CHAPTER V

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

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

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

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

Hollywood emerges against the backdrop of the cultural awareness of an empty space wherein the artificial invention of monuments and relics to prop up a façade of civilizational continuity has become a political necessity as America as a nation has continued to remain a metaphor of a future poised distantly, and Hollywood, therefore, ventures to affect a mechanism of breaking the dichotomies of this historico-cultural distance to evolve, what Jameson calls, “the phantasmagoric global American postmodernist culture”. And this culture calls Johannes Birringer, “is characterized by being a culture without a perspective.” In Hollywood, artists are,
as Tympany in *Angel City* puts it, “locked into the narrowest part of (their) dream machine” (40) and thus Hollywood colonizes the artist’s imagination. It entraps the subject in a space of perpetual monotony where the same products are circulated over and over again which eventually leads the subject to a situation in which the subject with a “deep sense of failure” (Shepard qtd. in Rosen 26) fails to locate a space for himself.

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

Hollywood is an institution for the systematic privileging of one language over others. Jim Luc Comelli explains Hollywood in Althusserian terms: “Because every film is part of the economic system, it is also part of the ideological system, for cinema and art are branches of ideology. None can escape, somewhere, like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle all have their allotted place. Cinema therefore fails to escape homogeneity.” It remains a part of the uniform identical mass culture where the artist
becomes a terrible victim. Yet the artist, like the drum plays Tympani, in almost Fausti and fashion is drawn to the Hollywood world. Lanx tells Tympani: "something drew you down here to us, something indescribable" (AC 31).

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

While talking to Taper Literary Manager, where Angel City was produced (1977), David Copelin, Director Robert Calhaun and writer Sam Shepard exchanged their views about Hollywood which formed the central setting in Angel City. Copelin, however, defined not only the play as "melodrama about selling out" even more than that. The artist protagonist of the play Rabbit Brown is seen as aware of being attached to power as well as being repelled by it. Shepard described his experience of Hollywood as painful and torturous. "People here sink or swim without even knowing how it happens". The play Angel City is written by him from his own understanding and experience of Hollywood which is, as Shepard clarifies, "not to regurgitate it but to use it as a catalyst." (Ibid). Like Rabbit Brown, the artist protagonist, Shepard too got involved with Hollywood not only as an actor but also as a writer to join a project
with Michaelangelo Antonioni at the age of around twenty four for the film Zuhriskie Point what Shepard recalled as: “I was 24 and just wasted by the experience. It was like a nightmare”. (Oppenheim, qtd. in DeRore 80).

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

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

All innocence was now behind her. All dreams of the life of man free and unfettered as she once knew it was on the plains of Nebraska. Here was the hard care cement. The concrete reality of the dreaming machine. The terrifying destruction which faced her head on was now
met by her own indivisible courage which she felt welling up from
same deep primeval source which she knew not of. Suddenly the
solution was clear. In her mind’s eye was a simple equation. It
appeared like a flashlight in a hooker’s nightmare. Money equals
power, equals protection, equals eternal life. (AC 18)

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

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

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

Against the backdrop of Hollywood totalitarianism the Hollywood aspirant
with all his greed for success is robbed off his imagination about what Rabbit himself
soon becomes aware of and he becomes a conscious accomplice of Wheeler who
represents the corruption of Hollywood. Rabbit realizes:
"I've connived in the deepest cracks of the underground. Rubbed knuckles with the nastiest poets. Done the 'Rocky Mountain Back Step' in places where they've outlawed bubble gum." (AC 12)

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

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

Lanx immediately endorses:

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

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

(It) is not simply an act of terror but something which will in fact drive people right off the deep end. Leave them blithering in the aisles. Create mass hypnosis. Suicide. Auto destruction. Something which will
open entirely new fads in sado-masochism. Penetrating every layer of their selves. Something which not only mirrors their own sense of doom but actually creates the possibility of it right there in front of them. It's our duty. We owe it to the public. For without the public we are nothing but a part of that public. We must stand apart, or another plane. We must rise to the challenge. We must help them devour themselves or be devoured by them. The time is ripe for this obliteration. We must rise to the occasion or be lost forever in a tidal wave of oblivion. (AC 15)

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

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

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

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

Cinema of Hollywood has deeper cultural significance. It is one of the most authentic expressions of the quintessential American fantasy. It is not a mere art, but a
gorgeous reflection of the ideological American identity. As Lee says in *True West*:

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

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

Thus the conditions of artistic existence is redefined within the new space. In the case of Hollywood it means “Some little fantasy, some tiny little delusions that you’ve got tucked away. They’ll pry it out of you ... They’ll feed off your hunger. They’ll keep you jumping at carrots. And you’ll keep jumping all the time you’re jumping” (Tympny, *AC* 17). Through Hollywood the ideology transforms into a material entity in which the artist represents to himself an illusion in concrete form. This concretization of the ideological illusion is realized through the interrelationship between the subject and the system which affects, as Althusser would say, “imaginary representation of the real world” (“Ideology and Ideological” 164). Miss Scooms reflects it when she described her experience of the system:
Here was the hard core cement. The concrete reality of the dreaming machine. The terrifying destruction which faced her head on was now met by her own indivisible courage which she felt welling up from some deep primeval source which she knew not of. Suddenly the solution was clear. In her mind’s eye was a simple equation. It appeared like flashlight in a hooker’s nightmare. ‘Money equals power, equals protection, equals eternal life.’ And with that she collapsed at the foot of La Cienaga. (AC 18)

The word ‘ideology’ was originally invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends to define the theory of ideas (Althusser, 158), but in Shepard it turns out to be almost a Marxist ideological experience, that is, it dominates the mind of the man, or the group of individuals. When most individuals or the group of individuals are easily dominated by the discourse, the artists try to resist it through their inherent capacity to remain as outsiders. The complex situational intricacies and the powerful apparatuses of the system are in combat with the artist, and the apparent failure to win as well as the resistance against defeat turns him into a being devoid of totality and a bricolage of fragments which Shepard himself has focused on in the beginning of his play Angel City. Shepard defines the “character” in this context as a “fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme. “In other words”, continues Shepard, “more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation” (Note to the Actors, AC 6). Miss Scoons interrogates Wheeler about the authenticity of the act of self annihilation to emerge as what the public has imposed as an image. Wheeler assures: “Of course there is .... We’ve to find that part of our own mind which corresponds to the masses. We’re immune and contaminated at the same time” (AC 39). The realization of the fact of being contaminated by Hollywood spurred one
of the characters in Nathaniel West's *The days of the Locust* to call Hollywood "the final dumping ground". When Wheeler here realizes that he had lost in his gamble to turn his artistic enterprise into an industry of imagination it turned out to be "Poisoned!" and "Putrified!" (AC 42). Rabbit endorses "It's no business! It's a disease!" (AC 42).

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

I look at the screen and I am the screen. I'm not me. I don't know who I am. I look at the movie and I am the movie. I am the star..... For days I am the star and not I am..... I look and I hate my life not being a star. I hate being myself in my life which is not a movie and never will be. I hate having to eat. Having to work. Having to sleep. Having to go
to the bathroom.... Having to live in this body which isn't a star's body and all the time knowing that stars exist. (AC 21)

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

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

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

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

The conscious journey of the subjects into the dark zone of oblivion properls them to appropriate the discourse through the media which they have supposedly mastered to control and in the process they are actively engaged in thwarting the
questions posed by the new entrants when it comes to redefining the status of an artist as well as the procedure of artistic creativity. Wheeler, who is one of the insiders of the system, dismisses Rabbit's claim of being an ARTIST by saying, (Being a producer) I'M IN DEMAND! YOU'RE DIME A DOZEN!" When Rabbit tries to assert his superiority by citing his creative capacity Wheeler described "Creation's a disease" (AC 45). The parameters are obviously different, as are the producers. This is 'auto-destructive' a 'mass hypnosis' created through hysterical media fed violence that has to configure an apocalyptic conflagration.

The individuals are displaced from their respective identities which forces the continuous fracture of their unpresentable identities. This eventually authenticates the fact of their being mere simulated stereotypes and their succumbing to the Hollywood hegemony. The subjects are fast reduced into unrecognizable non-entities. Miss Violet, a city prostitute in Rainer Fassbinders play Garbage, the City & Death comments: "From day to day the city is growing bigger. The people in it are growing smaller" (qtd. in Birringer 16). Similarly, the experience of Hollywood for the self conscious characters happen to be an encounter with a dehumanized, degraded space of suffering and destitution. The sight of Angel's City's spiritual degradation is found to have been reflected in a painting by Tod Heckett called The Burning of Los Angeles which captures the moment of a city's apocalyptic vision that traces the psychological journey of moving to the zones of the repressed, from Eros to Thanatos what Freud would define as "a society that is deeply in grip of the death drive". But the process has not only produced commodities it also has reduced the supposed
producers into commodities. But Wheeler realizes that his own presence emerges as an experience of eternal deference. He has been erased into an abstraction through a process of physical degeneration from whose body oozes the slimy green substance indicating the process of manufacturing movies which, as Wheeler claims, are inside his blood, churning around that tears him apart, "chewing (him) apart from inside out" (AC 43). In the process he even fails to make communication in physical/linguistic terms that could evoke any reciprocation. He finds himself amidst a world absolutely intelligible and devoid of meaning. Rabbit Brown reminds Wheeler of the stark contrast of Hollywood fantasy with the reality which is not a mere "hanky, panky love story and romantically depicted apocalypse" (AC 51). This disclosure is a terrible threat to the very existence of Wheeler which turns out to be a 'hard core disaster' not only in case of the movie but to his sense of belonging to a milieu as well. Wheeler desperately urges Lanx to rescue him from the ongoing onslaughts of threats but Rabbit makes the deadly blow by disclosing that they can't hear, they can't even see Wheeler for he has become an intangible entity through media simulation which like the distant frontier of America transforms into an ephemeral being constantly eluding physical authenticity that underlines the mutually agreed distant dynamics of screen/performance and spectators. Rabbit points out: "You are on the silver screen, buddy, you've been captured in celluloid and you'll never get out. All they are looking at is a moving picture show" (AC 52).

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

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

Henry Michael Heckamore lives in a state of perpetual absence. His existence itself is based on the continual processes of Henry's compulsive dreams. Henry is seduced by his own dreams to accept the world of make believe as his reality. Arline Aisis writes in the review of the Trinity Hall Production of Seduced: "Dreams very often seduce us into believing that we have really done something, been somewhere, seen someone, when actually we haven't" ("Surrealistic Theater"). Henry Heckamore is physically antique who is "old to the point of looking ancient, body is thin and emaciated impression is a cross between a prisoner of war and an Indian fakir" (Seduced 233), who is almost naked, with white hair and long white beard and twisted finger nails and toe nails. He lives in a secluded island set in a third world, south of the border remove, somewhere in Mexico. There he makes attempts to be physically
inaccessible to others as well as to himself. He is so obsessed with the images of his legend that he believes in them to be non-diminutive continual reality. His is a sparsely furnished well-controlled domicile where even nature assumes plasticity to be regulated as per Henry’s wish. Two mechanically raised lush, well cared for potted palm trees about seven feet tall are the first things that Henry wants to be properly placed and well positioned. The room is distinguished by a set of velour drapes reflects the recluses partitioned existence and their distance from the world beyond. His obsession with seclusion is so acute that he even cannot tolerate daylight. So he moves only at night. It is darkness that allows him to accomplish his escapes from the world of stark actuality. He prefers black: “It’s pitch black out here. Perfect. Perfect for escape” (275). Henry’s mission is to make an escape in absolute terms.

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

During the prime of Henry’s time he attained all there is to take from life. He exemplifies America’s popular notion of material success – ‘a surplus of women, war glory, material landslides’ (Aisis). “That the capacity for joy has gone dry. His soul is a void, his mind is muddled. What is left of the man is only breath, bones and skin, some of which are not even his”. It is, ironically, his own legendary power that enslaves him.
The appellation 'Hecamore' refers to a rope device to break horses. His own name refers to Henry's paradoxical status. He, at one point of time, mounted and mastered the world but now he is in bouts of delusion and compulsive withdrawal which have rendered him broken and became what Wade calls "a sullen and isolated misanthrope" (85). Henry's awareness of his own degeneration makes him fearful of the 'world' which he can no longer control. Hence he finds the same world that he used to control:

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

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

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

Henry is an invention of the media that instigated him to have the day dreams of success, glamour, fame which ultimately seduced him into becoming someone else. And he eventually is doomed to become the living entity of the nation's nightmare. America becomes an alien space for Henry where he cannot even dare fall ill.
This country is not fit for a man to fall ill in. There ought a' be a law against falling ill in a foreign country. A man's got a right to die in his homeland. (270)

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

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

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

Henry, the physical recluse, in order to gain supreme control over his private reality, goes for the selective evocation of his lost past through a process which he is confident of manipulating as per his needs. Henry too reflects the concern of Lanx in Angel City who admitted, "My power lies in manipulation. If no one is manipulated, there I'm sunk" (AC 33). Here, however, Henry wants to manipulate his reality so he insulates not only the place he lives in but also himself from the outside world. "Nothing from out there comes in here! No life! Not sun not moon, not sound, not nothing!" (Seduced 249). Henry has incarcerated himself almost in an antiseptic tomb where nothing from outside touches him. His previous existence into that outside world has been metaphorically described to be an experience of rape. There is mutual repulsion between Henry and the world.
"It is a mutual arrangement. I don’t touch it, it does-n’t touch me. That’s what happens when you rape something .... After that you don’t touch. There’s a repulsion between both sides.” (251)

For Henry, the total history of the immediate past is a repulsive aftermath. Hence he takes pain recreate of the selective set of events that would ensure the continuation of his seductive dreams of the past. In order to reinvent the mystery that enshrouded him, he invites two sultry Hollywood sirens Luna and Miami to visit him. They appear in front of Henry directly from their past without ageing. Henry, the fantasist who has been preferring “images to acts and appearances to actualities” (Mottram 28), asks the girls to tell him about life which, in fact, he never experienced. He makes a final attempt to know, at least, about life before his complete obliteration. Henry does not want to have the sensation of it in the form of a metaphorical abstraction but he wants to experience it in absolutely concrete and physical form (smell, taste and sound of life). But ironically, Henry aspires to have a physical experience despite the fact that Henry himself is not accessible for any physical contact. Besides, he wants to experience a tangible reality – the two girl friends – who themselves are the inventions of his own imagination and whose movements are also controlled by Henry himself whom he wants to appear “Like visions. Like moving pictures.” He wants them to appear in the form of beauty idealized, refined and flawless. That is what Henry is accustomed to - distilled reality. Like movies. He is comfortable with images not with physical immediacy. Ron Mottram considers Henry as an artist because of his this desire to manipulate and
his preference for images though he is cut off from the areas of experience essential to the artist or, at least, to Shepard’s conception of artist (For Shepard artist must have a sense of belongingness, must have roots). Leslie Wade describes Henry as a “fantasist, a version of the artist who seeks the farthest outpost of imagination” (85-86). Paradoxically, Henry’s power lies not in his propinquity to his immediate reality, but in his distance from it. It is his invisibility that makes him powerful. That provides him protection. The ambiguity of his existence, the mysterious disappearance, ensures the enigma that he painstakingly built up around himself. It is the lack of knowledge about Henry that makes others fearful about him. Henry is well aware of this hence he does not want to demystify his existential reality:

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

When Luna urges him to touch her, he discloses, he ‘can’t’. Henry being a product of the American mass media and consumerism becomes a veritable slave of marketing manipulation and simulation that shuts him round. His this obsessive paranoia is vividly reflected by his neurotic act of spreading Kleenex sheets over his entire body. He accomplishes consumerist rituals that gives him an illusion of satisfaction – the satisfaction of being possessed and controlled. Henry thus becomes a perfect product of that culture what he calls “Nightmare of the nation”. Eventually it
is not he who seduced the culture with his own powerful inventions (his planes, his
hotels, his movies), rather he himself has also been seduced by the dreams about his
own mythology that relapses him into the state of personal obliteration. "He has
become", as 'David J. De Rose says, "a living metaphor of the great American dream
of supreme wealth and power" (89). But in the process he lost a vital part of himself
that ensures freedom. As an attempt to regain control over himself he tries to reinvent
his invisibility to subvert the attempts of the state agencies to erase his metaphysics of
presence. Paradoxically it is his invisibility that signifies his presence. His visibility
would destabilize the image that Henry Heckamore stands for. It is the modified and
unreal shadow of Henry that replaces his real existence. Even Henry believes the
abstract notion about himself to be the truth and all other truth and realities as non-
existent. Henry would celebrate his own death. Because even death cannot destroy
Henry, for the physical Henry is already dead. He survives beyond his mortal
remains. "I'm dead to the world but I never been born" (278). Henry is aware of the
process that transformed him into a fictive reality, a made up entity. But in private he
discovers that he has his own pastoral nostalgia. The nostalgia about the west and the
myths associated with it. For him his reality belongs to Texas:

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

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
I happened in a second, in a flash. I was taken by the dream and all
the time I thought I was taking it. It was a sudden seduction. Abrupt.
Almost like rape. You could call it rape. I gave myself up. Sold it all
down the river. (274)
Henry admits, he sold his soul like Faustus and in a flash Henry is robbed off his soul. Now even his blood is not his own. He even does not know whose body he is in. He recalls his total subjugation to an unreal self-identity based on lies. Henry's reality is a product that reflects the bankruptcy of corporate capitalism.

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

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

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

Henry is conditioned to react to the simulated reality. Howard Hughes too was said to have watched the same movie over and over again because he knew that they would not change. Similarly Henry too regulates the events of life covering all
"variables". Henry distrusts physicality, for despite Henry's physical existence Henry is a corpse, as the world outside knows him as a pilot who wearing his clothes crashed over Nebraska. Henry attempts to retreat to his past through the "played out" narrative by the seductive women of Henry's past who are his "last link" to the world; his very "last possibility ... for remembering. For bringing something back" (262). He needed women, "woman's version" (50). Henry finds women to be his last resort to regain power. Henry even faints at the incorrigible power of feminine seduction:

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

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

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

Henry's nostalgic journey takes him to the space that never had any communion with the people that lived there. It was a space of dissociated totality, a place of the entities divorced from each other. That was a place "Flat, barren. Wasted as far as eyes could take in. Enormous country. Primitive. Screaming with hostility toward man .... As though men didn't belong there. As though men were a joke in the
face of it (271). This is the place where Henry encountered the laughter of rattlesnakes and coyotes:

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

Henry captures the image of civilization that the post-industrial west produced of which Henry too is an integral part with his destroyed subjectivity and the only thing that remains substantial for him is "Air". He even writes his will, making Raul as the heir to his holdings, not on paper but in air. ("Air is the only thing that’ll last forever" 271). In the process of executing the will in air Henry recounts the place and the process of the disappearance. ("I disappeared in a dream" 274). Like Niles in Suicide in B-Flat Henry disappeared from his own persona. But he admits that he has been seduced, that his life has been a chasing of a mirage. Recognizing his damned condition he is infused with a "Mephistophilean energy" (Wade, 86). He assumes his chair as though it were a cockpit and embarks upon a final nefarious flight to Las Vegas which he saw as "glowing in the dark" (275). Henry finally is consciously blurred with his faceless anonymity. His was "A face. A name. No one will ever know for sure.... Invisible. A ghost in the land. No voice. No sound. A phantom. They’ll never get rid of" (275). He becomes an image that cannot even be destroyed. His destruction is possible only through the destruction of the system that ‘invented’ him. Raul fires at him repeatedly, but bullets have no effects. Because he has
transcended his physicality. He is an entity that has turned into a legend of a hidden
power and manipulation, raped by a dream and eventually becomes the "nightmare of
the nation". Ron Mottram calls him "the end product of an aspiration for power and
success, the ultimate American" (130).

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

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

The present study, would, however, look at the play in relation to the issues
that present study concerned with. The two major characters are engaged in creative
writing – Hollywood Screenplay writing. The play captures the moment of two men's
chase for a personal image that is provisionally translated as 'true west'. But this
journey is accompanied by their perpetual awareness of having taken a tour toward an
uncertain destination. The uncertainty prompts the two brothers to go for role
reversals. Austin the well set, self complacent Hollywood screenplay writer takes on
the role of his Bohemian brother, Lee, a petty burglar and a scroungy looking fellow who lives in the desert with a dog. Lee, on the other hand, in a bid to abandon his native identity takes up the role of his brother and starts writing a screenplay which he claims to be the story of true life. Austin, on the contrary, reduces himself into a petty thief breaking into the neighbourhood to steal toasters. The act, apparently, provides Austin a peculiar sense of freedom that enables him to situate himself outside the claustrophobic world of urban propriety. Lynda Hart in her book *Sam Shepard’s Metaphorical Stages* (1987) describes the play as the struggle between rugged individualists of the frontier against the urban socialite which reflects, according to her, Shepard’s own dissenting voice that has rebelled against the restrictions of urban life to defiantly, and often nostalgically, assert the claims of freedom and adventure embodied in the myth of the American West (88). Shepard, however, is concerned with other crucial aspects as well. As Wendy Lesser in his review underlines, the play also focuses on the degree to which the actual life of the old time West has been sentimentalized and corrupted by Hollywood’s illusions. “In Shepard’s imagery”, writes, Lesser, “this aesthetic corruption finds a physical counterpart in the encounter of one wild landscape by a spreading sunbelt suburbia” (19). On a broader conversation, Shepard is concerned with the general impact of Hollywood on America’s process of creating fiction. Words like ‘true’, ‘authentic’ seem to become titular entities unless the work is approved by Hollywood – the aesthetic authority, represented in the play by Saul Kimmer.
The play discloses the tragic entrapment of the creative artist, the social validity of whose work is entirely dependent on the whims of the forces represented by Saul Kimmer. For Sam Shepard himself, Hollywood is a “giant machinery”. Hollywood even absorbed the creative idiosyncracy of Antonioni with whom Shepard was engaged as screenplay writer for Zubriskie Point (1968). Shepard admits the experience of working with Antonioni was a “nightmare” because “Hollywood problems and Big Business problems got in the way.” Shepard points out “There is no way you can work on a major motion picture without the producer having the last say on what’s going to be in the film” (qtd. in Copelin, G). Saul Kimmer in True West enjoys this invisible power which authorizes him to accept or reject a script absolutely on the ground of his private taste and fancy. In a minute Saul Kimmer could turn Austin into just a nobody by rejecting his proposal and accepting Lee’s script instead over a golf club by offering him a ridiculously huge sum of money as advance. This dramatic turn around of events beckons the ambitious desires of individuals and Lee is also lured by this mystery and promise. Shepard observes “a lot of people sink or swim in it (Hollywood) without knowing how it happens, without knowing how you find yourself in a studio office, and without knowing how there you become involved in your first draft” (qtd. in Copelin). Shepard underlines the problematics of being a Hollywood screenplay writer. As a playwright one could find an intimate communion with himself but as a screenplay writer one has to collaborate with dozens of people which is a completely opposite way of working” (qtd. in Copelin). Shepard calls Hollywood ‘a dead set’ and most of the time what one gets, according to Shepard, is a “big hodge podge”. Lee’s so called true-to-life story
is one such pastiche which Saul Kimmer attests as authentic by referring to some vague elements of the story to justify his claim. Kimmer says "(The story) has the ring of truth". Austin dismisses him with a laughter and asks "Why? Because it got horses? Because it got grown up men acting like little boys?" Kimmer fumbles: "Something about the land. Your brother is speaking from experience." Even Austin claims that his stories were also from his experience. Kimmer defends himself by arguing: "But nobody's interested in love these days, Austin. Let's face it" (35). But Austin's source of authenticity as a counterpoint to Saul Kimmer's is equally vulnerable and naïve. Austin makes a desperate attempt to outweight Kimmer's claim by frantically arguing with almost boyish naivety:

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

But Austin tragically fails to understand that his artistic paradigm may not be the one that Hollywood appreciates. Hollywood has its own aesthetic modalities which are absolute in its own right. As Shepard once remarked on Hollywood's needs: "They want jokes. They want clever language, things like that. I don't think that any writer in his right mind who wants to write for himself would try to write for the movies" (qtd. in Copelin). Hollywood is engaged in the creation of the objects of illusion to cater to the audience who are also, as Shepard says, "dreamers". Austin obviously fails to be patronized by a Hollywood producer for he represents a rational view. He is Harvard educated, orderly and intellectual. He believes in having a
reward for hard work and punishment for misbehaviour. He is, as Wendy Lesser puts it, "a bit too restricted but safe". Lee is a complete contradiction to what Austin stands for. He is a transcendent weirdo. His is a world which is messy, drunken, fragmented, irresponsible, violent, filled with lies, half truth and hard truths. Lee is almost an invention created by Hollywood’s own need. He is the psychological other of Austin’s rational self. Lee registered natural triumph where Austin failed. But Lee’s freedom too is restricted within the territory demarcated by Hollywood.

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

The second act depicts the gradual transformation of the artist-Austin and his steady approximation of the geography to which Lee belongs. Austin decides to abandon his private prairie and begs Lee to take him to the desert. Ironically Austin endorses the authenticity of Lee’s plot where two cowboys chase each other down the desert toward an uncertain destination – the ‘Tornado Country’. Austin described Lee’s story, to his chagrin, as a contrived story because two guys are made to chase each other in bizarre coincidental circumstances. The two guys are on tracks with ‘goosenecks’ (cattle trailer as explained by Lee, (20) where they have got their horses saddled up. The first guy, the one in front, realizes that he is chased by the one who has illicit relationship with his wife. Both of them run out of gas and are bound to mount their horses to chase each other. Lee, however, dismisses Austin’s reservation about the real life value of such a story. Lee insists that this is what exactly happens
in his story, his “true-to-life-western”. Lee ends the outline of his story with the
description that turns out to be almost oracular assertions of what actually happens
between the two brothers. The two brothers’ survival in uncertain space prompts them
to exchange their locations only to end up being nowhere. Lee’s closing of the outline
betrays their own aporia:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through a series of accusations and confessions the two brothers come to agree with each other’s proposals in a fleeting moment of fraternal bonding. The
bonding grew through the exchange of power symbolised by Austin’s car. It is the
car that demarcated the identities of the two brothers. Lee wants to borrow Austin’s
car and Austin is torn between giving up his car and keeping it to himself. The keys
move back and forth between the two brothers indicating what Wendy Lesser calls, “the shift of power between them and alternately heightening and releasing the sense of enclosure”. The downing of Austin’s roles makes Lee aware of the portents of unfreedom. Lee now wants to get a way from the world he thought made up of real objects, “something authentic” and not “plastics” (TW 58). Lee finds the cityscape as the breeding ground of insanities. He expresses the desperation:

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

Survival in the city (Hollywood) is only based on illusions constructed in the guise of art. Shepard makes this point as to how much the subjects really depend on the illusions created by art, by rituals, by language. Shepard understands, writes Wendy Lesser, as do all good playwrights, that those illusions may well be our only access to reality. Shepard carefully deconstructs the factors that hold the social fabric intact. Shepard lampoons Hollywood as well as questions the authenticity of the West. The American myths in the play is cuddled in pop fantasies. Shepard is both appalled and fascinated by this process which accentuates the plays’ ambivalence – the ambiguous power. The two brothers in the play even become a kind of “Pop Cain Abel” (Jack Kroll). Their mother’s retreat to Alaska, the last possible frontier of the
West, failed to provide the solace she expected there. ("It was the worst feeling being
up there. In Alaska, staring out a window. I never felt so desperate before" (59), Mom
shares her experience with Austin). She comes back from Alaska to meet Picasso
whom she thought was still alive. She returns to the home now unfamiliar with
unwatered plants and the unexpected arrival of her elder son with whom Austin is
engaged in a fight. ("I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless", 59, she
confides).

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

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

Sounds original now. "Intimate terms". That's good. Okay. Now we're
cooking! That has a real ring to it. (TW 52)
They want to be on “intimate terms” with their aesthetic geography as they yearn to rediscover themselves in a space like that of the foothills of San Gabriel mountains, where Lee finds, “a sweet kinda’ suburban silence…. Like a paradise. Kind’ place that sorta’ kill you inside. Kinda’ place you wish you sorta’ get up in. (TW 12).

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

Lee in TW, the original nomad, comes out of his native habitat – the desert, when Austin leaves his comfortable urban domicile to rediscover his lost identity in the open space of the Western desert. Desert is the space where the fixities of identities can be perpetually erased. Edmond Jabes wrote: “in the desert there are no avenues, no boulevards, no blind alleys and no streets. Only – here and there – fragmentary imprints of steps quickly effaced and denied” (39). The desert, the address of Lee, provides a unique experience of virtual arrival validating the wandering of yesterday as a purposeful venture. On the other hand, for Lee, home reflects the point of his supposed arrival which is at the same time pregnant with the possibility of new departure. In the course of role reversal Lee unlike Rabbit Brown and Henry becomes, what Zygmunt Bauman would call, an aspiring ‘Parvenu’ and Austin manifests his desire to reduce himself into a ‘pariah’. Bauman defines parvenu as an “arriviste, someone already in, but not quite of, the place, an aspiring resident without a residence permit” (72). He is someone who wants to forget the past and
wish away the future, and the older tenants dislike him because he awakens the memories and premonitions which they struggled hard to put to sleep. (Zygmunt Bauman 1997).

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

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

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

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

But in the course of their search for a native space Lee and Austin in *True West* regain almost a tribal wisdom and urgency to trace a traditional space of
belongingness. A place which is ‘authentic’, ‘somethin’ which can keep (them) in touch’ (TW 56).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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