



Sam Shepard's "Kicking a Dead Horse" As a Drama of Self-Confrontation

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قراءة لمسرحية سام شيبارد "ركل حصان ميت" كدراما عن المواجهة الذاتية

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Abstract

This paper explores Sam Shepard's play "Kicking a Dead Horse" as a drama of self-confrontation. The paper analyses the character of Hobart Struther and his journey of self-discovery, examining how the play reflects the human struggle with mortality, identity, and self-awareness. Through close reading and analysis of the play, this paper argues that the selected play is a powerful exploration of the human condition and the struggle to come to terms with oneself.

Keywords: "Kicking a Dead Horse", Sam Shepard, Drama, Postmodernism, Self-confrontation

المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث مسرحية سام شيبيرد "ركل حصان ميت" باعتبارها دراما عن مواجهة الذات. تحلل هذه الورقة شخصية هوبارت سترثر ورحلته لاكتشاف الذات، وتفحص كيف تعكس المسرحية صراع الإنسان مع الفناء والهوية والوعي الذاتي. من خلال القراءة الدقيقة والتحليل للمسرحية، ترى هذه الورقة أن "ركل حصان ميت" هو استكشاف قوي للحالة الإنسانية والنضال من أجل التصالح مع الذات. تتبع الورقة النظرية لما بعد حدثية في تحليل النص. ويتم تحليل النص من حيث الموضوع واللغة والبناء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: "ركل حصان ميت"، سام شيبيرد، الدراما، ما بعد الحدثية، مواجهة الذات

Introduction

As Hobart Struther, Sam Shepard's character in "Kicking a Dead Horse," faces his demons head-on. This paper, in this sense, proposes that the play delves into the universal themes of death, identity, and self-awareness, shedding light on the significance of facing one's mortality head-on to discover oneself. It shows how the play investigates deeply into the human experience and the inner battle for self-discovery. To discover the inner-self, one must face many difficulties, according to A. Almaarouf:,(٢٠١٧)

“There is nothing as before. Everything comes to be chaotic and the previously known as a social system is recognised as nonsense in postmodern age” .(P. 81)

As a drama about accepting one's mortality, this paper will analyse how the play mirrors the human battle with death, identity, and self-awareness, the study digs into Hobart Struthers's character and his path of self-discovery. This study seeks to better understand the significance of self-confrontation on the road towards self-discovery.

How does the play explore the human struggle with mortality?

How does the play examine the concept of identity and self-awareness?

- How does the character of Hobart Struther undergo self-confrontation in the play?

By seeing "Kicking a Dead Horse" through the lens of a drama of self-confrontation, this paper offers a fresh take on Sam Shepard's play, which is why it is important. The study emphasises the significance of facing oneself head-on on the path to self-discovery. It adds to the continuing conversation on the human experience of grappling with death, identity, and self-awareness.

The paper provides an insightful analysis of human nature and the internal conflict that accompanies it.

Previous research on Sam Shepard's plays has focused on masculinity, family, and American identity themes. However, there has been little research on "Kicking a Dead Horse" as a drama of self-confrontation. This paper draws on existentialist philosophy to explore the themes of mortality, identity, and self-awareness in the play and the importance of self-confrontation in the journey towards self-discovery.

This paper uses a close reading approach to analyse the selected play as a drama of self-confrontation. The analysis focuses on the character of Hobart Struther and his journey of self-discovery, examining how the play reflects the human struggle with mortality, identity, and self-awareness. The paper draws on existentialist philosophy to provide a deep knowledge concerning the themes explored in the play.

1. The Concept of Self-Confrontation

Confrontation, says Baron (1993: 6), is a mosaic of other people's opinions of us and our desires. "Confronting a person with his or her image, behaviour, or experience employing an artefact; that is, proposing a representation of the person's reality" is what self-confrontation entails, according to Rix and Lièvre (2010: 847). One common method has been to film people as they carry out an activity, such as a teacher giving a class. The self-confrontation interview method achieves within-method triangulation by integrating systematic observations, retrospective think-aloud protocols/stimulated recall procedures, and (qualitative) interview techniques.

According to Von Cranach and Kalbermatten (1982), there are typically three stages to a self-confrontation interview: (1) requesting that individuals in order to do the desired activity; (2) recording the behaviour while observers watch; (3) presenting the recorded behaviour to participants and inquiring about their "thoughts and feelings during the act" (i.e., the 'core' self-confrontation interview, Von Cranach & Kalbermatten, 1982, p. 144).

Nielsen (1962), in his turn, says that "the involved self is different from the uninvolved self" when confronting the playback. Confrontations may arise in casual conversation, such as when someone brushes their hair in front of a mirror (34)" in the following ways. Participants know they are being videotaped and are prepared to see themselves in the various experimental settings. This sequence, he said, was like asking someone to stare at themselves in the mirror or to do it unconsciously without anybody else there. According to him, the previous scenarios made people confront their reflections. Make an emotive picture.

To rephrase, self-confrontation is a strategy for seeking improvements in one's practices via observation, recollection, and reflection (Ceni Dinardi, 2009). For a comprehensive look at people's behaviour, it utilises video recordings. According to Eachus (1965), one advantage of using video recordings is that they allow you to face yourself or give others comments. Psychological guidance that emphasises self-confrontation, in another view, may help individuals make positive behavioural adjustments (Lyddon et al., 2006).

The educational strands also use it to understand the knowledge, verbal exchanges, behaviours, experiences, and work of instructors. Its purpose in language classrooms is to help instructors reflect on and make sense of their pedagogical actions by encouraging them to observe and record student responses (Muller et al., 2016). Simple and crossed self-confrontation are the two main categories. An individual may take stock of his or her actions on the job by engaging in simple self-confrontation.

They may also do this by watching videos of themselves doing various tasks. Crossed When you face yourself, you must have other people Assist in problem-solving or get feedback on observed actions by watching video recordings of someone in practice. According to Clot and etal., (2000), researchers and counsellors facilitate both self-confrontations. Students may need help understanding the need and necessity of successful confrontation if they have had poor experiences with criticism and confrontation. Conflict evokes unpleasant emotions (Lankford, 2004). All these things make students nervous when they think they will be incorrect, criticised, offended, or make a mistake. Another possible explanation for students' lack of effective confrontation skills is that they have trouble helping the client's true problem, which prevents them from addressing it head-on.

Sam Shepard was an accomplished American playwright, novelist, actor, screenwriter, and director who lived from 1943 until 2017. Off-Off Broadway Theatre Genesis staged Shepard's first two plays, "Cowboys and Rock Garden", in 1964, marking the beginning of his career. Ten Off-Broadway Theatre Awards (OBIEs), a Pulitzer Prize in Drama (1979) for his play "Buried Child" (1978), and an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor are among his most notable accomplishments. Shepard was "a plain-spoken poet of the Modern frontier who combined ruggedness with lyricism," as Jake Coyle put it, making him "one of the most influential playwrights of his generation" (Krasner, 2003).

In 1964, Samuel Shepard Rogers III changed his name to Sam Shepard, carrying on his father's surname, a World War II bomber pilot. Throughout his youth, Shepard frequently visited many American Army locations. Until his dad left the military. The whole family then made their home on a ranch outside Duarte, California. While Shepard admired his father's bravery and work ethic, he hated his father's recklessness and erratic mood swings, all because his father's drinking and lack of family responsibility caused him to have a tumultuous connection with his father. (Winter, 2000)

Consequently, there were many fights, and Shepard rebelled against his father. It is worth noting that Shepard often based some of his characters on his family members, even if this work does not establish any links between his family history and his playwriting. Shepard also takes inspiration from his mother for many female characters in his family plays (23, 109).

Shepard becomes a member of the Repertory Players upon his high school graduation. After graduating from college, he joins the company on a cross-country tour, eventually leading him to New York City. Then, Shepard meets the founder of Theatre Genesis, who puts his pieces on stage for the first time. It is the first work by Shepard, which would go on to have a fifty-year career. Sam Shepard passed away at the age of 73 in July 2017 at his home in Kentucky due to Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which is a form of Lou Gehrig's disease. A dying man is the protagonist of his final work, the posthumously released book *The Spy of the First Person* (2017) by Shepard, which is strongly tied to his battle with Lou Gehrig's illness. While Sam Shepard's family plays like *Buried Child*, *True West* (1980), and *Fool for Love* (1983) helped propel him to stardom in the 1980s, this paper will centre on his earlier works, which he referred to as experimental, in which he sought to explore his artistic abilities and nature (Krasner, 291).

2. Analyzing “Kicking Dead a Horse” and a Discussion

Shepard's character exemplifies self-confrontation; he attempts to communicate the hardships he was going through then but cannot alter his circumstances due to governmental policy. Many of Shepard's works depict his grief and other negative emotions. His play "Kicking the Dead Horse" is among his most prolific.

American playwright Sam Shepard wrote the 2007 drama, "Kicking a Dead Horse". This roughly 80-minute play is a good example of a dramatic monologue in which a single male character delivers his lines until a female character arrives. Tragically, Hobart Struthers's horse dies in the desert, cutting short his journey. He kicks it in a fit of annoyance. He gets to his feet and tries to make a decision. He has left his wife and comfortable life behind in pursuit of self-discovery. He had to lay the horse to rest. It turns out to be very challenging. After that, he discusses many aspects of his life and personality, trying to be genuine (as he says several times) until it looks like nothing would work no matter what he does (Bottoms, 1998, p. 12).

After Hobart finishes digging the grave of his dead horse, the play continues to depict his self-image of loneliness, which serves as a visual reminder of the play's primary conflict. The unexpected demise of Hobart's horse has left him stranded in the desert. For reasons of devotion and esteem by the cowboy ideal, he prepares a decent burial for the horse. Throughout the remainder of the performance, Hobart fights physically to get the horse's weight into the grave, symbolising his internal struggle with his mind and emotions. Midway through his 60s, Hobart experienced a crisis of identity when he travelled to the desert in quest of his "authenticity," a quality of life he believes he has lost yet had fond memories of from his days as a cowboy in the American West. Hobart describes his present domestic circumstances as mundane and lonely. Problems are brewing in his marriage. He no longer has any children. Hobart has a rough go of it and gets furious with the horse. He takes a break and thinks about his history. He concentrates on staying alive long enough to find a lighter load or set up camp. Then, a mysterious man shows up, returns Hobart's cowboy hat, and Hobart puts the horse, the hat, and himself in the hole he dug. The drama depicts Hobart's epiphany that forces him to visit his grave. The Western landscape, which the cowboy often inhabits, has also come to represent the aggression, initiative, independence, and roughness that are stereotypically associated with males. The whole time, Hobart is busy trying to bury his dead horse. The more aggressive aspect of his character convinces him to bury everything in his cowboy gear, including his new beanie. An enigmatic woman emerges from the tomb after Hobart discards the cowboy hat and returns it to his head. As the lights go out, the cowboy places his horse, everything of his belongings, and himself in the grave.

There is a Constructed view of Western existence in Hobart's relationship with his "authentic" or "truer" self that disregards the facts about cowboys, The very fact of being. How Hobart sees the cowboy shapes his perspective of who he is. It makes it quite clear that Hobart's conflicted selves are not working together harmoniously. There are sections of dialogue between Shepard and himself that break up the monologue. When performing, Hobart uses two voices, one for himself and one for his alter persona. In addition to Hobart's tendency to blame himself, his internal monologues are very contentious. Tragically, the early explorers' quest for power, empire, and expansion led them to a morally decaying world, and many of them took their own lives. Tracking back America's moral and political disaster.

Everything begins to go apart as the show comes to a close. The hat and the horse have found their last resting places at the crematorium. As the sun sThe sky grows darker ass and the prairie wind and thunder get louder and more terrifying, the sky gr no match, for I sprang into the abyssal blackness, braving the furious wind. The realisation that His true nature is powerless in the face of the crimes perpetrated in his name ultimately debilitates Hobart.

Literature critics have long relied on scientific methods to analyse various forms of literature; nevertheless, Richard Rorty is leading the charge to a new understanding of literary criticism that, if completely grasped, might be immensely valuable. Since the person is never permitted to challenge his position, what has primarily intrigued Rorty as a postmodern philosopher is the isolation of subjective thinking and how it might continually lead to a new gesture.

Cowboys, a one-act play that Shepard wrote in response to his interest in cowboy culture, is illustrative of his early work as a writer, then creates a play with the same plot as the last act. It delves deeply into his perspective on the cowboy, reflecting his views not as a young man but as an older man nearing the end of his career. Consequently, the following research first investigates the cowboy's history from two mythical and psychological angles to establish the extent. When focused on a fixed platform, the meaning of the cowboy notion becomes hazy.

Because philosophical argumentation can only ever lead to a single, predetermined outcome, Rorty argues that the capacity to "talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change" (Rorty, 1999, p. 7).

In contrast, honing one's oratory skills opens limitless avenues for self-reinvention. Following this line of thinking, Rorty developed the concept of a liberal ironist who can constantly rethink and reshape himself in pursuit of greater ideals. Literary writers who explore the Construction of the self, such as American playwright Sam Shepard, whose work is "a journey into the mystery of The self and mapping these states of consciousness" (Grant, 1991, p. 553), are ideal examples of liberal ironists according to Rorty.

"The rapid shifts of awareness and the sensations of the experience in writing" were the prevailing themes of Shepard's theatre, according to him (p. 550).

The American self-discovery he sought His focus is squarely on the physical place; he considers the American West to be integral to the American identity, and his extensive exploration of this issue has earned him the nickname "a conduit that digs into the

American soil and what flows out of him is what!" (as cited in Kroll et al. (1985, p. 71)). Sure enough, the cowboy stereotype is one of the main things that keeps drawing Shepard into the American West. Even from the titles of his one-act plays, such as *Cowboys*, in which Shepard often attempted to "reinvent one's identity" (Crank, 2012), his infatuation with *Cowboys* is easily apparent. When Shepard wants something solid to establish "the idealisation of American identity" on, cowboys are always there (Madachy, 1985).

However, this study's central argument will make Shepard's play about Rorty's liberal ironist theory more prevalent so that I may better grasp the subtleties of Shepard's cowboy vision and Rorty's literary critique. Far into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the eras Rorty draws his platform of two great philosophers—Friedrich Hegel and Immanuel Kant—Rorty draws contrasting responses to the idea of truth—their respective views on "the world of empirical Science as a made world"—led him to begin his two-hundred-year flashback with Kant and Hegel (1985). "Persisted in seeing mind, Spirit, the depths of the human self, as having an intrinsic nature" (1985), even if they both acknowledge Science's respectable standing. Truth and "higher truth, the truth about mind, the province Of philosophy that is still a matter of discovery rather than Creation" (1985) are two separate but equal branches of reality. Rorty sees this as an opportunity to avoid acknowledging the constructive nature of truth. Inadvertently, Rorty attempts to undermine the idea of truth by interpreting it as an expression of wordplay. Truth, in his view, is nothing more than a psychological fabrication that helps people deal with the external entire planet. "The world is out there, but descriptions of the World are not" (p. 5), he claims with an adamant conviction. It is a turning

point in his philosophical development since he defines truth as nothing more than sentences people use in their interactions. He says we should not be "justified in Believing a sentence true with the claim that the world splits Itself up, on its initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks Called 'facts'" (p. 5). He asserts that "truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences" (p. 8) as long as humans continue to create languages.

In the play, the audience follow Ho-Bart Struther as he ventures into the vast western wilderness. Hobart had just completed digging his deceased horse's grave at the play's opening. Even though cowboy horses are imported goods meant to be saddled to the cowboy, they have become both the play's central emblem and the cowboy lifestyle. In this scene, the play's protagonist, Hobart, conveys his conflicted feelings about staying in the desert when his horse dies suddenly. "Now what?" I am miles away from nowhere, with nothing in sight. I hit rock bottom after only one day. Abyssal plains stretching out in every direction" (Shepard, 2009, p.12).

However, he starts to prepare a suitable cemetery for his horse out of pure affection for it. What begins as a physical struggle to place the horse's corpse into the grave represents Hobart's inner struggle with his emotions and thoughts, which he experiences throughout the play. Hobart, a sixty-year-old man, has embarked on this quest in pursuit of what he terms "authenticity," a way of life or being that he has been unable to discover: "What? I guess genuine? "Beyond" means what? Beyond authenticity, what is there? (P.16).

A self-confession is central to the plot of the play. Put another way, the self is always questioning and trying to figure out the best

course of action. The problem is "I am unsure of which "voice" to use," it says before giving in to its demands. "Voice" in finding the appropriate tone for the situation. The situation I find myself in actually—Nothing is crystal clear. It is, but one can only hope that something good will come out of it as time goes on and things become more natural (p. 21) Based on Siegel's observations,

"Shepard has taken it upon himself to Explore the possibility of new myths for our time, most frequently returning to the roots of so many American myths, The Old West" (Siegel, 1982, p. 241).

If this theory holds, then Hobart, the play's protagonist, should be happy having finally found his mythological origins; however, it is clear that he is never satisfied with his life's mystery and that he recognises the banality of his situation, both of which contribute to his discontent because the situation is unclear. His children have abandoned him, his marriage has hit a wall, and his professional fortunes have started to decline; he seems to be suffering terribly. Hobart still has difficulty seeing himself as genuine since he keeps thinking about his history. What Hobart is trying to unearth from his history is the foundation upon which he can establish his identity and presence. However, nothing he does works, and he still needs help locating such a platform. He may give up becoming a cowboy since he still can not find a Status that suits him. Heienced all the difficulties that a cowboy or Westerner would face. The central theme of this narrative is how the protagonist faces both feasible and impossible decisions. (Shepard, 2009, p. 32)

Richard Rorty, a postmodern philosopher, was captivated by Shepard's play because it shows how the individual's ability to consistently examine his standing might lead to new gestures. He said that it is more important to have a "talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well. Is the chief instrument of cultural change" (Rorty, 1999, p. 34), according to Rorty, who claims that Romanticism has replaced the idea of endless opportunities for self-creation. Instead of always arguing for the same conclusion, one can work on growing their speaking skills to have endless options to remake themselves. Rorty generally follows a "count-er- tradition that delights in undermining the magisterial im-Age of the philosopher supposedly upheld by Kant, Husserl" (Mccarthy, 1990, p. 342).

He believes that all great philosophers, from Plato to Kant, have treated philosophy as an independent field with its vocabulary and ideas. For this reason, they have never stopped looking for "reality's language rather than Merely the vocabulary of a time and a place" (Rorty, 1999, p. 48). No matter what you call it—"mind or matter, self or world"—he does not quite agree with the romantics who understand that nothing has an inherent essence (Rorty, 1999, p. 48). That is also in line with what Shepard argues for in his play. Shepard is always cautious while making claims. Just as Rorty refers to these foundations as "Final Vocabularies," he argues there is no good reason for individuals to seek redemption. That people may understand themselves according to their standards rather than others imply that both the individual and the universe are meaningless, outdated, and helpless. Revisionism often brings shame (Rorty, 1999, p. 70). "In Kicking a Dead Horse", the cowboy played by Sam Shepard, goes through a similar ordeal. As a result, Hobart is trying to pin down who he

is. He goes to extreme lengths, including removing all of his Western clothing, to pull it off, which ultimately transforms him into overwhelmed and sad. He must decide with absolute certainty what to do with his life. Undoubtedly, he is experiencing feelings of shame. However, because redescription—his work—involves shame, he has no choice but to accept it.

Conclusion

To sum up, Shepard's demeanour reveals an element of self-confrontation. He tries to show us the hardships that people in the United States face. Because of the rules and regulations, people can not change their lives. Shepard may be a liberal ironist in his own right since none of his characters, including the play's protagonist, ever settle on a course of action; instead, they aimlessly wander. Their efforts are never in vain, but Shepard keeps his characters in the spotlight as they perform through this challenging scenario. The point when the protagonists hit a wall despite their best efforts to discover who they are by repeatedly taking on new identities. However, they have had to undergo self-description anyhow. As a visual reminder of the play's primary tension, the author closes the self-control by depicting Hobart's self-image of loneliness as he finishes digging his dead horse's grave. However, he still needs to find his System for studying the American West. Shepard stresses that Western Americans have an unrealistic and mistaken notion of the gleaming cowboy because of his legendary position and a few distinguishing characteristics. Be aware, nevertheless, that looking for the real myth in its background is fruitless. Just as the protagonist in "Kicking a Dead Horse" goes through an infinite cycle of self-creation while

humiliated, the audiences should embrace the fact that this is the human condition.

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