creative endeavours under a condition of forced social silence. The artistic articulations are mutilated or subjected to forceful withdrawal, yet the artist remains a “central presence”, for the space is physically occupied by their body. At times even the body is withdrawn, as in *Suicide in B-Flat*, making empty spaces more vocal as a powerful political statement.

One of the major Sam Shepard critics, Ross Wetzsteon in his essay “The Genius of Sam Shepard”, divided the plays of Sam Shepard in three major categories. First are the early one-acts beginning from 1963/64 to the mid seventies which include *Rock Garden* (1964), *Icarus's Mother* (1965); *Red Cross* (1966), *La Turista* (1960); *Oh!, Calcutta* (1967) and *Tongues* (1978). The plays reflect, what Wetzsteon pointed out, “a sense of paranoid despair” (23). Textually the plays are in the form of abstract collages, with lyrical monologues and with stunning visual and verbal imageries.

The second group of plays, as devised by Wetzsteon, deal with visionaries who pursue their emotional identity and spiritual freedom “even if it results in isolation and betrayal” (23). The second group includes, the plays like *Melodrama Play* (1967); *Mad Dog Blues* (1971); *Cowboy Mouth* (1971); *Bad Dog Beast Bait* (1971); *Tooth of Crime* (1972); *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974); *Angel City* (1976); *Suicide in B-Flat* (1976); *Seduced* (1977) and *True West* (1980). In this set of plays artist becomes a cult figure in popular imagination and becomes a victim of his own apotheosis.

In the third category he has included the two great family “plays”, *Curse of Starving Class* (1977) and *Buried Child* (1978) including *True West* (1980). Shepard won his fourth of the tenth Obie awards in 1977 for *Curse* which was followed by the Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for *Buried Child*. The plays focus on the theme of re-building private history redeeming the lost comfort of family – a social institution which was on the verge of total collapse.

The present project attempts to focus on the second category of these plays with the objective of devising a perspective to understand the dramatic statements of the plays which are considered to be some of the most elusive of Shepard’s plays. The focus will be on issues of creativity and the crisis it entails on the question of the subjective location of the artist against the given cultural map and the issues involved with the discourse of Shepardian aesthetics and concerns that are evolved through the distinctive narrative of the given plays.

The plays have reflected Shepard’s perpetual awareness of his Americanness. The protagonists are paralogical¹ and confront crisis against the silencing mechanism of the new cultural regime. The plays draw attention to the struggle of the protagonists for the retrieval of a space of creative isolation and to escape from a condition of, what Adorno would call “unfreedom” onto a liberated private landscape.

Shepard expresses a deep commitment to the notion of the artist's inexorable attachment to his time and space as well as to the people the artist supposedly addresses. Shepard suggests:

There's more to it than just getting off as an artist, because you know, anybody can make a piece of art admired by any number of people. But what happened between those other people and the artist? Is there really a sense of responsibility in the relationship between the thing you make and the people who come in touch with it? (qtd. in Ver Meulen 85)

The supposed relationship between the artist and his art and his audience is the central issue that Shepard takes up in the plays that are to be studied in the present project.

About the creative process, Shepard discusses his personal experience as a playwright in one of his essays, he discusses his method of making deposits and withdrawal from an unconscious "Inner Library" (214) of experience (one of Shepard's key concepts regarding the source and process of his creativity). He speaks about his characters who appear out of nowhere in three dimensions and speak. He points out that the genesis of his plays lies not in mere ideas but in images. The sense of being from nowhere is a constant preoccupation for the artist protagonists in Shepard. Shepard elaborates the role of images in his creative process:

The picture is moving in the mind and being allowed to move more and more freely as you follow it. The following of it is the writing part. In other words, I'm taking notes in as much details as possible on an event that's happening somewhere inside me. The extent to which I can follow the pictures and not intervene with my own two cents' worth is where inspiration and craftsmanship hold their real meaning. If I find myself pushing the character in certain direction, it almost

always a sure sign that I've fallen back on technique and lost the real thread of the thing. ("Inner Library" 215)

Shepard's protagonists in the plays – the Rock Plays (the term used to refer to the plays where the protagonist is a Rock 'n' Roll artist but in the present study the term would be used to refer to the plays where the protagonist is an artist or related to the system of producing art) reflect one of the perennial concerns of Shepard himself – "homelessness". Shepard says:

I feel like I've never had a home, you know? I feel related to the country, to this country, and yet at the same time I don't know exactly where I fit in. And the same thing applies to the theatre. I don't know exactly how well I fit into the scheme of things. May be that's good, you know, that I'm not in a niche. But there's always this kind of nostalgia for a place, a place where you can reckon with yourself. ("Inner Library" 215)

This strong sense of alienation, the feeling of being a pariah, despite having a sense of belonging to a country; and the nostalgia for lost memories and history are the distinctive characteristics of Shepard's artist-protagonists.

The artists in Shepard belong to a postmodern domain and they are quintessentially American. They are the products of the special American cultural map and symbolize a definite cultural role and meaning in their respective images. They are both products and producers of postmodern art. Wetzsteon call these characters as "Shamans" (25). Cowboys, rock 'n' roll stars, criminals, jazz players, screenplay writers or the mystic figures like Paul Bunyan or MaeWest are the characters in Shepard who embark on a search for emotional freedom. "Sometimes"

writes Wetzsteon, “they reach a momentary ecstasy of self fulfilment, but more often than not they are forced to surrender their private vision to the service of public commerce. They are spiritually kidnapped” (25). The vision of the artist and the power of assertions are separated and are distributed between two individuals – the artist and the mafia. The artist has only the dream, the power lies elsewhere. “You got the genius, somebody else got the power” (291), the gambler tells Cody, the dreamer, in *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*.

Shepard himself has been exposed to diverse creative exercises. He has been a drum player in *Holy Modal Rounder*, a screenplay writer, *Zubriskie Point* (1968), *Paris, Texas* (1984); appears as actor in movies *Days of Heaven* (1978), *Resurrection* (1980), *Raggedy Man* (1981, there he met Jessica Lange and married her later) besides being a poet, and playwright. Shepard, therefore, is well exposed to the process as well as the crises of creativity and the conflict the artist encounters as a creator.

Artist's creative exclusivity is replaced by its reproducibility. Shepard witnesses the time when avant-garde art of high modernism is a defeated event. Modernism, as an intellectual movement, fed by disgust and impatience with the slow and sluggish space of change, was a protest against broken promises and dashed hopes with a commitment to radicalism. There was a strong disapproval of the extant state of art and the role assigned to arts in connection to society. It also derided the past and ridiculed its canons and values. Stefan Marowsky, the Polish philosopher of art, mentioned the traits of the avant-garde art of modernism as having a historic

sense of accomplishment, the urge to follow the patterns of revolutionary movements, orientation toward collectivism, adoption of common programmes and manifestoes, thus taking self initiatives to become a collective harbinger of a time that was yet to come and formation of a preliminary blueprint for the future's universal pattern. They took it as their moral duty to show the light to the uninitiated and paradoxically the avant-garde school could validly claim its exclusivity so long as the teacher and taught are not merged and the difference between the two is not obliterated. Avant-garde always sought the other 'sunk-in darkness' in both the intellectual and material sense. But as analysed by Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (1997), the modernist movement in general was horrified and appalled when the distinction between avant-garde and the rest was erased, when everything supposedly radical was readily approved and the incomprehensibility of the arts was neutralized. Anything they produced failed to shock, thus art and artist suffered from a sense of being insufficiently radical. Avant-garde then sought more difficult forms to ensure the most advanced detachment between intellectuals and the people in order to exclude the masses from the process of cultural creation. Modernism sought the continuity of the socio-cultural dialectics to be operational within the dichotomy of two classes – "those who can understand and those who cannot" (Bauman, 98). There was a concerted move to sustain the difference and as John Carey suggests, the difference was necessary for the assertion of superiority of the learned and the creative: the significance of the minority, the intellectuals, was directly proportionate to its ability to outrage and puzzle the masses (*Intellectuals and Masses*). With the arrival of the arriviste middle class, market soon intervened to subvert the process of

modernist creations. The more recondite the art the more potential it became a commodity for the "art market" because avant-garde art became a symbol of intellectual prestige for the *nouveau riche* as art came to signify a social distinction. In order to escape from the trap of popular consent and acceptance, avant-garde, as suggested by Umberto Eco, sought a new venture in extreme forms to transgress its own limits. Bauman says, "The limit of arts lived as a permanent revolution was self-destruction" (100). This ritual of self-destruction was evident when art reached the empty and charred canvases like the erased Rosenberg's drawings, the empty New York Gallery at Yves Klein's private viewing, the hole dugged up by Walter-de-Maria in Kassel, John Cage's silent music, Robert Barry's 'telepathetic exhibition', of empty pages of unwritten poems et al. The perdition of avant-garde was affected from both inside and outside. Even the sites for such radical ventures became unavailable forcing modernism to phase out. Hence, Bauman makes the comment that "avant-garde art proved to be modern in intention, yet postmodern in their consequences" (100). Art failed to retain its exclusive autonomy. This is the juncture from where Shepard's plays take off. He contextualises the artists against this background when new identities and patterns are emerging for the artist and new ideas are being invented for all new aesthetic discourses.

New artistic inventions are not meant to chase out and replace extant ones, but to join the others, finding some elbow room on the notoriously over crowded artistic stage. The entire structural pattern is altered where synchronicity of art has been replaced by diachrony, "co-presence takes the place of succession and the perpetual

present replaces history – competition takes over from the crusade” (Bauman 100). The artists do not have to pretend to have undertaken a mission of political advocacy or of cultural prophesying of pseudo truths (In *Cowboy Mouth* Slim is forced by Cavale to become a prophet which Slim ostensibly failed to comply with).

One of the fundamental conditions under which postmodern art has to survive is competition that leads to the subsequent impossibility of collective actions, coordination of ideas and structures, and evolving of a disciplined pattern which eventually rules out collective negotiations and communal proclamation of rules and canons. The art as well as the process of creation becomes anarchic. Hoss laments in *Tooth of Crime* (1972) that there is no “teacher”, hence it is “without a code” and it becomes “just a crime”, therefore, there is “No art involved. No technique. No sense of mastery” (*TOC* 29). Hoss becomes a classic example of one who justifies the declared fate of the postmodern artist – “maximal impact and instant obsolescence” (George Steiner).

The stratifying power of art now no longer belongs to the artist nor to the artistic creations, it is the site at which art is viewed or purchased and the price it commands that determine the qualitative value of art. Thus works of art do not differ from other marketable commodities. Saul Kimmer, the Hollywood producer in *True West* determines the fate of art by buying them. Austin, the established screenplay writer immediately becomes an irrelevant writer as soon as Kimmer decides to drop his script and Lee, whose story is bought by Kimmer impulsively for an absurdly huge amount, becomes a recognised artist instead. But Austin warns Lee and exhorts

to bring down his excitement after having sold his story "You don't come up with a winner on your first time. they cut your head off. They don't give you a second chance" (*True West*, 40). The inevitable involvement of the artist in a fatal competition is a stark reality of the postmodern cultural map. "The urge to create works of art is essentially one of ambition. The ambition behind the ambition", says Miss Scoons, "is no different from any other ambition. To kill. To win. To get on top". (*Angel City* 31)

The present day art is distinctively separated from the shape of social reality. These arts, suggests Bauman, have elevated themselves into *sui generis* reality, thus the arts share the plight of postmodern culture in its entirety (101). Jean Baudrillard has called this the culture of *simulacrum* and not representation. Art itself becomes one of the many realities and each of them has definite mechanisms of proclaiming authenticity and the comparative qualities of those realities are extremely difficult to determine. It becomes almost impossible to find out relative authenticity, the "more real" from the many realities simultaneously available. The difference between the primary and the secondary blur irrevocably, even the origin and the copy becomes redundant like that of the paintings of Andy Warhol. The situation Baudrillard explains in terms of a 'psychosomatic disease', where the patient's pains are quite real the reality of illness may be a questionable truth. The situation operates through the dynamics, as Baudrillard states, of 'code and reproduction -- reproduction which is itself an 'original' (Lechte 235). When Hoss, the defeated rock star in *Tooth of Crime* (1972) screams, "I got my own ... Original. I'm my own man. Original" (620), Crow

the master adapter, gets into Hoss's walk and style perfectly forcing Hoss to struggle to change his own style in order to remain original, but he eventually fails to do so. The 'original' (Hoss) and the reproduction (Crow) become redundant. The 'originality' of Hoss could have ensured him a victory in the combat, but the referee credits winning points to Crow because 'originality' evades Hoss as it can be perfectly reproduced. When Hoss protests furiously to the referee, "How can you give points to liar", the referee coolly answers, "I don't. I give to the winner" (*TOC* 58).

Baudrillard provides a perspective by pointing out that natural object is no longer credible, the codes have raised simulation to an unprecedented importance in social life. This provides false assumptions and power to the individual involved in the process of simulation because the code that is associated with the process enables reality to be bypassed that creates a new situation which Baudrillard calls 'reversibility' which entails that all finalities disappear as it does in 'simulation' and 'simulacra'.

Media is a crucial aspect in the process of simulation. About the false power that the process provides Shepard says, "Dealing with the media makes you believe that you have an importance beyond your actual importance. It leads to a lot of false assumptions about who you are" (qtd. in Ver Meulen 86). One becomes a victim of media inflicted pretension.

Origin of things becomes coded signals and gets reduced to a formulae, and numbers, hence reversibility becomes completely possible. The last original produced

can be perfectly reproduced. Crow in *TOC* masters these codes and shows Hoss the process of blurring the difference between himself, Rod Stewart and Bob Dylan (Move yer head like Rod Stewart ... Listen to Hendricks ... sound like a Dylan, sound like a Jagger ... wearin' a shag now, looks like a fag now" (Crow in *TOC*, 62/3).

In this system of simulation and reproduction the difference between the real and the reproduced is erased. In its extreme form even death becomes reversible which implies that death does not really happen in *Suicide in B-Flat* (1976) where the death of Niles could not enable him to escape his own 'simulacra', or in the case of Henry Heckamore in *Seduced* (1977), despite his desperate bid to die, he keeps on being reproduced.

Shepard takes up one of the most crucial aspects of postmodern creativity and locates the artists in a zone of anarchic crisis and conflict. As Baudrillard points out, the era of the code is all pervasive and penetrates each aspect of life wherein the opposites begin to collapse and 'everything becomes undecidable' and is caught in an aporia. The beautiful and the ugly in fashion, the left and the right in politics, the true and the false in media, authenticity and falsity in art, the pure and the spurious in creativity – all become interchangeable in the era of reproduction and simulation. The artists in Shepard still continue to search for elusive state of creative sanity through implosive violence. The characters are transmigrated into the realm of hyper reality as in *Angel City* (1976) wherein the aspiring artists are entrapped in the process of simulation through the system of Hollywood movie making. In this state of hyper

reality the difference between the image and the actual is permanently effaced. Rabbit Brown discloses in *Angel City*, “You’re on the silver screen, buddy. You’ve been captured in celluloid and you’ll never get out” (AC 52) and this involves in Rabbit Brown’s own admission annihilation of the reality (“You can’t mix real life with the movies!”, (A.C. 46)

Shepard locates the struggle of artists around a “territory of language”. The struggle for the control of the linguistic territory is most successfully featured in *Tooth of Crime* where Hoss and Crow are engaged in a fatal fight in order to establish the superiority of their respective language. Their private vernacular becomes the basic foundation to claim superiority over others. They readily admit their limitations within their respective languages. It is the voice, the sound and language that forms the “turf” of “power” without which Hoss admits to have nothing (“something subtle like the sound of his voice could throw me off”, Hoss in *TOC*, 37). Thus the subject in Shepard, like any other subject for that matter, is part of a linguistic system which is, by virtue of its own characteristic, decentered, arbitrary, and incomplete hence by applying the Lyotardian paradigm it can be said that subject too is essentially fragmented, decentered, protean and incomplete. In fact, Shepard himself has given a candid description of his characters – “character” instead of a “whole character” is a “fractured whole with bits and pieces. In other words, more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation” (on his “Note to the Actors” in *Angel City* 6).

Lyotard can help provide a perspective to look at Shepard's plays especially though his notion of "paganism" and "paralogy". Lyotard writes in *Postmodern Condition*, "Let us wage a war on totality, let us be witness to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences ..." (82). Lyotard points out that the principle of paganism is heteronomy and multiplicity which addresses the issue as to how fragmented, decentered and changing can a subject be and yet retain basic elements of his self. In Shepard's dramatic world the unifying thread to hold together diverse subjects in the formation of a community is pronouncedly ineffective, for the individuals are pitted against others with their respective contesting interests. Hence all attempts of forming a coalition would either temporarily succeed or fail absolutely. In *Tooth*, the formation of any consensus has been an abortive attempt right from the beginning. Consensus leads to a compromise which can assure survival not sovereignty. Following the failure of such unifying attempts the crises in Shepard's plays continue to dominate as a theme. The characters constantly refuse to settle the boundaries of signification and thereby the protagonists wage a battle against this encroachment of terror. Lyotard attacks terror from the angle of both politics and aesthetics. Politically the subject resists continuation of injustice, aesthetically he resists the attempts of stifling alternative expressions.

Artists' language inherently resists obligation to structuring forces, hence their language is indeterminate – like that of the dream of cody in *Geography* which is purely arbitrary and beyond all predications and controls. Thus the creative discourses

essentially stand as counterbalance against any meta-discourse of the terrorizing forces - the normalizing apparatuses of state sponsored cultural institutions.

The artists seem to have taken up the mission of setting up of an "open system" in a Lyotardian sense. This end is translated as "turf" by Hoss (*Tooth*), "environment" by Cody (*Geography*); "life" by Henry (*Seduced*), and "anonymity" by Niles (*Suicide*). The system they aspire to reach is a place of being heard in which we can include, as Lyotard says, the "differend", the unrepresentable which can accommodate expressions alien to the dominant *phrase regimen*. The artists, however, in Shepard, seldom succeed in achieving this state of "open system". He is inexorably engaged in a struggle against the terrorism of the dominant system that prevents him from achieving any centrality within the institutional territory of cultural and political discourse.

"Terror" is as defined by Lyotard, "the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate a player from language game one shares with him" (63). The open system, on the other hand, provides space where there is no metalinguistic dominance. The approach to approximate this state of open system requires pagan retrogression on the part of the subjects to "legitimate" the unrepresentable and the "uncivilized". The artists in Shepard wage this anti-authoritarian war to establish the legitimacy of the 'pariah' the 'outsider' and ensure the political validity of their voice against the canonical discourse of social and cultural order.

The protagonists take the path of paralogy (dissension) which is a part of their pagan selves that strives to fight against all impositions and evolve ideas for alternative expressions. Within the territory of "terror" they can only *create* through paralogy and paganism. Lyotard argues "invention is always born of dissension": Creativity being an exercise of invention is predicated upon this fundamental condition of dissension – legitimization of instabilities. The artists, therefore, take a stance to oppose the metanarrative simulated through sophisticated technical means and mechanisms. As Lyotard describes, Postmodern knowledge is a search for instabilities, so is the search of the postmodern artist who looks for the means to destabilize the ordered structure. This is the means of disempowering the authorities and legitimizing as well as reinforcing the incommensurable. For Lyotard, "Postmodern knowledge is then not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. *"Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy"* (Lyotard xxv, italics mine).

Paralogy aesthetically promotes the artistic inventiveness of free spirits and politically it makes individuals sensitive to, and tolerant of difference. Thus artist's dissensus or paralogy, in the Lyotardian sense, is a continuous search for new moves and expressions to challenge the consensus of dominant paradigm. Cody's conceptual poetry in the form of his dream in *Geography* is a search for predicting the "winners" to subvert a particular institutionalized system turns catastrophic for the people who are involved in that system. They therefore try to force Cody to reduce his visionary

poems as means for their personal gain. As the visions fail to remain a challenge to the system Cody as Artist fails to invent any more.

The project looks for the subjective position of the artists in a geography of contesting forces. It tries to locate the spaces where the artist fragments into multiple entities, their expressions breakdown as intelligible utterances and gestures turn asemantic and their identities fall apart. In Shepard, artists, apparent defeat is the source of his creative redemption and his destruction is the process through which he regenerates his artistic self. The study examines the process of creativity in the post avant-garde and postmodern cultural condition which is not a mere self-expression but a political articulation the through idioms invented to challenge the canonical paradigms. They not only warrant an analysis but also an intimate understanding, to borrow a Rortian term, for "redescription of artist as a community". In Shepard's plays, they resign themselves to defeat only to justify their "small narrative" (*petit recit* as Lyotard would call it) as legitimate reality of a new cultural map that redescribes the socio-cultural territory of a given nation. They are a predominant presence in this cultural universe, for they are not mere artists, they are Shamans engaged in the exotic rituals of exorcising the dubious elements from the sites of art – West, Hollywood, myths, history, music, writing and dreams.

This study has taken up those plays where artists are the providers of these sites of art. Kosmo, Yahoodi in *Mad Dog Blues*; Lee in *True West* are involved in the exercise of redefining the west. Hoss in *Tooth*, Niles in *Suicide*, Slim in *Cowboy Mouth*, Duke in *Melodrama Play* are the musicians who betray the ultimate act of

aesthetic challenge and face the emphatic counter challenge from the establishment. Cody in *Geography* is a dreamer, the inventor of conceptual poetry, who encounters the oppressive subjugation of the corporate world. Rabbit Brown, Scoons in *Angel City*, Henry Heckamore in *Seduced*, Lee and Austin in *True West* are involved with the biggest "art making industry" -- *Hollywood* wherein like Shepard himself, they turn out to be minions. They realize the existence of an artist within such a mega system is only survival through compromises not only with his artistic principles but also with the reality of their own physical selves.

Despite such repressive politics the artists are victorious as creative individuals. They triumphantly resist all interpellations and establish the legitimacy of their dissents by keeping behind a trail of hope for the physically less powerful and establish that "inventor's paralogy" is still the most powerful means for authentic survival. They may be "defeated" but they are not "destroyed".

End Notes

¹ Frederick Jameson in his Foreword to Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* interprets Lyotardian paralogy precisely as a search not for consensus but for "instabilities". He explains paralogism as a practice in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which previous knowledge had been conducted. (See Frederick Jameson, Foreword, *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by Jean Francois Lyotard. Manchester: Manchester University Press, (1984), vii-xxi). Lyotard himself rejects Habermasian principle of consensus as an inadequate criterion of validation on the basis of his two formulations. Firstly, consensus presupposes an agreement between men defined as "knowing intellects" and free wills and which is obtained through dialogue. But this Habermasian formulation for Lyotard is based on the validity of the narrative of emancipation. Secondly, consensus is a component of the system which manipulates it to legitimate the system – existing power structure (*PMC* 60-61). See Jean Francois Lyotard (1984).

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CHAPTER II
RELOCATING SHEPARD

RELOCATING SHEPARD

Shepard, despite being a dramatist of the fringe, could provoke critics to respond his plays critically. The vivid glow of Shepard's personality seldom went unnoticed. In his essay, "Inside the Words" (*Time Out*, April 1977), Robert Downey writes:

When he comes into town to work, the props – a clean late model pick up truck with a ventilated straw hat on the dash board, the clothes, somewhere between working rancher in town on business and Ivey League grade student on a very casual country weekend fit the non image It's possible to read in his manner some faint traces of the mantric sensibility, that produced the ironic characters in the plays, the kind of look you see in reformed alcoholics, returned Viet Nam Veterans, ex-speed friecks – possible, but neither easy nor certain" (11).

Shepard could finally obtain an institutional recognition by winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for his *Buried Child* (1978) even before having any play of his staged at Broadway. In 1980, Ross Wetzsteon stated that "Shepard, now 37, is the greatest American playwright of his generation" (*New York*, Nov 24, 20). Wetzsteon writes "(Shepard) is not only the most inventive in language and revolutionary in craft. Shepard is the writer whose work most accurately maps the interior landscapes of his society. And his life is as quintessentially American as his work is" (20).

Patti Smith, the rock poet with whom Shepard had a short romantic stint, devotes a poem on Shepard to highlight his radical personality:

He was bad
la – lu – lid

a drunken kid
 He yo delled like a cowboy rolling
 and sliding
 all over them by dinosaur

People started up at him, he didn't care
 he was a renegade with nasty habits
 he was screech owl
 He was a man playing cowboys

[*Sam Shepard* in *Nine Random Years* (7 + 2)
 qtd. in Jasbir Jain 91]

Rick Foster, however, while commenting on the critical responses to Shepard's work, is quite critical about the inadequate critical attention to Shepard's work. He accuses, most critics having been only too keen to focus on the exotic sites of images, rituals and other aspects in Shepard's plays and more interested to reduce his plays into meaning as if drama cannot exist beyond the realms of common understanding. He argues that the "political economy of the dramatic region of (Shepard) is not probed". "At best" he writes, "these critics are to Shepard what the *National Geographic Magazine* is to Guatemala" (51).

Blurbs on books pertaining to Shepard describe him as the most brilliant and irreverent young playwright of America. Ronald Heyman described Shepard as "a poet of the theatre" (163) "Sam Shepard is phenomenal" writes Stanley Kauffman, "Much of Shepard's work is unforgettable, seen or read once" (66). Critics like Michael J. Hayes describe Shepard as the "rock star of American theatre" (132). The media, views Shepard as a more "machoist" personality by characterizing him as 'theatre's version of Clint Eastwood' who like the movie image of Clint Eastwood is projected as the high plains drifter who does not take the beaten path of Broadway.

but instead blazes a trail elsewhere (Ann. C. Hall 19). Some critics coined more rococo terms and describe Shepard as the “bucking bronco of American theatre” (Richard Gilman, ix). Richard Gilman provided a memorable term that became a favourite word for Shepard critics – “Shaman”. He writes “Sam Shepard is a Shaman – a New World Shaman ... Sam is as American as peyote, magic mushrooms, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and medicine bundles” (2). Martin Esslin provides a sort of finality to the ongoing exercise of defining Sam Shepard when he says “Sam Shepard is contemporary American theatre”. (qtd. in Gilman 2)

Despite being a playwright of the margin, Sam Shepard is so significantly visible that his presence is difficult to ignore primarily because he so deftly penetrates the very essence of Americanness. He simply said about America in American idioms. He thinks penetratingly about current conditions in America and he thinks in theatrical terms, writes Hayes. Shepard’s creative source has been his own surroundings during his small town experience in towns like Azusa and Duarte. He centred the action of his play *The Unseen Hand* (1970) on the abandoned wreck of a 1958 chevrolet surrounded by garbage, tin cans, Coca-Cola bottles etc. Similar images also become predominant part of the setting in *The Mad Dog Blues* (1971).

Shepard situates his protagonist against typical American backdrop which is either clustered with the images of corporate refuse or the wide expanse of the west – a recurrent theme of American landscape. He is a comfortable interpreter of events and individuals located in such quintessentially American sites – the west,

Hollywood, the suburban drive ways, the hotel rooms. Against such a familiar background Shepard deals with the characters who are so typically American.

Shepard's plays have been produced in the European countries like England, Germany, Austria and Switzerland since 1968. In Germany alone as much as 55 separate productions of his 15 plays were performed in German till 1991. The reception of his plays in Europe has been mixed. Carol Benet observes in *Sam Shepard on the German Stage* (1993), "Shepard's scripts presented not only language problems but conceptual one as well" (6). Benet points out that Shepard speaks to an American audience in a colloquial form of the English language. Through language, writes Benet, Shepard evokes certain stereotypical images of America and the people who inhabit it. That is, the intimacy of Shepard with his cultural grammar makes his plays profoundly American and to understand his plays one must know what America is all about.

Shepard, quite unassumingly exposes inner vulnerabilities of the seemingly invincible heroes of popular culture of America by lifting the carapace of solidity through his candid theatrical admissions. Shepard's significance lies not in mere depiction of an American reality in stark terms, but in his ability to enable theatre to emerge as one of the most powerful ideological discourses which could achieve a rare distinction by redefining the fundamentals of a nation's cultural dream. Sam Shepard has opened up a new cultural debate on the validity of artistic creations in the given circumstances of postmodern condition. Shepard is unsympathetic in disclosing the stark realities that beset an artist. Shepard is critical about the entire

mechanism and procedure through which artists are heuristically produced by the market.

Richard Gilman in one of his enthusiastic statements says that “If there’s more nearly perfect exemplar of a cultural education gained (“absorbed is a better word) in the fifties than Sam Shepard, I can’t imagine who it might be” (x). Gilman points out two important happenings in the fifties – firstly the obliteration of the distance between “high” and “low” art and secondly what he says the itch for “expression” for hurling the self’s words against anonymity and silence that began to beat down the necessity for formal training that had been always held necessary in regard to drama or any art.

Shepard is a product of the time when the occluded boundaries of culture collapsed causing what Frederick Jameson in his essay “Postmodernity and Consumer Society” said the effacement of difference between the high culture and mass or commercial culture. It is a time when the teleological view of history is replaced following the abandonment of canonical narrative by the new generation. The time witnessed the emphasis on ‘discontinuity’ and ‘open-unfinished qualities’, it tried to explore the new territories of history by rediscovering the myths, symbols and the shared assumptions of the community unattested by the established institutions of discipline. The breakdown of cultural boundaries is characterised by the formation of a new narrative in every aspect of art comprising of discontinuous images, simulacra and floating signifiers (Leonard Wilcox 560). Culture assumes

new signification as the art of the mass or commercial culture gains a new legitimacy following the progressive termination of modernist elitism.

Shepard's plays capture this quintessential transitional tension of the new cultural poetics. Shepard has not come out of a precise theatrical tradition, but as Gilman puts it, from the breakdown or absence of it (xi). The apparent absence of any profound American dramatic tradition made Shepard somewhat dismissive about a career in drama. He said in 1971, "I don't want to be a playwright, I want to be a rock and roll star I got into writing plays because I had nothing else to do. So I started writing to keep from going off the deep end." (qtd. in Gelber 3).

Shepard's shift to drama is marked by the accompanying theatrical idioms that characterize Shepard's works. Music is a dominant aspect in Shepard's plays. For him, "A play is like music – ephemeral, elusive, appearing and disappearing all the time. No one ever left a Rolling Stone concert confused." He tries to find a way to actually have the music become an actor to make the music take part in the drama in the same way as language does. Shepard's narrative in rejecting conventional intellectual form is more akin to Jackson Pollock as well as the Rolling Stones, notes Shepard. Shepard has used the structure of jazz music of improvisation. For him, as Bonnie Maranca points out, jazz is more than structural. As an approach to composition it embodies an attitude that is at the heart of Shepard's work spontaneity of expression. Not chance but improvisation (30). Shepard brings in the familiar figures of popular culture and cultural myths but they are exposed theatrically through unfamiliar methods. The plays structurally look disjointed and

elliptical because, as Gelber puts it, "he has abandoned the conventions of coherence and has attempted to create a theatre in which emotional, psychological, or spiritual states are presented directly to the audience" (7). Shepard makes attempts to explore what he himself has defined as "emotional territory" (qtd. in Rosen 1993).

Technically, Shepard spreads his dramatic action in a space which is emotional rather than physical. As in *Angel City*, *Seduce*, *Suicide in B-Flat*. The space, therefore, becomes alien to the audience in the first encounter till the audience makes a tacit agreement to enter the inner territory of the characters.

In Shepard, time is immediate rather than sequential, as time is associated with the mind of the characters who are placed outside the chronological temporal framework. This is a key element in Shepard's plays like *Melodrama Play*, *Angel City*, *Seduced*, *The Mad Dog Blues*, *Suicide in B-Flat*, *Fool for Love* etc. where characters are oblivious of a dual time as they live within their own temporal world. As in *Seduced*, physical time could not deter Henry Heckamore from going back to his olden days to make contact with his girl friends.

Characters in Shepard are spontaneous rather than coherent. Like the story line itself, the characters too are fragmented, impulsive, incoherent and unpredictable who are prone to abrupt shift of attitudes. Shepard consciously shatters the integrated personality of characters hence they immediately become unpredictable and wayward and become immune to any categorical definition. Shepard believes "Personality is everything that is false in a human being". Social individuality is divorced from humanity, believes Shepard (qtd. in Gelber 8).

His story focuses as consciousness rather than behaviour. Gelber explained the mode by pointing at the frequent fragmentation of the story line, abrupt shift of focus, even a seemingly secondary character assumes centrality and the hero disappears from the stage. These elements reflect the continuity of consciousness rather than continuity of behaviour. Niles in *Suicide* for a considerable period of time remains absent as the play focuses on the role of Pablo, Louis, Petronce and Paulette who desperately look for a meaningful space in their own respective ways to contextualize their positions. This is how Shepard creates new dramatic vision of space, time, character and story.

In dealing with the crisis of the artist Shepard is intimately self reflexive and conflict. Through this theme he often comes back to himself. Shepard was in the forefront of the generation that fought for “Eros” like the counterculture intellectual, Herbert Marcuse, the author of *Eros and Civilization* (1974). Shepard grew up amidst the appraisal of a new youthful idealism following the apocalyptic disaster of the Vietnam War (1954-75). The war marked a defining moment in US history, triggering a struggle between authority and dissent which also led to an interrogation of the value and viability of nationalist culture. This in-built mentality of protest was also one of the basic tenets of the rock movement of the sixties and the late seventies. They sounded an annulment of an overarching system of cultural totalitarianism. Shepard takes up this issue along with the fact of the artist’s entrapment within that system.

As an artist, Shepard had to undergo the usual upheavals on the economic front as his was an essentially anarchic, unsystematic enterprise. Funding and patronage was uncertain which led to an uneasy working condition. As he drew more attention as a playwright, he started getting honours and rewards. Shepard initially prohibited any review of his *La Turista* (1967) yet Elizabeth Hardwick saw the play and wrote a glowing review of the play in *New York Review of Books* (1967). Shepard meanwhile received a grant from the University of Minnesota in 1966; a fellowship from Yale University to explore relations between experimental writing and the TV/Film industry, and in 1967 he was honoured with the prestigious Rockefeller Grant. Thus, despite being a non-conformist, artist, Shepard is trapped by the dubious distinctions of cultural respectability.

During his early years, Shepard got himself engaged in some odd jobs. He used to work as a low paid employee in places like Hickory House Restaurant, The Village Gate Jazz Club and Marie's Crisis Cafe. But with the money he received as grants and honours he could engage himself as a full time writer. Robert Coe writes that this was the time which was "the beginning of the end" of "Shepard's enchantment with Off Off Broadway" (120). In the *Theatre Mailbag* section of the *The New York Times* a reader, one Wynn Handman, wrote:

When *La Turista* was first published at the American Place, Shepard decided against inviting the critics. He didn't want anyone connected with the creation of the production to feel the pressure of success or failure based on the critic's opinion. He watched the audience every night... Now in 1977, the general press, the public and resident regional theatres are more receptive to a new play by Sam Shepard. American playwrights may be finding greater acceptance. (*The New York Times*, Sunday, March 20, 1977, 28).

This acceptance is both absorption and legitimation which is immediately followed by expectations forcing the artist toward the ambivalent arena of doubt and apprehension of fame. Through this process the artist gradually approximates toward the institutions of legitimate cultural agencies and art no longer remains a vehicle for self-expression or ludic diversion as Cody in *Geography* announces: "At first it's all instinct. Now it's work" (94). Theatre for Shepard too became a job.

Shepard makes a close survey of the artist who are trapped in a cultural mesh with which he himself is quite familiar. He, therefore, could make an authentic representation of the artists who reflect the trauma of their creative self like their own creator (Shepard). They become the objective correlatives of Shepard's own self. This is why the plays of Shepard are so authentic, unpretentious and immediate that they can easily capture the American imagination of which his plays are themselves a product.

The forthcoming chapters would look in details at the plays that reflect Shepard's recurring concern with the position of an artist and the problematics of his creation. Shepard's artist is not the proverbial superman with divine power. He is rather a part of the common culture and he is constantly denied to exist beyond the demarcated territory as an autonomous entity. The study will examine the process through which the artist is produced, translocated and the methodology of his eventual subjugation. The study would examine the possibilities of artistic redemption of a creator in Shepard's work.

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CHAPTER III

ARRESTING COWBOY IN A GODLESS MEADOW: ARTIST AS SURROGATE CREATOR IN SHEPARD

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Artist in Shepard finds himself as an uneasy insider in a cultural landscape which for him appears to be a space of 'unfreedom'. Shepard has been a very sensitive respondent to the subjugating cultural politics of the new order that encompasses every aspect of an artist's creative existence. This is the zone of conflict that the artist is translocated from his traditional milieu of freedom. Shepard's deep concern with this dislocation of artist and his art finds constant resonance in a significant number of his plays which the chapter takes up for critical study. The perennial question of artistic freedom is addressed in *Melodrama Play* (1967), *Cowboy Mouth* (1971), *The Mad Dog Blues* (1971) and *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974) where the artist protagonists struggle in incarceration. The artist not only struggle against his physical subjugation he also confronts cultural disorientation of his own prehistory following the disruption of his identity, cultural meanings and myths.

Economic and cultural over exposure in America has introduced a sense of uncertainty for both the nation's historical validity and the individuals' cultural identity affecting a sense of totality. American landscape and language also, under such circumstances undergo a process of metamorphosis from what Shepard calls, the agrarian rural background to the alienating urban space. Shepard, in one of his interviews with Robert Goldberg, says, "to me one of the biggest tragedies was moving from an agricultural to an urban industrial society at the turn of the century"

(44). This cultural translocation from the rural to the urban is a painful experience for Shepard it is "like being transported to another planet and did not know how to get there" (44).

Shepard, therefore, makes his artist protagonists involved with the perennial struggle to construct his own mythological universe through the narrative of reachable memory which continues to elude him because even the myths, in post war America "in its truest form has been demolished" (qtd. in Carol Rosen 5). For Shepard, the exercise of reconstructing an identifiable mythic universe is acutely problematized because it turns out to be a conscious exercise of approximating an illusion because of the artists' awareness that "there is the myth (only) in the sense of a lie" (qtd. in Carol Rosen 5). Myth is reduced into a part of a historical fantasy that has lost the purpose through which the subject could reach a universe of meaning.

Melodrama Play (1967), first produced at Café La Ma Ma on May 18, 1967, reflects on the changes of meanings in American cultural landscape. This is the first play where Shepard has used rock music and a rock star as the central character. Here Shepard makes a sardonic comment on the process that reduces an artist into a commodity for mass consumption.

In the play *Duke Dungen*, a rock and roll singer achieves instant fame because of his hit song: "Prisoners Get Up Out of Your Homemade Bed." He soon draws attention of the music industry and the academia. Dr. Daniel Damon, a sociologist from Corning University tries to make him a subject to study how an

artist's social environment is affected by his public acclaim. Duke dismisses the professors academic suit. He broadsides:

Sociologists are movers. They don't hang around waiting for replies.
They make up their own if they don't get them on time. And I'd hate
to see him do that. To create a lie out of my negligence. (MP 119)

Though he can escape the imposition of academy, he fails to escape the tentacles of the music industry.

Duke has been requested by Floyd, the mobster manager, to write another hit song for the forthcoming Phoenix concert. But as Duke discloses that Drake Dungens is the original creator of his hit song, he was subjected to physical insult. Floyd immediately turns to Drake to sing for him and he does not care that he slugged Duke to death as soon as he became useless for him. This indignified existence of artist reveals the morbid reality of the music industry governed by the whims of the market. The stage setting features two huge black and white posters of Bob Dylan and Robert Goulet with their eyes blinded as *mise-en-scene* which is reflective of the reality of stardom that empties the artist of his identity and creative vision.

The artist is made into a faceless entity within the world of media hegemony. He is appropriated and enslaved by the 'industry' for its corporate interest and he is not allowed to utter anything that does not fall in their scheme of things. Duke's song reveals the artistic predicaments:

You could not say out loud what we already know
You should say it is to yourself
You should keep it in your mouth
... ..
Nobody knows when the pain got started
It's still the same as it always was.

(MP 116-117)

Artist is subjected to an ordering mechanism where the categories of boundaries, allocations, classifications and other stratifications are well legislated and well defined into existence. This ordering involves the rationalizing of definitives which is invariably predicated upon the immanence of rationalizing logic that aims at manipulating everything for its own interest. In the play *Melodrama Play*, Floyd and Dona are concerned with the next musical 'production' of Duke which must have the ingredients of success: beautiful tune, protest message, poetry so that they can 'sell' it ("When will Duke produce for us his next hit tune ... a shiny new tune that we can sell", 120). Drake finally appropriates his new role and proceeds to make a song for Floyd:

Drake: Just let me sing a song Peter. Please.
 Let me make up a song for Floyd.
 Peter: That will save your skin but how about mine?
(MP 141

The issues of artistic freedom, his creativity and exclusivity turn out to be plausible myths because the artist here is not certain even of his own identity. In the play the characters confuse about the identities of each other. Anybody can pretend to be Duke Dungen and anybody can be an imposter of an artist. Even Duke Dungen himself pretends to be Duke Dungen and the confusion is so extreme that Drake and Cisco even turn into one another. Authenticity of creation too becomes an irrelevant issue in the system as finally its Duke whose interview is broadcast over radio by Dan Damon whose main purpose is to turn the artist into an academic subject rather than discovering the artist in him.

Shepard wrote this play when he himself was gradually exposed to the operations of the art world. He was frequently playing the drum for Holy Modal Rounders, collaborated with Michaelangelo Antonioni to write the screenplay *Zubriskie Point*, and he started dealing with universities, foundations, record companies, movie studios and theatrical entrepreneurs which enhanced his antipathy to the system.

He himself felt to have been a captive inside a prison like that of Duke Dungen. Shepard, like his artist, too looks for an escapade. Shepard got romantically involved with an attractive rock poet/singer Petti Smith which jeopardized his three year old marriage with O Lan Johnson. He however makes an escapade at the Chelsea Hotel where he dramatizes his artistic and emotional ambivalence in the play *Cowboy Mouth* (1971). He wrote the play with Petti Smith pushing the type writer back and forth between them. He invents another rock artist as the protagonist who finds himself in "a reptile heap of dogshit situation" (CM 147). The play was first produced at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh on April 12, 1971. The artist Slim in *CM*, like Dungen, is also a prisoner here. But when Dungen was imprisoned by media operators Slim is imprisoned by a desperate youngster who has lost her all connections to history, faith and myths. When Dungen was forced to produce songs for the market, Slim is to create songs to reinvent the fictions of myths. Cavale, the kidnapper, wants Slim to emerge as the 'Rock 'n' roll Jesus with a Cowboy Mouth" (CM 157).

The Cowboy is one of the greatest mythological figures of American culture who enjoys a status, "somewhere above the president and below Christ" (William w. Savage Jr. 154). With the myth of the cowboy two important factors are intrinsically related, that of the wild West and the cult of individual propriety. The cowboy belongs to a specific geographic location -- the wild west - which symbolises the ethos of savagery, primitivism, promise, wealth and the justification to accomplish the task of enlightening the dark world -- one of the spiritual duties attached to the 'white men's burden'. He is not only a fictional purveyor of instant justice, but also a cult figure of romantic history. He is the physical reckoner of the possibility of living in the plausible world of the American Dream. As a symbol or myth, the cowboy has transcended all boundaries of limitations. He is not a mere pastoral figure that represents innocence and spiritual purity like that of the Biblical shepherds, the cowboy is a reference to a glorified past. He is also a reflector of one of the characteristics of American cultures that of the deification of an individual and the absence of a community identity. The cowboy is made to pose as the grandest of all individuals. The state of disequilibrium prevalent in the postmodern epoch has made it necessary for individuals to explore the possibilities of regenerating the myths.

The cowboy is, in the context of American culture, a symbol which can be defined, borrowing a term from Raymond Williams, as a means of a "specific communication" (60). The cowboy becomes an artist's reference for the discovery of certain values and its communication. Shepard's self conscious artists are engaged in an act of conceiving a cultural nostalgia which has been a part of the artists'

perception of the genetic structures of his sociology – the collective identity. But the artist here is adequately distanced from the romantic west and, instead, he is located in a complicated space of a capitalist market society. Lucien Goldman says , in capitalist society where the existence and development of an economic sector has precisely a tendency to the disappearance or, at least, a reduction in the status of the collective consciousness (167).

The cowboy happens to enact the role of a messiah in the obvious absence of a spiritual icon, culturally identifiable by the collective American consciousness. The cowboy is an allegory of the fast receding American morality. He symbolizes, as observed by William W. Savage Jr., truth, chivalry, honesty, courage, loyalty, precision, and other similar virtues that the present dominance of the corporate economy has reduced them to be the components of marketable '*feuilleton*' (Walter Benjamin).¹ Against this backdrop of the spiritual absence in the technology based repressive social order the cowboy emerges as a cultural event to allow an ideal continuity of a value-added history for the emplacement of an artist in a virtual discourse of teleological narrative. Because of the artist's supposed capacity for initiating rituals to this direction of cultural salvation, Cavale in *Cowboy Mouth* kidnaps Slim.

Shepard, in his search for an American geneology of myth and the continuity of this emotional narrative, re-creates a hero combining the qualities of two American cult figures – 'the rock 'n' roll star with the 'cowboy' attitude.

The play *Cowboy Mouth* (1972)² is about a quest for a new messiah, about the creation of new God as the collective repudiation of the old God has become a cultural imperative because "The old God is too far away. He don't represent our pain, no more" (Says Cavale in *CM* 156). This defiance of God is necessitated by the realization of being in a world of complex semantic configurations as against the apparent historical fixities, which again is a construction based on, as Foucault would say "profound intentions and immutable necessities" (157) of the dominant forces. The new God now has to reflect a new image i.e., "created from ... own image" (*CM* 156). Now Cavale stipulates the process of recreating myth to be strictly followed by the abducted artist, Slim, who can't follow his own paradigm of artistic creation like Cody, who is kidnapped to dream the winning number of dogs in *Geography of a House Dreamer*. Cavale too stipulates the process as to how Slim should create his own art:

You gotta collect it. You gotta reach out and grab all the little broken busted up pieces of people's frustration. That stuff in them that is looking for a way out or way in. You know what I mean? The stuff in them that makes them wanna see God's face. And then you gotta take all that into yourself and pour back out. Give it back to them bigger than life. You gotta be unselfish. Like God was selfish. He kept himself hid. He wasn't a performer, man. You gotta be like a rock 'n' roll Jesus with a Cowboy Mouth (*CM* 156-57).

The artist here like Dungen in *Melodrama Play* is transported to another universe of oppressive discourse where he is exposed to a new series of codes within which he is to create. He is to emerge as a new Saviour to give salvation along the parametres of prescribed norms. He is to deliver even more than God, like a 'real cowboy'. He has to embody all the mythic qualities that have been attributed to the

legendary heroes. He is to emerge, like the cowboy, as an archetypal figure of the American dream. Not a mere fictive cowboy, seen in movies and fictions, but rather idealized and mythic; instead of being a 'formula cowboy' he is to turn into an ambiguous cowboy (Mark Siegel 238/9). The cowboy, vis-a-vis the artist, turns out to be a means through whom an attempted approximation toward an invented prehistory is made. He is to climb inside America's collective consciousness and evolve a theatrical language and a mythological genealogy that, as David J. DeRose observes: "speaks to America about America" (51-52).

Cavale reveals the quintessential American desperation and almost tragic compulsion to invent a hero, a saviour, in order to keep their dream, their hopes alive. When Slim collapses following excessive violence he has been subjected to, Cavale realizes, that it is "her dream (that is) being busted and not his" (CM 157). She then articulates her desperation:

... My only dream. I spread my dream at your feet, everything I believe in, and you tread all over them with your simpy horseshit. Fuck you. Fuck you. Poor, poor baby. I take your world and shake it. Well, you took my fantasy and shit on it. I was doing the streets looking for a man with nothing so I could give him everything.... And its settled I can't do nothing to alter it. I can't do shit. I can't give you nothing. I can't. I can't. You won't let me. (157)

The artist is to emerge as a healer by inducing a faith, for collective self deception, by way of a pretentious de-mystification of a cultural reassurance. But as Slim discovers the bucolic nostalgia as he hears the sound of the river in the traffic noise, the expression and the experience of Slim becomes reassuring to Cavale:

Listen to the traffic. It sounds like a river I love rivers.... They make up their own paths. New Paths. I tried to make a dam once in a river. I

was really proud. I'd stopped a river.... Then it started to rain... all night long it rained. The next morning I ran down to the river, and dam was all busted to shit... I never built another dam again. (158)

Slim's pastoral roots and his intimacy with the sovereign space of nature empower him with a creative gift what Cavale lacks due to the absence of an intimate past. Cavale implores:

I wish I woulda' know you when I was little I wish you were around them. I bet you woulda' protected me. (158)

Slim is not a mere artist but he is a hero for Cavale who could assure her a respectable position because he was the one, believes Cavale, who has the ability and strength to protect her. In the world of capitalist aesthetics only "pretty people" have a rightful place. She would recall her experience in one of the school plays. She had "dumb eye patch" and a defective foot for which she had to use metal plates to correct her "duck foot" and she was given the role of an ugly duckling. She agreed to take the role of an ugly duckling because she was made to believe that in the end she would be the pretty swan. She tells the incident vindictively:

But you know what they did, Slim? At the end of the play I had to kneel on the stage and cover my head with black shawl and this real pretty blonde-haired girl dressed in a white ballet dress rose up behind me as the swan. I paid all the dues and up rose Ballerina Catty like the North Star. And afterwards all the parents could talk about was how pretty she looked I wish you were around then. I bet you woulda' protected me. (158)

She believes Slim to be the cowboy of her dream. "The Cowboy", a pastoral figure, writes Savage Jr, "exists in a primordial state and may, accordingly simply,

destroy his antagonists if he cannot intimidate them into submission" (157). He writes: "We in civilized societies are unable to attain this resoluteness of maintaining order, as we do, through systems of intermediaries. But we cowboy hats and cowboy boots, and we pretend. Great number of us buy guns, and that is where the pretense ends and the potential begins" (157).³

In order to ascertain a protective carapace around, the new generation voluntarily agree to accept the fictionality of their heroes as reality. They would not question their authenticity instead they would "like to know (his) darkest nightmares, (his) most beautiful dreams, (his) wildest fantasies, (his) hopes, his aspirations" (*CM* 161).

This desperate cultural preference for fictive figure is an effect of a deep sense of historical provisionality, and as Savage Jr. observes, "as a young country, with a simultaneous growth of her physical and technological change, America has not developed or had no time to develop, a culture of genuine substance. In comparison to much of the rest of the world, America has only a small shelf of myths." (159). These myths, though may not supplant history, yet it performs a vital function in shaping a social understanding. Hence Shepard proclaims, what America needs is a "renaissance of myth" through which "(he) seeks authentic values to sustain the performing self. These values rest in the ability to trust in the imagination and the heart as a repository of emotional truth, the living myth of the past and present." (qtd. in Robert Coe 65).

History assumes a peculiar onward direction in Shepard's plays. History is somewhat like a dream. Here it is not a mere recollection of the past. It is a kind of what Linda Hutcheon calls, 'historiographic metafiction'⁴ (qtd. in John M. Durvell 562) where history is to experience a new process of accumulation. Cavale explains:

"A dream, I'm playing You don't talk about yesterday stuff. Yah, you fucking coyote, Slim always howling after yesterday. Raymond (the Crow) don't squwak 'bout his old nests. Doy you baby? He sleeps on my belly 'cause my belly's today. Yesterday, yesterday, that's you, sulking shit face – Mr. Yesterday" (CM 148).

Robert Coe considers the real meaning of the word "history" in terms of its Greek root, *istorin* meaning 'to go, find out for yourself' (66). This is, indeed, what Kosmo, Yahoodi, Mae West and others did in *The Mad Dog Blues* – a Hegelian search for the self realization of human spirit through history. For Hegel "history is a rational expression of human freedom – the development of spirit in time" (qtd. in Ramon Selden 420). Particular events and physical reality in general are part of a large 'absolute spirit of history'. History therefore is not a mere retrogressive construction toward the confines of 'yesterday', it is rather a ritual of envisaging a dialectical view of the past history that underlines change and development. This is an onward peregrination in search of the conjectures to find out the genetic structure of the subject's cultural context. Shepard's subject is eternally enshrouded by an all encompassing universe of mystery. Despite having made desperate attempts to recontextualize the subjective existence, as Elizabeth Proctor proclaims, reality, identity and the ontology of meaning continue to remain eternally elusive (39).⁵ Shepard himself has insisted that "By myth I mean a sense of mystery and not

necessarily a traditional formula. Character for me is a composite of different mysteries. He's an unknown quantity. If he wasn't it would be like coloring in the numbered spaces" ("Inner Library", 55).

Through this mysterious power of individual ability Cavale turns the dumb Lobsterman into a rock and roll star through whom Cavale moves to fulfill her needs. She asks through her song – an incantation of sort - to infuse strength and revitalize dry force of man:

Show me the way to it
 You know I need a friend
 A song to pull me from the hole I'm in
 Give me something low down
 Give me something high
 Pulling in the power of dark or light
 To destroy to the left
 Create on to the right
 Oh come right here
 (CM 163)

Slim as an artist fails to attain a historical space for autonomous existence. His survival is a necessary construction by his audience, his abductors. It is not Slim who enjoys the power but it's the audience who holds the key to make or unmake the artist. As singer Cher has put it, "They raise the heroes to make them fall."

The artist does not exist as an authentic social entity. He lives as a myth who they search for. The very act of searching for a mythology is an assertion of its absence. But in case of Shepard's characters it is also an act of self translocation in a

realm of fantasy and the illusion about the past. Shepard writes of New England activism:

“New England is festering with bi-centennial madness, as though desperately trying to resurrect the past to reassure ourselves that we sprang from somewhere. A feeling that in the past at least there was some form of structure and that our present state of madness could be healed somehow by ghosts. Everywhere replicas of history are being sold” (*Rolling Thunder Logbook* 45).

Slim, aware of his proto-historicity as an artist, is to undergo the torture of being severed from the connections with his quasi past and yet he attempts to manufacture ideal dreams for his abductor. Slim complains:

I’ve a baby! My own baby! With its own cradle! You’ve stolen me away from my baby’s cradle! You’ve put a curse on me! I have a wife and a life of my own! Why don’t you let me go! I ain’t no rock ‘n’ roll star. That’s your fantasy. You’ve kept me cooped up her for how long has it been now? I’ve lost track of the time. A long time. A long fucking time. And I’m still not a star! (154).

The process of creativity, on the other hand, is redefined by Cavale with new paradigms. Cavale substantiates the process of artistic creation as an ‘escape’ (165), she justifies:

People want a street angel. They want a saint but with a cowboy mouth. Somebody to get off on when they can’t get off on themselves. I think that’s what Mick Jagger is trying to do... What Bob Dylan seemed to be for a while. A sort of God in our image... y’a know? Mick Jagger came close but he got too conscious. For a while he gave me hope ... but he misses. He is not whole” (156).

The artist, however, fails to emerge as an authentic manifestation of the fantasized myths because he himself turns out to be a product of, as in the case of

Slim, competing as well as incompatible desires of a desperate community orphaned by the absence of a God, hence, Cavale and other posit:

Any great mother fucker rock 'n' roll song can rise me ... higher than all of Revelations. We created rock 'n' roll from our own image, its our child ... a child that gotta burst in the mouth of saviour" and this new Jesus is to arrive in Yeatsian fashion, "the rock 'n' roll star in his highest state of grace will be the new saviour ... rocking to Bethelhem to be born. (156)

Myth for Shepard is a powerful means of reaching the mystified territory of the self. The absence of myth is an agonizing reality for the playwright "because (myth) takes to the emotions and not to the head. It moves us into an area of mystery." (*RTL* 62). For Shepard some myths are "poisonous to believe, but others have the capacity for changing something for a minute or two." (*RTL* 62). Shepard is aware of the replacement of myth with the quintessential fantasy of the American dream. But Shepard finds that myth has the capacity, which fantasy does not, to serve people to connect themselves in time to the past and "thereby connect themselves to the present and the future" (qtd. in Rosen 5) as well. For Shepard "Myth is so powerful and so strong that it acted as a thread in culture" (Rosen 5). But such a powerful means of approximating cultural prehistory is 'demolished' easily and what is left, points out Shepard, is "only the fantasies about it" (5). The myths even have ceased to speak, and articulate the inner self, Shepard says, "they speak to notions about the past. But they don't connect with anything. We've lost touch with the essence of myth." (5)

The protagonists in Shepard at times try to connect themselves with a supposed substance of history but which turns out to be a 'fruitless' exercise. Shepard himself is aware of the tempered and provisional enunciation of the characters who are engaged in search of a connection, a sense of belongingness. In their desperate bid to find out a connection, the characters construct themselves into mythic heroes, existing on the fragile foundation of, what Shepard says, "made up information" (*RTL* 76) but it seems to be little consequence because America "still wants to believe it" (76). This turns out to be a cultural imperative for the characters in Shepard's plays like one of the characters of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* who discloses "one needs an illusion which is a historical imperative". Similarly, the characters, who emerge in Shepard's play with an ambition to represent the values and the resonances of the legendary mythic figures, do not, in fact, exist apart from being a reflection of the grand falsehood on the basis of which they get constructed. Shepard clarifies, "through bragging a lot of early days American heroes sprang up. Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill all those mythic guys emerged from fantastic 'tall tales', mostly based on macho bravado and superhuman strength. But these guys are totally fictions (*RTL* 76). Thus all characters', grip on reality is constantly elusive, it doesn't allow him to form his self definition.

This cultural dislocation has not only affected the concept of self identity but has disrupted the basic foundation of linguistic communication. The certainty inherent in a rural establishment is no longer resourceful to language. For Shepard, "language comes from the earth, if a man raised on a mountain, he's going to talk

according to that place" (qtd. in Goldberg 44). With the change of the cultural context and economic transformation, language too has evolved into a new entity. The questions Shepard raises are whether an artist can create under such repressive circumstances, or can an artist reproduce an emotional image of his self through his creations? Can an artist locate the originality of his being? Reconstruction of cultural myths and its eventual merger with that constructed mythology is what forms one of the basic aspects of creative struggle in Shepard's plays.

The characters, in their bid to rediscover the lost spaces of mythological cartography, at times, are on the move to reach that eluding locale what they consider as home. As explained by Kosmo, in *The Mad Dog Blues* (1971)⁶, they "move(s) from spot to spot across the planet hoping to find a home" because that is where, he believes, lies his 'roots' (*MDB* 155). The characters in Shepard take upon themselves the task to explore the possibilities to form new myths. Mark Siegel calls this a return "to the roots of so many American myths." (235)

Against the blinding thickness of material objects in urban America, the artists make desperate attempts to disengage themselves from their immediate reality. Shepard notes:

(Americans) temperamentally come from the country, they come from that particular sort of temporary society, that you find in southern California, where nothing is permanent, where everything could be knocked down, and it would not be missed, and (from) the feeling of impermanence that comes from that – that you don't belong to any particular culture. (qtd. in Kenneth Chub 198)

Sam Shepard has assumed the image of a Shaman, a magician to exorcize evil elements from American civilization. Shepard confides:

What I'm trying to get at here", says Shepard, is that real quest of a writer to penetrate into a world. A world behind the form.... The power of words for me isn't so much in the delineation of a character's social circumstances as it is in the capacity to evoke visions in the eyes of the audience. American Indian poetry ... is a prime example. The roots of this poetry stem from a religious belief in the word itself. Words as living incantation. (qtd. in Siegel 236-237)

Shepard's characters are also found to have been engaged in the exercise of penetrating into 'the mythic world beneath the form' which is 'reality' for them but as Siegel observed this "reality" of the world most often is more "violently contradictory" and "ultimately inescapable" (237).

The play *The Mad Dog Blues*, defined by George Stambolian as an allegory of the American "brain" (83), wherein the characters who are actively engaged in search of identity and roots mostly look at the world through the images provided by the media and the myths of American culture. The protagonist, Kosmo, is a popular culture poscur who dresses like the rock 'n' roll star of the '60s (green velvet satin cape with tight pants, tease hair and no shirt, carries a Congo drum – *MDB* 148). He tries to reflect the qualities of a rock star, assigned by the media, through his personality, that of a sado-masochist, intuitive, without any control over his primeval violence coupled with the characteristic abhorrence of politics, philosophy or religion, yet he recourses to God showing his slim connection with the fundamental cultural

reference to faith; he 'grotes in the dark without a game'. The act reminds him of his spatial existence in vulnerable uncertainty.

This is the play of the artist's awareness of 'Americanness'. Stambolian writes, "(It) is clearly an American play, and only an imagination that has grown on American movies, radio shows, pulp magazines, and music could have conceived it" (81-82). The play is a collage of characters from American popular culture. There is Yahoodi, dressed in black and who is "like a big city dope dealer" (148) with an Indian flute; Marelene Dietrich wears short shorts, lots of make up, high heels and carries a whip; Mae West is in an evening gown with a feather boa drops from her famous movies who is tough and sexy. Paul Bunyan is there with his ox and waco and he moves around with his broken guitar like "Sad Gabby Hayes".

Kosmo, the protagonist, makes desperate moves to relocate his home and this voyage for home brings him to the 'contingency' of encountering a vision which too comes to him through the metronomic rhythms of Jimmy Hendrix. Kosmo's voyage is almost a Homeric Odyssey which makes the hero encounter unpredictable events in the undetermined trajectories of his journey. Like Ulysses, Kosmo, too, encounters eventualities. From his home – the space of crude certainty, equilibrium and repression – Kosmo is transported by the rhythmic vision of Jimmy Hendrix to the 'urban clusters of tangents' to a "jungle" which is, claims his sidekick Yahoodi, the place where he can "write" (*MBD* 151). And the city, says Kosmo, "getting me down. Too many tangents. It's no place to collaborate." (*MDB* 151). Hence he moves to

rediscover the interior territory of the self which inspires Marlene Dietrich to sing Blues, 'Jungen Mensch' like Janis Joplin:

They don't yet know who they are
 Silly boys, just young man following a star

 And loneliness comes like a dart
 There's nothing to find till you find your heart.
(MDB 151-52)

The characters, in their outward venture to have the reachable memory of their collective consciousness, are involved in the exercise of reconstructing the myths to regurgitate a history so as to contextualise their existence with a linear narrative to reintegrate the silent and the discontinued spaces with invented history. The characters of the play are engaged in the act of exploring a promised root, the finality of which reaches the pinnacle with the ritual of self-destruction; spiritually in the *Mad Dog Blues*, and physically in *Tooth of Crime* and *Suicide in B-Flat*, which assumes the meaning of a spiritual journey in search of a faith to reach the self.

The extrapolation of the self has different purposes for different characters. Yahoodi has undertaken the expedition to become 'famous' endorsing the popular image of a famous person. To be famous for Yahoodi is to be able to "fly back to the city and put a needle in (his) arm! ... buy a farm in the country and raise a family and be happily married man." (MDB 154). But for Kosmo, the journey is an artistic compulsion, because he realizes "I'm a musician! I've got to create! I've got to get back to the city. Back to my band. Back to my roots. I've lost touch with my roots."

(155) He is anxious because as he says, 'If I miss my moment in history, it may never happen again' (154).

But the mythical search for the treasure in the wilderness, which even instigated them to commit the primitive crime of homicide, treachery and even theft, turns out to be a desperate drive just for a sackful of market garbage which mockingly reduced the imagined self dignity of a cowboy hero into the despicable status of garbage gleaners carrying heaps of cold drink bottle caps – a sweeping symbol of the American market capitalism and the culture of mass consumption. They utterly fail to transcend the repressive reach of market capitalism and trespass the parameters of values constituted by the mechanism of mass consumption. The “tons of bottle caps”, which they thought to be heaps of gold, screamed loudly to remind them of the futility of the attempt to find out the purpose of existence, and these American drifters become aware of the terrible actuality about the irreplaceable silence of their ahistoric continuity and the subsequent impossibility to construct even an illusion of heroic prehistory. This tragic inability of the artist to construct the illusion even of an invented history displaces him from his quasi-stable locale and turns him into a cultural nomad which disempowers him from the ability to create owing to the obvious absence of any reference, owing to the terrible knowledge about the eternal absence of a home. The song that emanates from the inner core of their emotions turns out to be an elegy at the death of home:

Cause ya know that I'm true believer
In
Home

...
 Cause home is any place you feel
 Like
 Home

...
 Home is like a rolling stone
 Home is holding something you own
 Your own
 Home

...
 My spinning brain is a failure
 With no home
 Ride me in a passenger train
 Move me against the grain
 Move me
 Home.

(MDB 194-195)

Shepard's protagonists are icons of a cultural universe where the hegemony of the market discourse predominates. The characters, being embedded entities within that discourse, are forced to assume the identity given by the market. In the system the artist is fatally engaged in a process that eventually ensures the subordination of the artist's subjectivity.

Geography of a Horse Dreamer (1974) deals with this issue of the artist's conflict between his private vision and social exploitation. The play, unlike Shepard's earlier plays, has a thematic directness and clarity though the play as a whole is an extended metaphor for the personal dilemma of the artist himself. The play has obvious connections with Shepard's own psychic biography. The play's first performance in 1974 received favourable reviews for its transparency. B. D. Young in his review of the play in *Financial Times* (22 Feb, 1974) lauded the play for its

comprehensibility so did Irving Wardle in *London Times* who even found the play to have “Old fashioned plot development” (22 Feb, 1974). Shepard brings out his spontaneity as a playwright in this play by an eclectic mix of character types, surprise plot twists and unmotivated behavioural turns.

The play puts a dreamer as the protagonist who is kidnapped by gangsters to force the dreamer to dream the winning number of race horses. But he loses his gift, and cannot dream the winners any more because he has been displaced from the space where lies the roots of his creative power. He eventually goes mad and a doctor tries to perform a surgery on him to remove the “dream bone” from his nape. At that time his two brothers from Wyoming, his native place, come to rescue him. They kill the gamblers and take away their brother to Wyoming.

The play is defined as “a translation play” by Ross Wetzsteon because the audience/spectator has to translate the plot into meaning (“Looking A Gift Horse Dreamer” 133). The play reflects Shepard’s own crisis as an artist and his experience of being gradually enfolded by different forces that encroached upon his freedom. Cody, the dreamer in *Geography*, who is gifted to dream the winning number of race horses is forced to dream the winning number of dogs, a humiliating assignment for Cody. The playwright Shepard is also kidnapped by the cultural entrepreneurs, like Santee and Beaujo, initially through the Obie awards. Cody was also brought to prominence by the publicity in *Life* magazine through which he was noticed by the gangsters who kidnapped him. Shepard was writing plays in the Off Off Broadway production centres where he could easily give his dreams a shape for he had no

commercial stakes. But like Cody, Shepard too was almost hijacked by big production houses of Broadway that produced his later plays including *Buried Child* (1996).

As Cody was demoted as a dreamer – from a house dreamer to dog dreamer – as was Shepard from a playwright of the *Off Off Broadway* to a writer for Broadway and finally as a Hollywood screenplay writer (*Zubriskie Point*, 1968 and *Paris, Texas*, 1984). Shepard is torn by the conflict between dreams and power, between talent and its exploitation. Like Cody, Shepard's visionary gifts are also used by the system operators for their commercial gain. Shepard longs to escape to the bucolic world of the "Golden West" of his youth to renew his association with his roots.

Geography of Horse Dreamer was written when Shepard was in London where he went with the desperation of finding a new purpose in life. The play *Geography* was first produced in England itself (*Theatre Upstairs*, 21 Feb, 1974, directed by Sam Shepard) in which he offered the Royal Court patrons a taste of popular American imagination found in gangster movies. TV westerns, detective pulp fiction etc. The play in fact harkens back to a popular American stage comedy of the 1930s *Three Men on a Horse* which also involves horse racing, gangsters and prognostication. Shepard's *Blue Bitch* (1973)⁷ was a precursor to *Geography* which was written for presentation on BBC's "Open House" series.

Cody, the creative visionary who is driven to madness by the psychic accuracy of his dreams, depicts Shepard's concern with an Artist's subjugation to the

market place which reflects the crisis of the creative impulse itself. Creativity is the prerogative of a sovereign man which involves “spontaneity and intuition”. Creativity is almost an epiphanic experience. In *Geography*, this “rhapsodic mode of creation” is analogous to the phenomenon of dreaming – the sign of Cody’s creative gift. Recalling his early process of dreaming, Cody recalls, “It was accidental. It sorta’ come to me outa’ the blue.... At first it was all instinct. Now it’s work” (*GHD* 94).

The artist is literally arrested by the gang of Fingers and is locked in a decrepit hotel room that has a pungent stink and jagged wall paper and where Cody lies spread eagle with his legs and hands handcuffed and with the dark sunglasses on even when he sleeps, measures taken to allow Cody uninterrupted dreams where his abductors expect Cody to come across the winning number in the horse race. His position is described by Santee, one of the side kicks of the gang, as a “crucified position” (88) of “Mr. Artistic Cowboy” (86). Cody is entrapped in almost a Foucauldian Panopticon⁸ that prevents him from having any access to the world outside. He is under constant surveillance to ensure that he cannot make any other movement that falls outside the abductor’s space. Under the circumstances, to the horror of Santee and Beaujo, the prophetic accuracy of Cody’s dream gradually diminishes. Cody is exposed to an alien environment which cannot provide the artist the “connections”, where he cannot get what he calls “fresh air”. He looks for a situation where his “blood can move again.” Here he finds his “dreams are jagged. (He) gets a fuzzy picture. Sometimes the numbers blur.” (89).

In the claustrophobic incarceration, Cody is absolutely disempowered through the process of a new power relation that successfully subjugates the subject through eventual co-optation into the larger narrative. Cody does not have any access to power nor to knowledge. Power is operated by his abductors and knowledge is mediated through them in a form that would serve the interest of the forces that control Cody. The reach of this force is so pervasive that Cody realises the impossibility to escape from there. His body has almost been totally enslaved. Cody assures Santee:

I been with it too long Shantee. I couldn't run out or ya' now. I'd be lost. It's been years. I been blindfolded and shuffled from one hotel to another for as long as I can remember. The sun would probably blind me. Where would I go if I did escape? (88)

Cody has been perfectly subjected by the forces that aim to reify his creative gifts. Cody has been reduced almost into a mechanical device programmed to dream the necessary numbers but when Cody, quite predictably, fails to do so, Santee and Beaujo lament the tremendous fall of their hostage from grace. In fact, by displacing Cody from the realms of knowledge and power Cody's state has been exposed to one of "suspended extinction", for knowledge and power are a hyphenated abstraction, or to put in a quantum mechanic jargon, "entangled". They are predicated upon each other which creates the condition for the subject to survive in a society. Power produces knowledge and it is knowledge on the other hand that extends and reinforces power. The artist in Shepard is separated from these two basic sources of empowerment that results in their inevitable doom.

Cody in the play undergoes almost the Foucauldian process of subjugation in which both body and mind are put through a process of arduous and torturous training in order to make the subjected body into a device. The artist, in the process, loses ownership over his own body. When Cody was ordered to take a walk by Santee ("come on take a walk *Mr. Artist*. It may be yer last for a while", 89). Cody, while trying to get up from his bed, struggles to gain muscular control and tries to move his limbs very slowly to figure out how they work. His abductors on the other hand, are desperate to ensure that Cody remains absolutely ignorant about his own spatio-temporal dislocation – a space without geography. Santee, one of the abductors suggests:

We might arrange some fresh air. May be. His gotta be blindfolded though. He can't know where he is. That's the chief thing that Fingers impressed upon us. He can't for a second know what is outside the room he's locked up in. Otherwise it spoils the dreaming. He can't know the time either. (91)

The lack of geography prevents Cody from dreaming. The artist fails to regain his visionary gift because of the obvious absence of space. Cody needs his own "inner library" – "the inside one", the "space inside" from where the dream comes." Cody urges:

It's gotta be created. That's what Fingers don't understand. He thinks it's just like it was when I started

... ..
He's blocked up my senses. Everything forces itself on the space I need. There's too much chaos now. He'll never get a winner out of me till the space comes back. (92)

The play reflects an artist's quest for substance and solidity. The aesthetic enterprise is here intimately linked to place. Shepard once wrote, "I have a feeling that the cultural environment one is raised in predetermines a rhythmical relationship to the use of words ("Inner Library", 52). That geo-cultural space determines the private universe of an individual in which one thinks, perceives and experiences reality. Shepard has named this stored images of personal predisposition as "inner library". For Shepard, given his own "inner library", admitted to having become none other than an "American writer". Likewise, Cody can dream only "American dreams" for this is the American space that Cody lost, his place of origin. Cody's ability to dream the winning horses in advance is originally tied to his Wyoming native home and its bucolic environs. With a bid to regain his lost ability Cody urges for the regeneration of his "internal environment" (94). To fulfil this mission he makes mental attempts to reach the locale of his fading memories in order to restore his original identity with which his creative self had a natural bond. Cody's desperation for his old space is tellingly underlined:

Why is he (Fingers) keepin' me on! I wanna go back to Wyoming and raise sheep. That's all I wanna do. I got no more tips. I'm from the great plains, not city. He's poisoned my dreams with these cities. (96)

Cody's separation from his native space makes him intently aware of the necessity of his own space for the purpose of his creative exercise. For Cody this is the uncontaminated American landscape where his creative roots are nestled. The anarchy of the cityscape arrests the creative self of the Artist and eventually pushes the artist into a state of creative bankruptcy. Ironically the crime syndicate kingpin,

Fingers, orders his men – Beaujo and Santee – to ensure that Cody is not at all interfered by the surroundings or other outside objects which Fingers suspected might upset the flow of Cody's dreams. But Fingers fails to understand that Cody's isolation and relocation have destroyed his sense of Geography from where the images of his dreams come. Cody's displacement, therefore, jeopardizes the authenticity of the whole process of dreaming. This decentering of Cody is an agonizing experience because his dreams have to be produced in a state of void without having any reference. Cody finds it:

Stupid! It's really stupid! I'm dreaming American horses and we are probably in Morocco somewhere. It don't make sense. I gotta know where we are so's I can adjust. I've lost track of everything. I need some landmarks. (94-95)

But Beaujo reminds him of what Fingers had told him "dreams are a gift from God. I don't matter what country you dream in". Cody is furious at Fingers' unwarranted interference to stipulate the methodology of accomplishing an act of pure creativity. He retorts: "Fuck Fingers! I'm the dreamer. I ought a' know". (95)

Cody is a peculiar product of the American paradox. His roots are in the American landscape. The West is his home. The great plains, the subject of Cody's dream ("I dream about the great plains", 92). The "Cowboy Artist" belongs to the place of "Real Cowboys in leather craps" (116). Even Fingers recalls the native space of Cody from where he was abducted with deep nostalgia:

Oh what a town! Saloons with Winchester rifles tacked up on the wall
... Indians shuffling through the dusty streets. Buffalo Bill's name

plastered on everything. And at night. At night it was magical. Like praying. I never heard such a silence as that. No where on the earth. So vast and lovely. Just the brisk cold night blowing in through the hotel window. And outside, the blue peaks of the big horn mountains. The moon shining on their snowy caps. The prairie stretching out and out like a great ocean. I felt that God was with me. The earth held me in its arms. (116)

Fingers nostalgic recitation of the space of Cody's creative inspiration carries dramatic significance which directs attention to the invocation of the American West which constitutes, one of key elements in the play. Like Cody, Shepard himself has drawn his inspiration from the Western experience. His sojourn in London, where he wrote the play, provided him the vantage to accentuate his regard for geography and sensibility of place. And Shepard in casting a glance back across the Atlantic envisaged not the America of conflagrant contemporaneity but "the country of a century past" (Wade, 63). Shepard's deployment of western motifs, the reconstitution of its iconography, links the playwright to a deep rooted notion of Americanness which resides in the play with a resonance that echoes long held notions of the national character. It is the American geography, and the American aesthetics, American music, that created Cody. The continued survival of Cody is subjected to the availability of these contexts to Cody else Cody would be without history – acontextualized. In order to get back his "local frequency" Cody requires to relive his sources of belongingness. He wants a pure vision of the West and listen to his records again. If I could just listen to my records again. That's all. Just a couple of tracks off my record ... And all of them came from the music. It's a source of inspiration" (99). For Santee, who symbolizes deadly commercial entrepreneurship,

Cody's quest for his lost space is just a "cocka' shit" who considers the allowance of Cody to have "three squares a day. The movement through the room" (109) was more than enough for anybody "to dream". But it is Beaujo who casts a doubt on their own understanding of Cody's dream. He suspects:

May be his dreamin' does take on a kind of an art form, the way he does it. It might need some special stuff to get him back in top form.
(90)

Beaujo is also disturbed when Cody's area of activity has been shifted from horse racing to greyhound racing. The shift apparently underscores Cody's status as an artist. Beaujo does not approve of the shift which is not only disgraceful to the artist but their own sense of respectability as well. Besides, the cruelty Cody is subjected to terrifies Beaujo because Cody is used as a mere object that can dream the numbers which have commercial potentialities. He apprehends, "he can't suddenly change his whole style of dreaming like that, it might kill him" (95) because that is a completely new area of operation for the artist who "don't know a greyhound from a crocodile" (95). But Cody's inability to dream gets onto the nerve of Santee because his own fate is closely linked with Cody's success. It's the dream of Cody that would ensure him at least "a little room service and a color TV" (103). Cody is not only the victim of his gifts, Santee too is a victim who is doomed to have his fate determined by someone's abstract, mysterious abilities. Cody's mysterious creative gift, which was evolved through his American experience of the West and the music. Ironically threatens his own freedom because of his being within an American space where

media has a determining dominance. The media exposure has dehumanized him for he was considered as a means to earn fortune. Even his brothers, who would eventually rescue him from the gangsters, also started cashing in on Cody. Cody weakly recalls, "I had that big dream ... Then Life magazine ... Then folks started cashin' in. My brothers" (97).

Cody's fame turned on himself by taking away his freedom. His fame made him "the hottest thing in the West" and the gangsters intervened. He was wined, he was dined and he was kidnapped. Cody finally *interpellates* the new compulsions and almost mechanically goes through a process of regeneration that conditions him to dream the greyhounds, suggesting the final degeneration of the artist. He dreams the Black Bajo, the potential winner in the dog race. And immediately the condition of his abductors change as Beaujo says "the slump is over" (102). Cody's dream follows a candid confession of Santee that reflects the hopeless web that entraps everybody. Santee's almost inhuman treatment of Cody is justified by Santee's own existential compulsions:

May be I was pushing it too hard. This better be it boy or we're all gonna cut up in little pieces and mailed to our Mammas. I know you ain't used to working under pressure but that's how it is. It's like snake bitin' its own tail For a solid month you was right. You was so right that you had somebody out there eatin' turtle soup and fillet mignon three times a day. Being Chauffer driven to the grocery store. That's how it is you got *the genius somebody else got the power*. (102-103)

Cody's own power makes him powerless, he even fails to retain his equilibrium. He even loses his physical identity as he is possessed by the local dream

frequency that makes him speak in foreign accent (he begins to speak in Irish accent), he is transformed into a dog breeder and by the time Fingers arrives with the Doctor Cody has been transformed into a dog whimpering and scurrying away from the other characters, crashing into the things like frightened animal and Santee says “(we) can pet him” (110).

Cody reflects Shepard’s own crisis with geographical displacement. His stay in England had its apparent impact on his work that forced him to “Anglicize” his work. He mentions in “Inner Library”:

I noticed ... after living in England for three straight years, that certain subtle changes occurred in this rhythmic construction (of language). In order to accommodate these new configurations in the way a sentence would overblow itself (as is the English tendency). I found myself adding English characters to my plays (“Inner Library”, 216).

But the doctor who arrives on the scene with Fingers displays the horrible ignorance about the whole process of creativity by trying to interpret the process in terms of certain biological properties. He even proceeds to perform a deadly surgery upon Cody to remove his “neck bone” which he described a source of Cody’s magical power and how the power can live on if the bone is transplanted on Beaujo with simple surgical accuracy.

At this point two brothers of Cody storm into rescue him from the Brits and their effete bejeweled ring leader by having all of them shot down, (like an unexpected *deus ex machina*). But the reality of the two brothers remains ambiguous.

Jasper and Jason, the six foot five inches tall huge figures carrying double barrel guns and knocking the adversaries in a flash look almost like the images of Cody's final dream, the last metaphor of Cody's creative ability to shape his own life.

The play almost overtly acknowledges that tradition, geography, rootedness, and identity need to coalesce, for poetic art owes more to grounding than flight of fancy. That is why, the inexorable effort by force-feeding him Americana and American record albums an nauseam predictably fail to bring back Cody's frequency.

How agonizing the effect of this apparent comedy could be on an artist can well be judged by Bob Dylan's reaction to the last scene of the play during the play's Manhattan Theatre Club production. As the main character in the play was about to be shot by a hypodermic syringe Dylan stands in the row and yells in the hall "wait a minute! Wait a second! Why's he got the shot? He shouldn't get the shot! The other guy should get it! Give it to the other guy!" All his companions embarrassed at the situation tried to control Dylan by hauling him back down to his seat. Finally, Dylan leapt up again "I DON'T HAVE TO WATCH THIS! / DIDN'T COME HERE TO WATCH THIS!" (qtd. in *RTL* 181).

Shepard addresses the issue of cultural translocation of artist into the realm of reification where the artist is no longer ensconced in the comfort of his native space. An artist is not recognized as "just as a man" but an "industry" which can be controlled and manipulated by the corporate operators. He has captured the cultural context where the equations of power relations have altered. Creative ability and

artistic refinement cannot protect an artist as he can easily be arrested and subjugated by the gigantic forces that have reconstructed the social space through their sheer expertise of controlling the systems of cultural operations where mechanical power takes over creative and artistic power. The artist becomes an easy prisoner within the system that gradually shuts him round in a vacuum. But then Shepard's heroes regenerate a new strategies to prevent his disfiguration. Like Cody, they finally overpower the subjugating forces through imaginations and inventions at different dimension. The artist seems to follow Waco's inspiring instruction in MDB: "Just follow your heart. That's what a man is supposed to do. The only thing a man can do. Just follow your heart" (158).

End Notes

¹ *Feuilleton* is the salon attire of a literature which was fundamentally designed to be sold in the streets (See Walter Benjamin, *Claude Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: NLB (1973) 35.

² *Cowboy Mouth* was first produced at the American Place Theatre on April 29, 1971, as an after piece of *Back Dog Beast Bait*.

³ The book *Tack 'n' Togs*, Dealer Round Up Report No. 2 (Minneapolis 1972) records, as per the survey undertaken, Western vests are sold more in New York, Pennsylvania and New England than in Texas and Oklahoma showing the urban urge to artificially obtain intimacy with myths.

⁴ Linda Hart defines 'historiographic metafiction' as the blending of brute events of the past and the historical fiction we construct out of them (See John M. Durvell, *Modern Fiction Studies*. 43:3 Fall (1999) 562).

⁵ Elizabeth Proctor argues that Shepard's equation of myth and mystery has problematized several general areas such as art (what is it?), (Where does it come from? What is an art?), Identity (the quest for roots) and reality (What is it?). (See "Off Beat Humor and Comic Mystery in Shepard's Plays" in Kind Kimball. Ed. (1988) 39.

⁶ *The Mad Dog Blues* first produced by Theatre Genesis at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery on March 4, 1971, directed by Robert Glaudin.

⁷ *Blue Bitch* is about an American couple – Cody and Dixie. They try to sell their greyhound with the help of a cockney milkman. The milkman gradually metamorphose into a canine like beast and it results in eventual breakdown in communication.

⁸ Foucault has interpreted the post eighteenth century articulation of power in terms of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon which according to Foucault accurately captures the structure of power relation in the nineteenth century. Panopticon is a circular building enclosing a central inspection tower. It allows for the invisible surveillance of a large number of inmates by relatively smaller number of people. It reflects the theoretical formulation of nineteenth century penology which emphasizes disciplining of the body through the techniques of real or perceived surveillance. Foucault observes that the unstable history of penal system is associated not only with the perception of the criminals, but also on the changes engendered by the emergence of institutions dealing with the formation of knowledge. Thus is knowledge linked to power and the prison becomes a tool of knowledge. The emergence of disciplinary institutions in society give rise to prison. Panopticon perfectly fulfils the requirement of constant observation. (See Michael Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Allen Lane, 1977).

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CHAPTER IV

**ASSERTIONS AGAINST
APPROPRIATION:
COUNTERCULTURE HEROISM
AND THE ROCK AND THE JAZZ
STARS IN SHEPARD'S PLAYS**

ASSERTIONS AGAINST APPROPRIATION: COUNTERCULTURE HEROISM AND THE ROCK AND THE JAZZ STARS IN SHEPARD'S PLAYS

Shepard has created his protagonists from his own artistic experience. He is a peculiar insider to the American cultural landscape, who has been a part of the world which the dramatic characters in his plays are made to encounter. For him, therefore, the experience of the artist protagonist is more an extended metaphor of his own subjective realities than a mere depiction of an idealized world specifically created for the protagonists to live in. Shepard has diverse commitments to different art forms – music is one of them. Music has assumed a significant position in Shepard's emerging pattern of plays which not only provides a way to look at the conditions of the artists' world, it has also evolved into a means to redefine the changing realities which the artist is almost inescapably associated with.

The chapter takes up two of the most significant plays of Sam Shepard where music itself is a major character – *Tooth of Crime* (1972)¹ and *Suicide in B-Flat* (1976)². The first one portrays a rock icon Hoss as its protagonist when the second one features Niles, a Jazz maestro as the central figure of the play.

Sam Shepard was an insider to the world of Rock music. As a musician he came quite close to Bob Dylan when he took part in the Rock Odyssey, Rolling Thunder Revue as a writer that travelled across America. He, however, could assume the vantage distance from the Rock music world of America when he moved to London where he had written two very significant plays with American artist as protagonist: *Tooth of Crime* (1972) and *Geography of Horse Dreamer* (1974).

Rock in America is different from pop and rock 'n' roll music following its different ideological orientation. Rock music has, as Peter Wicke has pointed out, "a political ambition" (*Rock Music* 1990). Simon Frith observes that the organizing logic of rock has not been the intention of making money by fulfilling certain market criteria but to express commitment to music itself (qtd. in Wicke 161). Rock music, in fact, evolved through the artist's artistic and political perception. Shepard, in fact, was very much influenced by Bob Dylan who had given rock music a strong political dimension. Dylan's "The Answer my friend, is / Blowin' in the wind" soon became a battle hymn against racial segregation in America. Dylan even led, with Martin Luther King, a column of 20,000 people in the "Great March to Washington" in 1968 to protest against racism. Shepard's romanticism with rock intensified when he saw Rock music evolved into an assertion of social commitment.

Rock was viewed as a clever subterfuge of capitalist interest by the leftists and on the other hand the conservatives viewed Rock as an anti-American activity because of its obvious rejection of established norms (Wicke 102). However, Rock music emerged as a powerful discourse of challenging the established system. Hoss, the hero of *Tooth of Crime* defines rock as a means to "Go against the Codes" He says "That's what they used to do. The big one Dylan, Jagger, Townsend. All them cats broke codes. Time can't change that" (*TOC* 209).

As Rock succeeded to address social issues radically, the corporate operators arrived in the scenario to convert this music into a commodity. Commercial manipulations took Rock music to paradoxical circumstances. This seemingly anti-

capitalist art of America has been simulated for mass consumption through the system that the Rock had been antagonising. Thus a so-called revolution became a potential object to be promoted as market commodity. From a maverick, the artist is reduced to a stereotype whose radicalism is also “programmed”. In *Tooth of Crime*, Crow, the new generation rock renegade belongs to such a category. He is an image chaser who is under the compulsion of believing his mask to be his real identity:

But I believe in my mask – the man made up in me
And I believe in my dance – and destiny.
(*TOC* 234)

The true artist under such conditions is forced to encounter one of the typical crises of determining the preferences between the two dialectically opposing modes – qualifying the artistic creations with political commitments and quantification of the artistic success in terms of economic pragmatism. The artist finds himself amidst the complex interrelationship between market and ideology. Shepard addresses this crisis of artistic priorities and the paradoxical ideological conflicts in a definite set of plays that can be categorized as his ‘Rock Plays’. The Rock protagonists in these plays find the ambiguous problematics of representing the communal identity of the deluded generation and evolving an individualistic creative realization to formulate the desired ideology of rock which is recognised as a cultural imperative by both the artist himself and his audience.

In the play the *Tooth of Crime*, we find the old rock singer, Hoss, having failed to resolve this ideological crisis, takes up the drastic step of freeing himself from the repressive and threatening reality by blowing himself with a gun. This

happens in case of Niles as well in *Suicide*. Ironically when 'rock' is assigned to emancipate the individuals trapped in the system after being robbed off their lives, as mentioned by Rogers Waters of the *Pink Floyd*, the musician himself fails to find out means to liberate himself from the trap placed by the system.

The *Tooth* is a play redolent with the historical simulacra of rock music of the late fifties and the sixties as well as the other anti-social paraphernalia like that of gangsterism, gun slinging, and such other elements. The play has the story that is set against the backdrop of rock music taken in a historical perspective to highlight the modernist evolution of rock into a political narrative having its musical base on rhythm & blues that found the pinnacle of its mass success in the form of that unpretentious musical novice who soon turned into a rock legend called Elvis Presley. Like Elvis, Hoss in *Tooth* too was an energetic young man, a radical 'fast gun' who also picked up folk music like Dylan what Hoss wanted to become was "A Man" (227). R & B music like Presley as the source of his music and eventually got stuck in his invented image. Like Henry Heckamore in the *Seduced*, Hoss has his personality dissolved to turn into a fucking industry (TOC 227) and he eventually degenerates from being an artist to a chart killer; from being a creator to a chart climber. Thus begins the Faustian journey of the artist into the dark interior from where the only escape is through self-destruction.

Hoss in the play expresses his obvert awareness of the receding of a centre that provided the space of temporal location to the artist. The locational certainty enabled the artist to evolve the idioms of romantic radicalism. But Hoss laments the

passing of the era which Leonard Wilcox defines as the “modernist ethos of artistic mastery and a sense of history and tradition” (61-62). Hoss consciously witnesses his progressive degeneration from being an artist that creates and inspires, to a commodity at the mercy of market forces. He is being alienated from his own understanding of his self and identity as he finds his supposed creative gifts to have been turned into an exercise without any legitimate political objective. He chronicles this degeneration:

Backed to a fucking box. I can't believe it. Things have changed that much. They don't even apprentice no more. Just mark for the big one. No respect, no more. When I was that age I would sell my leather to get a crack at a good teacher. I would. And I'd some a' the best. There is no sense of tradition in the game no more. There's no game. It's just back to how it was. Rolling night clubs. Strip joints. Bustin' up Poker games. Zip guns in the junk yard. Rock fights, dirt clods, bustin' windows. Vandals, funkies, West side story. Can't they say where they're goin'! Without a code it's just crime. No art involved. No technique, finesse. No sense of mastery. The touch is gone. (TOC 219)

The rock singer finds himself stuck in a tricky historical juncture for when rock has been a symphony of protest against the repression of the past meaning and code's of patriarchs, Hoss discovers that the age and ethos have changed.

Jeanette P. Malkin finds the *Tooth of Crime* to be the best play of Shepard. She describes the play as “sci-fi futuristic and on the far side of American Dream.” She writes, the play is “Part western, part rock and roll fantasy, it is wholly American in its concerns with frontier roots, success ethics, identity and the hard rock images of a narcissistic pop industry turned into cultural myth” (198).

Shepard addresses the issue of the instability of success and its corrupting effects in a definite set of plays where the *Tooth of Crime* occupies a prominent place. The play also takes up one of the most pertinent cultural questions in the capitalist context – what Vivien Patraka has defined as “the archetypal challenge to and replacement of one ageing generation by a younger one” (26). The playwright here reinforces the regenerative power of violence. The violence is accentuated by the apparent division of the two worlds diversely represented by the figures poised against each other in their combat to assert supremacy of the competing ideologies represented by Hoss and Crow respectively. In this conflict, however, Ianier W. Gregory finds out certain symmetric equivalence in the structural order of the play (50). There is a balanced division between the two major figures who eventually get actively involved in the clash of two cultural vernaculars of two generations. Despite the apparent separation of the protagonists from each other Hoss and Crow happen to belong to the same world of rock music with opposing ethos in both physical and ideological terms. When Hoss is in black rocker gear with silver studs and black kid gloves who looks like a mean and slightly young Rip Torn (*TOC* 205), Crow, on the other hand, is like Keith Richard in ‘high heeled green rock and roll boots, tight greasy blue jeans, a tight yellow T-shirt, green velvet coat (...) and a black eye patch covering the left eye. He holds a short piece of silver chain in his hands and twirls it constantly, tossing it from hand to hand’ (*TOC* 220).

Hoss represents the ethos prevalent in the rock world of the 60s which was featured by the blues pulse of *Velvet Underground*, Bob Dylan, Crosby Stills and Nash, Fresh Creams and others. Crow, on the other hand, represents, as described by

Lanier “the flashier edges of the late 60’s cool rocker, the throbbing back beat, ironic lyrics, and often complex orchestrations of the *Rolling Stones*, *The Who*, *The Doors*, *Iron Butterfly*. They belong to the world of *Masserati* and *Impala* respectively.

The play focuses on the conflict of the bipolarised ethics of the two contesting generations and subsequent redrawing of the centres of the media centric world. Hoss, the elderly musician, becomes increasingly uncertain about the acceptability of his kind of music – rhythms and blues – which he disturbingly associates with the vanishing of the comforting myth of ‘blue suede shoes’. He is frightened to recognize the approaching end of his reign as a rock star which also makes him aware of the fact of his physical ageing to degeneration. His stage appearance too is emblematic of walking on down the hall toward a confrontation with death. The self deceptive particularity of the inner essence of the personality of Hoss is revealed in the opening song of Hoss wherein Bruce Powe finds the dream structure against which the play is set (51). That is, the song is the reinforcement of the underlying structure of the theme of the play itself.

So here’s another illusion to add to your confusion
Of the way things are

... ..

So here’s another fantasy
About the way things seem to be to me. (TOC 205)

The song is reflective of the world Hoss lives in. This is a world ‘adept with illusion’ (Powe 51), a world which is illusive and confusing. Hoss’s is a world of receding rebellion.

Crow's on the other hand, is a world much younger in taste and temperament. When Hoss's is an 'illusion of seeming', Crow's is a world of 'conscious deception' (Lanier 52). The determining pattern of Crow's world constituted the leitmotifs that are encoed in his song:

I've fooled the Devil's land
I've fooled the Ace of spades
I've called the bluff in God's own face
Now keep me from my fate. (TOC 253)

The tragedy, that is focused upon, lies not in mere destruction of the semantic certainty of culture through Hoss, it also lies in the conscious awareness of Crow about the improvised self delusion to invent a fictive reality of his own. Crow, in his bid to save Hoss from being obliterated, instructs him to impersonate Rod Stewart and other start of rock music to ascertain at least a temporary phase of acceptability. But Hoss rejects the approach. He rejects the process what Ernesto Laclau would call 'homogenization' and 'essentialization'.¹ Though Hoss himself has been a precursor of anarchy – 'a killer', a metaphorical expression of causing entropy, - he refuses to be radically stereotyped and patterned on the basis what Crow seems to have accepted as a *sine-qua-non* for survival. Even the anti-hegemonizing mission of the rock artist ironically gets entrapped by the same ideological representation which, after having a definite complicity in the market, turns into a hegemonic cultural discourse within the sub-cultural world of rock. Rock gets manipulated to serve the interests of certain economic ambitions. In the process, the well evolved self-perception of the artist, what he thought to be the valid means of self-understanding, tends to be threatened and jeopardized by the powerful subversions affected by the capitalist by-products

like the consciously deceptive artist Crow. Crow represents a morality as well as a nihilistic metaphysics which sharply delineates Hoss as against Crow. When Hoss has an awareness of mythical heroism and his obligation to represent this as a quintessential American cultural identity, Crow appears as a being, oblivious of his own prehistory. Hoss is perpetually reminded of his belongingness to a mythical landscape of possibility by Becky:

But you're a hero now. A hero. All those losers out there barking at the moon. (*TOC* 32)

Becky also defines the underlying philosophy of Hoss's existence – 'power', which is one of the most desired abstract authority that American heroism is so intimately attached with. This is also considered an end in itself. Becky underlines it:

Power ... that's what you live and die for. Every breath you take you breathe the power. You live the power. You are the power. (*TOC* 32)

But Crow, on the other hand, proceeds to appropriate the identity of Hoss as his own and is eventually able to walk perfectly like Hoss who is to be sacrificed by Crow (Crow is into Hoss's walk now and does it perfect, 50). Thus Crow assimilates the identities within himself through an absorption of Hoss's essential rhythmic structures. Gregory Lanier suggests that "Crow becomes Hoss by assimilating the heritage that forms Hoss's musical identity" (55). This act of Crow affects the ritualistic destruction of the original possessor of a tradition, namely Hoss, who is threatened to lose both his musical and physical territory.

The artist's struggle to retain his identity forces him to involve himself with an ontological search. The Derridean portmanteau word that signifies the rootedness of Being in a spatial location. Hoss, in his attempt to reconstruct his self identity, recourses to the chronotope of his private history. He finds incidental similarity in his history with that of Crow who recounts his lost, lonely, adolescent days, and who runs, being a runt, "outside the pack" quite like Hoss. But Hoss, despite his incidental commonality of experiences, refuses the complacency of sharing common history by disclosing brute actuality:

We're punk champs cowerin' under the keepers and the Refs and the critics and the public eye. We ain't free no more. Go dammit! We ain't flyin' in the eye of contempt. We've become respectable and safe. Soft, mushy chewable ass lickers. (*TOC* 217)

He, however, mournfully recollects, "we were warrior once".

The capturing of contesting identities becomes the sole reason for the fierce progression of the lethal rock combat. In the first round of combat Crow's allusions to the past have been rejected by Hoss fearing the blurring of his identity in the emerging hegemony of the familiar reality reconstructed through recollection. The next round of combat finds the reversal of roles to the extent that Hoss here becomes the recollector of history when Crow rejects it for fear of being shorn off anything which he could claim to be his own. Hoss reminds him of the pain of black slave who found solace in letting his anguish out through his music – "Little brother Montgomery with the keyboard on his back" or the 'Hookers movin' toward ivory

tinkle”, “Diplomats and sailors laid side by side to the blues” (241). Finally, Hoss reveals the essential norms for rocker to conform to:

‘So ya’ wanna be a rocker. Study the moves. Jeny Lee Lewis. Buy same blue suede shoes ... Listen to Jimmy Hendrix, Sound like a Dylan, sound like a jagger, sound like an earthquake all over the fender. (TOC 243).

Hoss as an artist denies the shift from ‘within to without’. The interiority i.e., the within, of Hoss is conflicting, scattered, fragmented what Bakhtin suggested in different context to be folkloric and vernacular that provides an alternative to the outer landscape constructed by the elements taken from without. The world constructed by the elements of the external logic is unifying. Seemingly integrated hegemonically homogenized so that culture remains within the confines of ‘controllable cartographic panopticon’. Hoss, defies the defusion of his personality within the rationalizing landscape of the official cultural geography. In doing so he ensures his subsequent self destruction because he was engaged in the act of carving out a personal space against the wilderness of hegemonic cultural totalitarianism.

The history of rock has never been personal. It always has a composite as well as a collective identity for its fusion and composition of diverse, seemingly disparaging, conflicting sounds, styles, images that eventually achieve unity out of sheer absorption. The rock masterpieces like Lewis’s ‘Great Balls Fire’; Stewart’s “Maggie Mae”; Hendrix’s “Are you Experienced”; Dylan’s “Sub-terranean Homesick Blues” or Jagger’s “Jumping Jack Flash”, collectively establish the identity of rock as a communal musical identity. Hoss in his desperate bid to locate the space of privacy

encounters the crude final vision which reflected his desired image not in himself but in Crow – the deliberate impersonator of Hoss. Hoss realizes his own presence as an embodiment in absolute absentia. He cries out at Crow:

It's me. He is just like me, only younger. More dangerous. Takes bigger chances. No doubt. No fear. ... Yeah it's me just like I wanted to be (*TOC* 71).

But Hoss makes laudable attempts to retrieve his heroism. Firstly, by enabling himself to interpret his own destiny by reading his own palm 'In the palm of my hand I got the last say' (*TOC* 73). He admits his opponent's strong points: "You are a master adapter. A visionary adopter' (*TOC* 251). But he achieves, in spite of his apparent defeat, an elegant heroism. Hoss declares:

All this collection of torture. It's all yours. You're the winner and I'm the loser. That's the way it stands. But I'm losin' big Crow (*TOC* 251).

And Hoss does it with the ritual of a final shot into his own mouth. Crow, on the other hand, is doomed to survive with conscious self-deception. Hence his desperate persuasion to convince himself of his own presence:

But I believe in my mask – the men I made up in me
And I believe in my dance – and my destiny (*TOC* 234).

He, however, is apprehensive, genuinely, of the possible collapse of his entire being and total annihilation hence he attempts to hide his image from himself with the fragile front of masks to keep on rolling over his face so that he remains unreachable even to himself:

Keep me rollin' down
 Keep me rollin' down
 Keep me in my state a grace
 Just keep me rollin' down (TOC 252)

Sam Shepard is a man of multiple talents: a musician, an actor, a writer. All three have informed one another. Shepard uses music in his plays as – “another way of making the invisible present” (C.W.E. Bigsby, 164). Shepard seldom fails to set challenges to the actors and audience alike to break through the carapace of naturalism. There is, what the critics like Bigsby call a kind of ‘visceral power to Shepard’s work, the sense of the unexpected’ (154). A premonition of imminent violence haunts the characters who are menaced by this cognitive ambivalence of violence from within. Bigsby describes Shepard characters as ‘borderline psychotics’ who occasionally cross borders and eventually befog and eclipse the boundary lines, and, having done this, they ‘gestate uncertainty’ which threatens the well cultivated orderly edifices and structures of society which then turns such individuals into strangers to pre-empt any further entry of such individuals into, what Bauman identifies, ‘the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map’ of the given social territory.

Shepard makes such a ‘social misfit’ the protagonist of his 1976 play *Suicide in B-Flat*. Niles, the protagonist, is a prince of jazz who finally becomes a prisoner of the self as an artist, and to rescue himself from the prison he, as Michael Feingold writes, ‘flirts with death’. Feingold in his review of the play in *The Village Voice* (Nov. 15, 1976) observes, “Shepard rediscovers life as a mystery out of a torrid flirtation with death” (113). The play was first produced in Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven in 1976, directed by Walt Jones. Paul Schierhorn played as Niles, Joe

Grafasi played Louis, Clifford David as Pablo, William Hickey and Alina Cuervo played Petrone and Laureen respectively. This is the play that brought Shepard to a prominent theatre, "YRT, founded by the Dean of the School of drama, Robert Brustein.

Niles, the master of jazz music enacts his own death to the bafflement of Pablo and Louis, the two detectives, who find it too hard to find a clue as to how and why such a death occurred. Like These two detectives most of the reviews that immediately followed the Yale Repertory Theatre production (1976) of the play found the play 'mysterious' and 'elusive'. 'The play was ambiguous and vague like looking at silhouette through a frosted glass... the play could be enjoyed as a mystery of a mystery, and may be wasn't even worth trying to dissect and analyze. I still have the question in mind" wrote Joseph Pronechen in his review published in the *Trumbull Times* (19). He however, reconciled with his position by stating that, *Sucide in B Flat* is mysterious, but then, everything in theatre doesn't have to be perfectly clear. If that is the case, then audiences would be sentenced to sitting through replay upon replay of 'Barefoot in the Park' or worse yet, 'Abre Irish Rose'. He even called Shepard a kind of playwright's version of Salvador Dali's artistic surrealism. He wrote:

As we can be fascinated by Dali's dreams on canvas without trying to interpret them or actually be expected to make out Dali's meaning in them, so, too, we can be engaged by Mr. Shepard's mysterious impressions without herniating our own brains. And neither should we be expected to since Shepard's view of theatre is, in a way, selfishly personal (19).

Pronechen found its justification for being mysterious in the subtitle of the play: "A Mysterious Overture". As by nature and definition 'mysterious' applies to what excites wonder, curiosity or surprise while baffling and eluding efforts to explain or understand. Michael Feingold wrote about the play as:

On at least one major count, the fault is Shepard's. He never makes it clear Possibly he intends something else, but I can't imagine what: there's no chance of ambiguity on such a point, and beg him to clarify it immediately (113).

Despite the obvert ambiguity and puzzlement the play generated, *Suicide in B-Flat* is part of a dramatic pattern which is typically Shepardian, for it deals with a theme that constitutes one of the major creative obsessions of Shepard's plays where the artist is in danger of becoming the captive of his own legend. As in *Angel City*, *Seduced*, *Geography*, *Tooth of Crime*, Shepard here problematises the issue of, "The identity and the ontology of the artist" (Wade, 80) who is living in the backdrop of an 'ambient fear' – the term coined by Marcus Doel and David Clark, qtd. in Bauman 22). The fear emanates from the perpetual demand upon the artist to over-reach their own limits. The play exposes the rift between the artist and the milieu in which he was produced.

The play begins with the intriguing event of the presumable death of Niles under mysterious circumstances. Two detectives, Pablo and Louis arrive to investigate the incident and unravel the mystery for themselves and the audience as well. Their role is reminiscent of the two grave diggers who attempt to resolve the mystery of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*. Pablo and Luis got engaged in an exercise of

pseudo argument like that of the two grave diggers to explain the riddle of the death of Niles which posed a challenge because the face of the victim was blown off beyond recognition. Pablo and Louis belonged to the world that lies outside the psychic space of an artist and then did not have any legitimate access to the world of the victim who was an artist. In order to demystify the mystery of the death they were investigating, they tried to reconstruct the event and even the biography of Niles in a rather contrived way. What they tried to do was "Trying to reconstruct the imagination of it" (*SBF*, 194). This is what forms the first line of the play. Ron Mottram found special dramatic significance of this opening line which, according to him, at the immediate level refers to the attempt by Pablo and Louis to reconstruct the crime, but the peculiar wording of the statement implies much more. The line, in fact, does not say that they are trying to reconstruct the crime, but, instead, the imagination of it. As they were not witnesses to the crime, wrote Mottram, they could not reconstruct and restage the crime, they could only stage their imaginative concept of a crime. (*SBF*, 194). Similarly, the staging of the play is a reconstruction of the imagination of the playwright himself. Ron Mottram defined Pablo and Louis not as mere detectives but as two characters in search of an author like that of Laureen and Petrone, two other characters of the play, the two young musicians, who were waiting for Niles as they were looking for a musician.

Niles:	What's happened to all of you
Laureen:	We've been waiting
Niles:	For me?
Laureen:	We've been waiting to play (<i>SBF</i> 228).

Niles is apparently reluctant to take the responsibility that his role as an artist entails, he, therefore, tries to escape the part that was thrust upon him.

“Jazz is freedom” said Duke Ellington, an eminent jazz musician (68). Niles, being a jazz musician was in search of his own freedom what he considered to be his artistic privilege. As a jazz musician freedom is supposed to be an intimate essence of his artistic self. Freedom of Niles is endangered. Niles as an artist is threatened. Hence to pre-empt his absolute obliteration, Niles makes an attempt to disappear, escape from the enclosure in which he was confined. The subtle act of disappearance baffles the individuals like Pablo and Louis who belong to conventional institutions. The play, as rightly identified by Ross Wetzsteon, has a structure that resembles “jazzlike riffs”, and the play enters the events through a series of ‘confused identity’, ‘invented self’, contested dichotomy between “creativity and power” and the “sterility of inherited forms” (13).

Niles was born as an artist and he was born outside the America that he eventually finds himself in. He was born in an “island”, in the bucolic frill of the nation. He assumed intimacy with sound right at his prenatal state when he heard sound “gurling, pounding under water” and “an ocean of blood swimming around him. Through his veins. Through his mother” (*SBF* 196). And one day he broke into the light of day and was shocked to discover that “he has voice” (*SBF* 196). It is the discovery and the experience of his own sound that had made him aware of the presence of his own body. The presence of his physicality could become a private experience only through the intimate noises produced in his body, and his discovery

of “music” was an experience mediated through his bodily presence – (crack of [his] flesh, [his] heart, squeaking, growing of [his] bones, stretching organs expanding” *SBF* 197). It was music that made a tangible impact on his body. “It stabs at him. Enters into him and becomes part of his physiology. His physignomy. His psychology. His paraphernalia” (*SBF* 197), said Louis of Niles.

Body was a significant part of Niles’s consciousness. His physical size had an important role to play in the growth of Niles as an artist. “Niles was a big man”, said Petrone, “A huge man ... His hands were so huge they could stretch two octaves in a single stroke” (*SBF* 208). Music is not a mere aesthetic mystery for Niles, it is, rather, an experience that is physically tangible. Therefore, the body becomes a major image in the play. The body provides a fulfillment the world could not provide. Bigsby writes about body to be warm; animate; three dimensional that inscribes its own meaning and generates its own discourse which is “independent of and at a tangent to a verbal language which threatens to pull the self into history. It was its own act of resistance in a world in which the mechanical dominated” (5). It is the body that both confines and sets free the soul of the artist. Niles, therefore, gets engaged in an exercise of destroying the “bodies” to recreate new ones to get hold of that elusive freedom. Niles was caught in an ambivalent environment surrounded by music. Music, his most prized sudden discovery, “disappointed” as well as “exhilarated” him. It disappointed because it was “organized”, structured, (“Music as an extension of sound. An organization. Another way of putting it. He’s disappointed” *SBF* 197). But he was at the same time exhilarated “because he sees an opening, An adventure” (*SBF* 197). As a jazz musician he had what, Marsalis would call, “structured

freedom", "freedom with restraint" (80). Niles made attempts to break through the barriers following the wakes of his radical "revelations", "putting any two things together (that) produces sound ... striking, plucking, blowing, rubbing, dropping, kicking, kissing ..." (*SBF* 197). It is the act of subversion of the conventional form that terrified the establishment which was threatened of being derationalized and disrupted. He had put it to such an extent that, pointed out Louis, "most men considers (it) dangerous and suicidal" (*SBF* 197). His musical productions were abundant and non-stop which was "Endlessly winding through unheard-of-before symphonies. Concertos beyond belief" (*SBF* 197), Jazz is a musical form, which, unlike pop, is an "infinite challenge" (Marsalis 67). Niles had mastered this art form vis-à-vis the act of posing challenges. He not only placed his music, but his life, as well as his death, at a level located beyond the cognitive reach of the commoners. His music and life were composed in a fashion that follows the typical pattern of jazz syncopation where rhythm falls apart. The syncopation in jazz is an approach that forces the rhythm to do the unexpected by challenging its patterns. As Marsalis talks of Jazz, he says, it challenges the form and parameters by improvising the rhythms and harmonies, and messing up with the boundaries. This music provides Niles the ritual to reach out "A new dimension" (*SBF* 220), hence Pablo and Louis remain absolutely clueless about its perspective.

Even the music of Petrone, one of the apprentices of Niles, is also a kind of "unheard-of-music" in its literal sense of the term. Louis and Pablo could only see the act of playing the saxophone by Petrone, but could not hear any sound coming out of

the instrument. The music apparently cannot be comprehended by the detectives in both sensuous and intellectual terms. Petrone explained the reason to them:

Well it takes a while to attune your ears to the frequency we're playing in. It's extremely high. Dogs can't even hear it. That's why Niles has trouble selling it. (*SBF* 204).

Niles, as well as his co-artists, failed to communicate and exchange dialogues with his supposed audience. He was an avant-garde artist who was perpetually ahead of the given temporal space. His forward mobility engendered fear in others hence they tried to restrain his movement by forcing some culturally familiar and comfortable identities upon him which initially Niles voluntarily agreed to accept. Niles was never a part of the American landscape. He was separated from this territory right from his birth ("I was born in an island. I was not born in America, you know. I was born away, far away, I was imported" *SBF* 211). Niles' awareness of being an outsider to the given cultural map empowered him to reject the mechanically constructed self of his own being. Niles asserted the difference through his music. Music became a medium to construct a new set of codes as a counterpoint against the forces of cultural repression and disorientation.

Shepard here has espoused a new position for the artist – "the fourth dimension". The dimension at which Niles operates is absolutely different from that of the "two tough-yegg detectives" who even could not notice the physical appearance of Niles on stage because he and Paulette were invisible to others as they used to inhabit in an alternative dimension (83). With the power of the fourth dimension Niles and Paulette planned to remove the encumbrances that affect his

creativity. Niles wanted to liberate himself from the conditions that forced him to carry the burden of his own legend. Despite being in the fourth dimension, as Feingold wrote, "Niles is stricken with remorse" (113) mainly because his ritual of murders were mostly the murder of one of his own images. To put it in Feingold's term, Niles' was the killing not of a victim, but the victim's image of himself (113). Niles faced the daunting task of killing the images of the hero vis-à-vis of himself which he found almost impossible. Niles became a simulacra and went beyond his control. Like Henry Heckamore (*Seduced*) Niles' own image outgrew his actual identity. He became too big an entity so that Niles himself became alien to his own image. He was so big that even:

"Chicago wouldn't even exist if it wasn't for him. He drove cattle right to Chicago's front door. Town sprang up wherever he stopped to wet his whistle. Crime flourished all around him. The law was a joke to him... He sang songs to the Milky way" (*SBF* 217).

That was the reason he could not get rid of this identity of his self. "I can't kill a hero! He's a hero". Niles admitted. Because one "can't kill a myth" (218). As he changed costumes Niles adorned the identity of a cowboy like that of Hoss in *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*. Niles became Pecos Bill, one of the quintessential cowboy images of popular American imagination. This act of adopting identities instigated Niles to celebrate his supposed immortality. He would sing:

Pecos Bill, Pecos Bill
Never died
And he never will
Oh, Pecos Bill. (*SBF* 214)

In the process Niles became a redundant entity, a spent force. He has been possessed by the simulated images through subtle persuasion that eventually erased his presence. Paulette reminded him that he had to begin from 'scratch' in order to regain his lost presence, for "now you (Niles) can't get to anything new. It's always the same. You're repeating yourself" (*SBF* 216). Niles admitted that he was besieged by Voices coming in from all directions that drowned his own. "I'm repeating myself again and again", said Niles, "It's not even myself. I'm repeating them. Over and over. They talk to me all the time. THER'S VOICE COMING AT ME" (*SBF* 216). He became part of a system which Baudrillard would call the "era of the code" wherein the difference between original and copy becomes redundant. It entails reproduction of an object the origin of which is inaccessible and simulation has reached a point of unprecedented importance. Simulation does not only involve the reproduction of a given object it also included the reproduction of labour power of the worker. As in the work of Andy Warhol who went to the extreme to efface the "original" from his artistic practice. He developed a technique to reproduce any number of copies making the original absolutely impossible to be pointed out. This marks the onset of a new era characterized by the erasure of difference between the real and its representation; the original and its copy. The corpse lying in Niles' apartment could not provide any clue to the detectives because they could not ascertain the difference between Niles and the imposter. The couple was faceless but his finger prints resembled Niles'. Just as the detectives failed to recognize the body, so did Niles fails to recognize himself. "How could you recognize me when I don't even recognize myself", Niles asked Petrone.

With a bid to “start from a scratch”, Niles recalls his childhood memories to reshape his present reality. His nostalgia for the uncontaminated bucolic past took him to the days when it rained on the corrugated roof of their house that sounded like Belinese cymbals (*SBF* 211). He would go out with his mother to watch a movie in an army jeep that would run past the rain that was pouring down in a sheet of green jungle water (211). Niles’ desperation to regain his lost childhood motivated him to destabilize foundations that upheld the cultural signs appropriated as native by the people represented by Louis and Pablo. Niles invents new musical idioms which were apolitical as Laureen commented “This music has no room for politics.” It answers to nobody. It plays by itself.... It has no boss. Even when the boss is dead it keeps playing” (*SBF* 207). That music suddenly revoked its social context and emerged as an autonomous institution without having any obvious commitment for social communication. Jazz is expected to be communitarian. In fact, Shepard’s own artistic aporia. He writes, despite his resistance, Niles could no longer avoid responsibility like that of Shepard. But to remain responsible to a society and a system one must recognize them as respectable institutions. Niles separates himself from any such set up. His act of killing an unidentified individual is itself an act of rejecting the normative codes of society. This exactly is the reason that disturbed the self complacent passivity of Pablo. He laments Niles’ act of creating profane music:

How does it relate to breaking with tradition! To breaking of with the past. To throwing the diligent efforts of our forefathers and their forefathers before them to the winds! To turning the classics to garbage before our very eyes! To distorting the very foundation of our cherished values... To changing the shape of American morality ... You’ve smuck up on us through the backdoor. You’re not strong

enough to take us over by direct political action so you've chosen to drive us all crazy... I know when I'm being bushwhacked. (*SBF* 205)

Niles was effective enough to dehistoricize the identities of Pablo and Louis against their supreme resistance. Like Niles they too became aware of being ahistorical bodies, displaced and a contextualised. Both Pablo and Louis became restless to go out of the apartment because they found it absolutely a crazy place and the case too complicated to be handled by them. When Paulette released an arrow directing toward the back of Niles it hit Pablo who immediately admitted, "THIS TIME THEY REALLY GOT ME ... IN THE END WE WERE NOT CERTAIN WE COULD MAKE NEITHER HEAD NOR TAIL OF THE PREDICAMENT. WHETHER OR NOT WE WERE DESTROYED FROM WITHIN OR WITHOUT NOW IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE. THERE IS ONLY THE REALITY OF MY DYING! (*SBF* 223). Louis, on the other hand, was attacked by an unseen face possessed by his own hand that tried to assassinate him. Louis became apologetic about his own American upbringing. He apologetically explained that it was not his fault being what he was:

"IT'S NOT MY FAULT! I CAN'T HELP IT... I had to go to night school in my spare time to earn my diploma. The war took my time away I've shrapnel scars on the back of my neck. Pieces of hard grenade still embedded in my knees. I'm entitled to a little dance music! (*SBF* 213).

Ironically, Niles as a musician was already a mysterious figure for Louis and Pablo. They had problems understanding how Niles made a living. "Do composers get a salary? Enquired Louis of his boss Pablo. Pablo answered him hesitatingly,

“Commissions whatever. He didn’t earn much” (*SBF* 195). Besides, the typical reason they could associate with a suicide was sudden material fall of the victim. They were further confused about the motive behind the suicide because “he was at the top of the bill. May be not as high up as you depict but pretty goddamn high up there. Why disappear when things are going so good. “It’s crazy” (*SBF* 198). This mysterious figure turned out to be the force to deconstruct the entire edifice of cultural rationality to the extent that both Pablo and Louis found themselves on the verge of having lost all control over their body and mind. Like that of Niles they too started striving for assuming anonymity.

Niles disappeared to “remain mysterious. Anonymous” (*SBF* 214), said Petrone. He was successful only partially, for he had to come back again to the old turf. He could escape a cultural ghetto dominated by “politicians”, “gangsters”, “rackets”, “dope syndicates”, “CIA” et al. Niles was more frightened by the insidious group which included “The Mind Benders, The Chromatic Persuaders, The Psychic Transfusions, The Cult Mongers. All forms of ritualistic terrorism” (*SBF* 210). He made a desperate attempt at self obliteration but realized that to leave a “life” is not so easy “It’s not the easiest thing in the world” (*SBF* 209). Niles could still smell the spoor of his own presence remained stuck in the places he left long before. Coming back to the old spot so he regretted that he should not have come back again. Niles, in fact, was a complete failure when it came to handling the reality that surrounded him. Pablo in one of his rare occasions of authentic judgement evaluated the issues that preceded and caused Niles’ disappearance:

(Niles is) A victim of circumstances beyond his control ... He bought off more than he could chew. He began dallying with power figures. He was sinking in a sea of confusion. His music was driving him mad. (SBF 204)

Niles lost his mental equilibrium because even music went out of his control as he was not creating music but struggling to retain his legacy. He became a typical postmodern artist whose musical improvisations were "lasting for days on end" (SBF 204). The situation could best be defined in terms of George Steiner's view of "maximal impact and immediate obsolescence". He became a frantic and developed compulsive obsession to "reproduce" and "repeat" his tunes and had to be dragged from his piano and strapped to his bed; he was fed intravenously to keep him alive. He even lost his own voice. He could only utter some noises at varying pitch. He even became aware that he was possessed by his own gift. His voracious hunger for sound became a demon. He was possessed by multiple identities. He discovered other bodies inside "that lashed out without warning." That took hold of him and swept him away. Each time with more and more violence..." (SBF 204). It had its effect on his music which "turned into boring melodies" (SBF 209). He waited to be exorcised of the "demon" that took over his soul. Niles was thus always in a situation which Adorno would call "the state of unfreedom" in which no one has a liberated consciousness (qtd. in Lechte 95). Niles only had a reified appearance behind which lay the truth of the phantasmagoria of commodity production and truth entails that human beings, despite what they might think, are unfree because, they have restrictive forms of thought and action imposed upon them by the existing social conditions of capitalist production, they live in, as Adorno says, in "an open air

prison” and people adapt to the condition rather than oppose them. Niles had a feeling of freedom because he thought that the demon had left and he could go off on his own again. But he was soon reminded that he was not free. Freedom as described by George Simmel became a myth for Niles. Niles was warned that “he was still in danger. That as long as he’d be within their power he’d be all right. He’d be safe” (*SBF* 204). At this, as Pablo explained:

“His mind would go back and forth between submissions and rebellion. His music was turning to pablum. Finally, he decided to leave them completely. And that’s when they killed him” (*SBF* 204).

Niles, after having killed, failed to redeem his self through his musical creations. Niles was completely defaced and was erased of any individual sign. Niles failed to locate his body, he could not even locate his self because he failed to identify the differences between him and the others. Niles was wondering at the pervasive presence of the other within him that he himself became untraceable even to himself. He would ask:

Are you inside me or outside me? Am I inside you? ... Am I buzzing away at your membranes? Your brainwaves. Driving you berserk? ... Destroying your ancient patterns? Or am I just like you? So exactly like you that we’re exactly the same. So exactly that we are not even apart. Not even separate. Not even two things but just one. Only one. Indivisible. (*SBF* 229)

Niles seeks solitude to retrieve his creative self. He wanted to get rid of them all so that he could start all over (*SBF* 210). He, therefore, wanted to reinvent himself by being dead so that the imposed identities too died with his death enabling him to be reborn with a clean slate. He wanted to be away from the elements that made false

promises as Paulette tells Niles: “They ‘Yes’ you to death and then they slam you in the ‘Tomb’ (*SBF* 227). After having made that attempt of escape, abortive though, Niles refused to go back home again. For him, his creative salvation lies in his being “Anonymous”, “being on the streets; being “ALREADY DEAD.” This anonymity could provide Niles one of the conditions of creativity.

For Maurice Blanchot, a major post-war critical thinker of France, any artistic work is anonymous, as it is the creative force of the work itself which effaces the presence of the author. The effacement of the author prioritizes the work of art and thus establishes its singularity and significance. But, to remain significant on its own right has to subvert art institutions which might predetermine and stabilize the process of creativity by enclosing artistic exercise within a framework. Art, therefore, requires the artist to be in solitude, outside the impressionable range of institutions and individuals so that a work of art produced under such conditions can become an experience unique and exclusive (Lechte 209).

Solitude is also a condition that forms an author’s silence for work itself provides conditions for the writer’s silence to take a shape. “The clean slate”, the condition of being able to “wipe them all out” is what Paulette described as “perfect” (*SBF* 228). Niles wanted to regain his time when he could create totally a new kind of music. The kind of music that was terrifying for Pablo and Louis. Louis said nervously “I am used to Tomy Dorsey, the Mills Brothers, Bary Goodman. All this free-flow stuff is disturbing to my inner depths. It leaves me feeling nauseous” (*SBF* 213). He was satisfied being a Republican and an ardent follower of Eisenhower.

("I'm a Republican by nature! ... I'm not ashamed of that. Eisenhower was my main man! (*SBF* 213). Niles made attempts to be away from such commitments. He encountered his own image in the street, beckoning at him to come out of the window, the tomb, to put him at crucial moment of decision. Niles' other ego on the street turned ahead and walked away and as he watched him going from behind the window he made a clean jump all the way to the bottom and the life went dancing out of the window (*SBF* 221). The composer thus made a journey into a purely private aesthetic realm beyond the tangible reach of the community. Beyond the reach of his fans who are fanatics ("I'm a fan. A fanatic. I live for revenge", said Petrone *SBF* 228). The solitude and anonymity rewarded Niles with music. Music he invented in order to drive off his loneliness:

I am afraid to be lonely. It's almost worse than dying ... That's the reason I invented music. It filled me up. I got so filled up that I could not go on. Now I gotta start over. (216)

But the tragedy lies in Niles' final submission. It resembles Luigi Pirandello's *When One is Somebody* (1933) in which the unnamed hero, an essayist is permanently imprisoned in his own celebrity. He must do everything as per public expectations. He finally turns into stone and as David J. deRose writes, became a "perfect unwavering monument to his artistic ideality, completely entombed by his public's expectations" (147). But Niles returns to the structured reality inhabited by Pablo and Louis without resolving any one of the dramatic answers nor by explaining the reasons of his return. "What's anyone waiting for? ... Am I dead or alive? Is this me, here, now? Are these questions or answers?...." (*SBF* 229). Niles returns to the so

called space of rational fixities only to disrupt its surface tranquility by subverting this into a surreal, unanswerable, plausible territory.

The two plays reflect the perpetual conflict of artist with the oppressive reality of the new cultural grammar which forms the normative codes for an artist to survive within the system. Both the artists Hoss and Niles redeem their art through the rituals of self destruction. Hoss destroys himself to become absolutely immune to all reductive mechanisms of the market forces and Niles, on the other hand, deconstructs himself to reach out the spaces of pastoral innocence where he discovered his music. Both of them are the victims of their own legacy. When Hoss is made redundant through a simulated cultural product in the form of Crow, Niles is forced to simulate his own image over and over again. But both of them finally triumph over the repressive market mechanisms by subverting them through their silence and isolation.

Shepard profoundly disturbs the cultural complacency of his time when art is translocated to the territory of market, simulation, media hegemony, technical supremacy and cultural anarchy.

End Notes

¹*Tooth of Crime* was first performed at the Open Space, London, on July 17, 1972, directed by Charles Marowitz.

²*Suicide in B-Flat* was first produced at the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut on October 15, 1976, directed by Walt Jones.

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CHAPTER V

**COLONIZING IMAGINATION:
HOLLYWOOD AND THE
DECENTERED ARTIST**

COLONIZING IMAGINATION: HOLLYWOOD AND THE DECENTERED ARTIST

Hollywood is a major cultural site where Shepard locates his protagonists in conflict with the system. Sam Shepard himself becomes a popular culture icon following his screen image. Shepard has been very critical about Hollywood, yet he could not remain absolutely away from it. Like music, Hollywood too is an intimate experience for Shepard. Shepard made his first major motion picture appearance in *Days of Heaven* (1978) directed by Terence Malick. After that he acted in more than ten Hollywood movies. One of the most widely acclaimed commercially successful movie is *The Right Stuff* (1983) directed by Phil Kaufman. For Shepard's outstanding performance as Chuck Yeager, the pilot who could cross the barrier of time, Shepard earned an Oscar nomination in 1983. Shepard was involved with Hollywood not only as an actor, but also as a screenplay writer. He wrote his first screenplay with Michaelangelo Antonioni, *Zubriskie Point* (1968). His second major Hollywood screenplay *Paris, Texas* (1984) which was directed by Wim Wenders. The movie was awarded the prestigious Palm d'Or in the Cannes Film Festival of 1984.

Despite being intimate to Hollywood, Shepard has always been cynical about the Hollywood experience. Shepard describes his Hollywood experience as a "nightmare" (Qtd. in Rosenberg, H). The protagonists of the plays that the chapter would discuss would echo this Shepardian experience. The chapter takes three major plays of Shepard that deal with the Hollywood experience: *Angel City* (1976)¹, *Seduced* (1977)², and *True West* (1980)³. Hollywood is the setting of all these plays

and Shepard makes a critique of Hollywood from the vantage of his personal experience.

The wild west and the Hollywood provide two contradictory geographical spaces intrinsically related to the mythic cultural desire of the American Dream. Hollywood is an integral part of the urban illusion of enlightening the universe which reinforces the perpetration of a dream into the mind of the masses which, consequently, translocates them to a psychic state of appropriation fundamentally based on self-deception. Shepard even said "movie audiences are dreamers" (Qtd. in Goldberg 44). Hollywood, through gradual mastery over technology, evolved into a place for manufacturing dreams for mass consumption. It thus reifies an abstract creative experience into a lucrative marketable commodity. But Hollywood, for an artist, as Leonard Wilcox describes it, is "the inner landscape of nightmare with its deep obsessions and dark compulsions and the outer geography of doom and apocalypse" (61). Mike Davies defines Hollywood as a "deracinated urban hell" (37).

Hollywood emerges against the backdrop of the cultural awareness of an empty space wherein the artificial invention of monuments and relics to prop up a façade of civilizational continuity has become a political necessity as America as a nation has continued to remain a metaphor of a future poised distantly, and Hollywood, therefore, ventures to affect a mechanism of breaking the dichotomies of this historico-cultural distance to evolve, what Jameson calls, "the phantasmagoric global American postmodernist culture". And this culture calls Johannes Birringer, "is characterized by being a culture without a perspective." In Hollywood, artists are,

as Tympany in *Angel City* puts it, “locked into the narrowest part of (their) dream machine” (40) and thus Hollywood colonizes the artist’s imagination. It entraps the subject in a space of perpetual monotony where the same products are circulated over and over again which eventually leads the subject to a situation in which the subject with a “deep sense of failure” (Shepard qtd. in Rosen 26) fails to locate a space for himself.

Hollywood legitimises the system of appropriating the dominant ideology instead of formulating a mechanism of questioning the system and evolving alternative discourses. Even when Shepard wanted to produce motion pictures his two off beat plays *Silent Tongues* and *Far North* he did not find producers in Hollywood. Two French producers helped Shepard. A Hollywood film, Jim Collins points out “is allegedly the dominant or hegemonic ideology writ in celluloid” (90). It never recognizes the existence of the competing discourses within its domain. The result is the uncritical appropriation of the dominant discourse because it does not give any validity to the decentered universe, instead, Hollywood enforces a centric universe of the hegemonic ideology.

Hollywood is an institution for the systematic privileging of one language over others. Jim Luc Comelli explains Hollywood in Althusserian terms: “Because every film is part of the economic system, it is also part of the ideological system, for cinema and art are branches of ideology. None can escape, somewhere, like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle all have their allotted place. Cinema therefore fails to escape homogeneity.” It remains a part of the uniform identical mass culture where the artist

becomes a terrible victim. Yet the artist, like the drum plays Tympani, in almost Fausti and fashion is drawn to the Hollywood world. Lanx tells Tympani: "something drew you down here to us, something indescribable" (AC 31).

Shepard is known for his special fascination with Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. "You know (sic) Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe? I'd prefer it to Goethe's version because of Marlowe's incredible language" (Qtd. in Cott 170). Shepard writes a play with a Faustian protagonist: *Man Fly*. Shepard's Doctor Faustus, Skeetz, is a poet in search of a muse who in desperation sells his soul to the Devil's emissary, Moustafu. Sam Shepard writes his very next play *Angel City* (1976) where this theme of selling of the soul by the artist for success reappears where the emissaries of Devil are the agencies of Hollywood.

While talking to *Taper Literary Manager*, where *Angel City* was produced (1977), David Copelin, Director Robert Calhaun and writer Sam Shepard exchanged their views about Hollywood which formed the central setting in *Angel City*. Copelin, however, defined not only the play as "melodrama about selling out" even more than that. The artist protagonist of the play Rabbit Brown is seen as aware of being attached to power as well as being repelled by it. Shepard described his experience of Hollywood as painful and torturous. "People here sink or swim without even knowing how it happens". The play *Angel City* is written by him from his own understanding and experience of Hollywood which is, as Shepard clarifies, "not to regurgitate it but to use it as a catalyst." (Ibid). Like Rabbit Brown, the artist protagonist, Shepard too got involved with Hollywood not only as an actor but also as a writer to join a project

with Michaelangelo Antonioni at the age of around twenty four for the film *Zubriskie Point* what Shepard recalled as: "I was 24 and just wasted by the experience. It was like a nightmare". (Oppenheim, qtd. in DeRore 80).

T. S. Zinman describes the play as "about the grotesque ruthlessness of Hollywood, where characters named Wheeler deal for disasters, and corruption is made visible, people run green and slimy, becoming the monsters they wanted to create" (514). Rabbit Brown, like that of Shepard experiences Hollywood as a terrible nightmare, who, in fact, encounters this in the form of the visceral degeneration of the producer from whose skin oozes slimy green viscos. The producer, who was to make a disaster to produce a blockbuster movie, himself transforms into a figure of apocalyptic degeneration. The play reaches its climax when the private ambition and thirst for power of Rabbit Brown itself turns out into a disaster as he fails to escape the identical doom like that of Wheeler, the producer. Rabbit, in almost Faustian desperation, makes vain attempts to rescue himself from the state of his crude degeneration.

In the play Rabbit Brown becomes a voluntary prisoner like that of Skeetz and Faustus to pursue fame and achieve recognition in exchange of his artistic ability. The play is an elegy on the demise of innocence epitomized by Rabbit Brown and Mrs Scoon. Miss Scoons, in one of her trance states, unconsciously laments:

All innocence was now behind her. All dreams of the life of man free and unfettered as she once knew it was on the plains of Nebraska. Here was the hard care cement. The concrete reality of the dreaming machine. The terrifying destruction which faced her head on was now

met by her own indivisible courage which she felt welling up from same deep primeval source which she knew not of. Suddenly the solution was clear. In her mind's eye was a simple equation. It appeared like a flashlight in a hooker's nightmare. Money equals power, equals protection, equals eternal life. (AC 18)

The system of Hollywood takes the artist as hostage as in *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* where Cody – the man with a creative gift to dream horse numbers – is chained to a bed by gangsters to force him to dream horse numbers, as in *Cowboy Mouth* where slim is abducted to be made into a “Rock ‘n’ Roll , Jesus with a cowboy mouth” or Duke in *Melodrama Play* who is forced to write another successful song like “Prisoners, Get Up out of Your Home made Beds”.

Sam Shepard, in one of his interviews to Carol Resen, talks about *Angel City*, “Artist/hero exploited and devoured by movies”. The artist is inescapably incarcerated by Hollywood’s absolute illusions. About Hollywood’s hegemonic ideological repression Shepard comments:

Hollywood is impervious to criticism. You cannot puncture the skin of that mechanism It's like steel armour. You can't even get next to it, because it's so completely locked up, guarded by the mechanism. (Qtd. in Rosen 19)

Against the backdrop of Hollywood totalitarianism the Hollywood aspirant with all his greed for success is robbed off his imagination about what Rabbit himself soon becomes aware of and he becomes a conscious accomplice of Wheeler who represents the corruption of Hollywood. Rabbit realizes:

"I've connived in the deepest cracks of the underground. Rubbed knuckles with the nastiest poets. Done the 'Rocky Mountain Back Step' in places where they've outlawed bubble gum." (AC 12)

The process that Rabbit is involved as artist is to disempower him from even being able to communicate because the system has systematically marginalized the language of his artistic self and put that outside the universe of communication prevalent in Hollywood. He realizes that he could no longer remain an artist. Rabbit could no longer remain what Lanx called "a magician" and Miss Scoons "The messengers of God" (31). Instead he becomes what he himself defines as:

I'm a stunt man. I fall off horses. I've done some sleight of hand. I've conjured a little bit. I collect a few myths, but this sounds like you need a chemical expert or something. (1)

Lanx immediately endorses:

"Exactly! A chemical expert. Very well put". (AC 15)

Shepard, like Nathaniel West, considers Hollywood images as luring and captivating but the dreams of Hollywood corrupt artist's imagination because Hollywood dreams "In the profit sense of the word, of course" (AC 14). In order to assure the economic rationality of the project, Hollywood legitimizes the post-modern mode of production that reduces art into a commodity. Wheeler stipulates the framework for creating this 'art object' with definite structural elements to be incorporated. Wheeler elaborates:

(It) is not simply an act of terror but something which will in fact drive people right off the deep end. Leave them blithering in the aisles. Create mass hypnosis. Suicide. Auto destruction. Something which will

open entirely new fads in sado-masochism. Penetrating every layer of their selves. Something which not only mirrors their own sense of doom but actually creates the possibility of it right there in front of them. It's our duty. We owe it to the public. For without the public we are nothing but a part of that public. We must stand apart, on another plane. We must rise to the challenge. We must help them devour themselves or be devoured by them. The time is ripe for this obliteration. We must rise to the occasion or be lost forever in a tidal wave of oblivion. (AC 15)

One of the reviews of *Angel City* by Dan Sullivan in *The Los Angeles Times View* (April 18, 1977), titled 'Surreal Trip', described the play in terms of the archetypal plot:

Nice boy goes to Hollywood and becomes what he beholds ... The play plunges back and forth between fantasy and reality mixing them up to the point where the disaster movie *where* our producers are trying to get off the boards becomes the apocalypse they both fear and lick their lips for.

The involvement of the subject with the system becomes a ritual of self annihilation the way Tympani's position is described by Miss Scoons. "Frozen in the Act of Creation" (AC 19).

In the play *Angel City*, Rabbit Brown and Miss Scoons abandon their innocence and willfully yield to the repressive ideological apparatuses operated by Wheeler. This inevitable subjugation of the artist to the state apparatuses is a constant thematic concern in the plays of Shepard that deal with the question of artistic creation.

Cinema of Hollywood has deeper cultural significance. It is one of the most authentic expressions of the quintessential American fantasy. It is not a mere art, but a

gorgeous reflection of the ideological American identity. As Lee says in *True West*: "In this business we make movies. American movies. Leave the films to the French" (30). Movie, in the American context, has greater semantic significance which reflect the figurations of the ideological illuminations of the national fantasy with such huge dimensions and grand operations that the subjects get blurred by a postmodern consciousness that is indistinguishable from the simulated images, spectacles, ideology. And the subject "locked into the narrowest part of (the) dream machine" (Tympani, *AC* 40).

This aligning of the artist to the dominant ideological territory reinforces his translocation into a place of absolute vacuity. In his act of entering the territory of dominant ideological space, through a complex process of mechanised simulation, he soon enters into a space of absolute absence.

Thus the conditions of artistic existence is redefined within the new space. In the case of Hollywood it means "Some little fantasy, some tiny little delusions that you've got tucked away. They'll pry it out of you ... They'll feed off your hunger. They'll keep you jumping at carrots. And you'll keep jumping all the time you're jumping" (Tympany, *AC* 17). Through Hollywood the ideology transforms into a material entity in which the artist represents to himself an illusion in concrete form. This concretization of the ideological illusion is realized through the interrelationship between the subject and the system which affects, as Althusser would say, "imaginary representation of the real world" ("Ideology and Ideological" 164). Miss Scoons reflects it when she described her experience of the system:

Here was the hard core cement. The concrete reality of the dreaming machine. The terrifying destruction which faced her head on was now met by her own indivisible courage which she felt welling up from some deep primeval source which she knew not of. Suddenly the solution was clear. In her mind's eye was a simple equation. It appeared like flashlight in a hooker's nightmare. 'Money equals power, equals protection, equals eternal life.' And with that she collapsed at the foot of La Cienaga. (AC 18)

The word 'ideology' was originally invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends to define the theory of ideas (Althusser, 158), but in Shepard it turns out to be almost a Marxist ideological experience, that is, it dominates the mind of the man, or the group of individuals. When most individuals or the group of individuals are easily dominated by the discourse, the artists try to resist it through their inherent capacity to remain as outsiders. The complex situational intricacies and the powerful apparatuses of the system are in combat with the artist, and the apparent failure to win as well as the resistance against defeat turns him into a being devoid of totality and a bricolage of fragments which Shepard himself has focused on in the beginning of his play *Angel City*. Shepard defines the "character" in this context as a "fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme. "In other words", continues Shepard, "more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation" (Note to the Actors, AC 6). Miss Scoons interrogates Wheeler about the authenticity of the act of self annihilation to emerge as what the public has imposed as an image. Wheeler assures: "Of course there is We've to find that part of our own mind which corresponds to the masses. We're immune and contaminated at the same time" (AC 39). The realization of the fact of being contaminated by Hollywood spurred one

of the characters in Nathaniel West's *The days of the Locust* to call Hollywood "the final dumping ground". When Wheeler here realizes that he had lost in his gamble to turn his artistic enterprise into an industry of imagination it turned out to be "Poisoned!" and "Putrified!" (AC 42). Rabbit endorses "It's no business! It's a disease!" (AC 42).

The decrepit reality of Hollywood is physically represented by the *mise en scene* of the play like settings, costume, background music and other stage accessories which Wilcox has described as the inventive translation of disorder onto the stage ("Refiguring" 64). The incongruous assemblage of stage paraphernalia like that of the producer's swivel chair, neon rectangle, timpani drums, the pale metamorphosis of light from black to yellow and the overbearing presence of darkness on stage and the characters like Rabbit who is dressed in detective suit, hat like Dick Tracy's and tennis shoes; the leather garbs of the secretaries with nun's habits; the English working garb of the drum players (white T-shirts, suspenders, baggy pants and heavy construction boots); wherein characters change, quite strangely, their roles as well as costumes. This indeterminacy of physical reality is an echo of the ideological entropy which inherently features in the Hollywood consciousness. Hollywood is not only a place of annihilation, but also a means of reappropriation. Miss Scoons reveals her own state of mind:

I look at the screen and I am the screen. I'm not me. I don't know who I am. I look at the movie and I am the movie. I am the star..... For days I am the star and not I am..... I look and I hate my life not being a star. I hate being myself in my life which is not a movie and never will be. I hate having to eat. Having to work. Having to sleep. Having to go

to the bathroom.... Having to live in this body which isn't a star's body and all the time knowing that stars exist. (AC 21)

Miss Scoons who represents countryside innocence is ceremoniously drowned in almost an Yeatsian apocalypse. She desperately strives to abandon her real life in exchange for the idealized life legitimized in the movies, where:

There are people doing nothing all their life except being in movies. Doing nothing but swimming and drinking and laughing and being driven to places full of potential. People never having to feel hot pavement or having to look at weeds growing through cracks in the city. People never having to look the city square in the eyes. People living in dreams which are the same dreams I'm dreaming but never living. (AC 21)

The fragmental characters of Shepard are the prototypes of their corresponding landscape which too is fractured, disorganized that negates totality as well as organized. This is mystic, alluring, dark and enigmatic. But the promise it makes to let the insiders forget the reality outside is what constantly attracts its victims. Tympany who enacts here the role of a chorus too, at times, represents the author's voice explaining the cinematic urge:

I just wanna go to the movies, Ma! I don't care about anything else! Just the movies! I don't care about school or homework or college, or jobs or marriage or kids or insurance or front lawns or mortgage or even the light of day! I don't care if I never see the sun again. Ma! Just send me to the dark, dark movies! (AC 24)

The conscious journey of the subjects into the dark zone of oblivion propels them to appropriate the discourse through the media which they have supposedly mastered to control and in the process they are actively engaged in thwarting the

questions posed by the new entrants when it comes to redefining the status of an artist as well as the procedure of artistic creativity. Wheeler, who is one of the insiders of the system, dismisses Rabbit's claim of being an ARTIST by saying, (Being a producer) I'M IN DEMAND! YOU'RE DIME A DOZEN!" When Rabbit tries to assert his superiority by citing his creative capacity Wheeler described "Creation's a disease" (AC 45). The parameters are obviously different, as are the producers. This is 'auto-destructive' a 'mass hypnosis' created through hysterical media fed violence that has to configure an apocalyptic conflagration.

The individuals are displaced from their respective identities which forces the continuous fracture of their unrepresentable identities. This eventually authenticates the fact of their being mere simulated stereotypes and their succumbing to the Hollywood hegemony. The subjects are fast reduced into unrecognizable non-entities. Miss Violet, a city prostitute in Rainer Fassbinders play *Garbage, the City & Death* comments: "From day to day the city is growing bigger. The people in it are growing smaller" (qtd. in Birringer 16). Similarly, the experience of Hollywood for the self conscious characters happen to be an encounter with a dehumanized, degraded space of suffering and destitution. The sight of Angel's City's spiritual degradation is found to have been reflected in a painting by Tod Heckett called *The Burning of Los Angeles* which captures the moment of a city's apocalyptic vision that traces the psychological journey of moving to the zones of the repressed, from Eros to Thanatos what Freud would define as "a society that is deeply in grip of the death drive". But the process has not only produced commodities it also has reduced the supposed

producers into commodities. But Wheeler realizes that his own presence emerges as an experience of eternal deference. He has been erased into an abstraction through a process of physical degeneration from whose body oozes the slimy green substance indicating the process of manufacturing movies which, as Wheeler claims, are inside his blood, churning around that tears him apart, “chewing (him) apart from inside out” (AC 43). In the process he even fails to make communication in physical/linguistic terms that could evoke any reciprocation. He finds himself amidst a world absolutely intelligible and devoid of meaning. Rabbit Brown reminds Wheeler of the stark contrast of Hollywood fantasy with the reality which is not a mere “hanky, panky love story and romantically depicted apocalypse” (AC 51). This disclosure is a terrible threat to the very existence of Wheeler which turns out to be a ‘hard core disaster’ not only in case of the movie but to his sense of belonging to a milieu as well. Wheeler desperately urges Lanx to rescue him from the ongoing onslaughts of threats but Rabbit makes the deadly blow by disclosing that they can’t hear, they can’t even see Wheeler for he has become an intangible entity through media simulation which like the distant frontier of America transforms into an ephemeral being constantly eluding physical authenticity that underlines the mutually agreed distant dynamics of screen/performance and spectators. Rabbit points out: “You are on the silver screen, buddy, you’ve been captured in celluloid and you’ll never get out. All they are looking at is a moving picture show” (AC 52).

Despite Wheeler’s frantic struggles to establish communication with Lanx and Miss Scoons, his torturously loud outcries remain absolutely inaudible which is a

silent gesture for the onlookers who respond to Wheeler's desperation with smile and while chewing their popcorn (4C 52). And Rabbit discloses "You're dead Wheeler. You're dead and gone". (52) Wheeler's claim of immortality soon transforms into a comic utterance for in spite of his self deceptive conviction of being alive in memories, he is ideally dead, a wreck of a corpse. He became a victim like the contemporary man about whom Baudrillard in his essay "Ecstasy of Communication" spoke as "the obscene prey of the world's obscenity" (132-133).

Shepard's next play *Seduced* (1978) portrays a Hollywood dream chaser who is literally seduced by Hollywood fantasies. Shepard here takes up a character who evolves into an imaginary entity like the figures on screen. Henry Michael Heckamore, the hero of the play, is totally devoured by the Hollywood fantasies.

Henry Michael Heckamore lives in a state of perpetual absence. His existence itself is based on the continual processes of Henry's compulsive dreams. Henry is seduced by his own dreams to accept the world of make believe as his reality. Arline Aisis writes in the review of the Trinity Hall Production of *Seduced*: "Dreams very often seduce us into believing that we have really done something, been somewhere, seen someone, when actually we haven't" ("Surrealistic Theater"). Henry Heckamore is physically antique who is "old to the point of looking ancient, body is thin and emaciated impression is a cross between a prisoner of war and an Indian fakir" (*Seduced* 233), who is almost naked, with white hair and long white beard and twisted finger nails and toe nails. He lives in a secluded island set in a third world, south of the border remove, somewhere in Mexico. There he makes attempts to be physically

inaccessible to others as well as to himself. He is so obsessed with the images of his legend that believes in them to be non-diminitive continual reality. His is a sparsely furnished well-controlled domicile where even nature assumes plasticity to be regulated as per Henry's wish. Two mechanically raised lush, well cared for potted palm trees about seven feet tall are the first things that Henry wants to be properly placed and well positioned. The room is distinguished by a set of velour drapes reflects the recluses partitioned existence and their distance from the world beyond. His obsession with seclusion is so acute that he even cannot tolerate daylight. So he moves only at night. It is darkness that allows him to accomplish his escapes from the world of stark actuality. He prefers black: "It's pitch black out here. Perfect. Perfect for escape" (275). Henry's mission is to make an escape in absolute terms.

The character of Henry Heckamore is admittedly modelled on Howard Hughes, the business tycoon who ended his life in mysterious seclusion. Henry Hackamore, is a hermit like Hughes aeronautic entrepreneur and a successful Hollywood producer.

During the prime of Henry's time he attained all there is to take from life. He exemplifies America's popular notion of material success – 'a surplus of women, war glory, material landslides' (Aisis). "That the capacity for joy has gone dry. His soul is a void, his mind is muddled. What is left of the man is only breath, bones and skin, some of which are not even his". It is, ironically, his own legendary power that enslaves him.

The appellation 'Heckamore' refers to a rope device to break horses. His own name refers to Henry's paradoxical status. He, at one point of time, mounted and mastered the world but now he is in bouts of delusion and compulsive withdrawal which have rendered him broken and became what Wade calls "a sullen and isolated misanthrope" (85). Henry's awareness of his own degeneration makes him fearful of the 'world' which he can no longer control. Hence he finds the same world that he used to control:

Wild. Undominated. Ravenous for the likes of us. Ready to gobble us up at the drop of a hat. We can't allow penetration. Not at any cost. Whatever the price we have to pay it to ensure our community. You have to ensure that for me Ravel. It's in your hands. (*Seduced* 254)

Henry is not only afraid of the world, he fears even his own national space where he had his moments of glory. He realizes that it was not he who had done the things, but it was through him that things had been done. Through him they gratified their own desires:

I'm the demon they invented. Everything they ever aspired to. The nightmare of the nation! I'm dead to the world but I never been born. (*Seduced* 275)

Henry is an invention of the media that instigated him to have the day dreams of success, glamour, fame which ultimately seduced him into becoming someone else. And he eventually is doomed to become the living entity of the nation's nightmare. America becomes an alien space for Henry where he cannot even dare fall ill.

This country is not fit for a man to fall ill in. There ought a' be a law against falling ill in a foreign country. A man's got a right to die in his homeland. (270)

He admonishes Raul when he puts forward the proposal to fly over America in day time for he has not seen it for the last ten years. Henry warns by disclosing his own experience about America:

Nothing's changed. I guarantee it. All it would do is tempt you. Fill you with a lot a' aching. Desire again. Desire all over the place. Land of Lust. (238)

It is this lust that has made Henry invisible. This has rendered him an entity devoid of his self, his soul. That is the reason Raul cannot see Henry's soul because this is that "unseen part that is thoroughly ravaged, beyond recognition" (239).

Henry, the physical recluse, in order to gain supreme control over his private reality, goes for the selective evocation of his lost past through a process which he is confident of manipulating as per his needs. Henry too reflects the concern of *Lanx* in *Angel City* who admitted, "My power lies in manipulation. If no one is manipulated, there I'm sunk" (*AC* 33). Here, however, Henry wants to manipulate his reality so he insulates not only the place he lives in but also himself from the outside world. "Nothing from out there comes in here! No life! Not sun not moon, not sound, not nothing!" (*Seduced* 249). Henry has incarcerated himself almost in an antiseptic tomb where nothing from outside touches him. His previous existence into that outside world has been metaphorically described to be an experience of rape. There is mutual repulsion between Henry and the world.

"It is a mutual arrangement. I don't touch it, it does-n't touch me. That's what happens when you rape something After that you don't touch. There's a repulsion between both sides." (251)

For Henry, the total history of the immediate past is a repulsive aftermath. Hence he takes pain recreate of the selective set of events that would ensure the continuation of his seductive dreams of the past. In order to reinvent the mystery that enshrouded him, he invites two sultry Hollywood sirens Luna and Miami to visit him. They appear in front of Henry directly from their past without ageing. Henry, the fantasist who has been preferring "images to acts and appearances to actualities" (Mottram 28), asks the girls to tell him about life which, in fact, he never experienced. He makes a final attempt to know, at least, about life before his complete obliteration. Henry does not want to have the sensation of it in the form of a metaphorical abstraction but he wants to experience it in absolutely concrete and physical form (smell, taste and sound of life). But ironically, Henry aspires to have a physical experience despite the fact that Henry himself is not accessible for any physical contact. Besides, he wants to experience a tangible reality – the two girl friends – who themselves are the inventions of his own imagination and whose movements are also controlled by Henry himself whom he wants to appear "Like visions. Like moving pictures." He wants them to appear in the form of beauty idealized, refined and flawless. That is what Henry is accustomed to – distilled reality. Like movies. He is comfortable with images not with physical immediacy. Ron Mottram considers Henry as an artist because of his this desire to manipulate and

his preference for images though he is cut off from the areas of experience essential to the artist or, at least, to Shepard's conception of artist (For Shepard artist must have a sense of belongingness, must have roots). Leslie Wade describes Henry as a "fantasist, a version of the artist who seeks the farthest outpost of imagination" (85-86). Paradoxically, Henry's power lies not in his propinquity to his immediate reality, but in his distance from it. It is his invisibility that makes him powerful. That provides him protection. The ambiguity of his existence, the mysterious disappearance, ensures the enigma that he painstakingly built up around himself. It is the lack of knowledge about Henry that makes others fearful about him. Henry is well aware of this hence he does not want to demystify his existential reality:

Some even think I'm dead. Others don't know. Most others don't know. That's the best of all. Keeping them all in the dark. That's the best... Worst is invisible. They know that. That's why they fear me. They can't put a finger on me. A stab on the dark.... They comb the cities for me. Little American towns. Fortunes are spent on hired assassins. Presidents fear me. International Secret Agencies. Internal revenues. Secretaries of Defence. Mobsters. Gang lords. Dictators. Insurance Detectives. None of them can touch me. None of them.
(*Seduced* 251)

When Luna urges him to touch her, he discloses, he 'can't'. Henry being a product of the American mass media and consumerism becomes a veritable slave of marketing manipulation and simulation that shuts him round. His this obsessive paranoia is vividly reflected by his neurotic act of spreading Kleenex sheets over his entire body. He accomplishes consumerist rituals that gives him an illusion of satisfaction – the satisfaction of being possessed and controlled. Henry thus becomes a perfect product of that culture what he calls "Nightmare of the nation". Eventually it

is not he who seduced the culture with his own powerful inventions (his planes, his hotels, his movies), rather he himself has also been seduced by the dreams about his own mythology that relapses him into the state of personal obliteration. "He has become", as 'David J. De Rose says, "a living metaphor of the great American dream of supreme wealth and power" (89). But in the process he lost a vital part of himself that ensures freedom. As an attempt to regain control over himself he tries to reinvent his invisibility to subvert the attempts of the state agencies to erase his metaphysics of presence. Paradoxically it is his invisibility that signifies his presence. His visibility would destabilize the image that Henry Heckamore stands for. It is the modified and unreal shadow of Henry that replaces his real existence. Even Henry believes the abstract notion about himself to be the truth and all other truth and realities as non-existent. Henry would celebrate his own death. Because even death cannot destroy Henry, for the physical Henry is already dead. He survives beyond his mortal remains. "I'm dead to the world but I never been born" (278). Henry is aware of the process that transformed him into a fictive reality, a made up entity. But in private he discovers that he has his own pastoral nostalgia. The nostalgia about the west and the myths associated with it. For him his reality belongs to Texas:

Texas. That's the last time I lived on this earth. Texas. I disappeared on a dream. I dreamed myself into another shape. Another body. I made myself up.

... ..
I happened in a second, in a flash. I was taken by the dream and all the time I thought I was taking it. It was a sudden seduction. Abrupt. Almost like rape. You could call it rape. I gave myself up. Sold it all down the river. (274)

Henry admits, he sold his soul like Faustus and in a flash Henry is robbed off his soul. Now even his blood is not his own. He even does not know whose body he is in. He recalls his total subjugation to an unreal self-identity based on lies. Henry's reality is a product that reflects the bankruptcy of corporate capitalism.

Henry is no longer powerful to assert anything different for it is not the mere destruction of subjectivity, but the historical circumstances have also transformed the subject itself. Henry is beyond any possibility of regaining his lost selfhood which had its home in Pastoral Texas.

In his life truth had only a marginal value when he himself is a simulacra, invented by the corporate world's apparatuses of seduction. When Miami fumbles to narrate an imaginary story about her Las Vegas experience Luna is asked to tell the same story. Luna protests, "But that's her story" (265). But for Henry it is not authenticity but convincing manipulation is what that counts. Henry becomes an inseparable part of the mechanisms of manipulation which he fatally interpellates at the expense of his private rationality. About the difference of stories and their authenticity, Henry asks:

What difference does it make? It's a good story. One story is as good as another. It's all in the way you tell it. That's what counts. That's what makes the difference. (265)

Henry is conditioned to react to the simulated reality. Howard Hughes too was said to have watched the same movie over and over again because he knew that they would not change. Similarly Henry too regulates the events of life covering all

“variables”. Henry distrusts physicality, for despite Henry’s physical existence Henry is a corpse, as the world outside knows him as a pilot who wearing his clothes crashed over Nebraska. Henry attempts to retreat to his past through the “played out” narrative by the seductive women of Henry’s past who are his “last link” to the world; his very “last possibility ... for remembering. For bringing something back” (262). He needed women, “woman’s version” (50). Henry finds women to be his last resort to regain power. Henry even faints at the incorrigible power of feminine seduction:

You femaleness. It’s an awesome power It’s not only you it’s a force. With men I was always a master. They’d lick my heels. Men become dogs in a second. It’s the female that’s dangerous. Uncontrollable. Cat like At the front door to death I needed women! Women to fill me up. To ease me into other world. To see me across. To bring me ecstasy and salvation. Don’t let me fall! Don’t ever let me fall. (Henry Collapses). (250/51)

But Henry collapses in the midst of the process of attaining what he said “salvation” (251) through his failed attempts to orchestrate a moment of cohesion.

After having failed to reach any reapproachment with his ghost lovers he wishes to return to America, the place of his origin, with a bid to regulate his own historical courses. He wants to go back to that space from where he disappeared.

Henry’s nostalgic journey takes him to the space that never had any communion with the people that lived there. It was a space of dissociated totality, a place of the entities divorced from each other. That was a place “Flat, barren. Wasted as far as eyes could take in. Enormous country. Primitive. Screaming with hostility toward man As though men didn’t belong there. As though men were a joke in the

face of it (271). This is the place where Henry encountered the laughter of rattle snakes and coyotes:

Cactus stabbing the blue air. Miles of hit and wind and red rock where nothing grew but the sand and far off invisible little man were huddled against it in cities. In tiny towns. In organizations. Protected (where) the whole world of men (was) pathetic. Sad, demented little morans moving in circles. Always in some circles. Always away from the truth. Getting smaller and smaller until they finally disappeared. (271)

Henry captures the image of civilization that the post-industrial west produced of which Henry too is an integral part with his destroyed subjectivity and the only thing that remains substantial for him is "Air". He even writes his will, making Raul as the heir to his holdings, not on paper but in air. ("Air is the only thing that'll last forever" 271). In the process of executing the will in air Henry recounts the place and the process of the disappearance. ("I disappeared in a dream" 274). Like Niles in *Suicide in B-Flat* Henry disappeared from his own persona. But he admits that he has been seduced, that his life has been a chasing of a mirage. Recognizing his damned condition he is infused with a "Mephistophilean energy" (Wade, 86). He assumes his chair as though it were a cockpit and embarks upon a final nefarious flight to Las Vegas which he saw as "glowing in the dark" (275). Henry finally is consciously blurred with his faceless anonymity. His was "A face. A name. No one will ever know for sure.... Invisible. A ghost in the land. No voice. No sound. A phantom. They'll never get rid of" (275). He becomes an image that cannot even be destroyed. His destruction is possible only through the destruction of the system that 'invented' him. Raul fires at him repeatedly, but bullets have no effects. Because he has

transcended his physicality. He is an entity that has turned into a legend of a hidden power and manipulation, raped by a dream and eventually becomes the “nightmare of the nation”. Ron Mottram calls him “the end product of an aspiration for power and success, the ultimate American” (130).

He can move anywhere he wants to. “Freer than life” (276). His body is gone. Nothing can see him. Henry utters: “I’m dead to the world but I never been born.” He rises up in menacing triumph, a phoenix like figure before whom Raul the representative of the corporate culture “collapses in a gesture of supplication” (276).

True West (1980) follows the author’s shift to a new zone of American experience – nostalgia for a family. Shepard focuses more on the private universe of individuals menaced by the constant apprehension of being isolated from the family unit and being devoid of a sense of Home. The theme is of central concern in his *Buried Child* (1978) and *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977). *True West* is mostly seen as part of Shepard’s “family trilogy”.

The present study, would, however, look at the play in relation to the issues that present study concerned with. The two major characters are engaged in creative writing – Hollywood Screenplay writing. The play captures the moment of two men’s chase for a personal image that is provisionally translated as ‘true west’. But this journey is accompanied by their perpetual awareness of having taken a tour toward an uncertain destination. The uncertainty prompts the two brothers to go for role reversals. Austin the well set, self complacent Hollywood screenplay writer takes on

the role of his Bohemian brother, Lee, a petty burglar and a scroungy looking fellow who lives in the desert with a dog. Lee, on the other hand, in a bid to abandon his native identity takes up the role of his brother and starts writing a screenplay which he claims to be the story of true life. Austin, on the contrary, reduces himself into a petty thief breaking into the neighbourhood to steal toasters. The act, apparently, provides Austin a peculiar sense of freedom that enables him to situate himself outside the claustrophobic world of urban propriety. Lynda Hart in her book *Sam Shepard's Metaphorical Stages* (1987) describes the play as the struggle between rugged individualists of the frontier against the urban socialite which reflects, according to her, Shepard's own dissenting voice that has rebelled against the restrictions of urban life to defiantly, and often nostalgically, assert the claims of freedom and adventure embodied in the myth of the American West (88). Shepard, however, is concerned with other crucial aspects as well. As Wendy Lesser in his review underlines, the play also focuses on the degree to which the actual life of the old time West has been sentimentalized and corrupted by Hollywood's illusions. "In Shepard's imagery", writes, Lesser, "this aesthetic corruption finds a physical counterpart in the encounter of one wild landscape by a spreading sunbelt suburbia" (19). On a broader conversation, Shepard is concerned with the general impact of Hollywood on America's process of creating fiction. Words like 'true', 'authentic' seem to become titular entities unless the work is approved by Hollywood – the aesthetic authority, represented in the play by Saul Kimmer.

The play discloses the tragic entrapment of the creative artist, the social validity of whose work is entirely dependent on the whims of the forces represented by Saul Kimmer. For Sam Shepard himself, Hollywood is a “giant machinery”. Hollywood even absorbed the creative idiosyncrasy of Antonioni with whom Shepard was engaged as screenplay writer for *Zubriskie Point* (1968). Shepard admits the experience of working with Antonioni was a “nightmare” because “Hollywood problems and Big Business problems got in the way.” Shepard points out “There is no way you can work on a major motion picture without the producer having the last say on what’s going to be in the film” (qtd. in Copelin, G). Saul Kimmer in *True West* enjoys this invisible power which authorizes him to accept or reject a script absolutely on the ground of his private taste and fancy. In a minute Saul Kimmer could turn Austin into just a nobody by rejecting his proposal and accepting Lee’s script instead over a golf club by offering him a ridiculously huge sum of money as advance. This dramatic turn around of events beckons the ambitious desires of individuals and Lee is also lured by this mystery and promise. Shepard observes “a lot of people sink or swim in it (Hollywood) without knowing how it happens, without knowing how you find yourself in a studio office, and without knowing how there you become involved in your first draft” (qtd. in Copelin). Shepard underlines the problematics of being a Hollywood screenplay writer. As a playwright one could find an intimate communion with himself but as a screenplay writer one has to collaborate with dozens of people which is a completely opposite way of working” (qtd. in Copelin). Shepard calls Hollywood ‘a dead set’ and most of the time what one gets, according to Shepard, is a “big hodge podge”. Lee’s so called true-to-life story

is one such pastiche which Saul Kimmer attests as authentic by referring to some vague elements of the story to justify his claim. Kimmer says "(The story) has the ring of truth". Austin dismisses him with a laughter and asks "Why? Because it got horses? Because it got grown up men acting like little boys?" Kimmer fumbles: "Something about the land. Your brother is speaking from experience." Even Austin claims that his stories were also from his experience. Kimmer defends himself by arguing: "But nobody's interested in love these days, Austin. Let's face it" (35). But Austin's source of authenticity as a counterpoint to Saul Kimmer's is equally vulnerable and naïve. Austin makes a desperate attempt to outweigh Kimmer's claim by frantically arguing with almost boyish naivety:

(Lee) has been camped out on the desert for three months. Talking to cactus. What's he know about what people wanna see on the screen! I drive on the freeway everyday. I swallow the smog. I watch the news in colour. I shop in the safeway. I'm the one who's in touch! Not him!
(TW 35)

But Austin tragically fails to understand that his artistic paradigm may not be the one that Hollywood appreciates. Hollywood has its own aesthetic modalities which are absolute in its own right. As Shepard once remarked on Hollywood's needs: "They want jokes. They want clever language, things like that. I don't think that any writer in his right mind who wants to write for himself would try to write for the movies" (qtd. in Copelin) . Hollywood is engaged in the creation of the objects of illusion to cater to the audience who are also, as Shepard says, "dreamers". Austin obviously fails to be patronized by a Hollywood producer for he represents a rational view. He is Harvard educated, orderly and intellectual. He believes in having a

reward for hard work and punishment for misbehaviour. He is, as Wendy Lesser puts it, "a bit too restricted but safe". Lee is a complete contradiction to what Austin stands for. He is a transcendent weirdo. His is a world which is messy, drunken, fragmented, irresponsible, violent, filled with lies, half truth and hard truths. Lee is almost an invention created by Hollywood's own need. He is the psychological other of Austin's rational self. Lee registered natural triumph where Austin failed. But Lee's freedom too is restricted within the territory demarcated by Hollywood.

The rejection of Austin's story by Saul Kimmer is emblematic of the course that work of art is to take. That it is not the artist who is empowered to endorse his own work but the power lies with a different centre that determines art's validity.

The second act depicts the gradual transformation of the artist-Austin and his steady approximation of the geography to which Lee belongs. Austin decides to abandon his private prairie and begs Lee to take him to the desert. Ironically Austin endorses the authenticity of Lee's plot where two cowboys chase each other down the desert toward an uncertain destination – the 'Tornado Country'. Austin described Lee's story, to his chagrin, as a contrived story because two guys are made to chase each other in bizarre coincidental circumstances. The two guys are on tracks with 'goosenecks' (cattle trailer as explained by Lee, (20) where they have got their horses saddled up. The first guy, the one in front, realizes that he is chased by the one who has illicit relationship with his wife. Both of them run out of gas and are bound to mount their horses to chase each other. Lee, however, dismisses Austin's reservation about the real life value of such a story. Lee insists that this is what exactly happens

in his story, his “true-to-life-western”. Lee ends the outline of his story with the description that turns out to be almost oracular assertions of what actually happens between the two brothers. The two brothers’ survival in uncertain space prompts them to exchange their locations only to end up being nowhere. Lee’s closing of the outline betrays their own aporia:

So they take off after each other, straight into an endless black prairie. The sun is just coming down and they can feel the night on their backs. What they don’t know each one of them is afraid. And they keep ridin’ like that straight into the night. Not knowing. And the one who’s chasing doesn’t know where the other one is taking him. And the one who’s being chased doesn’t know where he’s going. (*TW* 27)

But Lee is handicapped as he requires Austin’s help to write his story. Saul Kimmer’s acceptance of the story makes Lee aware of his formal entry into a different world where instinctive existence is out of question. Lee makes an agreement with Austin that he would take Austin to the desert if he writes the story for him. Austin responds mockingly:

Oh, now you’re having a little doubt, huh? What happened? The pressure is on boy. This is it. You gotta come up with it now. You don’t come up with a winner on your first time out they just cut your head off. They don’t give you a second chance ya’ know. (*TW* 40)

Lee is almost trapped by the “Hollywood blood-money” (*TW* 8). Lee mocked at Austin’s work as “dumb fuckin’ line and he wonders “you get paid for dreamin’ up a line like that?” (*TW* 8) But what Lee himself creates says Austin, are the characters from his boyhood fantasies: “the illusions of characters – fantasies of a long host boyhood!” (*TW* 40). Austin then claims he has a “true story”, the story of his father.

Austin narrates the story of his father's losing all his teeth in a bag of American Chop Suey.

The old man started losing his real teeth one every morning, so he went to a Mexican dentist to 'yank' his teeth and the dentist took away all his remaining teeth and his money. Finally, he put the teeth in a doggie bag in which he was carrying Chop Suey from a restaurant. He left the bag in one of the bars that he went to get Austin introduced to some of his old friends. He left the bag there and they could not find the bag and he could not get those teeth back. Ironically, it is the old man's search for his past connection that caused him to lose all his teeth. This is what Austin calls "The true story. True to life" (*TW* 42).

The penalty that Austin had to pay for his successful living in the city appears to be too costly for Austin. Austin, therefore, wishes to go to the desert where he expects to find the space of lost innocence. The cityscape for Austin is empty, barren and lifeless. Austin takes a look at his own urban existence and finds:

There's nothing here. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a life here then. But now – I keep comin' down here thinking it's the fifties or something. I keep finding myself getting off the freeway at familiar landmarks that turn out to be unfamiliar. On the way to appointments wondering down streets I thought I recognized, that turn out to be replicas of streets I remember. Streets I misremember streets I can't tell if I lived on or saw in a postcard. Fields don't ever exist anymore.... There's nothing real down here, Lee. Least of all me. (*TW* 49)

Through a series of accusations and confessions the two brothers come to agree with each other's proposals in a fleeting moment of fraternal bonding. The

bonding grew through the exchange of power symbolised by Austin's car. It is the car that demarcated the identities of the two brothers. Lee wants to borrow Austin's car and Austin is torn between giving up his car and keeping it to himself. The keys move back and forth between the two brothers indicating what Wendy Lesser calls, "the shift of power between them and alternately heightening and releasing the sense of enclosure". The downing of Austin's roles makes Lee aware of the portents of unfreedom. Lee now wants to get a way from the world he thought made up of real objects, "something authentic" and not "plastics" (*TW* 58). Lee finds the cityscape as the breeding ground of insanes. He expresses the desperation:

I'm clearin' outa' here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane. Look what it's done to Austin there. I'm not lettin' that happen to me. Sell myself down the river. No sir. I'd rather be a hundred miles from nowhere than let that happen to me. (*TW* 57)

Survival in the city (Hollywood) is only based on illusions constructed in the guise of art. Shepard makes this point as to how much the subjects really depend on the illusions created by art, by rituals, by language. Shepard understands, writes Wendy Lesser, as do all good playwrights, that those illusions may well be our only access to reality. Shepard carefully deconstructs the factors that hold the social fabric intact. Shepard lampoons Hollywood as well as questions the authenticity of the West. The American myths in the play is cuddled in pop fantasies. Shepard is both appalled and fascinated by this process which accentuates the plays' ambivalence – the ambiguous power. The two brothers in the play even become a kind of "Pop Cain Abel" (Jack Kroll). Their mother's retreat to Alaska, the last possible frontier of the

West, failed to provide the solace she expected there. ("It was the worst feeling being up there. In Alaska, staring out a window. I never felt so desperate before" (59), Mom shares her experience with Austin). She comes back from Alaska to meet Picasso whom she thought was still alive. She returns to the home now unfamiliar with unwatered plants and the unexpected arrival of her elder son with whom Austin is engaged in a fight. ("I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless", 59, she confides).

The two brothers also find the home unlivable and finally disappear from there to merge in the desert against the fading prowling of coyotes. They, through violence, discover the process of creation which they didn't know before. They exchange their respective aesthetic abilities. This aesthetic exchange, says James C. McKelley, sparks off a "corresponding ontological exchange, setting in motion a chase between two contraries over the internal frontier of a shared identity" (298). This opposing principles of creativity are interdependent on each other.

But then artistic union requires a freedom for an untrammelled contact with the landscape of human exigency and a disintegration from "the common endeavour of human civilization" (McKelley 299). This is how they can be on "intimate terms" with the "prairie" (*TW* 52). The phrase "intimate terms" of Austin is found provocative by Lee. The phrase could provide an articulate expression to Lee's own aesthetic longing:

Sounds original now. "Intimate terms". That's good. Okay. Now we're cooking! That has a real ring to it. (*TW* 52)

They want to be on “intimate terms” with their aesthetic geography as they yearn to rediscover themselves in a space like that of the foothills of San Gabriel mountains, where Lee finds, “a sweet kinda’ suburban silence.... Like a paradise. Kind’ place that sorta’ kill you inside. Kinda’ place you wish you sorta’ get up in. (TW 12).

The Artists in these plays are exposed to a world torn between the beauty of their private vision and the ugliness of reality. They emerge as cultural nomads in search of an undefined habitat.

Lee in *TW*, the original nomad, comes out of his native habitat – the desert, when Austin leaves his comfortable urban domicile to rediscover his lost identity in the open space of the Western desert. Desert is the space where the fixities of identities can be perpetually erased. Edmond Jabes wrote: “in the desert there are no avenues, no boulevards, no blind alleys and no streets. Only – here and there – fragmentary imprints of steps quickly effaced and denied” (39). The desert, the address of Lee, provides a unique experience of virtual arrival validating the wandering of yesterday as a purposeful venture. On the other hand, for Lee, home reflects the point of his supposed arrival which is at the same time pregnant with the possibility of new departure. In the course of role reversal Lee unlike Rabbit Brown and Henry becomes, what Zygmunt Bauman would call, an aspiring ‘Parvenu’ and Austin manifests his desire to reduce himself into a ‘pariah’. Bauman defines parvenu as an “*arriviste*, someone already in, but not quite of, the place, an aspiring resident without a residence permit” (72). He is someone who wants to forget the past and

wish away the future, and the older tenants dislike him because he awakens the memories and premonitions which they struggled hard to put to sleep. (Zygmunt Bauman 1997).

The Artists who are drawn to the dazzled wonder of Hollywood are not always privileged to be a 'parvenu'. Like Austin, Rabbit Brown in *Angel City* and Henry Heckamore in *Seduced* are devoured by the system to the point that they can no longer retreat. Their identities are effaced. Hannah Arendt notes, "when a subject is forced to transform identity by the system he is even "denied the right to be (himself) in anything and in any moment" (Qtd. in Bauman 74).

The artists in these plays are classic chasers of a mirage. They voluntarily exchange their respective spaces and roles being allured by the majestic promises shimmering at the end of the tunnel. Rabbit Brown in *Angel City* passionately justifies his being seduced by Hollywood.

Millions seeing the same story.... Replacing their books. Replacing their families. Replacing religion, politics, art conversation. Replacing their minds. And I ask myself, how can I stay immune? How can I keep distance from a machine like that? (AC 13)

They finally end up being at artificial homelands what Bauman describes as "hallucinations at best, vicious delusions at worst" (78).

But in the course of their search for a native space Lee and Austin in *True West* regain almost a tribal wisdom and urgency to trace a traditional space of

belongingness. A place which is 'authentic', 'somethin' which can keep (them) in touch' (*TW* 56).

But, paradoxically, their search for a space to relive their past experience in retrospect has only accentuated the absolute disappearance of the tradition and the locale that was supposed to cater a space of belongingness.

Lee is horrified to live in the world of Austin where identities can be adopted and discarded like disposable objects. The terrifying thing of the new situation is that all diligent work may prove to be in vain. This for Lee is a world of 'plastics'. Miss Scoons in *Angel City* describes the world where "one minute its good, the next minute its garbage" (*AC* 19).

The artists are terrible victims of Hollywood's devastating impact. Hollywood subjugated them to the extent of reducing the artist into, as Henry said in *Seduced*, "demons". However, Shepard's last major Hollywood play *True West* ends with an optimistic note as the artists are able to at least undertake a journey work toward an imaginary destination that is not a part of the simulated cultural map of Hollywood. When Rabbit Brown, Wheeler, Miss Scoons, Lanx and Tympani are all devoured by the Hollywood machine who were making a Hollywood movie ironically titled as *Frozen in the Act of Creation*, Henry Heckamore in *Seduced* becomes a shadow of his own simulated image, Lee and Austin in *True West* indicate they could make a timely exit from the site before being alienated. This possibility of escape perhaps,

emboldened Shepard to keep on flirting with Hollywood as an actor. Like Lee he knows the route to escape.

End Notes

¹ *Angel City* was first produced at the Magic Theatre, San Francisco, on July 2, 1976, directed by Shepard himself.

² *Seduced* was first produced at the American Place Theatre in New York. It was directed by Jack Gelber.

³ *True West* was first performed at the *Magic Theatre*, San Francisco on July 10, 1980.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Sam Shepard is one of the latest icons of America who is often compared with the other icons like Ernest Hemingway, Huck Finn, Audie Murphy, John Wayne. Even Shepard's image reflects a prototype of a typical American figure. In the book covers, photographs and film posters Shepard mostly appears in western wear with a cowboy hat. In the cover of his book *Motel Chronicle* (1982) he appears in typical costume with a coke bottle in his hand, standing beside a coach with Texas license plate. In the picture he looks at the camera but most of the time he avoids the camera. The diversion is suggestive of, writes Leslie Wade, his "impractical rural modesty" (143). He prefers to cast his look toward the horizon and exudes a frontier appeal and "intimates a secretive understanding of his native soil" (Wade 143).

This is Sam Shepard. The "rodeo rider" of American theatre. Shepard's personality reflects the open range of America's national imagination. And the works of Shepard too betray the intimate spontaneity of Shepard's own Americanness.

Shepard's works are not a body of works that uncritically celebrate national obsessions, rather they disturbingly betray the terror that lashes out at the collective conscience of America. John Lahr writes, Shepard's plays "flush out the hidden yearnings and terrors of the American collective unconscious" (136).

Shepard's achievement lies in giving this American preoccupation with cultural fear a dramatic expression. This elemental preoccupation forms an important theme in Shepard's plays. Shepard redraws the cultural cartography of America with

intimate cultural signs. Shepard's landscape is not made intimate only through themes, the profound intimacy of the landscape is achieved, as Ruby Cohn puts it, through images and rhythms (185). He draws his images and rhythms from the familiar sites of popular culture and mass media which have made Shepard intensely contemporary and profoundly American. Shepard has given a legitimacy to the intimate cultural signs that preoccupy the American mind. Shepard has most effectively turned the figures of popular culture into lasting patterns of myth. He has accorded a new aesthetic vitality to the figures of popular culture retaining their established meaning as cultural sign. Ruby Cohn writes about Shepard that "like his ancestor O'Neil ... Shepard in maturity is dramatizing a tragic America, mired in sin like the Fitzgerald of *Great Gatsby*", she continues, "Shepard is at once seduced by and critical of American wealth and its artefacts. Like Thomas, he realizes that you can't go home again -- to a pastoral civilization" (185). Shepard reflects this awareness.

The protagonists of Shepard look for the idioms to invent a new narrative which can assure a sense of freedom and personal integrity and wholeness. They strive to achieve the mental status to be able to live beyond their present identity which is largely a constructed image that the protagonists involuntarily carry as the authentic persona. Henry Heckamore in *Seduced* metamorphosis into an image that is not destructible even by bullets. Henry is a victim of his own apotheosis.

Melodrama Play (1967) marks a significant beginning in Shepard's dramatic career as this is the first play where he uses rock music. This is also the first play that deals with the problematics associated with the artist's role in a society where art is treated as any other consumer product. The theme of creativity and crisis in an artist reappears in his later plays *Tooth of Crime* (1972) and *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974) as well as in the two early plays *Mad Dog Blues* (1971) and *Cowboy Mouth* (1971).

The Mad Dog Blues and *Cowboy Mouth* (along with *Back Bog Beast Bait* which was produced at the American Place Theatre on 29 April 1971 on the same programme with *Cowboy Mouth*) reflect a deep sense of confusion and the compulsive obsession of the protagonist to escape from confinements. The protagonist who are artists engaged in a desperate conflict with fear and material temptation.

The issue of an artist's conflict with the new social system of production continues to dominate in the plays that followed the rock plays of the early '70s. *Tooth of Crime* (1972) exudes great power and makes a decisive impact upon the audience as the play invents a new language that reveals Shepard's ability to provide a new dimension to the language of theatre. Shepard achieves a rare intimacy with language and context in this play. The dominating dramatic force of Shepard continues to get reflected in the plays that followed with similar concern - *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* (1974), *Angel City* (1976), *Suicide in B-Flat*. The issue of

corrupting the commercial environment and its degeneration of artistic values receives mature treatment in his 1980 play *True West*.

The concern and unease reflected by the artists can be understood in terms of the Lyotardian paradigm of "performativity". The artist is poised against the setting of technological supremacy wherein originality is a secondary virtue and the scientific and technological advancement make any artistic creation a matter of systematic manipulation which demands "maximum output with minimum input". All the artists are forced to enter a system network wherein they are asked to deliver to their limits under duress. The artist becomes a pawn, quite obviously, in *Angel City* and *True West*. Rabbit Brown and Austin are enmeshed in the technological game and their arts become absolutely subservient to a new cultural equation "wealth, efficiency and truth." James Schevill describes Shepard as a gifted playwright with a vision to reflect the confused, rapidly changing technological society along with the other grotesque changes ("Grotesque" 3). Shepard also reflects the split between Jafferson's dream of an endless frontier land and Hamilton's vision of industrial centralization.

Against such an oppressive background of technological tyranny, the artists seek a space of freedom through their pastoral nostalgia. They recall their pastoral past with romantic fondness and rural naivety. As Niles would recall his house in the island where the rain sounded like "Balinese cymbals on the roof" (SMB 211).

Shepard's artists belong to the era of Eisenhower romanticism of post-war America. This is the time when the Hollywood dream machine continues to invent images of victorious America (the trend, however, continues till date) which used to reflect as David J. DeRose would call "a righteous and Audie Murphy America of heroic proportions and bigger than life stars and adventures" (2). He writes, "this was the period when media generated myths grew to such proportions and with such speed that they lost all connection to the reality from where they once sprang" (2-3). Shepard's art heroes are described as "grotesque" by Schevill (3). He calls the characters "grotesque" because he describes them as American fantasies of power and fame. This is the power and fame that both foster and distort them. Henry Malcolm Heckamore, the relic of his own fame and power in *Seduced*, the defeated rock star Hoss in *Tooth*, Rabbit the degenerated actor in *Angel City* are all trapped in the imperial dream of a phantasmagoric America. But Shepard underlines the vacuity of such dreams through his subtle lampooning of the system that reproduces this dream through various narratives. Hollywood is a narrative that transforms the countryside innocence of Rabbit Brown into a sci-fi monstrosity.

The protagonists in Shepard are fragmented and desperate ; they lack coherence and totality. The characters in Shepard are caught in a condition of "ontological insecurity" having led a life without feeling alive. (Henry Heckamore desperately seeks to experience how it feels to live a life). Cody in *Geography* implores Santee to let him be in "Great Nature" which he had not seen for years. He

fears that the sun might even blind him for he did not have any experience of leading a sovereign existence.

Shepard contextualises his artists against a backdrop which is defined as “unfixed” by David J. DeRose. He describes Shepard’s world as the one that has abandoned the elements that ensure an individual’s wholeness, wherein they do not rediscover their own heritage and where the communal rituals of social living is replaced by enclaves made of multi-million dollar structures. Shepard’s is a world, writes DeRose, where man becomes a stranger all of a sudden, when he returns to the place once used to be his home, he fails to recognize it. This is also the world in which “artists have lost the roots of their inspiration and heroes don’t remember what heroism is, a world that remains seemingly uncharged but that has actually turned into a foreign planet.” (De Rose 5)

In its search for a form and contents to give articulation, the artistic obsession in Shepard has been to access a reachable memory. History becomes an unreliable site from which one can define the artist’s present because the present turns out to be a gestalt of fragmented recollections of an assumed past and in the process the artist is engaged in the exercise of reinventing the myths in retrospect. Niles in *Suicide* keeps on trying to define his own identity through the various images that he has been associated with. Henry in *Seduced* tries to outreach his own myth which is reconstructed through the fragments of his memory. Hoss in *Tooth* tries to validate his artistic identity by way of rediscovering the mythic image of his own which is more a part of naïve nostalgia than his private history. Art too under such cultural

circumstances becomes fragmented. Shepard writes in *Rolling Thunder Logbook*: “Art is a direct outcome of fractured memory” (1). It (art) becomes a reference to reassure one self that “they sprang from somewhere” (*RTL* 45).

This pattern of reconstructing the past by aligning the myth and the imaginary construction with physiognomy, societal living, is described by Johannes Birringer as a “retrospective process”. The process becomes a part of the artist’s creative exercise through which he seeks an aesthetic transformation of the social space that he inhabits. The artist attempts a journey through historical trajectory to locate the lost space where he can validate his aesthetic authenticity. This urge for transformation resonates in the imploring quests of Kosmo in *The Mad Dog Blues*:

But I’m a musician! I’ve got to create. I’ve to get back to the city.
Back to my land. Back to my roots. (155)

Such a cultural scene makes it imperative to redefine the state of art and the status of the artist. Sam Shepard becomes a tremendously significant cultural event because his plays happen to have started a new cultural debate by providing decisive legitimacy to a new generation of artists and their art that has been accorded a secondary position in the cultural maps of the modernist elites. Shepard provides a discursal prestige to the art form which is a part of a nation’s popular culture.

The artists, despite being a part of the postmodern cultural landscape of America, are not gregarious insiders. They collectively form a destabilising force that strongly resists appropriation. They assert through paralogy – dissension - and

categorically refuse to become an uncritical part of the system. They do not settle for any consensus which could enable them to survive within the system. Consensus would make them victims of manipulation. This awareness prompts them to go to the extent of self obliteration as the final assertion of their power. Hoss in *TOC*, Niles in *SBF* defy consensus with the postmodern media legislators through self destruction.

They frustrate the attempts of disciplining by the agencies of cultural power through continual subversion of their attempts. Despite being put in the “panopticon” of postmodern cultural order the artists could save themselves from being disfigured. The crude attempts of disciplining of artists in *Geography*, *Melodrama* and *Cowboy* conclusively fail. The artists, therefore, in Shepard could remain as sovereign entities. They are postmodern not only because they belong to that cultural map, but also because they assert paralogy in true spirit of postmodern dissension.

Shepard, as a dramatist, discovers the myths that constitute the essence and the prehistory of the mass consciousness. He becomes a folklorist who captures in his warbling the images of common imagination. Shepard is a people’s man who disturbs the sense of self complacency in material comfort by exposing the tragedy experienced by the “cultural signs” in their efforts to authenticate their creative exercises. Shepard secures the confidence of his audience and readers because he portrays those with whom he has cultural intimacy. His world is crowded like that of the dream world of Kosmo – Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Buddy Holly, Big Bopper, Sam Cooke, Jimmy Rogers, Brian Jones, Mae West, or the world of Austin and Lee – Kirk Douglas

Shepard deals with familiar icons: Rock stars, Hollywood stars, Jazz musicians, who are part of the intimate American cultural landscape. They constitute the pantheon of new heroes. Shepard as a visionary manifests his ability to look at them beyond their apparent apothetical realm. As an insider of the world of American heroism Shepard makes cultural documentation of their rise and their fall. He records the moments of their victory and their defeat. He reveals a cultural truth with oracular accuracy.

All the heroes is dying like flies, they say it's a sign a' the times.

(Tooth 205)

Despite being the greatest beneficiaries in material terms in the world, the artist, the stars, become ever more apprehensive of the world itself. They find themselves as the executioners of fatal deals. Shepard here celebrates the romanticism of tragic heroes. The hero is finally afraid of the world yet he longs to become a part of it:

Rabbit	: What is the most frightening thing in the world?
Tympani	: (blankly) a space (He continues drums).
Rabbit	: What is the most frightening thing in the whole world?
Tympani	: A life cut off from all life.

(AC 23)

The artist betrays urge to return to this pastoral geography becomes a recurrent theme in his plays. The protagonists attempt to reach this elusive landscape by way of regenerating the ability to merge with his native space.

Writing drama enables Shepard to address the contesting forces within and outside which he both identified with and abandoned. The process liberates him to establish a commune with himself at a more immediate level. Writing for him becomes a ritual of both renewal and sublimation as drama for Shepard is a metaphor for approximating the rediscovered intimacy with various forms of expressions. He informs "I'm interested in exploring the writing of play through attitudes derived from other forms such as music, painting, sculpture, film etc" (qtd. in Foster 51). For Shepard language is a veil that hides the demons and angels that inhabit the characters and the quest of his characters is to find those forces hiding behind their own language. For Shepard it is quest is to find those forces, to meet them face to face and end the mystery. This process of demystification involves death and rebirth (*Suicide* is one of the plays where the theme is directly dealt with) Shepard reveals:

The idea of dying and being reborn is really an interesting one. It's always there at the back of my head.... I was raised an Episcopalian. But that was another kind of prison to get out of. You have this personality and somehow feel locked into it, jailed by all your cultural influences and your psychological ones from your family and all that (qtd. in Foster 51).

Shepard's urge for self renewal makes him impulsively aware of the possibility of another kind of world that is not confining like the one in which his artists are entrapped.

There is always that impulse that there is another kind of world, something that does not confine you that way ... so what it means to die and be born again I've wanted somehow to get into (in Foster 51).

This has been the declared mission of Shepard to locate that “other world” which is liberating and which can only be reached through rituals of renewal.

Shepard is a writer of intuition and impulses. The arguments in the plays, too, take place at intuitive level. Rick Foster makes a contrast of Shepard with Ibsen. When Ibsen – a theatre architect is disciplined in dealing with the materials of stagecraft and plot structure. Shepard’s, on the other hand, are the works that have brilliantly improvised music. The word rift is often applied to his monologues. That is, when Ibsen’s root metaphor is spatial, Shepard’s is temporal. The progression in Shepard’s play is along the line from moment to moment. The text of *Tooth* is one of the most successful in using the typically Shepardian narrative.

The moments in Shepard’s plays are important as they capture the theatrical fantasies of Shepard and his characters alike. For Shepard a fantasy is an important means for establishing a communion of understanding. He, in fact, exhorts his implied audience to share his fantasies in good faith in order to arrive at a space of understanding. Shepard informs:

If someone shares a fantasy with me, there is an understanding between us. However, the understanding may come to a painful end when the actual world is encountered and the two fantasists have radically different interpretations of the consequences of sharing. In the early stages of love affair the most shattering kind of arguments came from just this kind of understanding without understanding. A Communist, a Nazi, a Zionist, a Catholic and a businessman can sit in the same concert hall and have the same ‘understanding’ of a symphony. (Qtd. in Foster 53)

Shepard's plays therefore tend to "move from fantasy to fantasy as operas move from aria to aria" (Foster 53).

Artist's conflict as an area of critical focus, has been a familiar event for both radical and conservative critical schools. Conflict indicates as is put by Christopher Sharett, "a sense of renewal". It suggests a "cyclical occurrence" that signals the necessity for an alternative set up (for the Marxist) and re-establishment of the existing institutions (for the capitalists because they interpret crisis as an aberration). In the postmodern culture, however, both "crisis" and "catastrophe" are interpreted as an epistemological as well as a historical break that problematizes the ontology of being. In Shepard's play the material condition, as in any postmodern society, constructs the dramatic world as a 'crisis scene'.

The artist in Shepard is trapped in this zone of conflict because the allegiance of the artist to anyone of the responses to overcome crisis would further endanger his freedom. The two available responses would subjugate the autonomy of the artist. The radical as well as the conservative responses to crisis are directed toward evolving and re-legitimizing meta-narratives. The tenacity of their cultural vision seems to have led to their resolute resistance to the appropriating advances of the discourse forces in order to ensure untutored manifestation of their creative self. As Slim refuses to pose as a "Rock 'n' Roll saviour" in *Cowboy Mouth*, Cody denies to dream as asked by his captors in *Geography* or Niles decides to disappear to pre-empt attempts of colonizing his art in *Suicide*.

The second Band song in *Melodrama Play* subtly reveals the tragic irony that entails the subjective position of the artist in the given society:

Well now that you're older than ya' was before
 And ya' can tell that you're older
 Cause everything is a bore
 Well now that you're clumsy instead of so quick

 'Cause we're sunk on the ground
 And your heart even don't pound
 While you lay on the floor
 And they just ask you for more
 Of the same that ya gave
 Of the same that they took. (131)

Cody in *Geography* asserts his autonomy and freedom by subverting attempts of being disciplined by his kidnappers. Cody, the dreamer, out rightly denies to dream anything. He expresses his freedom despite being a hostage. He declares, to the perplexity of his captors, "I've got no worries, no troubles to work out. Everything is honky dorey" (GHD 92).

The rejection of the totalizing cultural edifice is not done through agonised and disciplined responses, hence it renders opposing forces clueless about their moves. The unpredictability of their acts and its paganism offends the intellectual ability of the ordering forces, for these forces are comfortable to take on the situations that is definable on their terms. Besides, by being 'disorderly' in their strategies to resist the determining forces the artists pre-empt the possibility of falling in the trap of their discourse. Their elusive and incoherent resistance and their cryptic passivity shake and threaten the establishment. The artist is never ostensibly violent against the

violence of his surroundings. He is rather disturbingly passive and torturously receptive of the atrocities inflicted upon him. Physically he is weak. He is disruptive through his creative expressions. His subtle resistance and compulsive subversion of all logical predications push the subjugating forces of the society to the verge of insanity. The apparent recalcitrancy and the immunity from being transparent makes the enigmatic world of the artist a crazy place for those who attempt to explain it in received idioms. As for Pablo and Louis, their encounter of the world of Niles (*Suicide*) is an experience of insanity where 'everything is crazy' and where they are exposed to the danger of going 'mad'.

Thus the artists pose serious threat to the onward horizontality of the cultural march. Shepard's artists are like the Foucauldian figures who represent the disjunctive vertical identities in the horizontal archaeology of cultural rubrics. The artists affect the disruption through madness (Henry Heckamore, Niles, Cody) or death (Hoss, Niles) whereby the tyranny of reason of the state is effectively thwarted. The 'vertical' posture of the artist is a means to retreat into the realms of aesthetic liberation or fractal freedom atomizing a motion against totalization.

The artists boast of an innocence that refuses to accept reality's rule. This is what Ihab Hassan would call "Radical Innocence" [the term borrowed by Hassan from Yeats' *Prayer for my Daughter*]. Shepard presents a case of confrontation between the innocence of the artist and the destructive reality of experience. The confrontation reaches the high point of crisis when the reality turns out to be an experience that is related to the discovery of limits within the narrow world of

conventional specificities. The artist encounters the situation when even his privacy of having dreams is also taken away. As Cody complains that the ideal environment is not there for him to dream who needs a “better situation” where the “windows” should not be “blocked” (*GHD* 283).

Sam Shepard seems to be equally concerned with the question that even Ihab Hassan asked in his autobiography, *Out of Egypt* (1986). He asks “Can (man) learn to dream again, and dreaming wake to meditate actively between Culture and Desire. Language and Power, History and Hope?” (15).

Culturally, Shepard's hero is a decentered entity. He is, as Shepard himself describes, “fragmented bits of pieces”, “unorganised”. He undergoes several phases of personal crisis in various forms that threaten to physically destroy him. Henry Heckamore is compelled to go in self exile, while Niles is forced to attempt self obliteration, Hoss is without any other option other than committing suicide, Rabbit Brown compulsively degenerates into a slimy creature and Austin decides to get vanished in the vast horizon of the western desert. They leave the social space primarily because the societal history of theirs fail to predict any salvation for them. Here there is “nothing real” (“There's nothing real down here,” says Austin in *True West* 49), everything is fake, everybody is with a mask (“I believe in my mask” sings Crow in *Tooth* 235).

The artist is exposed to a repressive power-relation wherein his very existence is imperiled. He is subjected to physical subjugation by the imperialist forces of

corporate culture. The process of subjugation is obvious in the plays like *Melodrama Play*, *Cowboy Mouth*, *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* where the artist is imprisoned inside a kind of Foucauldian panopticon. The incarceration of artist is more subtle and pervasive in the other plays such as *Suicide in B-Flat*, *Angel City*, *Seduced*, *True West* and *Mad Dog Blues*. In these plays the self incarceration is necessitated by the coercive threats of the outside world that perpetually threatened to destroy them. Henry, therefore, frantically instructs Raul to lower down the curtains because "Anything could be out there trying to get in" (*Seduced* 254). Niles in *Suicide* is an artist by birth whose own voice shocked him to an emotional awareness as he finds himself with an imperiled body lacerated by the brutal forces of the outside world. Niles, therefore, makes a virtual exit from this world because "It's a trap! It's worse than a trap! (*SBF* 228).

The outside world tries either to colonize the artistic gift of the artist or destroy his artistic ability in order that the source of his power can be taken away. The incarcerated artist is confined in an enclosure that is shut out to the outside world. The artist is not allowed to have any access to the reality that lies beyond the confines of the panopticon. Duke, Slim, Cody all look for an access to the world outside – their native mainstay. They are transported to a location which is not their own. They are thrown into an alien geography where their confident creative freedom collapses and makes him powerless. The abductors make earnest attempts to enslave the artist to regulate attempts his conceits (*TW*, *MP*); the contours of his imagination (*AC*); his palpable voice (*TOC*, *SBF*) and the privacy of his dreams (*GHD*).

Inside the fortified confinement, the artist is reduced into a powerless entity and his freedom is mutilated so that imploring seer cannot impulsively keep on creating and dreaming to ascertain his creative freedom. Ihab Hassan, almost prophetically proclaims:

Men seem to know by instinct that dreams are monstrous things that should never see the light of day. Men tempt the hero to realize their dreams, then punish him for his daring credulousness. In a limited sense, therefore, every hero is a scapegoat, and a radical innocent. Thus was Prometheus chained to a rock and Oedipus banished from Thebes. Thus, too, in more subtle fashion was Faust self damned and Christ crucified. (*Radical Innocence* 326-327).

Shepard's heroes are cultural abstractions. They are allegories of contemporary cultural symbols. The issue of locating a cultural space continues to dominate the thematic concern of the plays. The heroes' source of creative knowledge is cut off and he is emasculated. The situation can be explained in terms of Foucauldian paradigm that analyze knowledge and power as hyphenated complimentaries to each other. Knowledge extends and reinforces power and power produces knowledge. By disrupting this dynamics the artist is turned to cultural subaltern. As is seen in Shepard's plays the subjugation is not mere psychological or political. The process of disempowering the artist is also carried out through physical atrocities and implosive violence of cultural terrorism. In *Geography*, Cody is tied to the foot of bed and is forced to lie as a "crucified artist", and he is constantly terrorized by the mauling of corporate discourses.

Shepard's protagonists wage a fight to escape from what Jim Collin would call the "circle of reality". The artists are engaged in the struggle of liberating himself from the determining structures of their imposed identities. There is an obvert tension at the subjects compulsion to represent his socially given identity and his perpetual struggle to relocate private autonomy of his existence. The artist protagonists in Shepard confront an acute crisis as they resist to be reduced into what the socially given identities have turned them into. At the same time they are yet to attain the autonomy to relocate space for themselves outside the ordering structures of society.

The consequences that they often end up with make the artists tragic figures who are exposed to the finality of absence of cultural order conducive for creative freedom. They are forced to exit the social space, like Travis in *Paris, Texas*, in search for an imaginary destination.

The anthropological explanation of Clifford Geertz informs us that man, like ideas, values, emotions and even nervous system, is a product of a given culture whose self is fashioned according to the generative rules of the given cultural system. He explains man's individuality is guided by the cultural patterns, as well as the historically created systems of meaning which determine form, order, point of view and direction (5-9). As culture shapes man into single species so does it shapes man as separate individual who defies even the forceful establishment of a cross cultural consensus. He asserts paralogy. Shepard deals with the individuals who despite being a part of common system of signification differs from the general body of the community. Against uncritical resignation to his lot Shepard's protagonist asserts

dissension by challenging the institutional culture. Neil Carson characterises tragic hero as:

All the tragic heroes from Orestes to Macbeth, we are told, are destroyed in attempting to obtain their rightful place in society. What distinguishes the tragic hero from the mass of ordinary man in his willingness to *question* and *attack* the scheme of things that degrade him. (80, Italics mine).

In Shepard the hero does not fight an individual enemy, he takes on the system that attempts to make him a part of a hegemonic totality. The hero adopts the strategy to fragment and disintegrate his own self in order to elude categorization.

The hero in Shepard attempts to construct new boundaries of assertion by breaking the impregnable fortress of "civilized culture". The heroes in Shepard strive toward locating a homeland at the edge of civilization with a powerful optimistic note to "rocking Bethlehem to be born" to find what Shepard calls "a new innocence".

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