

## 2. Postmodern Sense of Doom in the Hyperreal World of Sam Shepard's States of Shock and Kicking a Dead Horse

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### Abstract

*Sam Shepard is one of the most prolific, influential, and celebrated playwrights that the United States has produced in contemporary era. In his plays, America is complete with traditional and mythical symbols. He uses these emblems in order to subvert their meanings and manifest the discrepancies between characters' living in the West and the realities they confront. In his later plays, including States of Shock, and Kicking a Dead Horse, Sam Shepard reflects on the traditional meanings of myth and their erasure in the postmodern societies. Furthermore, the postmodern universe in these three plays is bombarded with representation and distortions of reality and hyperreality. The characters enter in simulations of reality after accepting the fact that the true reality doesn't exist. As a matter of fact, myths are not real; they are simulations of the past myths. Media with its glamorous and captivating power is one of the most influential medium in constructing the hyper real.*

### Keywords

*Sam Shepard, Myth, Reality, Hyperreality, Postmodern Society, Media*

# Postmodern Sense of Doom in the Hyperreal World of Sam Shepard's *States of Shock* and *Kicking a Dead Horse*

## Introduction

Sam Shepard in his major plays especially in the later ones such as *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), *States of Shock* (1991), *Simpatico* (1993), *The God of Hell* (2004) and *Kicking a Dead Horse* (2007) depicts characters who try to escape the unbearable world of illusion and take an inside journey toward realization of the truth, while it seems they are powerless parts in the big system (DeRose, 1992, p. 134). As Sheila Rabillard (1993) indicates, "Shepard's plays (at least the later dramas) are commonly regarded as strongly plotted, verging even upon myth and melodrama" and "it is a commonplace of Shepard criticism to detect mythic, heroic actions". Sam Shepard has created his own myth, but his own "life and his art seem to be a constant struggle to retain control of that myth" (DeRose, p. 134). The characters in *States of Shock* and *Kicking a Dead Horse* are frustrated and this anxiety reveals itself in their desire for an "authentic" West and self that appears to have been lost in postmodern America. The truth has become elusive and deceptive, and characters are doomed to wander vainly in search of reality in this hyperreal world.

*Kicking a Dead Horse* is, in essence, a one-man show concentrating on Hobart's identity crisis. A solitary man, Hobart Struther, attempts to reconnect with the mythic cowboy. His voyage to desert landscape is interrupted by the death of his horse. As a result, the play begins as he is digging a hole in the ground for his horse. Standing there in the vast open desert, out of frustration every once in a while, he gives the corpse a kick for having let him down. He is now miles away from civilization without any companion and trying to figure out what to do. This loneliness leads into an internal debate between his cynical and the ingenuous sides. He ponders over the routes which brought him here; the fate of his marriage, his career, politics and ultimately the nature of the universe. This inward discussion continues until his final decision. According to Jennifer Levin (2013) in "Alive and kicking: Sam Shepard's *Kicking a Dead Horse*", this play "asks how and if we can tell we are living our lives authentically, while the lure of the landscape of the American West is an intrinsic part of the quest to define one's true nature" (p.2).

*States of Shock* is radically unlike Shepard's previous plays and that's why critics "couldn't find a place to put it. ...Some of them called it absurdism or...They couldn't fit it into anything" (Willadt, 1993, p. 148). In a letter to his friend, Chaikin, Shepard refers to his thinking over the

condition of a “shock state”, of being “lost” and of “one’s identity being shattered under severe personal circumstances- in a state of crisis where everything that I’ve previously identified within myself suddenly fall away” (DeRose,1992, p. 133). In this play, Shepard moves away from “more realistic and linear elements” of his family plays like *A Lie of the Mind*. This play creates an atmosphere of “calculated mayhem, a sort of shock-for-shock’s-sake” (Madachy, 2003, p. 78); in response, Kramer remarks, “The point has been reached where the presence of [...] an ice cream sundae or a bowl of soup predicates the creation of a mess” (as cited in Madachy, 2003, p. 78).

The story of *States of Shock* takes place in a “family restaurant” (Shepard, 1993, p. 8), an all-American style diner, where Colonel brings Stubbs, a disabled war veteran, in a wheelchair in order to memorialize the anniversary of Colonel’s son’s death. His son was killed in the same incident, called as “friendly fire” (Shepard, p. 6) that is, shelling from his own forces, which crippled Stubbs and left him brain damaged. Immediately after sitting in a booth, Colonel begins to reveal his true purpose for this occasion and starts to interrogate Stubbs on the details of his son’s death. Colonel intends to find out the truth of his son’s death, though they’ve done this before. Thus, the crucial issue that should be taken into consideration in this play is pursuing of self-identity. Loss of identity is a crucial problem for Stubbs. The characters “look back in time in order to find the nuclear ethics that can ultimately endow their lives with a purpose and upon which a society can be firmly established” (Tarancon, 2004, p. 22). Like Hobart Struther, in *Kicking a Dead Horse*, the characters in *States of Shock* cling to different things to find a meaning in life or escape their monotonous condition in the hyperreal world. A major source is myths, even if they are the postmodern myths of Sam Shepard. However, these myths functions as the simulacra which have been imposed on them by the authorities.

## Discussion

The term postmodern is often used to describe the condition of living in contemporary, post-industrialized societies with the stance of questioning truth and authority that such a condition precipitates. According to Gregory Castle (2007), Postmodernism, “is a critical reaction to the Enlightenment project of MODERNITY and the Modernist movements in art and literature” (p. 144). Waugh argued that, “Where modernism is preoccupied by consciousness, showing how the workings of the mind reveal individuals to be much less stable and unified than realist psychology would have us believe, and postmodernism is much more interested in fictionality” (Nicol, 2009, xvii).

Jean-François Lyotard, the French philosopher, sociologist, and literary theorist, is well known for his analysis of the impact of postmodernity on the human condition in the contemporary culture. His major contribution and the main cause of his international fame is definitely *The*

*Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, a report on “the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies” (Lyotard, 1982, xxiii). According to Lyotard, “the postmodern era indicates that all comforting myths of intellectual mastery and truth are at an end, replaced by a plurality of language-games, the Wittgensteinian notion of ‘truth’ as provisionally shared and circulated without any kind of epistemological warrant or philosophical foundation” (p. 47). Individuals in late twentieth-century realize that they have lost a stable sense of identity and of history. They attempt to solve their feelings of placelessness and alienation.

Roland Barthes is one of Baudrillard’s great influences who provide the semiotic model for postmodern culture. The sign is the highest semiotic order, which breaks into signifier and signified. The sign is both object and subject but consumer society, according to both Baudrillard and Barthes, breaks down the object. For example, “advertising companies turn commodities into status symbols associated with the image of the item being consumed such as Nike shoes becoming a symbol of athleticism under the meaningless saying ‘just do it’” (Harden, 2011, p. 3). Christopher Butler (2002) believes that “we never really get what we want anyway. But we might on the contrary say that we do indeed get what we pay for, however it is advertised” (p. 114). As Baudrillard (1988) deduces, meaning is imploded not because of a lack of meaning but because of an overabundance of meaning (p. 59)

Furthermore, Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* is a series of articles concerning the values and attitudes implicit in the variety of messages. He believes that culture with the aid of these messages barrages us: “advertisements, newspaper, and magazine reports, photographs, and even material objects like cars and children’s toys” (Moriarty, 1991, p. 19). Moreover, Roland Barthes (1966) claims that “Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion....Entrusted with ‘glossing over’ an intentional concept, myth encounters nothing but betrayal in language, for language can only obliterate the concept if it hides it, or unmask it if it formulates it” (p. 22). According to Roland Barthes, semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology. If our society is objectively the privileged field of mythical significations, it is because formally “myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society: at all the levels of human communication, myth operates the inversion of anti-physis into pseudo-physis” (p. 142).

Jean Baudrillard’s work is also commonly associated with postmodernism and post-structuralism and his focus is on the concept of Hyperreality and simulation of Baudrillard’s significant ideas is the connection of hyperreality to myth. He believes that by the murder of the real and giving birth to hyperreal, nostalgia reaches its highest point. Baudrillard (1994) assumes the “proliferation of myths” (p. 6) to be a result of the nostalgic mode of postmodernism:

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and the substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. This is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us: a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal, whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence.

Concerning this condition, Fredric Jameson in his *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* also indicates that the fact the past resurrects in nostalgia, films and images shows this feeling of loss for the past. According to his view, in this way the history is made through these images and that's why, "the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history" (Jameson, 1991, p. 20). In accordance with Baudrillard's vision, Jameson believes that this kind of history is the "glossary mirage" of the past which is constructed by the media and the generated images. In his study, Jameson refers to the connection between postmodernism and memory. His concern is the fact that what happens to history when it transforms into multiple surfaces and is affected by deathlessness. Yet, our images of the past don't tell us a lot about the true meaning of the past or the way it has shaped the present. The ever-copied image is itself the original reality.

In postmodern era, Baudrillard (1993, p. 126) states, "Determination" has gone out and "indeterminacy" has taken its place. It is the uncertainty which rules the universe because of the substitutability of the "truth" and the "false" of media, of the real and the unreal in the world. As pointed out before, in *Simulations and Simulacra* he discusses the condition of twentieth Century, especially the United States of America. Baudrillard (1994) considers "Disneyland" an ideal model and instance of the third order of simulacra:

Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms: the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. This imaginary world is supposed to ensure the success of the operation. But what attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys. (p. 10)

It is a game of "illusions" and "phantasms" in an "imaginary" world. In other word, his attempt is on depicting the fact that "how things we believe to be false are there to hide the reality; there is no reality anymore" (Hawes, 2013, p. 1). Disneyland is shown as an imaginary to make people believe that everything except what is in Disneyland is real, whereas all America and Los Angeles are "no longer real" but they are owned by "hyperreal" order and "simulation". In consequent, the fact that "the real is no longer real" is hidden. Disneyland was there to conceal that Disneyland is the "real" country and the "real America is Disneyland" (Hawes, p. 1).

## Searching for Identity and Meaning in Postmodern Society

The postmodern man lacks something and feels emptiness in his life which leads to his wandering and searching. He wants to know who he is or where he comes from. He lacks a fixed identity. Considering *Kicking a Dead Horse*, one will encounter the portrayal of the American myth of the cowboy and the West, accompanying the failures of these myths in contemporary American society. The main figure, Hobart Struther, “an urban businessman who has suddenly decided to rough it” (Shepard, 2008, p. 3), abandoned his wife, his fashionable life of city for a “grand sojourn” (Shepard, p. 11). There in the city, he was a successful art dealer; he bought lost masterpieces of the Wild West, neglected paintings found and bought for a few dollars and sell them on to wealthy ones for thousands of dollars. He felt in his life he had no real purpose or meaning, and this disillusionment causes his escape into the Wild West in search of the “authenticity” (Shepard, p. 18). He repeatedly claims that he fled west in a desperate search for “authenticity”. He isn’t sure where he lost it, or if he ever really had it, but he knows for sure “that it’s as scarce as sagebrush in the concrete-and-glass canyons of New York City” (Isherwood, 2008, p. 2). Hobart describes his life condition before this journey:

The kids had all flown the coop. Empty nesters—that’s us—suddenly. It happens just like that. You don’t see it coming. Sitting around, folded up on sofas, sipping tea and reading *The Week in Review* [sic] [ . . . ] my nervous condition had gone from bad to worse, constant pacing all hours of the day and night, talking to myself—which is no surprise—and then sudden, unpredictable bursts of fury where I’d rip valuable objects of art off the walls and hurl them out the windows into the lush canyon of Park Avenue: Frederic Remingtons wrapped around the lampposts [ . . . ]. (Shepard, 2008, p. 19)

So, his current situation at home is banal and lonely (Knowles, 2010, p. 14), due to sitting on sofas, “constant pacing,” and “bursts of fury” or violence (Shepard, 2008, p. 19). His marriage is in trouble as his relationship with his wife has deteriorated, their kids have left them, and he finds his career as an art dealer unrewarding. The members of the family suffer from a lack of unity. Hobart, as the father of the family, traditionally is supposed to act as a unifying center to the circle of the family; nonetheless, he is not centered himself and cannot provide coherence. Hence, on one side he gains whatever he desires in life, he becomes disappointed at the discovery of his absent children, unhappy marriage and feeling useless. According to Hobart, he and his wife “became—tolerant, I guess. Of each other’s- [ . . . ] That’s it. Except for those occasional times when she’d explode and call me an asshole. Those were the moments I suddenly realized the depth of her anger. How much she deeply resented me. [ . . . ] Then we’d inevitably go silent” (Shepard, p. 31). They are not able to show any kind of affection to each other due to their detachment and disintegration.

Many of Shepard’s greatest characters are “hollowed-out men with strangely fluid identities, torn up by confusion or engaged in a search for a fixed self” (Isherwood, 2008, p.2). Being trapped in this world, the postmodern man can no longer hold to a unified identity, but is rather a fragmented

existent. Hence, the play's main goal is to illustrate "the nostalgic longing of the contemporary man for what he believes was a secure masculine identity embodied in the frontiersman or rancher of an earlier time" (Knowles, 2010, p. 9).

Most of the critics unanimously affirm that in the postmodern society, there is no more individuality. As Parvin Ghasemi (2012) indicates, "the self is no more the united whole of the modern era, but rather a constructed fragmented phenomenon which is basically under the dominance of mass media images" (p. 134); that with its manipulative power provides the pre-modeled perception for the audience. Struther starts this so called holy mission to the mythic land, the return to nature and the past, in the promise of answering his question and finding himself. In Barth's (1966) language, the press, the films, theatre, pulp literature, rituals, justice, diplomacy, conversations, the people remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we as a part of society dream of, the garments we wear, simply, "everything in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world" (p. 139). Similarly, in Shepard's society, the dominant class and system impress the mass that becomes the locus of the authentic, of origin, of the real – in direct antithesis to the hyperreality of the city. However, it is not true and the imposing image of the model American is incomplete and inaccurate.

As a result, Hobart Struther who, unable to reconcile his understanding concerning American identity with the reality he is confronting, tries to escape from his current situation and find a better life by achieving a semblance of the proffered American character. This better place for him is the West and in J. Chris Westgate's (2005) term; it becomes "quintessentially American religion – more than Christianity, more than Mormonism – replete with its own rituals, sacred texts, holy sites, and promises of salvation" (p. 733).

In *States of Shock*, the focus is on Colonel and Stubbs whose dialogues and appearances reinforce their symbolic positions. As David J. DeRose (1993) puts: "These two characters take on both socio-political dimensions and mythic proportions, embodying universal qualities of manhood, young and old" (p. 134). Colonel's outfit indicates that though *States of Shock* may have been written as a response to The Gulf War, Shepard in his mind has a much broader context for "his indictment of the inherent violence of American identity" (Madachy, 2003, p. 139). Stubbs' appearance also uncovers his function. He is "a Christ-like martyr who has been technologically resurrected after surviving a direct hit from incoming artillery" (Bigsby, 2000, p. 134). A disabled veteran of an unnamed war, he is pushed onstage by Colonel "in a wheelchair with small American flags, raccoon tails, and various talismans and good-luck charms flapping and dangling from the back of the seat and armrests. STUBBS is [...] covered from the waist to the ankles with an old army blanket" (Shepard, 1993, p. 6).

His comments and physical condition establish him as the victim of the struggle to achieve American identity. His physical condition as an invalid “mirrors his spiritual condition at the breakdown of American identity” (Madachy, 2003, p. 140). In a scene, he says to the white couple, the other two costumers, that “The middle of me is all dead...The core. I’m eighty percent mutilated. The part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead” (Shepard, 1993, p. 14). This speech illustrates the character’s division between past events which is a condition of a postmodern man; in truth, this instability denies Stubbs any possibility of rediscovering a fixed identity he is yearning for. The only pasts the twentieth-century viewer can refer to and identify with are those which are created through pop images and mass mediastereotypes (Jameson, 1991, p. 118).

Colonel, whose costume is a mixture of military uniforms from the American Revolution to the First Persian Gulf War, recalls glorious history of American lineage by referring to the idealistic images of the cowboy:

We can’t forget that we were generated from the bravest stock. The Pioneer. The Mountain Man. The Plainsman. The Texas Ranger. The Lone Ranger. My son. These have not died in vain. These ones have not left us to wallow in various states of insanity and self-abuse. We have a legacy to continue, Stubbs. It’s up to us. No one else is going to do it for us. Here’s to them and to my son! A soldier for his nation! (Shepard, 1993, p. 24)

Taking this statement into account, Shepard presents the myth of the American spirit as being ridiculous. Despite all these exaggerating and distinguishing features which the Colonel ascribes to Americans, in another scene throughout his shouts “WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE’RE NOTHING,” (Shepard, 1993, p. 15) reveals that “the myths which make up ‘the bravest stock’ are founded on politically driven hatred and violence” (Weiss, 2009, p. 56).

From what has been discussed so far, one can deduce that there is a connection between national and individual identities. Accordingly, Gerri Reaves (as cited in Dyne, 2012) contends, “Whether an author views America as an ideology, a set of cultural codes, a geographical place, a metaphorical space, a myth, a fiction, or even a state of mind, that vision defines the sense of self and structures an autobiographical discourse”(p. 24). Consequently, if one’s culture is “destroyed” a national identity and even a sense of self become difficult to define. There is a tremendous endeavour on the playwright’s part to display Stubbs’ condition and state of mind in this fragmented society where he is completely alone.

Likewise, Lyotard’s idea does indicate, as long as the grand narratives destruct, there is no longer any unifying identity for the subject or society. Thus, a postmodern man questions the validity of any rules, theories and conventions as “he is constantly confronted with a shifting environment,



speed changes and an accelerated rhythm of life” (Ghasemi, 2012, p. 134). Thereby, Stubbs and Hobart have tried to find a stable identity in this unstable society by sticking to national and traditional myths. However, these mythical and national values make them disappointed. Ultimately, in Stubbs' case, he turns into a challenger to the war mentality and the ideology of his father, who justifies the bloodshed of history in the name of the nation. For Stubbs, “America has disappeared” with all its ideology when he has witnessed how easily they forsook him and threw him away (Shepard, 1993, p. 23). Hobart also believes that he can reconnect with the land and with himself in order to find his lost identity. But according to Paul Seamus Madachy(2003), “whatever the desired destination, the illusion of American identity” Sam Shepard’s characters “cling to is ultimately unachievable because, based on his plays, this place (and the identity it embodies) no longer exists, if in fact it ever did”(p. 53).

## National and Traditional Myths

In the course of his career, Shepard has often “invoked the unifying power of national symbols with the conviction that identity and meaning lie somewhere in the past” (Tarancon, 2004, p. 24). His main obsession is the receding of the myths on which American character and spirit are founded. Shepard, as well observes that, “in our essentially material and profane culture, we have desacralized the past and seem unable to replace our old legends with any viable new ones” (Siegel, 1982, p. 235). According to Sandra Wynands (2005), “National identity–founding myths” delineate essential ideological concepts which are able “to evoke an entire connotative field” which is shared by the whole of society:

These myths are, then, inherently political. They are not, as the popular use of the term “myth” might suggest, harmless stories but images a culture invests with meaning beyond their immediate context in order to situate itself in a secure narrative of the world. National identity–founding myths are recoveries of an origin that gives a culture meaning. (p. 300)

Similar to most of Shepard’s plays, *States of Shock* and *Kicking a Dead Horse* center on popular iconic figure, American character in the form of cowboys. The cowboy hero is a mythic figure in American culture which depicts both “the values of common, middle-class citizens and the idealized stature to which only mythic heroes can hope to attain” (Siegel, 1982, p. 238). Harry Brod (1995) in “Masculinity as Masquerade”, remarks that “like the American cowboy, ‘real’ men embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural truths of the world”(p.13). The cowboy is then a symbol of man. President Theodore Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman, called the cowboy a “Man’s man” someone who “will not submit tamely to an insult, and is ever ready to avenge his own wrongs. [He possesses] the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation” (cited in Knowles, 2010, p. 15).

The striking question here is the fact that “the heroic cowboy of American popular culture bears little resemblance to the historical cowboy has been demonstrated a number of times” (Siegel, 1982, p. 238). The mythic cowboy possesses no heroic aspects, similar to all ordinary people who have frivolous and evil sides. Philip Rollins’ (1922) division of the fictional cowboy into three types in his book, *The Cowboy: His Characteristics, His Equipment, and His Part in the Development of the West*, will give us a better picture of this controversial figure: “the clownish, reckless, excessively joyful, noisy, and profane; or else wolfish, scheming, sullen, malevolent, prone to ambush and murder; or else dignified, thoughtful, taciturn, idealistic, with conscience and trigger-finger accurate, quick, and in unison” (p. 40). However, Shepard combines these three different character types into “a single, integrated personality” (Siegel, p. 240). Furthermore, he places “his cowboys in unusual situations for which the expected stock responses are inadequate” (Siegel, p. 240). In Mark Siegel’s (1982) view, although the setting of many of Shepard’s plays are the West and Southwest, the characters are stereotypical often “identified with the so-called ‘formula’ Western, the ambiguous cowboy is a key element in fully half of Shepard’s thirty-odd plays, and it is virtually impossible to comprehend Shepard without coming to grips with his figure”.

In Frederick Jackson Turner’s account (1963), “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character” (p. 60). In this regard, the frontier has provided an opportunity for Americans to create a society independent of European influence, “a new product that is American”(Turner, 1963, p. 61). This issue will gain more significance by knowing that “American identity was largely defined by becoming something other than European, and it was shaped by the geography of the West” (Dyne, 2012, p. 3).

The focal point is the connection of the West to American interplay of identity, geography, and history. In Eric Heyne’s view(1992), “Many Americans continue to live as though they had a frontier available, to remake them as they need it, and to have their way with when they want it” (p. 5). Harold Simonson in *The Closed Frontier* argues that the myth of the West remains central to American identity: “The myth proclaimed that on the open frontier a person could be reborn; he could have a second chance. Already freed from the heavy enchainment of culture, the frontiersman once again experienced the pristine harmony between himself and nature” (Heyne, p. 5).According to J. Chris Westgate (2005), this vision of the frontier characterizes American thinking:

The West is more than merely an antidote to a moribund society; it approximates a Platonic ideal. It is a world intrinsically accessible to Americans yet entirely distinct from the vagaries of American industry, urbanization, or institutions. It is a world where they can start over, can renew or recreate themselves – a world without sin or history or death.

In accordance with Westgate’s outlook, Simonson (1963) states that many Americans intuitively believe in the birthright of “virgin land, a golden gate, an open road” (p. 36) – “any number of tropes for the open frontier that underscore a seemingly indefatigable idealism about the future” (Westgate, 2005, p. 735). Significantly, Shepard’s characters are, without a doubt, the most heavily invested of all Americans in the implications of an open frontier.

In *Kicking a Dead Horse*, Hobart Struther’s journey, along with the resulting freedom and adventure, displays the importance of open frontier to his self-definition. Following the frontiersmen of the previous century, he has searched for freedom and opportunity guaranteed by the American West. Notwithstanding, at the end, there is no “perennial rebirth” (Turner, 1963, p. 2). What we are evidently witnessing in the course of the play is the view point of Sam Shepard toward the West; the West his characters encounter with, is continually “associated with decay, trauma, loss, and regret; it is generally more of a purgatory than a paradise” (Westgate, 2005).

Hobart Struther has left all his belongings for a “cowboy” pilgrimage, with required equipment such as tent, camping equipment and riding paraphernalia, and of course the cowboy hat. In his mid-sixties, he has come to the desert to find what he calls “authenticity”, a way of living or being that he feels he has lost, yet remembers having this “authenticity” in his youth when he worked as a cowboy in the Western desert. David J. DeRose(1992)describes this condition when “the sense of loss is present in the plight of cowboys who have lost touch with the land, in hallucinatory monologues that push the limits of reality into heightened state of consciousness” (p. 138).Hobart describes that golden time as “when work was work” (Shepard, 2008, p. 31), “when I worked for an honest living. Back in the days of AUTHENTICITY, when I ‘rode for the brand,’ as they say: mending fences, doctoring calves, culling cows” (Shepard, 2008, p. 31). Hobart goes on to describe this period as a time of being “utterly alone [ . . . ] It didn’t terrify me anymore. Complete aloneness. Not like when you’re little and—in the dark, listening—screams—distant—broken glass” (Shepard, 2008, p. 31).Thus, the “authenticity” he seeks and wants it back is positioned in his early life before children, marriage, or professional success. After those unforgettable days, he “worked for the brand” and spent his days drunk in bar. Ultimately, his problems and his spiritual crisis lead to this Western adventure. J. Chris Westgate (2005) in his essay “The American West in Shepard’s Family Plays” paraphrases Turner’s theory concerning dessert and city:

Free land is put in overt opposition to the city. The city is associated with stagnation, while the frontier, untouched by the deadening influence of civilization, is associated with primal, instinctual forces that the frontiersman would overcome, through the many hardships of the wilderness, or simply merge with, through transcendental reverence. (p. 729)

Frederick Jackson Turner in *The Frontier in American History* considers the frontier as the locus of authenticity, origin, and renewal, as Shepard’s characters do so. And it was through



continually renewed contact with that frontier that men arouse their best qualities: the West was central to “developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman” (Turner, 1963, p. 15).

“Barely even got started on the Grand Sojourn, and he drops from underneath me”, Struther says, and just a short ride into his “Great Sojourn”, things are looking bleak and his four-legged vehicle of redemption, a beloved old horse, has let him down, and then he gives the poor creature the first of many swift blows to the belly with his boot (Shepard, 2008, p. 41). Laurie Thomas (as cited in Levin, 2013) emphasizes the horse existence as a strong support for Struther:

The horse is his transport, his pal — he’s out there with his horse. It’s symbolic of our essential foundations crumbling underneath us. We think that we’re so far from the days of the early West, that we’re so technologically superior, that we’ve made so many scientific discoveries, and yet we seem to have lost our basic footing, our basic ability to deal and survive in our environment. Shepard has put Hobart and the horse in a vast landscape, and yet it’s an intimate play. I think people in the Southwest can relate to that. We understand that sense of intimacy in a profoundly vast landscape. That’s elemental when you live out here. (p. 4)

Then out of respect and loyalty to the horse and the cowboy ideal, he digs a hole to bury the horse, but it won’t budge. The struggle for Hobart to maneuver the dead horses into the whole “was the same irreconcilable struggle he faced within his own fractured identity”(Knowles, 2010, p. 33). So, the death of the horse may signify Hobart’s failure to claim back the “authentic” masculinity he desires. Another significant issue is Hobart’s role in his horse’s death as he “feed him a nosebag full of oats”, something he claims he should “have known better” than to do (Shepard, 2008, p. 50). In this way, as Scott C. Knowles (2010) puts:

Hobart actually represents the cause of his own shame, and possibly the failure of his search for “authenticity.” Hobart’s shame encompasses losing his Western roots, selling Western masterpieces, moving to the city, and finally accidentally killing his horse. Burying these wounds, which the horse signifies, prevents the healing and transformation of the wounds into golden potential and the “deep masculine”. (p. 24)

This sudden and difficult challenge pushes him to speak about his life up to this moment and his reasons for leaving the city. He speaks to himself in a sort of dialogue, voicing the opposite conflicting opinions in his mind. He also talks about a “she” he has abandoned. He is furious that the horse has gone and died on him, thereby halting his journey and hindering his search for “authenticity”. Hobart enacts countless blows on the body of the horse. Each of these blows reiterates “the death of his traditional masculine identity” and “his frustration at the inconceivability of change” (Knowles, 2010, p. 77).

Additionally, in Sandra Wynands' terms(2005), the existence of Western's horses signifies the extensions of their rider's masculinity. Those who have don't have adequate masculinity, are emasculated by being thrown off their horses' backs and "have to resign themselves to the humiliating experience of walking, or they start out without a horse in the first place (women and children, in particular).... in the distance, he is indeed reduced to walking". In simple terms, the death of his horse "has ruined what was to be his last escape into the open frontier and a nostalgic mythic expression of his masculine identity that he has lost from years of working as a domesticated (almost house broken) art broker" (Knowles, 2010). Unsure of his next step,he scans the landscape and begins to throw all his equipment down into the grave. He ruefully throws his expensive cowboy hat into the hole.

A short time later, after throwing away the cowboy hat, a young mysterious woman emerges from the hole and places the hat back on Hobart's head. She is silenced and invisible. Again in *Kicking a Dead Horse* Shepard shows a female character that "is more object than human being. She is simultaneously oppressed intellectually and physically" (Knowles, 2010, p. 9).Due to the stage directions, he "question[s] how the hat could have reappeared" (Knowles, 2010, p. 9). Hobart's failure to notice the female character and discard her actions indicates his blatant ignorance. In other word, Shepard's work falls in line with that of many canonical American writers:

Much American literature by men has presented "melodramas of beset manhood." The male characters in Shepard's plays believe in the need to discredit, wipe-out, or erase the feminine whether within or outside of themselves in order to assert a "macho" identity which their frontier (cowboy) mythos privileges as being truly manly, and (in Shepard's thinking) truly American. (Baym, as cited in McDonough, 1995, p.66)

Moreover, the Young Woman's invisibility signifies "both the presumed unimportance of the female role in masculine identity creation and the actuality of her role in the creation of Hobart's identity" (Knowles, 2010, p. 31). Her returning the cowboy hat, metaphorically shows her "attempt to place Hobart back on the road to the deep masculine" (Knowles, p. 31). Yet, she is not successful to reawake him and is not seen by Hobart similar to his wife. He throws the hat again in the hole as if he's disappointed by this promised journey. Below the audience sees his internal conflict on getting rid of the cowboy hat and all ideals behind it:

Not the Hat!  
 You're breaking my heart. Toss it.  
 What about the sun?  
 It's setting.  
 What about rain and wind?

You can't predict it.  
 What about the whole idea?  
 Which one's that?  
 The West? The "Wild Wild West."  
 Sentimental claptrap. (Shepard, 2008, p. 37)

Along with the idea of heroism and cowboy's obsession, Stubbs in *States of shock* went to the war in order to do heroic actions. He went and kicked "some ass"; this certainly "corresponds with America's cowboy way" (Madachy, 2003, p. 153). However, by coming back, he is going to realize that this image has been an illusion as Colonel says to him: "There are certain things that are irreversible, Stubbs. Irreversible. Now sit down and stop trying to be a hero" (Shepard, 1993, p. 36). Encountering with reality shatters him physically and mentally. He frequently lifts his shirt to expose a gaping red wound and also his repeated announcements such as "the middle of me is all dead. The "core" (Shepard, p. 14) or "MY THING HANGS LIKE DEAD MEAT!" (Shepard, p. 14). His figure, in reality, refutes the concept of the Super Cowboy Man as an American ideal and displays Shepard's recreating images and characters of the Wild West in order to debunk them.

In Charles Bachman's vision (as cited in Siegel, 1982, p. 240), most of Shepard's cowboys are "rendered harmless by being stereotyped, caricatured, or by immediately revealing cowardice and vulnerability". Like Stubbs, they are contemporary people who try and crave to play the roles of cowboys. In the course of the play, Stubbs is trying, of course vainly, to make meaningful connections between his emotional and physical lives. This is the state of all people in the present universe. Kenneth Chubb (as cited in Siegel, p. 240) overemphasizes on this issue by this quote: "implying a collective experience within a very personal vision...is the strength of Sam's work". Shepard's major point is that "the hero must be someone who is spiritually in tune with contemporary culture. The cowboys of yesteryear, mythic or not, cannot be transplanted into contemporary culture" (Siegel, p. 240). Yet, Shepard's effort is to "produce a viable hybrid hero by crossbreeding him with the equally mythic and more contemporary rock and roll star" (Siegel, p. 240). However, they are, in truth, "the physical incarnation of our cow boy past" and "only empty cardboard images" (Williams, 1997, p. 59).

While Stubbs explicitly displays the view of the disillusioned and detached American figure, Colonel's language and gesture positions him as "an archetypal military man" who defends national values. Although Colonel is "a firm believer in the noble myths of war" (Bigsby, 2000, p. 134) and American identity, he is a victim who is trapped in hyperreality of America. When Stubbs attempts to assert, "America has disappeared" (Shepard, 1993, p. 20), Colonel violently retorts, "DON'T TALK FOOLISHLY! That's a blasphemous thing to say! [...] The principles are enduring. You know that. This country wasn't founded on spineless, spur-of-the moment whimsy. The effects are international!

UNIVERSAL!" (Shepard, p. 20).Colonel's cry, "A soldier for his nation!"(Shepard, p. 21) reveals his patriotic views and his belief in an American virtue, that is, to fight willingly for one's country and to die for it[4].Colonel is infatuated by the myth of cowboy and the hyperreality which is imposed on American people and forces the ones around him to believe in such ideas.

Colonel as the father figure attempts symbolically to confirm "the power and legacy of American identity" (Madachy, 2003, p. 142). Additionally, his efforts to shape Stubbs' persona show "the same controlling force of a national character's attempts to impose itself on its citizens" (Madachy, p. 142). In Shepard's apparent world view, fathers as well as the government they support and stand for, will always be struggling to eternize "their own patriarchal myths" (Butler, 2002, p. 135). The sons are always called, "unwittingly or unwillingly, to serve their fathers' unwholesome ends" (Butler, p. 135). Like all of Shepard's father figures, he seems to be an incompetent father; he has a taste for alcohol and prefers to eat and to live alone: "I've loved to eat alone. I've gone out of my way to eat alone. I've walked miles in search of empty restaurants....I was born in isolation. If I can't have companionship it won't kill me" (Shepard, 1993, p. 35).

Moreover, Colonel lives in his own fantasy world. Firstly, he escapes to the decaying myths such as cowboys. He even invents a story of his son's death. Secondly, in a scene he refers to Shepard's another favorite myth, the myth of land; Colonel dreams up a scenario in which he and Glory Bee run off together to the Shepard's preferred escapist destination, Mexico:

Colonel: we're running away to Mexico!  
 Stubbs: you're leaving me for good?

.....  
 Colonel (*still dancing*): That's not the attitude we try to engender, Stubbs. It's only the present that stinks. Try to remember that. The future holds bright promise. Acapulco! Marimbas under the full moon! A new name! I was thinking something along the lines of "Mr. and Mrs. Domingo Chalupas." We'd be entirely incognito. A mystery surrounds us! We begin to spawn children. All boys! Each of them physically perfect in their own way. Each of them beyond reproach. It's not too late to begin again, and with a woman like this, the prospects are endless.(Shepard, 1993, p. 35)

Colonel's speech recalls Shepard's interview with Matthew Roudané (2000) that Shepard considers "the myth of the American Dream and expresses frustration that it, like the West, has never been succinctly defined" (p. 69). He believes that the image of the "Wild West" that has become so instilled in the American psyche sprung "from advertising campaigns," and he posits "that Americans accept the fantasy promulgated in advertising because they prefer fantasy over reality" (Roudané, p.



70). Thereby, the Colonel takes Mexico as a place of rebirth and in his imagination makes an unachievable reality.

Simultaneously, the play refers to the famous archetypal male tradition which goes back to the Bible when Stubbs says "Abraham, maybe. Maybe Abraham. Judas," who is searching for the "original moment" that triggered the everlasting war between fathers and sons (Shepard, p. 44). The same as Abraham, who wanted to sacrifice his son Isaac to God, in this play Colonel is willing to sacrifice his son Stubbs to "the God of war" (Shepard, p. 44). "It is a sacrifice for a violent concept of manhood, for the belief that fighting in a war is a manly and heroic deed" on a metaphoric level, Shepard is saying that America is the father willing to sacrifice all the sons, even by force, for what he considers a "hoax" (Rosen, 1993, p. 39). In Stubbs' word, he (the Colonel) gave him up and invented his death (Shepard, 1993, p. 23).

Another national symbol and also myth which is used ironically in *States of shock* is the American flag. The wheelchair on which Stubbs sits is decorated with American flags and also there is a mark of the national flag on it. Moreover, He is "covered from the waist to the ankles with an old army blanket" (Shepard, 1993, p. 6). This touch of irony deepens as the play develops. Shepard seems to indicate through such images that "violence is concealed by the flag, providing a patriotic/nationalistic cover for the violence" (Madachy, 2003, p. 129). American flags are not able to hide the reality of a wheelchair bound victim of war any more "than could President Bush's campaign visit to a flag factory distract from the reality of economic and spiritual decline" (Biggsby, 2000, p. 192). However, perhaps they did again. More ironically Stubbs had been wounded by his own side and, "whether true or not, it is clear that this is a society which is destroying itself" (Biggsby, p. 192). From these statements, one may deduce that Shepard conveys the idea that American iconography, such as the American flag, "sugarcoats the fact that America is founded on violence and violation" (Prohaszkarad, 2010, p. 74). His criticism is directed against "any totalitarian regime and against any kind of torture. At the same time, he also criticizes the ignorance with which people accept the status quo and fall captive to serving a power that denies their right to freedom and which ultimately destroys them" (Prohaszkarad, p. 74).

Hitherto, the inevitable outcome would be the fact that Colonel and Stubbs confrontation represents a battle between those fathers who make war and those sons who must do battle: "between the Patriarchal, pre-Vietnam myths of a righteous American military and the shattered, post-Vietnam realities of young men killed and traumatized in a costly and paranoid war of expansionism" (DeRose, 1992, p. 134). Like an abusive father who disciplines his disobedient child, or more concisely, like the media in Baudrillard's view, Colonel seeks to, even harshly, influence and mold Stubbs' character into the image that he (government) desires. In Baudrillard's term, media is a medium of pervading hyperreality and help the government to induce the public to believe in its ideology and create myths. According to David DeRose, in postmodern America, media-



generated myths grew so fast in huge proportions that they lost all connection to the reality from which they once sprang (DeRose, p. 3). “They became hollow simulacra infiltrating all aspects of America’s cultural identity; but no longer capable of sustaining its inhabitants” (DeRose, p. 3). The media with its seductive power, manipulate the spectators’ minds to think and believe realities as the pre-designed media expects to accept them as reality; here it succeeds in spreading hyperreality.

As the play goes on we gradually become doubtful about Colonel's story that his son was killed in the battlefield and we get the impression that it is not his friend but Stubbs himself that is the son of Colonel. Considering Shepard's other plays, it is acceptable for his readers that they are actually father and son and the person who died at the battlefield is not Colonel's son but his friend or even an invented story which comes to be a fiction (Morimoto, 2007, p. 77) Concerning the myth of quest, Stubbs is one of Shepard's typical characters who quests for identity and *States of Shock* depicts his initiation journey. Paul Seamus Madachy (2003) analyses Shepard's earlier plays, in some of which characters gained the insight to recognize the futility of their quest. He continues:

These characters begin to confront their perception of American identity by acknowledging their connection to past events on both an individual and national level. This crisis of confrontation culminates in *States of Shock* (1990), and since that play Shepard's works have depicted an identity void that results from an America in which its citizens have lost any sense of a collective narrative that unites them as a nation. As yet, Shepard has offered no suitable replacement. (p. 221)

Hence, each character in these two plays tries to establish his position via his own medium. However, the most vivid issue, in this respect, is their common entrapment in the particular types of legends and myths. These myths, by the way, are simulacra. Shepard suggests “that authenticity – the true or real– has been torn down, rather than having never existed” (Weiss, 2009, p. 57). In Baudrillard's view (1994), “when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second hand truth, objectivity and authenticity”. Stubbs, the Colonel and Hobart attempt to get rid of the unbearable condition by creating new world and returning to common and nostalgic issues such as myth. This state is Jean Baudrillard's “hyperreality”, which is presented as reality and result in blurred boundaries between reality and fantasy.

## Conclusion; Trapped in Hyperreality

Hobart Struther understands the essence of living in the hyperreality of city life and steps to the desert which he assumes is the real one where he can heal his wounds go back to his roots and

escape the hyperreality of the city. Hobart describes his work in the city as “the thrill of the kill” and “the ecstasy of power” (Shepard, 2008, p. 16). Hobart notes that the excitement he once felt for his cutthroat business has “eluded” him (Shepard, 16). However, he realizes that he is lost among all which is related to the city: “The sense of being inside my own skin. That’s what I missed. That’s what I missed more than anything else in this world” (Shepard, 16). As a matter of fact, the desert becomes the source of his salvation when his world of freeways, business, and shopping centers succumbs to simulacra. However Baudrillard (1994) states, “It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle” (p. 10). The inevitable outcome is the fact that the desert itself is a simulation which tries to hide this lie. This statement does explicitly accord with Sir Thomas More’s notion that, “it is a no place, no ‘real’ place, or perhaps a place only real in the telling” (Westgate, 2005, p. 741).

Furthermore, whenever Stubbs tries to defend his own point of views concerning his identity and his perception of the events which happens, Colonel labels them as hallucination or imagination: “your imagination has done you in, Stubbs” (Shepard, 1993, p. 39). Stubbs, actually, creates a life separating from others and away from reality. For a long time, he believes the story of colonel since he has no memory of his own as he utters: “The part of me that goes on living has no memory of the parts that are all dead. They’ve been separated for all time” (Shepard, p. 14). However, later in his conversation with Colonel he thinks that “Stubbs” is not even his real name:

Stubbs. You had my name changed! YOU INVENTED MY DEATH!

Colonel. That simply isn’t true, Stubbs. There was some mix-up. Some computer scramble. I don’t know where you get these ideas.

Stubbs. No "next of kin." No "next of kin." A "friend of the family," they told me. That's what they told me!

Colonel. It was simpler all the way around.

Stubbs. Some mysterious "friend of the family." A friend of a friend of my father's friend. (Shepard, p. 44)

According to Susanne Willadt (1993), colonel has invented Stubbs’ death and creates the illusion that he is interested in; “that his real son was a courageous war hero and a real man, unlike the mutilated and impotent Stubbs” (p. 157). Having this picture of the situation in mind, it can be observed that Colonel’s fabricated history explicitly expresses the simulacrum: his history is mere narrative which is based not on fact but fantasy. The past is not immutable fact, but “itself modified: what was once...the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project...has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” (Jameson, 1998, p. 68). His position, in fact, enables him to become the creator of the simulacrum and to forge a new

narrative and make others to believe it. The noticeable result will be his and Stubbs' increasing imprisonment in hyperreality.

Simulation of the frontier, as Baudrillard(1994) argues in *Simulacra and Simulation*, "threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (p. 3). In plain English, simulation "signals the confounding and conflating of binaries, along with the resultant loss of referentiality" (Westgate, 2005, p. 737). As the city succumbs to hyperreality, and Hobart comes to doubt not just his identity but also his existence, he conceptualizes the desert frontier as the "real as the antidote to the simulacral city" (Westgate, p. 737). However, he fails to appreciate and enjoy the liquidation of referential which is the hallmark of Baudrillard's "era of simulation" [16]. In reality, he "had become well aware of [his] inexorable descent into a life in which, daily, [he] was convinced [he] was not intended to be living"(Shepard, 2008, p. 12). Thereby, he decided to leave everything behind for the land in the hope of finding the real but in Jean Baudrillard's view(1988) this dream is inaccessible and false:

American culture is heir to the deserts, but the deserts here are not part of a Nature defined by contrast with the town. Rather they denote the emptiness, the radical nudity that is the background to every human institution. At the same time, they designate human institutions as a metaphor of that emptiness and the work of man as the continuity of the desert, culture as a mirage and as the perpetuity of the simulacrum. (p. 63)

Having lost his horse and being forced to take a rest, Hobart endeavors to pitch his tent. A violent storm is coming and Hobart cannot comprehend the reason of having so much trouble "taming the wild"(Shepard, 2008, p. 59). He then compares his journey to that of the Goldrush and the western pioneers closing the frontier. He becomes furiously angry that he is incapable of even pitching a tent properly and launches into a diatribe about the destruction of the West and its native population; in Charles Isherwood's term, it "balloons into a laundry list of sins" (Isherwood, 2008, p. 3). He also grieves over what America has done to itself — "stripped itself bare of resources, demeaned the people who've worked the land, and destroyed its own ideals through hubris" (Levin, 2013, p. 5):

I do not understand why I'm having so much trouble taming the Wild. I've done this already. Haven't I already been through all of this? We closed the Frontier in 1890 something, didn't we? Didn't we already accomplish that? The. . .Iron Horse- Coast to Coast. Blasted all the buffalo out of here. An ocean of bones from Sea to Shining Sea. Trails of Tears. Chased the Heathen Redman down to Florida. Paid the Niggers off in mules and rich black dirt. Whipped the Chinees and strung them up with their own damn pony-tails. Decapitated the Mexicans. Erected steel walls to keep the riff-raff out. Sucked

these hills barren of gold. Ripped the top soil as far as the eye can see. Drained the aquifers. Damned up all the rivers and flooded the valleys for Recreational purposes! Ran off the small farmers. Destroyed Education. Turned our children into criminals. Demolished Art! Invaded Sovereign Nations! What more can we possibly do? (Shepard, 2008, p 60)

Finally, he erects the tent and climbs inside and the storm subsides in the distance. Hobart thinks of praying, but can't bring himself to think of God in this godless world. Hobart's struggle and failure in the desert leads him to criticize himself for thinking that his journey into the wilderness would cause him to "somehow feel miraculously at peace? One with the wilderness? Suddenly—just from being out here, I'd become what? What? Whole? After a whole lifetime of being fractured, busted up, I'd suddenly become whole?" (Shepard, 2008, p. 28). Here, Hobart realizes that he is fractured and there is no point in this journey and myths. Furthermore, he starts speaking directly to the dead horse: "Maybe the two of us—huh? Maybe that's it. Both of us were meant to go down in the hole. Do you think so? Maybe that's exactly it. Both of us" (Shepard, p. 57). The fact that he deposits himself, the horse, and the cowboy hat in the grave he has dug would suggest "the inability, impracticality, and failure of modern American masculinity to adapt new forms of identity" (Knowles, 2010, p. 28 ). Finally, Hobart announces:

*Hat like that shouldn't be down in a hole. Brand-new hat. Hardly even got a chance to break it in. Slowly, he climbs back down into the hole where he originally made his entrance, disappearing. Long pause, then the dead horse slams forward, this time downstage, with a mighty boom accompanied by bass timpani offstage, dust billowing up, filling the stage. The horse falls into the hole with just its head sticking out.* (Shepard, 2008, p. 67)

By presenting the question of contemporary men's crisis of identity failing to find a solution and being trapped in the hyperreal world, the play challenges its addressees to get involved and attempt to find an answer for themselves. *Kicking a Dead Horse* provides a look at an American man at the end of his life who after having raised a family, becoming rich, and losing his sense of "authenticity", departs for the West. Nevertheless, in his journey he questions the ontological certainty of the West itself and at the end he sees that there might never have been any "real" West. Under the logic of simulation, the "real" is consisted of unanchored, free floating signs that are subject to "artificial resurrection in the system of signs" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2).

Consequently, American history may be constructed on the foundation of simulacra. In this case, Hobart or any other Shepard's characters, cannot take refuge from the hyperreality of the city on the desert frontier, as Baudrillard (1988) utters that the desert, the same as the city has become, or perhaps always was, a hyperreality, "It is not the least of America's charms that even outside the movie theatres the whole country is cinematic. The desert you pass through is like the set of a

Western, the city a screen of signs and formulas [...] The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies” (p. 56).

From what has been discussed so far, one can deduce that there is a connection between national and individual identities. Accordingly, Gerri Reaves contends, “Whether an author views America as an ideology, a set of cultural codes, a geographical place, a metaphorical space, a myth, a fiction, or even a state of mind, that vision defines the sense of self and structures an autobiographical discourse” (cited in Dyne, 2012, p. 24). Consequently, if one’s culture is “destroyed” a national identity and even a sense of self become difficult to define. There is a tremendous endeavor on the playwright’s part to display Stubbs’ condition and state of mind in this fragmented society where he is completely alone.

Rather than undergoing a “perennial rebirth” that transcends corruption, stagnation, and uncertainty, Hobart undergoes an almost perennial diminution of self. As he follows the archetypal trajectory into the desert, strictly speaking, his identity continually fragments and goes toward undeniable extinction. Juan A. Tarancon (2004).describes the condition of the individual in the culture devoid of mythical values:

As myths lose their essence, neurosis settles. The degeneration of traditional myths and the rise of a new pop mythology in a society that considers itself post-mythical and purely scientific exposes the dispersal of meaning, the waning of community, and the psychological backbone of individuals whose selves have been torn asunder. (p. 31)

As a victim who suffers loss of idealism in his relationship with his country, Stubbs in *States of Shock* has been shattered by his inability to gain the principles that delineate the nation. Paul Seamus Madachy(2003) defines this condition well as he states that “the glory and power which once radiated from the nation’s symbol now occupy a place alongside the rest of the useless, ineffectual gewgaws that might hang from a car’s rear-view mirror” (p. 140). Disillusioned Stubbs recites his “dissociation” while overseas fighting for his nation: “It didn’t smell American to me. It smelled like a foreign sea. The birds were not American birds. I wanted to have a feeling for home but nothing called me back. I wanted to have a memory”(Shepard, 1993, p. 19). Then he directly talks to the audience and in three words expresses the separation he feels as an American from the ideology of the nation: “America has disappeared” (Shepard, p. 20).

As victims of false advertising, they strive to achieve a vision of American identity that is only a half-truth; but the dark underbelly of national character is purposely concealed from public view. In this condition recognizing reality is not a simple task:

Reality unfixed is also, Shepard's play suggests, the condition of postmodern America, and thus it is intimately tied to the various "American" themes present in his work. Shepard's fantastic spectral palette of spoken American vernaculars, if the rival idiolects his characters speak, is an extension of the fragmentation of our land into a growing number of self-generating subcultures. Mother, father, and son experience reality so differently that they no longer speak a common language. Instead, they have each generated a personal vernacular to give expression to the world they see. (DeRose, 1992, p. 138)

Consequently, in this media and image-dominated world "where immediate and first-hand observation has been replaced by images of a technologically and virtually created reality" (Prohaszkarad, 2010, p. 73), pinpointing the real is a sophisticated task. David J. DeRose's remark does also indicate an important point about the role of the media in luring the public's view. Furthermore, he states that "as if to remedy that myopic media coverage and to remind Americans of the physical and emotional reality behind the masculine myths of war, Stubbs frequently wheels himself to the front edge of the stage, pulls up his shirt, blasts on his whistle, and thrusts his wound in our faces" (DeRose, 1992, p. 136):

*(Stubbs suddenly lifts his shirt again and shows his scar to Glory Bee.) Stubbs (to Glory Bee):* Right here is where it went through. It went clear through here and out the other side.

Colonel: Stubbs, put your shirt down now. The lady's already seen that. (Shepard, 1993, p. 10)

Considering the setting of the play, the restaurant, is like a place out of the world which is disconnected from the reality of America. As C.W.E. Bigsby (2000) puts it, the restaurant becomes a kind of "no man's land on a mental battlefield" (p. 193). It reminds the reader of the Disneyland and the concept of hyperreality. According to Jean Baudrillard (1994), Disneyland with all its fascinations exists to hide that America is the "real" country, or in other words, all of "real" America that is Disneyland (p. 10). Shepard in this restaurant mixes reality and fiction to the extent that it is hard for the readers to distinguish them. We get the impression that the restaurant is not real as everything seems to be pretentious like the white couple who try to be civilized and the milieu which at first seems to be calm and nice. Bigsby (2000) in *Modern American Drama* describes the restaurant as a place which "still has the remnants of a faded civility about it, becomes the stage for a post-apocalyptic drama, an image of an America which has slid from war into a boredom which threatens to devolve into anarchy" (p. 193).

Baudrillard(1994)believes that Disneyland's presentation as an imaginary place make us believe that the rest is real, while in reality "all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are

no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation” (p. 10). The characters are “blinded by the multitude of images, facets, and perspectives of reality and interpretations of the world that they are exposed to and that are imposed upon their own thinking” (Prohaszkarad, 2010, p. 73). Hence, similar to characters, the readers also get confused of the reality of the situation and this merging of reality into unreality makes a hyperreal world for both audience and characters. By the end of the play, the reader assumes there must be a war outside the restaurant which is going to invade their privacy.

As it has been mentioned above, the play includes other characters including Glory Bee, an incompetent waitress who creates comic situations such as when the Colonel repeatedly models for her how to properly carry a tray of glasses, but she is incapable of doing it right. The name of Glory Bee, the waitress, suggests her symbolic presence. Susanne Willadt (1993) argues that Glory Bee is “present mainly for decorative purposes. [...] Women characters in Shepard’s plays, as in *States of Shock*, very often are marginalized and portrayed mainly by negative stereotypes” (p. 158). Clumsy as a waitress and simplistic in her dialogue, as her name connotes she “symbolizes a restorative power” and in fact successfully or not she plays a role of redeemer for Stubbs (Willadt, 1993, p. 210). Stubbs develops a strong connection to Glory and in a way she revitalizes him, while Colonel is not successful to be close to her. He assumes the name is French and he cannot associate the name Glory with America. Moreover, he cannot recall her name when he wants to order a glass of water, yelling “Oh, miss! Miss! What the hell was her name? ‘Bee’ somebody?” (Shepard, 1993, p. 30)—the word he can’t remember is glory which is supposed to be the main achievement of American life while it is forgotten even by the supporter of the government.

Besides Glory Bee, Colonel and Stubbs, there is a couple in the restaurant, the White Man and White Woman, who are made up to look “*white and pallid, like cadavers*” (Shepard, 1993, p. 5). During the play, mostly, they complain about Glory Bee service or they are verbally abused by others on stage. Seemingly affluent couple, “dressed completely in white, very expensive outfits, reminiscent of West Palm Beach” (Shepard, p. 5). They “remain at the edges of the play as cadaverous embodiments of mainstream consumer consciousness” and try to pretend that they are civilized ones (Wade, 2000, p. 263). However, as the story goes on we see how ignorant they are such as watching unmoved as father and son debate the terrible cost of war. Anyhow, this restaurant is a hyperreal world which Buadrillard (1994, p. 2) refers to as a “world without a real origin” and characters are trapped in it. A crucial issue that needs to be noted here is these characters nostalgic longing for past:

Glory Bee (*in booth*): “You know what I miss? You remember how we used to have those little ‘quiet times’ just before the sirens? Way back when it first started? I think it’s a shame we don’t have those anymore.” White Man: “I agree.” (Shepard, 1993, p. 39)

Through the course of the story, outside of the diner there seems to occur an unspecified war which threatens to intrude in. This war on a metaphoric level can connote the intrusion of reality into the unstable world of hyperreality which is not easy to cope with. As the battle sounds intensify and the restaurant patrons prepare for an impending attack, Glory and Stubbs put on gas masks, while Colonel and the white man appear not to survive the war taking place around him. Glory and Stubbs seem to be prepared to endure the battle and come out alive, and this “suggests that glory can be returned to American character” (Madachy, 2003, p. 146).

By the end of the play, Stubbs regains his ability to communicate and revives his physicality to get out of the wheelchair. He also regains his memory and remembers all the details from that fateful day when he was wounded. He says that Colonel was present the day of the battle: “The part I remember—The part that’s coming back—is this. (*To COLONEL, on his knees.*) Your face. Your face leaning over my face. Peering down. [...] Your face, lying. Smiling and lying. Your bald face of denial. Peering down from a distance. Bombing me” (Shepard, 1993, p. 43). He blames Colonel for abandoning him which results in his present condition as he claims: “YOU INVENTED MY DEATH!” (Shepard, p.23). Stubbs’ revelations restore his own strength and potency as he rolls around with Glory on the floor. Although Colonel has no physical problem, suddenly he sits down on the wheelchair instead of Stubbs. This represents his aging, weakness and his defeat. *States of Shock* “takes Western conventions and bluntly inverts them in an attempt to make America face up to its past, to the hypocrisy of its national mythic constructions, and to a mentality that keeps on blundering in the present” (Wynands, 2005, p. 301)

The ending of *States of Shock* has been received different feedbacks. John Simon considers it as nonsensical. Stephen Bottoms (as cited in Simon, 1991) who takes the play’s final image—Stubbs, frozen in a moment in which, while wielding a saber, he hovers behind a clueless Colonel, seemingly intends to decapitate him— as pessimistic and “chilling. *States of Shock* ends with Glory Bee passing out gas masks and the characters wear them while all of them (except Stubbs) sing Leadbelly’s “Good Night, Irene”. This image freezes and the lights fade. Stephen Bottoms (1998) takes this scene as a “quietly suicidal lament for unrecoverable dreams, juxtaposed starkly with that Damoclean sword hovering over Uncle Sam, wielded by his own ‘son,’ creates a chilling conclusion to an awkward but nonetheless provocative play” (p. 249).

On the other side of the dispute, there exist optimistic viewpoints about the potential for Americans as Stubbs reclaims a sense of identity and recognizing the illusion long time they stick to. He appears to recognize “that identity and the past are only myths to be performed and manipulated” (Williams, 1997, p. 64). Yet, as postmodern characters who live in the society, ruled by simulation and hyperreality, they are regularized in ranges of public’s responses and choices. They are, in fact, controlled by the system though they think they escape it. Baudrillard (1994) asserts in *Simulations* that certain “models” and “codes” are introduced by the system to make the individuals react as it is pre-programmed in the domains of economics, politics, social life and culture (p. 11).



By all means, Shepard leaves too many questions unanswered in this play and creates in last scene a dreamlike condition which intensifies their continuous entrapment in hyperreality. Apparently, Stubbs is successful in making a change and taking the control of situation whereas Colonel, similar to Hobart Struther undergoes an almost perennial diminution of self. As a matter of fact, the inescapable doom of the alternation of the generations is indicated by the changes of the owners of the national flag and the wheelchair. Stubbs' standing above Colonel with a sword seemingly preparing to decapitate Colonel (and his values) shows his dramatic physical recovery. However, this transformation might indicate that Stubbs will be another Colonel in a new form as hyperreality which disguises in various masks in order to beguile and manipulate the public. In simpler terms, in such a world of elusive truths, shifting images, and simulacra, and in a culture of disbelief and suspicion, gaining an insight and holding the control of oneself seem to be still a dream. Furthermore, AslyTekinay (as cited in Weiss, 2009, p. 34) defines Shepard's political drama as nihilistic.

*Kicking a Dead Horse* and *States of Shock* imply that the American ideals that fed men's souls are tarnished and corrupted. As far as the plays fail to provide any other options for a man like Hobart, at the end he has no alternative but to die. According to Baudrillard, when the only possible real event is death, there exists nihilism (as cited in Harden, 2011, p. 2). The characters reach to the point that Hicks (2011) considers as nihilism: "that nothing can be known, that human potential is nothing, and that ethical and political ideals have come to nothing" (p. 198). Having witnessed the characters' fate, what comes to mind of a reader is the noticeable issue that they are not unique; there is always someone to take their place and even to struggle but finally they are doomed to failure. As Sandra Wynands (2005) affirms, "Shepard seems to propose a depressing, yet apparently accurate, vision of humankind's inability to learn from history and to change its course. Human beings are condemned to repeat their mistakes because they fail to gain insight into the dynamics of those mistakes" (p. 35). The American ideals and myth are finally decayed and useless. The truth has become elusive and deceptive, and characters, noticeably Hobart and Stubbs, are doomed to wander vainly in search of reality in this hyperreal world.

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