

**COWBOYS AS THEATRICAL PROPS AND DRAMATIC  
DEVICES: SAM SHEPARD'S *COWBOYS #2* AND  
*GEOGRAPHY OF A HORSE DREAMER***

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The mythic figures that inhabit the stage in most of Sam Shepard's plays are carefully reconstructed from elements, features and traits assorted from deconstructed and dismantled pop-culture icons. In the development of the plays, these intertextual mythic figures undergo a process of an elaborate demystification, of deconstruction. The playwright follows the route from deconstruction to reconstruction and finally to re-deconstruction, being motivated quite differently in each play. Shepard's employment of the mythic image of the cowboy as a theatrical mask and a dramatic device is an intriguing instance of this intertextual mythopoesis. In *Cowboys #2*, the cowboy image becomes an articulate and useful prop in Shepard's effort to look into the issue of theatricality, to examine the very nature of the theatrical event. In *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, Shepard employs the cowboy image as a *deus-ex-machina*. In this play, he considers the condition of the artist whose vision and integrity are threatened by commercial concerns. By undermining the *deus-ex-machina* figures he stresses that a non-personal and miraculous release from such forces is practically an impossibility.



Sam Shepard's dramatic cosmos is uniquely informed by an extensive preoccupation with myth on a number of different levels. Commenting on the properties of myth that he finds valuable and intriguing, Shepard writes: "Myth speaks to everything at once, especially the emotions. By myth I mean a sense of mystery and not necessarily a traditional formula" (Marranca ed. 217). In most cases, the sense of mystery that Shepard is talking about becomes evident as a primary force in his writing. Furthermore, the playwright is also involved with myth in more concrete terms than the ones suggested above. Pop iconography, mass-media images and national heroes that have attained the status of myth in contemporary America become an indispensable feature of his work.

Sam Shepard does not restrict himself to employing and discussing ready-

made mythic entities. The myths in question undergo a process of considerable transformation and redefinition at his hands. The act of deconstructing images, figures and icons in order to pick up elements, features and traits to be used in reconstructing a new face, an original entity, which is eventually demystified and thus re-deconstructed, is one in which Shepard shows particular talent and dexterity. This process, like virtually every other aspect of Shepard's dramatic discourse, is essentially multifunctional. Mythos is employed by Shepard in various ways and for different reasons in each individual play. In plays such as *The Unseen Hand* and *Operation Sidewinder*, the demystified figures and the dismantled icons are placed in a contemporary American setting and are allowed to establish a line of communication with the cultural, political and social context of the particular moment, as the playwright attempts to formulate and voice an innovative response to his immediate environment. On the other hand, it is in plays such as *The Mad Dog Blues*, *The Tooth of Crime* and *Angel City* that the playwright finds chance to examine the mythic quality of celluloid icons and rock idols and question his own personal identification with the icon.

In *Cowboys #2* and *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, the process in question facilitates the articulation of issues pertaining to the notion and practice of theatrical representation. The present discussion sets out to describe the place and illustrate the function of the mythic persona on a stage, offering an insight into the nature of theater itself, in *Cowboys #2*, and to analyze the employment of the cowboy image as a deus-ex-machina, in *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*.

*Cowboys #2*, presented for the first time at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in November of 1967, is a revised version of Shepard's first play ever: *Cowboys*, a play triggered by one of the playwright's real life activities. As Shepard himself has explained in an interview with Kenneth Chubb and the editors of *Theatre Quarterly*, the play "happened because Charles and [he] used to run around the streets playing cowboys in New York" (Marranca ed. 190). The playwright has often addressed this very fascination of his with the cowboy image, while at the same time shedding light on the centrality of the particular index in American culture: "Cowboys are really interesting to me... most of them really young, about 16 or 17, who decided they didn't want to have anything to do with the East Coast, with that way of life, and took on this immense country, and didn't have any real rules"(190). Shepard and his friend, Charles Mingus Jr., decided on the above mentioned role-playing activity, since they recognized an apparent parallel between the free, reckless and uncompromising temperament of the mythic cowboy persona and their own; in Shepard's words: "between the two of us there was a kind of camaraderie, in the midst of all these people who were into going to work and riding the buses" (190).

In the context of the play, the word "cowboys" refers to and recalls the particular role-playing activity to a much greater extent than the historical,

the cultural, the cinematic, the legendary or the mythic notion of the cowboy. By means of the title of *Cowboys #2*, Shepard plays upon the audience's expectations concerning the actual subject matter and the central theme of the play. Shepard invites the audience to follow the imaginary process of reconstructing a picture from bits and pieces of images coming from a variety of sources. For anyone among Shepard's intended audience the notion of the cowboy signifies and is signified by such figures as Buffalo Bill, John Wayne and others, as well as by such contexts as the game of "cowboys and Indians." Shepard realizes the intriguing value of the word "cowboy" in the collective American mind. The word in question appears to be a general and indefinite term, allowing for and facilitating the paradigmatic display of images. As William Savage Jr. notes in his book *The Cowboy Hero*, "despite the tomes that commemorate him, the cowboy remains the invisible man in our national past, for while we know almost exactly what he did, we have no very clear historical idea of who he was" (3).

In *Cowboys #2*, Sam Shepard outlines the two dramatis personae along general, abstract lines. The stage directions read as follows: "On each side of the sawhorse is a Young Man seated against the upstage wall. They both wear black pants, black shirts and vests, and black hats" (Shepard 1986:140). The information provided in these lines — abstract and general as it may be — is all that one gets in regard to the particulars of the two characters. These two figures evoke and refer, indefinitely — almost vaguely — to cowboy images. The playwright directs and prompts the audience — once they have encountered the difficulty of placing the characters — to revisit the stock of cowboy images they have available, and further on to reconstruct the picture by deconstructing figures and picking up elements and traits at their own will; material from films, comics, folk tales, songs, historical accounts may be utilized. However, as the dramatic action starts off, the audience is led to the step of re-deconstruction, since they have to discard all of the above mentioned images and are required to pay attention to the role-playing aspect of the "cowboy" notion.

The two characters play around and experiment with the cowboy image as a theatrical mask. As the play develops, Stu and Chet keep getting in and out of role. They fashion for themselves the roles of two elderly cowboys, Mel and Clem. This is a game-like activity taken up in earnest and carried out in a serious manner by the two characters. Like the cowboys in Shepard's mind, Stu and Chet appear to have no rules whatsoever in their improvisation. Thus, quite often they disagree as to what direction their game should take. It must be noted that they are themselves the authors of their performing texts and at the same time their primary audience. For the two characters this performing text becomes a center. Their activity bespeaks and reveals a yearning for a defining center. Like Shepard and his friend they are in need of placing themselves, of defining themselves against others. Early on in the play, it is made clear that the cowboy persona is but a pretext for an insight

in performance, an excuse to review the issue of theatricality and pose the question of what being on stage involves.

In the case of *Cowboys #2*, Shepard is particularly definite and precise about his point of interest and his intentions. By means of the first sentence of the text of the play he makes clear that "the setting is a bare stage" (140). *Cowboys #2* — as if it were a Brechtian play — depends a great deal on gestus; the director and the designer have to direct their efforts towards a stage that refers primarily to a stage. On the other hand, the demands placed on the actors performing the dramatis personae in the specific play are of a complex nature. Kenneth Chubb comments on a specific aspect of the task in question:

Here the actor must create in his imagination and the imagination of the audience those film sequences that inspire children to play cowboys and Indians. ... in the same way that a child can stop in the middle of a game and be himself, so an actor playing a man playing an "old-timer" being attacked by Indians must be able to stop at any time and be the man or the actor.

(Chubb 19)

Kenneth Chubb accurately points to the significance of cinematic intertextuality not only in the staging of the play but equally so in its reception. It is important to underline that Shepard succeeds in utilizing and exploiting such an intertextuality in a play that primarily seeks to explore the theatrical event.

In an effort to examine the relation between the actor and his role even further, Shepard comes up with still another set of characters, Man Number One and Man Number Two. These two characters remain off-stage throughout the greatest part of the play; however there is an intricate correspondence between them and Chet and Stu. The dramatic action as well as the play within the play are initiated by a voice off stage. As the play starts off, the two dramatis personae visible on the stage, Chet and Stu, appear to be sleeping; they wake up and proceed with their verbal interaction only after Man Number One is heard speaking off stage:

MAN NUMBER ONE: (off left) It's going to rain.  
STU: Do you think so?  
CHET: What?  
STU: Uh, rain.  
CHET: Oh ... sure. Maybe.

(140)

In this encounter between the performing "I" (Man Number One) and the performed "I" (Stu), it is not quite clear whether the first line forms part of the actual text to be performed or if it is just a casual phrase that was never meant to transcend the boundaries of the wings of the stage. Shepard, in a subtle, yet telling mode handles the issue of the relation and the interaction

between dramatic art and life. The playwright appears to be thinking about the specific issue along the same lines as Allan Kaprow does when he notes that:

The dividing line between art and life should remain as fluid and indistinct as possible, and time and space should remain variable and discontinuous so that, by continuing to be open phenomena capable of giving way to change and the unexpected, performances take place only once.

(Kaprow 190)

At the same time this instance serves to remind the audience that there is an even larger set enveloping Chet and Stu as well as their role playing activity. Although the two characters are presented as the authors of their free and un-preconditioned performance, still one cannot help noticing the playwright's own authorial voice at this point. The opening lines set the rhythm, the tone and foreground the character of the entire piece. Throughout *Cowboys #2*, the two characters, Chet and Stu, are provided — in a sense bombarded — with various incentives and differing stimuli which evoke their performance. Thus, in the opening scene, they are presented responding to the word — and as a consequence also to the idea and the notion of — rain. At a later instance in the development of the play, the two characters are seen reacting to the physical phenomenon of the rain. The playwright's interest lies in comparing and juxtaposing the two distinct reactions. In other words, emphasis is placed on the manner in which the character-performer shifts from the state of contemplating the idea of rain to the state of actually experiencing the phenomenon of rain. What is of primary significance in this case is following the two different modes of performing that Chet and Stu come up with as well as what each one of these modes involves. Similarly, throughout the transformations from a younger persona to an older one and backwards, as well as in the course of the imaginary and game-like transposition into the "cowboys vs Indians" arena what is being dramatized is this very route from the one state to the other, from the particular role to a modified version of that role.

Sam Shepard has deliberately ascribed a rather loose structure, an indefinite air and a general identity to these two characters in an effort to facilitate the dramatization and the exposition of the above described process of becoming via performance. Shepard's ideas concerning the issue of theatricality seem to be in accordance with those expressed by other contemporary practitioners and theorists of drama. Thus, for example, Robert Benedetti notes: "Acting is not self-expression; it is self-extension. Acting is neither seeming nor being; it is becoming" (Benedetti 87).

Furthermore, Joseph Chaikin has stressed that: "as the actor advances in the process of the work, the person is transformed. Through the working process, which he himself guides, the actor recreates himself" (Chaikin 6). Chaikin has also expressed the idea that character denotes "the actor's study

of a single person (not necessarily other than himself)" (6).

In an article entitled "Actors Acting Actors," Martin Esslin has quite appropriately underlined that: "all acting consists of the actors acting actors ... entering upon an enterprise of 'semiosis' " (Esslin 79). However, it must be mentioned that not all plays are designed and written on the assumption that the semiosis in question has to be made explicit and needs to be dramatized. Sam Shepard's plays are primarily noted for a conscious theatricality — the most striking and blatant example of which quality being found in *Cowboys #2*. Commenting on the dramatis personae of Chet and Stu, Lynda Hart accurately notes that they "differ from the conventional dramatic character since they have little or no identity outside their onstage improvisation" (Hart 30). As mentioned above, this improvisation is their very reality, their text and their center. It is significant to note that Chet and Stu, as dramatis personae, have no exits and no entrances. They are always on stage as well as on a stage.

In the course of the transformations and the role-playing activities undertaken by Chet and Stu as well as beyond that, the two characters perform in and handle verbal and physical action of a minimalist quality. Thus, a dialogue full of repetition and one-word sentences, which, however, makes sense by all means and carries forward the play, is a typical feature and a recurrent phenomenon in *Cowboys #2*:

*They fall on the floor and roll around the imaginary mud.*

STU: Mud! You're beautiful!

CHET: All this mud!

STU: Mud all over!

CHET: Kiss me, mud!

STU: Dirty mud!

CHET: Aaah!

STU: Muddy, muddy!

CHET: Dirty gook!

*They kiss the floor and throw mud on each other.*

STU: Muck and slime!

CHET: Aaah, mud!

STU: Fucky, fuck!

CHET: Mud and guck!

*The rain sound stops suddenly.*

STU: Oh, mud.

CHET: Mud.

STU: Mud.

*They slowly stop laughing and roll over on their backs. They stare at the ceiling.*

(145)

In instances like this, the skills of the actor playing the character-performer — whether Chet or Stu — inevitably become visible and prominent. Throughout the play and particularly in the above quoted lines as well as at the instance when Chet is performing calisthenics, a point is made

on the significance and the centrality of the actor's body in performance. As Josette Feral notes:

Performance is meant to be a physical accomplishment, so the performer works with his body the way a painter does with his canvas. He explores it, manipulates it, paints it, covers it, uncovers it, freezes it, moves it, cuts it, isolates it and speaks to it as if it were a foreign object.

(Feral 171)

Furthermore, the differing modes of performing and the process of becoming are closely related to perception. Commenting on the cloud formations, which reflect and mirror the characters' own transformations, Stu, facing the audience, delivers the following words, "So it's important! Ya got to notice things like that. ... So ya can stay alive or something. Ya got to notice things like that" (143). The characters in question are mainly interested in perceiving their own selves as they shift through different personae, roles, attitudes and so forth. Sheila Rabillard has noted that Shepard's characters in general appear to be addressing the audience in the following words: "'listen to me,' 'hear me perform'" (Rabillard 62); a statement holding particularly true in the case of Chet and Stu. What is more, the two dramatis personae are involved in an act of listening to themselves perform, of watching themselves acting a phenomenon that Harry Berger has defined as "imaginary audition." In a Derridean mood, Shepard wishes and asks that his character "will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator" (Derrida 306). Sam Shepard appears to be quite intrigued by this particular type of self-inspection, and furthermore he seems to be thinking along the same lines as Herbert Blau, who notes that: "Acting may come out of the desire to know" (Blau 156).

This act of perceiving one's own self, and the effort of knowing and perceiving in general, is what the character-performer attempts to communicate to the audience. The dramatis personae succeed in communicating and sharing this sense of knowing and perceiving with the spectators by means of the body and the senses. In Roland Barthes' words: "The germs of true theater are always elementary movements of prehension or distancing: the surreality of theater objects is of a sensorial, not an oneiric order" (Barthes 27).

*Cowboys #2* provides Shepard with the chance to examine and question what needs to be made visible in theatrical terms as well as how one is to define the positive esthetic. By means of Stu's "aria," commenting on the grotesqueness of images, conventionally regarded as beautiful and pleasant to the eye, such as peacock feathers and painted turtles, Shepard passes a judgement among other things on the staleness and sterility of the images provided by commercial and established theatrical practices. In the process of the monologue, Stu gets into a description of dead-end situations and environments of stagnation such as chickens being fed on their feces and flowers striving to blossom in slimy water. Shepard appears to be making a

statement on the danger that the employment of overused, worn out and depleted conventions entails for the very essence of dramatic art; his drama of minimalist and in a certain respect absurd action is being juxtaposed to the so-called successful enterprises of Broadway.

Towards the end of the play, the performed "I" and the performing "I" become simultaneously present. At a particular instance, *Cowboys #2* offers concurrent and parallel backstage and onstage verbal action. These two levels of verbal action are, in a certain respect, quite related and corresponding: as Stu and Chet carry on a conversation on the pleasure of breakfast, Man Number One and Man Number Two can be heard off-stage handling the topic of living expenses. On the other hand, Chet's and Stu's game-like role-playing activity is carried on till the end of the play, even up to the point when Man Number One and Man Number Two actually appear on stage holding the script of *Cowboys #2* in their hands and start reading the play from its very opening lines. At this point, it becomes rather difficult for the audience to recognize precisely and definitely the identity of the performed "I." One can not safely decide whether Stu has given up the role-playing activity or not. Has his text ended? Can't he bear any longer the cowboy mask? Has Stu himself fainted? Is he out or in role? The one answer that the audience gets at this point is that there is a text enveloping Stu and Chet. After all, this is a play with an authorial voice, the audience is in the theater and is led to become conscious of its own presence. This is part of the task that Man Number One and Man Number Two have to fulfill. The indefinite state between being and becoming as shown in Stu's case is compared with and contrasted to the monotonous reading of the play provided by Man Number One and Man Number Two. Although Man Number One and Man Number Two are in effect *dramatis personae* themselves, the overall venture of exploring the interrelation and the line of communication between the performed "I" and the performing "I" is successful to a remarkable extent.

In *Cowboys #2*, the mythic image of the cowboy as such is never realized on stage. The mythic status of the cowboy triggers the particular role-playing activity, and in fact, the play itself. Being a familiar and widely shared mask, the cowboy image becomes a particularly useful prop in this insight into performance. Thus, all references and points made about the cowboy figure in the play are closely related to the act of role-playing.

On the other hand, *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* offers a full length presentation of the cowboy image. Furthermore, in this case the task assigned to the mythic entity in question is quite clear and specific. Jason and Jasper appear just before the end of the play and provide the drama with a solution, their role being that of a classic *deus-ex-machina*. The two Wyoming cowboys succeed in saving their brother Cody, a gifted horse dreamer who has been kidnapped by gangsters, carried all the way to England, imprisoned and forced to dream dogs instead of horses. As a typical *deus-ex-machina* the



cowboy image is introduced at the crucial and climactic point. At the moment when the doctor has already started operating on the back of Cody's neck and is about to excise his dreamer's bone, the two cowboys burst into the scene killing the doctor and two of the gangsters, and thus saving their brother.

Shepard's portrayal of the two dramatis personae is quite detailed, careful and particular:

They're both about six foot five and weigh 250 lbs. each. They wear Wyoming cowboy gear with dust covering them from head to foot. Their costumes should be well used and authentic without looking like dime-store cowboys. They both carry double-barreled twelve-gauge shotguns and wear side guns on their sides.

(Shepard 1984: 306)

The authentic air of the specific figures, that makes them appear as if they have escaped from a realistic western film, has quite a peculiar effect on the overall esthetics of the play. Jasper and Jason, in being authentic cowboys, are juxtaposed to every other dramatis persona in the play, who all appear to have a presence of a metaphorical quality. *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* quite obviously and directly dramatizes the metaphor of Cody as the artist who is being exploited and whose work and vision are threatened to be commercialized and cheapened. Cody's western background, his outfit and primarily his name allude to Buffalo Bill, the legendary figure of the West, who became tragically involved in commercializing and selling his very own mythic past and identity. Characters such as Beaujo, Santee and Fingers stand as aspects of the same "artist" persona, aspects of the artist's character that to a lesser or greater extent allow the above mentioned exploitation. The metaphor is expressed with great directness and honesty, as becomes apparent in instances like the following one:

SANTEE: It ain't Fingers. That's a byproduct of the situation. The reason we is here is on account of Mr. Artistic Cowboy here. Backslidin' on his system.

(280)

The two cowboy figures are extraneous to the specific metaphorical pattern and structure prevalent throughout the play; their place and status are appropriate for any *deus-ex-machina* figure. Because of the realism involved in the portrayal of Jason and Jasper, eventually they appear incongruous, foreign, and even unrealistic in the context of the play. The very act of reconstructing the mythic faces of Jason and Jasper entails a process of defamiliarization, of demystification. As Shepard's characters transcend spatio-temporal and cultural boundaries, they also surpass the confines of the traditional and conventional cowboy-hero image. In addition, the reconstruction of their faces is significantly based on cinematic

intertextuality, since their sudden appearance in England recalls and refers to science fiction heroes rather than to western figures.

Yet the Wyoming cowboys are further on demystified in a more serious and elaborate manner. It should be noted that Jason and Jasper differ considerably from characters such as the Morphans in *The Unseen Hand*, who remain totally inactive in the liberation of Nogoland or Mickey Free in *Operation Sidewinder*, who is for a certain period of time engaged in an absurd and futile revolutionary plan, in that they actually succeed in rescuing their brother. However, it is precisely this act of rescuing that demystifies them, for it remains quite debatable whether they really save Cody or not. Earlier in the play it is mentioned that Cody had also been exploited by his family, in particular his brothers, in the past. Furthermore, as Jason and Jasper lead Cody out of the hotel room, the latter does not recognize nor does he address his brothers; rather, his words are indicative of an acute feeling of alienation and uprootedness:

This day. ... Even after the smoke cleared I couldn't see my home. Not even a familiar rock. You could tell me it was anywhere and I'd believe ya! You could tell me it was any old where.

(300)

Ross Wetzsteon's statement: "I'm disturbed by the apparent confusion in Shepard's mind as to whether or not Cody is in fact rescued at all" (Wetzsteon 135) appears to be quite a sound and justifiable response in a certain respect. However, it can be argued that Shepard is deliberately ascribing such a dubious colour to the denouement of the play. Although, on a surface level, Shepard appears to be particularly in favour of the operatic tone of the ending of the play, in fact he undermines the optimistic air of this scene quite effectively.

Shepard wrote and directed *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* in 1974, while living in England. The play presents and exposes the author's own predicament at that time. Shepard realizes and reviews in Cody his own yearning to regain immediate contact with his native cultural background. In addition, the character reflects the playwright's longing for an artistic expression free from business concerns and commercial prospects. Shepard desires and dreams of a miraculous rescue from the forces threatening to alienate him from his roots as well as his artistic goals. And yet, he realizes that such a wish is unrealistic, his plan rather implausible. By undermining the *deus-ex-machina* figures in this play, he highlights his conviction that one has to work hard, on a personal level, in order to remain immune to commercialization and also to establish a viable line of communication with one's cultural background. According to Shepard, longing for such a miraculous release can only take one to the indefinite state between being free and being imprisoned that Cody finds himself in.

What makes *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* an intriguing and exceptional

case is Shepard's willingness to read through his own preoccupations and dilemmas. To dismiss the ending of the play as "phony" (135) — as Bonnie Marranca does — is to fail to recognize the significance of the ambivalent presence of the Wyoming cowboys for Shepard's purposes. In regard to this final scene, Ross Wetzsteon finds Shepard in a moment of "despair." However, he stresses that there is a positive aspect about it:

In this confusing mixture of rescue and captivity ... I sense Shepard's despair at resolving the dilemma of art and exploitation. But I also sense that in a way this confusion is redeeming, for in at least confronting it, in trying to come to terms with it, he is not surrendering but continuing the painful struggle of a maturing artist.

(285)

Shepard's leap into his cultural background is quite intricate and significant. A figure of the mythic West, a cowboy icon, Buffalo Bill helps him address persistent and urgent questions of his. The playwright assigns a central role to the cowboy image in this enterprise of self-dramatization. On the other hand, he undermines and exposes his nostalgia by re-deconstructing the cowboy figure, this time in the faces of the two Wyoming cowboys. At the end of this dramatic exposition of argument and counter-argument, Shepard knows and lets his audience know the way one has to follow in order to (re)establish lines of communication with one's cultural background. The play emphasises the centrality of cowboys in Shepard's inner library, in his thinking as well as his art.

Furthermore, the play addresses the question of spontaneous creativity as opposed to systematized and methodical writing. Thus, Cody is heard saying: "At first it's all instinct. Now it's work" (285). In a similar vein, Shepard reminisces about the early stages in his career as a playwright in the following words:

I can remember being dazed with writing, with the discovery of finding I actually had these worlds inside me. ... I wrote all the time. Everywhere when I wasn't writing, I was thinking about it or continuing to "write" in my head. I'd have six or seven ideas for plays all rolling at once. I couldn't write fast enough to keep up with the flow of material running through me.

(Shepard 1986: ix)

In the case of Cody, Shepard dramatizes his own entrapment in a business-like activity and also his confinement within a specific art form. In "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library," he notes: "The structure of any art form immediately implies limitation. I'm narrowing down my field of vision. I'm agreeing to work within certain boundaries" (Marranca ed. 216). At the end of the play, Cody, although far from being free, succeeds in defying the form; his dreaming evolves around the notion of home, rather

than horses or dogs. The denouement in this play articulates in theatrical terms the romantic desire and aspiration of transcending the limits of one's own artistic expression. The liberation that Shepard "dreams" of is of the same quality as the one Herbert Blau is talking about in *Blooded Thought*:

The hunger is visceral, psychic, formal, metaphysical, paracritical, the actor's desire meeting the character's desire meeting the theatre's desire ... for liberation from its own limits.

(114)

Finally, it should be mentioned that Shepard, a playwright who has made clear that he "can't be anything other than an American writer," (Marranca ed. 216) borrows and draws his theatrical masks and his divine figures quite appropriately from the mythology of the West. In *Cowboys #2* and *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, they prove particularly helpful in his efforts to look into and examine the issue of theatrical performance as well as his personal predicament as an artist.

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Οι μυθικές φιγούρες που εδρεύουν στη σκηνή στα περισσότερα έργα του Sam Shepard, χτίζονται προσεκτικά με στοιχεία, χαρακτηριστικά και ίχνη που συλλέγονται από αποδομημένες και διαλυμένες εικόνες λαϊκής κουλτούρας. Στην εξέλιξη των έργων, αυτές οι διακειμενικές μυθικές φιγούρες υποβάλλονται σε μια διαδικασία πολύπλοκης απομυθοποίησης και αποδόμησης. Ο δραματουργός ακολουθεί την πορεία από την αποδόμηση στην αναδόμηση και τελικά στην εκ νέου αποδόμηση, έχοντας διαφορετικά κίνητρα σε κάθε έργο. Η χρήση από το Shepard της μυθικής εικόνας του καούμπου, σαν θεατρική μάσκα και δραματικό τέχνασμα, είναι μια πολύ ενδιαφέρουσα περίπτωση αυτής της διακειμενικής μυθοποίησης. Στο έργο *Cowboys 2* η εικόνα του καούμπου γίνεται ένα εύγλωττο και χρήσιμο σκηνικό αντικείμενο στην προσπάθεια του Shepard να διερευνήσει το θέμα της θεατρικότητας, να εξετάσει την ίδια τη φύση του θεατρικού γεγονότος. Στο έργο *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* ο Shepard χρησιμοποιεί την εικόνα του καούμπου σαν από μηχανής θεό. Σ' αυτό το έργο εξετάζει την κατάσταση του καλλιτέχνη, του οποίου το δράμα και η ακεραιότητα απειλούνται από εμπορικά ενδιαφέροντα. Υποσκάπτοντας τις φιγούρες των από μηχανής θεών τονίζει ότι μια απόσπλη και ως δια μαγείας αποδέσμευση από τέτοιες δυνάμεις είναι πρακτικά αδύνατη.