2010

Locating American Masculinity with(out)in the Male: Sam Shepard's Kicking a Dead Horse, Neil Labute's Reasons to Be Pretty, and Sarah Ruhl's Late: A Cowboy Song

Scott C. Knowles
LOCATING AMERICAN MASCULINITY WITH(OUT)IN THE MALE:
SAM SHEPARD’S KICKING A DEAD HORSE, NEIL LABUTE’S REASONS TO BE
PRETTY, AND SARAH RUHL’S LATE: A COWBOY SONG

By
SCOTT C. KNOWLES

A Thesis submitted to the
School of Theatre
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2010

Copyright © 2010
Scott C. Knowles
All Rights Reserved
The members of the committee approve the thesis of Scott C. Knowles defended on April 1st 2010.

__________________________________
Elizabeth A. Osborne
Professor Directing Thesis

__________________________________
Irma Mayorga
Committee Member

__________________________________
Dan Dietz
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With great appreciation for: Dr. Christine Frezza, for her support and mentorship; Michael Eaton, for his love of theatre and constant inspiration; Professor Richard Bugg, for acting as an intermediary between myself and Neil LaBute; Vanessa Banta for her constant support and encouragement; Ginae Knowles, for pushing me to accomplish all of my goals; Dr. Mary Karen Dahl, for her constant questioning, dedication, and mentorship; Dr. Irma Mayorga, for her guidance in writing and thinking; Professor Dan Dietz for his support; and, Dr. Elizabeth A. Osborne, for her constant encouragement, insight, and mentorship.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “FUCKING HORSE”: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN SAM SHEPARD’S KICKING A DEAD HORSE</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NEIL LABUTE’S RENEGOTIATION OF MASCULINE MISOGYNY: REASONS TO BE PRETTY AS REASONS TO POSSESS IT</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDEX: IRON HANS</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis focuses on the representation of the crisis of masculinity and how that crisis, real or imagined, both calls for and automatically creates a renegotiation of the masculine identity. Specifically, it interrogates three different formulations of masculine subject creation as depicted in Sam Shepard’s *Kicking a Dead Horse*, Neil LaBute’s *Reasons to Be Pretty*, and Sarah Ruhl’s *Late: a cowboy song*. This document will focus on a specific theoretical formulation of masculinity found within each play. Respectively, I will utilize the theories of the mythopoetic men’s movement, Michael Kimmel’s contemporary theory of *Guyland*, and feminist reconfigurations of gender such as Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body* and Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity*.

The first chapter will explore traditional, patriarchal masculinity as represented by the character of Hobart Struther in *Kicking a Dead Horse*. The play presents an instantiated masculinity that falls short of providing a life outside of the work force and fails to allow for a renegotiation or reestablishment of traditional masculinity. The second chapter examines the journey of Greg in *Reasons to Be Pretty* as he attempts to renegotiate his misogynistic male identity. Greg’s desire to change and his ability to retool his subjectivity leaves the dual possibility of real progress, or a softer manipulation and oppression of the feminine gender. Finally, *Late: a cowboy song* presents myriad different sexualities and genders as the play asks the audience to skew or alter the way they view traditional binary gender system. It allows the location of the masculine to be considered distinct from the male body, and encompasses differently sexed and gendered individuals. I am interested in the ways that these renegotiations create or negate the possibilities of the masculine identity with regards to the crisis of masculinity in our contemporary society.

These three plays represent case studies in a much larger spectrum of masculinity, ranging from the traditional, patriarchal forms of masculine subjectivity found in *Kicking a Dead Horse*, to the progressive and fluid construction of gender subjectivity expressed by feminist scholars and located within *Late: a cowboy song*. The presentation of these differently
constructed subjectivities within theatrical representations allows for an interrogation of the masculine subject and gestures toward the constitution of a new masculine identity.
INTRODUCTION

I have a younger brother, named David, who at the age of eighteen, in his haste to take life by storm, was married, in debt, and without any means of supporting himself. Because of my brother’s poverty it became a common occurrence (much to the whole family’s surprise) for David and his partner to stop by for Sunday dinner, not for socializing or family fun, but to endure a free meal and leave as quickly as possible. After a few weeks of these short and hungry visits my youngest brother, Kyle, began to rail at David for his lack of responsibility, specifically to that of his wife. He spoke directly and constantly for about five minutes and ended the entire diatribe with words that have haunted my thoughts ever since: “You’ve got it all wrong! She’s not supposed to be take’n care of you! You should be taking care of her!”

Kyle was teaching his older brother what it was to be a “man.” A man, according to him, was supposed to take care of his wife, provide her with money and security, and always already be the pinnacle of responsibility. At the age of ten Kyle knew exactly what he was to become and how he was supposed to act as a gendered individual: he would be a patriarch, a breadwinner, and a distant, but loving father. He learned it from my father, just as I had, by both example and outright instruction.

Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity are truly in no short supply (as my own family so sharply and constantly remind me) and yet much of the scholarly work on American men claims that the male identity is in crisis.¹ Victor Seidler’s Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities claims, “in the West heterosexual men have responded to the challenges of feminism and gay liberation in different ways, but they have left many men feeling uncertain and confused about what it means ‘to be a man’”(1). In fact, books about masculinity that don’t treat the concept of crisis in some way are few and far; whether they agree that men are in turmoil over their identity

¹ When I say “American men” I’m actually speaking about U.S. American citizens. For the sake of simplicity I will simply use the term American to denote this group. Also, I would like to stress that my project does primarily reside within the realm of white heterosexual men, not to diminish the importance of race or sexuality but as a means to investigate the large body of American Theatre that is primarily about white heterosexual men in the continental United States of America. Further research and exploration into the racial groups that reside in America and how their male identities intersect with white concepts of manhood offers a multitude of sites for investigation and analysis, but remain out of the scope of my current project.
or not. I argue that the perceived loss of power that seems to accompany the idea of the crisis of masculinity is at the heart of most of the scholarly discourse. Conversations in scholarly discourse can be separated into two distinct categories, those that attempt to resurrect some sort of male/masculine supremacy and those that attempt to find new, less hegemonic, plastic, masculinities that will allow a shift. Thus, I will first investigate the instantiated masculinities that refuse to acknowledge a need for change. Then I will explore the negotiations of the men who recognize the inequality they are a part of creating. And, finally I will locate masculinity within the female sex in order to dislodge the masculine from maleness and explore the location of masculine power.

The formation of the masculine identity in contemporary American plays provides a site in which we can trouble and interrogate the supposed crisis of masculinity. My thesis will provide a critical look at the masculine identities presented by three contemporary American plays, *Kicking a Dead Horse* (2007) by Sam Shepard, *Reason’s to Be Pretty* (2008) by Neil LaBute, and *Late: a cowboy song* (2003) by Sarah Ruhl, each of which has received little scholarly attention. The selected plays depict characters in conversation with the concept of what it is to be masculine. By understanding the varied ways in which masculinity is constructed by the male and female sexes we can begin to locate and dismantle the oppressive power systems that are fueled by hegemonic masculinity. It is the project of this thesis to interrogate the varied forms of masculinity and understand their position within the culture that they are produced. By analyzing contemporary dramatic literature, primarily by white middle class males and females, I will locate culturally influenced perceptions of the masculine in order to examine their creation and effect in theatrical representation.

**Masculinity Studies – Men’s Studies – Men’s Rights?**

To say that the (re)construction of American masculinity has been floating in some sort of liminal place of non-decision for the last forty years would be a gross exaggeration. In fact, many different movements have sprouted out of the ideas of feminism and under the various names that describe the study of men. In *Taking it Like a Man*, David Savran points to five separate groups that all represent the men’s movement: “the “mythopoetic” sect (under Bly’s

---

2 Other texts that deal with the crisis of masculinity include: *The Masculinity Studies Reader* edited by Rachel Adams and David Savran; *Iron John: A Book About Men* by Robert Bly, *Masculinities* by R. W. Connel; and *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* by Michael Kimmel, etc.
aegis), committed to the renewal of “spiritual values”; the right wing, overtly antifeminist camp; the profeminist; the gay men’s movement; and the African-American men’s movement” (170). For the purposes of my project the mythopoetic movement will reveal the ways that men attempt to resurrect traditional masculinities via myth, nature, and storytelling. Meanwhile, the profeminist movement and its desire to move hand in hand with feminism will provide a starting point to understand men who wish to alter their masculine identity in a way that promotes equality.

American men began to recognize the need to reconstruct their conceptions of manhood shortly after women’s liberation. In Michael Kimmel’s book, *Manhood In America*, he states that “by the mid-1970’s there were calls for ‘men’s liberation’ to free men from the restrictive roles to which they had been assigned. Men it turned out needed liberating too” (174). To accomplish liberation, men began to copy the methods of feminist consciousness raising groups and attempted to teach men of the dangers of patriarchy. According to Kimmel, psychologist Joseph Pleck “argued that patriarchy was a dual system of oppression, a system by which men have oppressed women and in which some men have oppressed other men” (*Manhood* 188). While the movement was restricted to a small number of people and largely ignored by most American men, it provided the impetus for future men’s movements. With the founding and proliferation of the mythopoetic men’s movement, led by Robert Bly throughout the 1980’s, men began actively reconstructing their identities:

> We are living at an important and fruitful moment now, for it is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them. By the time a man is thirty-five he knows that the images of the right man, the tough man, the true man which he received in high school do not work in life. Such a man is open to new visions of what a man is or could be. (IX)

Bly’s words, at first glance, appear to be very similar to the work of men’s liberation five to ten years earlier in that they both acknowledge the need to break down contemporaneous visions of manhood. However, instead of looking forward to a new way of being or becoming a man Bly insists on miring us in the mythology of Zeus and Iron John, which truly becomes more of a re-inscribing of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity than a recreation of them.
Throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s America experienced a backlash against feminism. As Victor Siedler put it “there was no way of turning the clock back,” despite what the nostalgic mythopoetic movement desired (15). Many men began to see themselves as the victims of affirmative action, sexual harassment laws, and even divorce hearings. Some men began calling for a new men’s rights movement which was focused on righting the supposed wrongs done to them by attempting to create laws and legislation that would allow women and minority groups the chance to participate in the public sphere along with straight, white, middle class men. These groups generally assert an essentialist argument about masculinity and femininity that focuses on monolithic definitions that I seek to critique.

Today, many American men are still struggling to adjust to a world with feminism and gay liberation. In many respects their responses to these cultural upheavals have remained largely the same as described above. In fact, I would argue that no large-scale movement has actually produced an overarching change in the masculine identity within the United States. The stagnation of the masculine identity is primarily caused by a cultural disinterest, a belief in a supposedly monolithic and essentialist based definition, and an uneasiness to relinquish the default power and privilege connected to patriarchy. It is my project to explore some of the fundamental challenges of contemporary masculinity found within theatrical texts and then examine new ideas about masculinity’s construction and possibility. Culturally, we are at an apex where the masculine identity is still in question. Will we continue with traditional, and oppressive, versions of masculinity, or forge into new territory that allows for equality and a fluidity of gender?

The Boy Who Cries Wolf Eventually Gets Eaten

Crisis, as a metaphor for the necessary change that the masculine identity is currently experiencing, embodies the questions that I hope to investigate within this project. Crisis, with regards to this project, is a state of imbalance, a place in which the identity of a person is called into question or destabilized entirely. An identity can be called into question for good reason and still evoke a crisis within the person in question. My aim is not to garner pity for the crisis men must face to change, or evidence with which to bolster or repair a traditional version of masculine identity. Rather, I will attempt to situate the cause of the masculine crisis within theatrical texts and interrogate their proposed solutions.
As previously noted, I will be exploring three different locations of masculine crisis and the attempts made to reclaim, reconstruct, and frustrate the traditional vision of the masculine. For each of these locations I will explore the text through a different theoretical lens. The mythopoetic men’s movement offers one such solution to the crisis of masculine identity that I will explore within Shepard’s *Kicking a Dead Horse*. Robert Bly, one of the movement’s founders, falls into a pitfall that Harry Brod refers to as the “nostalgic contemporary male eye” (Kimmel, *Changing* 267). Brod notes that men who dream of a time in the past when manhood was secure and straightforward have rarely been in short supply.\(^3\) The mythopoetic movement longs for a return to nature, to the “warrior spirit,” to “the wild man” and appropriates a multitude of different myths from a diverse range of cultures to accomplish this end. It is a movement towards a primordial manhood where men were hunters, providers, and independent. I suggest that the nostalgia that men feel for the past hinders their growth and ability to adapt to a shifting environment and changing demands on their gendered performance. Longing for a return to the frontier, to the nuclear family, or to the type of manhood expressed in the concepts of Zeus and Iron John is a re-inscription of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. The movement focuses on retreats into nature, connecting to an essential self, and situates the masculine within a discourse of religious and spiritual reverence. I believe that Bly’s masculine recovery project serves well to examine the representation and stakes of masculinity found in *Kicking a Dead Horse’s* fallen cowboy.

In order to examine the misogynistic world of LaBute’s plays I will delve into the social theories of Michael Kimmel. Different labels are used to define masculinity within America, especially by sociologists attempting to categorize and define different aspects of the masculine identity. The breadwinner, the self-made man, and the protector are just a few examples of the motivations ascribed to masculinity within American culture. In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel theorizes that, while feminist scholars tend to define masculinity by a “drive for power, for domination, for control […] manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us” (4). The fear of being dominated actually keeps hegemonic masculinity in place far better then the promised rewards of power and privilege ever could. The conscious fear of being dominated presents us with another impetus

\(^3\) Brod cites the 1890’s as yet another “crisis in masculinity,” within the United States, caused by any number of reasons including the closing of the frontier and industrialization.
for a different type of crisis within masculinity. This crisis is fueled by peer pressure and reproduced by fear put into place by both men and women. An excellent example of masculinity driven by fear is Kimmel’s concept of Guyland, which is a liminal place of masculinity situated between adolescence and adulthood. It encompasses college life and continues for up to a decade after college has officially ended. Men who reside in Guyland live the fraternity life, drink excessively, engage sexually with multiple partners, refuse commitment, take dead-end jobs, and adhere to the Guy Code. The Guy Code is, according to Kimmel, “the collection of attitudes, values, and traits that together composes what it means to be a man” within the context of Guyland (Guyland 45). While, it can be applied to other cultural areas—like the corporate world or religious fraternities—it is important to note that the Guy Code does not apply to all men everywhere. The fear of domination, rejection, and emasculation creates an environment where masculinity requires the humiliation, domination, and subjugation of others in order to maintain its identity. I suggest that escape is hard to find in this—dominate or be dominated—sphere of masculine behavior. To break free of the cycle can mean isolation from the group and a sense of confused identity. It can also indicate success if it leads to a steady job, family life, and more responsible behavior. The fear of domination, other masculine identities, and failure all feed into reproducing traditionally masculine characteristics. In this project I will use the concepts of fear, peer pressure, and the Guy Code in order to explore Neil LaBute’s Reasons to Be Pretty, which begins within a form of Guyland and leads to a supposed dismissal of its ideologies.

Female masculinity offers a final site of inquiry into the masculine identity. It allows us to disconnect the masculine from the male body and explore a masculinity that is vilified by both “heterosexists and Feminist/womanist programs” (Halberstam, Female 9). Judith Halberstam, in her book Female Masculinity, claims, “that far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (1). Halberstam asserts that in large part masculine power comes from its ability to be held strictly to the male body while ignoring other variations on the masculine. Dominant masculinity (white, heterosexual, male) is naturalized and inextricably linked to power. Thus, according to

---

4 Guyland seems to be most applicable within middle class, U.S. American, and white contexts of masculinity construction.

5 Halberstam situates female masculinity in the context of being opposed by camps located within both feminist groups and heterosexist groups.
Halberstam, “masculinity . . . becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle class body” (Female 2). Halberstam attempts to define female masculinity within the culture and mark its legitimacy and importance. In fact, I would suggest that the reclamation of the masculine within the female body represents another form of masculine crisis born of the female masculine identity. This crisis is largely built on the naturalized concept of a strict gender binary between male and female. Anne Fausto-Sterling, in her book Sexing the Body, troubles this binary from both a biological and cultural perspective allowing us to examine the rich diversity that is, in fact, between and around the binary of female/male. Encountering the masculine outside the male body allows us to explore the nature of power within and between the hetero-normative masculine/feminine relationships. Masculinity is often defined with respect to its domination of others. I will use the concepts of female masculinity and the fluid nature of gender to attempt to explore masculine characters—male and female—that lack the traditional power, and masculine domination inherent within traditional versions of masculinity. By allowing for masculinity to be defined outside the male body, we can expand the boundaries of the masculine and permit male bodies to recognize their gender as other than their physical presence.

New Men on Stage: A Review of Scholarship on Theatrical Representation and Masculinity

The literature on masculinity in the theatre is extensive. Carla McDonough concludes Staging Masculinity by calling upon us all to answer the “man question” that she has brought to the forefront throughout her book. She suggests that traditional masculinity must change and to change it must be examined. She offers up new plays (M. Butterfly by David Henry Hwang and Angels in America by Tony Kushner) that point towards new and different types of men, and encourages us not to re-inscribe the idea of a static monolithic masculinity, but embrace the diversity of men and all of its incumbent problems.

In Act Like a Man, Robert Vorlicky argues that male cast drama—a play cast entirely of men—follows a “rigidly coded” semiotic system that, once revealed, allows a playwright “to articulate and to stage new types of male subjectivity, new masculinities” (22-23). Vorlicky’s description of “new masculinities” is discovered through the breaking down of “overdetermined dualist gender codings” which then allow for men to take on different forms within a text (22). Vorlicky points specifically to several examples of “new masculinities” in Yankee Dawg You Die, American Buffalo, Family Business, and That Serious He-Man Ball. Notably most of the
plays that are able to break the “dualist gender coding” involve men that belong to minority groups, arguing that since white straight men have the most to gain from patriarchy there is much less reason for them to challenge traditional forms of masculinity. However, Vorlicky does include two straight white male plays: *American Buffalo* by David Mamet and *Family Business* by Dick Goldberg. He claims that these plays present new forms of masculinity because the men in them become involved in personal dialogue, which allows them to break “gender codings” and “cultural barriers” (189-190). To assert that new forms of masculinity are to be primarily found within men who either belong to a minority group or are more feminine—allowing them to become detached from the power and privilege of hegemonic masculinity—is slightly simplistic and very pessimistic of the majority of the population. While I agree that personal dialogue, or feminist consciousness raising (“a dynamic of communication in which self-disclosure and individualization are central,”(16)) that allows a person to define himself as other than the monolithic hegemonic masculinity is necessary to the creation of alternate masculinities, I suggest that this concept could be expanded to include the difference which we always already see within ourselves compared to a group.

David Savran’s book *Taking it Like a Man* provides a theoretical concept, explained in his introduction, of the male identity’s need to constantly re-prove itself. Savran points out the divided nature of many men who are engaged in a sadomasochistic battle within to prove they are a “true” man. Here, Savran notes that both the sadist (traditionally associated with the masculine) and the masochist (traditionally associated with the feminine) are both always at work within the self to create a masculine identity.

Vorlicky and Savran both posit ways in which to locate new masculinities, yet they both seem to over determine the monolithic and static nature of masculinity. A white straight man can only reconstruct his masculine identity by breaking with exactly what he is; he must appropriate minority culture, experience homosexual desire, or feminize himself in some way that proves he is different from a static “normative” masculinity. While these ideas provide a starting point for understanding new masculinities they tend to rely on gender and cultural binaries. If we continue to only view new masculinities by examining those men that break from the statistical majority of white, straight, American males, then we are failing to allow for the possibility of change in the majority of men. Research on masculinity within theatre has, up to this point, focused on
locating and defining “new” masculinities. It has created a discourse that is essential to understanding contemporary masculinity.

**Contemporary Men Grasping at Straws**

In this thesis, I wish to examine the various ways in which contemporary American masculinity is portrayed on the stage as it deals with the possibility that traditional masculinity may no longer be a viable option, attempts to reconstruct masculine identity in order to support equality between men and women, and dislodges the masculine from the male body, allowing us to consider how masculinity is (mis)used as a locator of power. Continuing the work of McDonagh, Savran, and Vorlicky, I will examine three contemporary American plays produced and written within the last ten years. I will investigate the way that masculinity is located and positioned in Sam Shepard’s *Kicking a Dead Horse*, Neil LaBute’s *Reasons to Be Pretty*, and Sarah Ruhl’s *Late: a cowboy song*.

In the first chapter, I will analyze *Kicking a Dead Horse* by Sam Shepard to explore the various ways in which Hobart Struther’s struggle with the dead horse is representative of contemporary man’s attempts to work with and around the failings of traditional masculinities. The play is basically a one-man show revolving around Hobart’s identity crisis. It begins mid-story as Hobart Struther’s attempt to reconnect with the mythic cowboy is interrupted by the death of his horse. The horse’s death has left Hobart stranded in the desert where he must make choices imperative to his survival. Shepard paints a complicated portrait of masculinity as Hobart deals with the death of his horse, which has ruined what was to be his last escape into the open frontier and a nostalgic mythic expression of his masculine identity that he has lost from years of working as a domesticated (almost house broken) art broker.

The play primarily illustrates the nostalgic longing of the contemporary man for what he believes was a secure masculine identity embodied in the frontiersman or rancher of an earlier time. Shepard complicates this basic idea by allowing Hobart to both recognize the inability of traditional masculinity to carry him any further and refusing to allow for another solution. The cognitive dissonance of Hobart’s reasoning, perhaps, represents one of the reasons that masculinity has failed to change. The strategy of looking to the past to change masculinity is echoed in the mythopoetic men’s movement. Using the work of Robert Bly and the mythopoetic movement, I will investigate the image of the cowboy as a variation on the theme of the independent wild man. The cowboy represents a stronghold for men who wished to connect with
a decidedly masculine past, maintain their independence, and demonstrate their ability to survive within nature. The cowboy can then be read as a form of mythopoetics, a return to a former masculinity that allowed men to be true to their essential selves. The essentialness of manhood is central as a proposed solution to the crisis of masculinity not only throughout time but also within contemporary culture. By truncating Hobart’s retreat to this perceived haven of traditional masculinity, Shepard elucidates the ideals and problems of the mythopoetic movement. Thus, in this chapter, I will explore the masculinity that searches for a return to the past in order to secure a long lost essential construction of manhood. While the reclamation process suggested by the play ultimately fails, the romantic portrayal of a man dying alongside his horse presents a call to action, and a demand for the acceptance of traditional notions of masculinity. In this way, the play indicates a simultaneous recognition and denial of masculinity’s need to change.

The second chapter will explore Neil LaBute’s Reasons to Be Pretty. The play follows the story of Greg as he deals with a separation from his long time girlfriend. Greg navigates the world of male friendship and bonding that not only caused the separation but also requires him to participate in misogynistic acts under the guise of a male bonding code (exemplified in Kimmel’s Guyland.). The play portrays a set of male characters that are almost quintessentially misogynistic. In particular, LaBute situates Greg in a position where he must choose a path towards change or continued misogyny. The failings and successes of his journey are worthy of study.

Reasons to Be Pretty presents two mid-to-late-twenties male characters that exhibit the behaviors expected in Guyland, eventually leading to chaos in both their lives. The performances of these two characters create a dialogue between two different paths that a man can choose to create his identity. One man ultimately wishes to free himself from the gendered behaviors of Guyland. The other prefers the macho behavior, sports, and sexual affairs that characterize Guyland and the Guy Code. Greg’s journey throughout the play provides insight into one particular view of a man’s struggle with the different aspects of his own masculinity as well as the ways in which he can adjust his previously misogynistic self-definition to allow for many of the ideas of feminism. Greg ultimately recognizes his need to reconstruct his identity, and his choices reflect that work, while Kent, his old friend, remains mired in his sexist attitude towards women and relationships. The dichotomy between these men represents two of the primary ways
in which men choose to deal with their journey from boyhood into some form of adult masculinity. In this context “growing up” refers not to the physical, sexual or even psychological development from boyhood to manhood, but rather is a movement from an older outmoded masculinity to something different, to something based more on equality and understanding. LaBute’s body of work is riddled with misogynistic men, usually found in pairs that horrify audiences and scholars alike. In general these pairs fail to change meaningfully, despite LaBute’s attempts to make it appear that way. For example, LaBute states in the introduction to *Fat Pig* that “The story really deals with human weakness and the difficulty many people face when trying to stand up for, live up to, or come out for something they believe in” (XII). LaBute attempts to write a play about humanity, but ignores the issues of gender in his play in favor of focusing on “universal” human weakness. *Reasons to Be Pretty* represents, perhaps, the closet LaBute has come to depicting a renegotiation of the masculine identity away from misogyny. For this reason, LaBute offers a rich site in which to examine attempts at different masculinities. LaBute’s play shows his audience some of the worst of masculinity’s manifestations, along with its potential to change and develop. Whether or not he succeeds in depicting a white, middle class male’s desire to rethink his outmoded concepts of masculinity is the question I wish to interrogate critically.

The first two chapters focused on masculinity as it is solely connected to maleness and the male body. This connection allows for the creation of definitions that are monolithic in scope and ignore the many other subjugated forms of masculinity. In the final chapter, I will focus on Sarah Ruhl’s portrayal of female masculinities in *Late: a cowboy song*. Ruhl’s gender bending play allows an interrogation of the stereotypical characteristics of male and female, femininity and masculinity. Ruhl presents us with an atypical situation in which her three characters mark the major points located on the gender spectrum. Crick, who is male, embodies feminine gender constructions for much of the play. Mary, Crick’s wife, floats between the masculine and feminine, exhibiting androgynous characteristics. Red, as described by Ruhl, is “no cowgirl, she’s a cowboy” (121). Red and Crick strictly go against societal norms of gender, while Mary represents some sort of center. The action of the play follows the relationship of Mary and Crick as it spirals into destructive patterns that end in separation. The conflicts of the play reside within questions of gender identity and performance. Red’s masculinity, Mary and
Crick’s inter-sexed child, and Crick’s femininity all become sites that cause conflict in the world of the play.

Sarah Ruhl gives special thanks to Anne Fausto-Sterling and her book *Sexing the Body*, within the introductory notes of her play, *Late: a cowboy song*. Fausto-Sterling’s book is a treatise on the way in which we place sex and gender onto bodies, and police those boundaries based on created ideas about what it is to be a woman or man. Just as Fausto-Sterling critiques the boundaries that we place on gender in favor of a more fluid theory, so too Ruhl calls into question and presents alternative options to static genders and sexualities. Red and Mary offer a site of investigation that Judith Halberstam, in her book *Female Masculinities*, claims, “affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.” Halberstam goes on to say “female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinities in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (1). I will use Halberstam’s theories and the concept of female masculinity in order to expand the definition of the masculine, and sever the link between the male body and masculinity.

**Studying Straight White Masculinity**

The need to examine masculinity as a gender that is not just the benefactor of an oppressive system or some sort of universalized human being is of the greatest importance in growing towards greater gender equity and a better understanding of ourselves and the culture we live in. Richard Dyer, in his book *White*, suggests “the project of ‘making whiteness strange’” in order to break the mythology that the position of whiteness holds (4). Dyer states that we must recognize white as not a universalized subject that is taken to be simply human, but as a racialized subject that has hegemonic power. But further, the position of heterosexual white masculinity requires even greater awareness of the self as heterosexual, white, and masculine. I intend to make masculinity strange through a close examination of the masculine identity, including an exploration of the multifaceted ways in which people embody the masculine, which will help elucidate an understanding of masculinity that is no longer natural, monolithic, or infallible. By doing so I allow for the open questioning of the masculine identity and its privileged position. I can then enter into the scholarly conversation about masculine power and dominance from a prospective that does not simply ratify the masculine identity as the oppressor but interrogates the masculine itself.
CHAPTER 1

“FUCKING HORSE”:
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AMERICAN MASCULNITY
IN SAM SHEPARD’S KICKING A DEAD HORSE

Among the stereotypes with which American popular culture abounds, the cowboy is the embodiment of masculinity, whether in the person of John Wayne walking through a movie-set door purposely built smaller than life to make him larger than life, or the Marlboro Man, saying nothing but demonstrating by the determined angle of his jaw precisely what sort of person smokes his brand. Even historically, the cowboy is identified with something called the “cult of the masculine.”

—William W. Savage, Jr., The Cowboy Hero (95-96)

The mythic stature of the cowboy as a masculine hero presents an idolized figure from which to acquire the male identity. The cowboy—as a source of stories, attitudes, and identities—parallels and might even serve the ideologies of the mythopoetic men’s movement. Kenneth Clatterbaugh describes the mythopoetic movement’s perspective: “masculinity depends on deep psychospiritual patterns that are best revealed through inherited stories, myths, and rituals” (95). The mythopoetic movement believes in a collective unconscious, posited by Carl Jung, which Clatterbaugh explains as “a vast unconscious set of patterns of behavior that served our ancestors and now serves us” (98). Because mythopoetics takes up an essentialist position with regards to masculine identity, it is a useful frame for the interrogation of the “traditional” masculine. The mythopoetic movement searches out these set patterns of behavior in myths and ancient stories in order to better understand what is locked within the unconscious mind.

Surprisingly, the mythopoetic movement never attached itself to the American myth of the cowboy. Instead, the mythopoetic movement sought out ancient myths and stories—ranging from creation myths, to the heroic tales of Hercules—from other cultures. Through these myths,
rituals, and ancient stories the mythopoetic movement attempts to regain a unity, self-knowledge, and balanced understanding of society for the male identity. Sam Shepard’s *Kicking a Dead Horse* offers a similar search for self-realization, but appropriates the mythopoetic methodology for the American cowboy and the iconic exploration of the West. The play’s search for “authenticity” echoes what the mythopoetic philosophers Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette label “mature” masculinity: the “individual struggle[ . . . ]?[brings] to the fore the mature masculine archetype—king, warrior, magician, lover” (Clatterbaugh 100). In this chapter I will explore the ways in which *Kicking a Dead Horse* presents a constant mixture of critique and celebration of masculine ideals of the American West, and how it illustrates mythopoetic ideals through the use of the iconic American myth of the West—the cowboy. Hobart Struther’s crisis of male identity offers a site to test and critique the solutions posed by mythopoetics and to situate the crisis of masculinity within the context of contemporary society. First, I will describe the ideals behind the mythic Western cowboy. Second, I will illustrate the mythopoetic use of Jungian psychology and present an overview of Robert Bly’s foundational mythopoetic text *Iron John*. Finally, I will read the play through the lens of Jungian psychology and mythopoetics in order to examine the ways in which it critiques and celebrates traditional masculinity.

*Kicking a Dead Horse* depicts the “grand sojourn” of Hobart Struther into the western landscapes of his past. The play begins as Hobart finishes digging his dead horse’s grave, which serves as a visual reminder of the central conflict in the play. Hobart is stranded in the desert due to the unexpected death of his horse. Out of respect and loyalty to the horse and the cowboy ideal, he digs the horse a proper grave. Throughout the rest of the performance, Hobart struggles to deposit the dead weight of the horse into the grave, a physical battle that serves as a metaphor for the psychological and emotional battle that Hobart wages against himself. Hobart, in his mid-sixties, has come to the desert in search of what he calls “authenticity,” a way of living or being that he feels he has lost, but remembers having in his youth when he worked as a cowboy in the Western desert. Hobart explains his current situation at home as being banal and lonely. His marriage is in trouble, his kids have moved away, and he finds his career as an art dealer less than rewarding. While the play’s larger story is embedded in confessions and information provided by Hobart, the actual events on stage are relatively straightforward. Hobart struggles and becomes angry with the horse, rests while reminiscing about his past, focuses on survival long enough to lighten his load or pitch a tent, receives a visit from a mysterious and silent
woman who returns his cowboy hat, and ultimately deposits himself, the horse, and the cowboy hat in the grave he has dug. The play portrays Hobart’s literal, metaphorical, gendered, and mythical death. It presents an outline of his life story, the choices that have led him to this moment, and finally the realization that compels him to enter his own grave.

According to William W. Savage Jr., the history of the cowboy is fraught with “conjecture offered as fact, speculation passed off as history and allowed to stand as though the burden of proof lay in other, more significant cultural quarters.” In short, scholars dealing with the cowboy “are dealing at bottom with an image” (Cowboy 5-6). Paul Carlson’s essay “Myth and the Modern Cowboy” describes the reality of cowboy existence as a stark contrast to the image described by William Savage, Chris Blazina, and Douglas Branch: “Real cowboys were dirty, overworked laborers who, writes William Forbis, ‘fried their brains under a hot prairie sun.’ Often unemployed in winter, many went to town, where they took odd jobs, like painting” (3). While the actuality of the cowboy life remains a hotly debated topic, one can be sure that it was not the romanticized “cowboy icon” described by Chris Blazina as “a mounted sombrero-wearing knight errant looking for adventure, righting the wrongs of evildoers, and making a name for himself as he saved the community” (54). Instead, Harry Brod notes that “like the American cowboy, ‘real’ men embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural truths of the world” (13). The cowboy then represents a site from which to pull definitions of what it is to be a man. President Theodore Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman, called the cowboy a “Man’s man” someone who “will not submit tamely to an insult, and is ever ready to avenge his own wrongs. [He possesses] the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation”(Roosevelt 55-56). Savage further defines the qualities of a cowboy as “truth, honor, justice, preparedness, righteousness, free enterprise, and a great many more noble nouns” (150-151). The cowboy embodies the characteristics of the American dream, thus marking the modes of behavior that are admired for men in the modern age. As such, a “masculine man” must fight for what is good, defend the weak, tame the wild, and remain stoically silent about his feelings and emotions.

Not only has the cowboy become an icon that embodies masculinity, but also the cowboy’s environment, the West, has come to symbolize the masculine qualities of independence, ruggedness, aggressiveness, and initiative. The home of the mythic cowboy is the American West. According to Gary J. Hausladen the West’s “role is to help forward mythogenesis, not recreate history,” he views the West as a moral landscape that “speaks to who
we are as people. It helps form a national identity. This is why, even though the heroes and the storylines change over time, certain kinds of places persist as settings. [ . . . ] They are places for transformation, regeneration, rejuvenation, and resurrection” (302). The mythic Western cowboy then represents the qualities of masculinity that are most desired, and occupies a place in which he can reform the national identity. Within Hobart Struther, the main character in *Kicking a Dead Horse*, Sam Shepard displays the American myth of the cowboy and the West, while at the same time interrogating the failures of mythic cowboy masculinity in contemporary American society.

Before interrogating the ways in which the cowboy icon and the West can be interpreted through mythopoetics, I will present a simplified version of the movements ideas. The mythopoetic movement is based in Carl Jung’s more mystical and spiritual theories of psychology. Carl Jung describes his theories of the collective unconscious and archetypes:

*Man, of course has an inherited scheme of functioning [ . . . ]. But because we have no means of comparison we are necessarily unconscious about our own conditions. Yet it is quite certain man is born with a certain way of functioning, a certain pattern of behavior, and that is expressed in the form of archetypal images. For instance, the way in which a man should behave is given by an archetype. [ . . . ] And that is always supported by mythological tales. Our ancestors have done so and so, and so shall you. Or such and such a hero has done so and so, and this is your model. Again, in the teachings of the Catholic Church there are several thousand saints. They show us what to do, they serve as models. They have their legends and that is Christian mythology. In Greece there was Theseus, there was Heracles, models of fine men, of gentlemen, you know, and they teach us how to behave. They are archetypes of behavior.* (McGuire 292-293)

Jungian archetypes include a large number of varied images and ideas from mythology, history, and religion. They include the Earth Mother, Hero, Devil, Supreme Being, Magician, Knight, Warrior, Oedipal Child, Divine Child, Enduring Horse, Trickster, etc. Of particular importance for males are three archetypes: the shadow, the anima, and the self. According to Calvin Hall and Vernon Nordby:

*The shadow contains more of a man’s basic animal nature than any other archetype does. Because of its extremely deep roots in evolutionary history, it is
probably the most powerful and potentially the most dangerous of all the archetypes. It is the source of all that is best and worst in man, especially in his relations with others of the same sex. (48)

When Hall and Nordby refer to “what is best and worst,” they are referring to the animalistic, uncivilized instincts as well as a person’s source of “vitality, creativity, vivacity, and vigor” (48-51). When the shadow works in concert with the rest of the psyche it manifests “all that is best.” When allowed too much control or influence it becomes uncivilized and destructive (48-51). In contrast, the anima is the feminine archetype located within all men. Murray Stein describes the anima as “hypersensitive and soggy with emotionality” (131). The anima represents a man’s feminine side. According to Hall and Nordby, “if the personality is to be well adjusted and harmoniously balanced, the feminine side of a man’s personality [...] must be allowed to express [itself] in consciousness and behavior” (46-47). Stein summarizes Jung’s theory of the self succinctly as “the concept that there is a transcendent center that governs the psyche from outside of itself and circumscribes its entirety” (168). The self is the archetype that seeks self-realization and knowledge. It is the unified whole. Within these three primary archetypes exist smaller, more specific archetypes like those listed above. Jung argued—as do most of the adherents to the mythopoetic movement—that through an acceptance and knowledge of the different archetypes located within a person, one can heal the wounds and fragmentations of the self that inevitably occur throughout a man’s life.

The mythopoetic movement believes that children begin their lives whole and are psychologically wounded along the path to adulthood. Unless these wounds are healed through a proper understanding of the archetypes that reside within our collective unconscious, then they will inhabit immature, destructive, and oppressive forms of masculinity. Further, one cannot simply access the collective unconscious, find what one needs, and become whole. The path to healing, which varies between different mythopoetic sects, is almost always found through the recitation of myths, the performance of rituals, and the importance of ancient stories. Specifically, mythopoetics focuses these more general definitions to examine the state of contemporary men. The mythopoetic movement claims that the extreme amount of “wounded” male adults in today’s society is the cause of oppressive patriarchy.

Carl Jung’s theories and the mythopoetic movement, while essentialist in nature, do point towards the importance of mythic ideals and structures in the shaping of human subjectivity.
Whether or not a collective unconscious exists in a physical sense, as an essential part of each human being, becomes immaterial if we realize the concept of the collective unconscious could just as well be made up of socially constructed ideals. *Kicking a Dead Horse* presents the monologue of Hobart Struther, a man in his mid-sixties, who is stranded, “miles from nowhere” (10), in the desert, because of the death of his horse, while attempting to rediscover his “authenticity” that he believes is located in the Western desert where he worked in his youth.

Hobart defines his lost “authenticity” as his ability “to still throw a leg over a horse, like [he] used to; still fish waist-deep in a Western river; still sleep out in the open on flat ground under the starry canopy—like [he] used to” (18). Throughout this sixty page monologue we learn about the various ways in which Hobart has been wounded by contemporary society. He had a rough childhood, and then worked as a cowboy of sorts for several years until breaking into the art business and becoming a successful dealer. As he aged, he developed a nervous condition in which he talks to himself, paces, and occasionally becomes violent. We witness the conversations of his dual identity as they interrogate the purpose of their “grand sojourn” (11) into the Western desert. Throughout it all Hobart attempts to bury his dead horse, and is convinced by the more dominant side of his personality to also bury the rest of his cowboy paraphernalia, including a new cowboy hat. After throwing away the cowboy hat, a mysterious woman, who says nothing, climbs out of the grave and places the hat back on Hobart’s head. Eventually all the cowboy gear, the horse, and the cowboy himself are deposited in the grave as the lights dim. Hobart’s connection with what he calls “authentic” or his “truer” self distills to a constructed vision of Western life that does not take into account the actualities of cowboy existence. Despite the historic inaccuracies of his imagined Western adventure, Hobart bases his sense of self, his identity, on his perception of the cowboy. For Hobart, the mythology of the American West seems all-important to his identity. Hobart’s journey into the Western landscape can be read as a mythopoetic journey to find the “deep masculine,” locked away in our collective unconscious, but manifested in differing archetypes such as the cowboy. In the following pages I will analyze *Kicking a Dead Horse* through Robert Bly’s widely known mythopoetic reading of the Grimm fairytale *Iron John* (originally *Iron Hans*). Because Bly’s analysis is a central part of my discussion of the play I will first present a detailed examination of *Iron John*, so that I can apply a similar model to *Kicking a Dead Horse*. 
The story of *Iron John* begins with the mysterious disappearance of anyone who enters the dark forest where the wild man, Iron John, lives. Eventually, a noble hunter captures Iron John and he is locked in a cage near the castle. The young prince of the kingdom releases Iron John to obtain his lost golden ball, wounds his finger in the process, and agrees to follow Iron John into the forest and live with him. After failing Iron John three times, the boy is forced to leave the forest and experience poverty. He works as a cook’s servant and a gardener’s servant in another kingdom all the while hiding the golden hair. When the kingdom is invaded the prince offers to fight alongside the other men of the kingdom, but he is provided a horse with only three good legs. The prince rides to the forest and asks Iron John for help, and receives a small band of warriors and a strong horse. The prince saves the kingdom from invasion just as the king’s forces were about to be overrun. To discover the identity of the brave knight who saved his kingdom, the king holds a three-day festival where his daughter, the princess, will throw a golden apple to the knights as a type of competition. Each day, the prince receives different colored armor (red, white, and black) from Iron John and catches the golden apples. On the third day his identity is discovered and as a reward the king grants the prince his daughter’s hand in marriage.  

Bly uses the Iron John mythology to explore the stages of a young boy’s initiation into manhood. First, the boy must lose his youthful innocence, and unity of self. According to Bly the golden ball represents the “unity of personality we had as children—a kind of radiance, or wholeness, before we split into male and female, rich and poor, bad and good” (7). The unity that Bly speaks of parallels Carl Jung’s suggestion of the wholeness children possess before they are wounded. The initial wound the young prince receives on his finger symbolizes any emotional or physical trauma suffered through childhood, encompassing anything from sexual abuse to “not receiving any blessing from [the] father” (31). To release Iron John, the young prince steals the key out from under his mother’s pillow, an act that marks the prince’s psychological break from his mother. The young prince has successfully broken with both his mother (by stealing the key) and his father (by leaving with Iron John). He has begun his initiation into manhood, under the tutelage of his new male role model, Iron John.  

In the next stage Iron John instructs the young prince to guard the golden spring. The boy fails three times: first by dipping his wounded finger in the spring, second by allowing a loose
hair from his head to fall into the spring, and finally by permitting the tips of his long hair to touch the spring. Each time the prince fails, the parts of his body that touch the spring turn to gold. According to Bly “gold all over the world symbolizes sun-glory, royal power, self-generating radiance, freedom from decay, immorality, [and] spiritual luminosity” (39). The gold represents the potential for creativity, genius, and greatness within the young prince. Despite the grandeur that the gold signifies, the young prince’s failure forces him to leave the forest and experience poverty.

In the second half of his journey, after the prince has learned about his potential from Iron John, he must go out and learn humility, poverty, and weakness. The young prince works as a lowly servant and hides his golden hair—his potential for greatness—until the kingdom is invaded. The three-legged horse the young prince is given represents another type of wound, which Bly labels shame. Shame, like other wounds, can be variously produced: “from parents who shame us in order to make us more controllable, from addicted parents who shame us to get rid of some of their shame, or from peers who shame us to get rid of some of their shame” (162). Because the prince is willing to ride out on the three-legged horse, and ask for the help he needs from Iron John, his shame is transformed into a heroic band of warriors that allows him to save the kingdom, while maintaining his humble identity by means of secrecy.

Because of the secret surrounding the identity of the knight who saved the kingdom, the king devises a three-day festival that he hopes will lure the knight to town. Each day the young prince travels to Iron John and is given a different colored horse and set of armor to wear to the festival: red, white, and black. The colors of the horses represent three separate stages in the initiation of a boy into manhood. Red is the first stage where the boy unleashes his anger, aggression, desire, agency, intensity, and initiative. White, the second stage, represents a man who follows the rules, fights for good, and engages in relationships instead of domination. Finally, Black depicts a man who has come to understand humanity. He recognizes the necessity of passion and intensity, while following through with engaging, communal behaviors. He has a developed morality that neglects blame and practices forgiveness and understanding. Importantly, Bly notes that a man will remain in each stage anywhere from ten years to the rest of his life. Thus a man can become mired in an earlier stage and be quite advanced in years. (202-206).
Bly reads the fairy tale as an initiation sequence that American men desperately need and currently lack. Although he claims to avoid the use of certain Jungian archetypes, the three archetypes of shadow, anima, and self are present throughout the journey of *Iron John*. The Wild Man represents the shadow archetype. While with Iron John, the boy learns about his potential from a hairy, animalistic man, initially imprisoned for killing people who walked through his woods. The golden spring, and the boy’s golden finger and hair represent the potential that Iron John helps him to unlock. Next, the boy must learn about poverty to gain humility and passivity. To accomplish this he becomes a servant, hides his potential, and learns to integrate his feminine side into his sense of self. Within this sequence he develops his anima. With both the anima and shadow in place the prince can begin to unleash his potential in a controlled, enthusiastic, and positive way. The prince develops the self, and forms his masculine identity around his central sense of wholeness, which he lost as a child, by utilizing various other archetypes like the shadow and anima. The colors of the horses (red, white, and black), which represent the three primary steps of the initiation, also mirror the three archetypes of shadow, anima, and self. The mythopoetic movement appropriates mythological stories, rituals, and characters in order to understand a form of Jungian psychology that allows men to reestablish a deep or traditional masculinity. Robert Bly’s *Iron John* provides an ideal example of how this strategy becomes realized.

Within the story of *Iron John* there are several moments in which the young prince is wounded. Initially, he is wounded when he frees the Wild Man and cuts his finger on the cage. According to Bly, “the wounded finger in our story stands for a wound most young men in our culture have already received” (29). The mythopoetic movement generally claims that these wounds are created by “blows that lacerate self-esteem, puncture our sense of grandeur, pollute enthusiasm, poison and desolate confidence, [or] give the soul black-and-blue marks, undermining and degrading the body image” (32). While wounds can be both physical and emotional the physical wounds are generally seen as manifestations of the inner emotional wounds (31). Specifically, Bly notes wounds caused by the absent father and the controlling mother. Men are not only wounded when they are children, but throughout their lives whenever life-changing events occur that upset their harmony or balance. When men experience a crisis, regardless of its severity, it seems the reaction is to assert a primal masculine ideal that proves their manliness. The wound within the ritual process that *Iron John* presents signifies as all the
wounds obtained within life, and allows men to remember and deal with those wounds in order to grow (34). Bly suggests we view wounds as gifts, rather than burdens: “how would the boy in our story have found out about his genius if he had not been wounded?” (41). The wounds we receive during our life, if used and handled properly will also be the source of all our genius, happiness, creativity, and success. Within *Kicking a Dead Horse*, Hobart, while he has been successful and wealthy, fails to make use of his wounds—violent childhood, failing marriage, important relationships with others, etc.—in a positive way. He buries them, kicks them, throws them away, and avoids them as much as possible. Hobart’s crisis, his untended wounds, finally takes him to the desert on his old horse in order to relive what he believes were the glory days of his youth, and perhaps to attempt to heal and make use of the old wounds he has tried to bury. Bly’s theory of development allows for the interrogation of *Kicking a Dead Horse*’s use of the mythic cowboy to reveal a Jungian psychology that desires a return to “authenticity,” or traditional masculinity.

Hobart Struther’s journey into the Western desert to rediscover his past “authenticity” (or what Bly might refer to as his golden ball) seems to fail despite all effort. Perhaps Hobart fails to discover “authenticity” because his past life is not particularly enchanting. Hobart describes his “’truer’ days, hanging out worthless in lost Wyoming bars, skunk drunk in Silver Dollar saloons, staring bleary up at the masterful Western murals nobody could recognize anymore through the piled up years of grime, tobacco juice, and barroom brawl blood” (19-20). The ‘truer’ days described by Hobart are not indicative of the wholeness or unity that Bly or Jung would suggest we experience in childhood before being wounded. Instead, Hobart misidentifies his time spent working as a cowboy with his “authentic” self. In reality, this period would line up with the young prince’s time spent with Iron John. The beginning of Hobart’s initiation into manhood is mistaken for his definition of masculinity, and the “authenticity” he seeks. In his ‘truer’ days, Hobart allows the shadow archetype to control his life, and leaves when he realizes his “golden hair” potential by recognizing the worth of the “masterful Western murals.” Hobart does not hide his “golden hair,” but instead immediately sets to work establishing himself in the art world. This is only one example of the way in which Hobart misses his opportunities at progressing towards the “deep masculine” or what the play labels “authenticity.”

An examination of Hobart’s past life in greater detail will allow for a more complex articulation of both what Hobart is searching for and what he actually possessed. Hobart recalls
the past throughout the play in short bursts of important, but easily lost, information. It was a
time “when work was work” (22), “when I worked for an honest living. Back in the days of
AUTHENTICITY, when I ‘rode for the brand,’⁷ as they say: mending fences, doctoring calves,
culling cows” (41, original emphasis). Hobart goes on to describe this period as a time of being
“utterly alone [. . .] It didn’t terrify me anymore. Complete aloneness. Not like when you’re
little and—in the dark, listening—screams—distant—broken glass” (31). Particularly, the
screams and broken glass indicate a repeated domestic disturbance that marked Hobart’s youth.
He has lived his life in a state of solitary existence, whether we refer to that existence as
independence or loneliness. On the one hand, Hobart lived the ideal American dream of hard
work and success by becoming a rich art dealer. On the other, his childhood was filled with fear
and isolation. Clearly, Hobart has been wounded deeply by his dysfunctional and violent
childhood. His days of “authenticity” mark the beginning of an attempt to heal his wounds, but
fail when he succeeds in becoming a wealthy art dealer. Because of the failure to complete the
path to manhood, and the missed descent into poverty and humility, or what Bly calls “the road
to ashes,” Hobart needs and desires to return to his time spent with the wild man, nature, and his
golden potential in order to complete his initiation and heal his wounds.

Hobart’s misidentification of the first step in the healing process with that of the solution
further locks his identity within the initial step. Hobart’s search for his “authentic” past self is
undercut by recollections that suggest anything but a unified, balanced state of being. One might
argue then, that Kicking a Dead Horse misreads mythopoetic initiation rituals that lead to a
balanced identity. While the story of Iron John tracks the development of an adolescent into his
early adulthood, Bly indicates that in reality the process outlined in the myth can take most of a
man’s life. I suggest that the play offers an example of how certain steps will frequently be
passed over by American society in favor of money, power, prestige, love, and family. If we
accept that men will go through a wild man stage—of enthusiasm, aggression, return to nature,
and discovery of golden potential—then why would that same man, having now discovered his
“goldenness,” descend into a state of poverty? Within contemporary society, one can see how the
descent into poverty might be indicative of any student’s journey through college and into

⁷ ‘Rode for the brand’ indicates working for a specific rancher. Each ranch had its own brand with which it would
mark its cattle in order to indicate ownership. Riding for the brand then, means working for the ranchers who owned
the cattle designated by a specific brand.
apprenticeship. Hobart’s position within the initial stage of male initiation and prompt movement
to a state of wealth by recognizing a portion of his golden potential—identifying, procuring, and
reselling valuable Western art—points out the missed stage. That said, the importance of Bly’s
“road to ashes” as a vehicle to learn not to abuse power, and always remember the position of the
lower class is clear. As either a misunderstanding of mythopoetics, or a statement about the
failures of the process of becoming a man, the play depicts the search for “authenticity” as a
futile attempt to resurrect a dying mode of identity.

Echoing the fact that Hobart’s vision of his past self fails to live up to the ideals of
“authenticity” that Hobart is searching for is the primary image of the play: the dead horse.
Hobart describes his last remaining horse—the same one that currently lies dead before him: “I
had one good one left, out in the Sand Hills on open range. Course, he was just a colt back
then—big, good-lookin’ son of a buck, too” (21). An actual remnant of Hobart’s past, the horse
signifies the “authenticity” that Hobart seeks. Thus, the death of the horse may indicate Hobart’s
inability to reclaim the “authentic” masculinity he desires. In contrast, if one compares the horse
to the importance of horses in the mythology of Iron John, one finds yet another missed
opportunity at continuing towards the deep masculine. Recall that the prince in Iron John was
forced to ride out on a three-legged horse that Bly argued symbolized the wounds the prince had
received from others in the form of shame. Hobart’s horse, while old, is remembered as ”big”
and “good-looking.” The horse begins to signify shame when it experiences its own physical
malady—death. Unlike the prince who rides out on his three-legged horse—accepting and
healing his wounds—Hobart’s answer to the shame brought from a dysfunctional horse is to bury
it. For Hobart the shame represented in the death of his horse closely ties into his abandonment
and wholesale ravaging of the West for valuable pieces of art. Hobart lacks any sort of male role
model to turn to when the shame of his dead horse affects his ability to continue on the path to
“authenticity.” In fact, Hobart directly causes the horse’s death by “feed[ing] him a nosebag full
of oats,” something he claims he should “have known better” than to do (50). In this way, Hobart
actually represents the cause of his own shame, and possibly the failure of his search for
“authenticity.” Hobart’s shame encompasses losing his Western roots, selling Western
masterpieces, moving to the city, and finally accidentally killing his horse. Burying these
wounds, which the horse signifies, prevents the healing and transformation of the wounds into
golden potential and the “deep masculine.”
Hobart, in his mid-sixties, seems to be experiencing what R. C. Peck terms “ego preoccupation,” which occurs “when the older man thinks solely of what he has done, what he could have done, or what he should have done” (Solomon 53). Hobart’s focus remains isolated to finding an “authenticity” that he feels he had as a cowboy in his youth and has now lost. Importantly, the “authenticity” he seeks is positioned in his early life before children, marriage, or professional success. It is the time in which he “worked for the brand” and spent his days drunk in bars surrounded by other men and an individualistic, solitary culture. Hobart describes the events leading up to his proposed Western adventure:

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

Hobart describes his life as a banal existence of nothing but sitting on sofas, “constant pacing,” and “bursts of fury” or violence. The cause of this existence, Hobart seems to suggest, is the fact that the kids are all raised and that his relationship with his wife has deteriorated, but it seems more likely that the lack of fulfillment his career has recently offered him creates his anxiety about his children and wife. Thus, as Hobart attempts to transition from a breadwinner and cutthroat businessman into a familial community, he becomes disappointed at the discovery of his absent children and unhappy marriage. According to Hobart, he and his wife “became—tolerant, I guess. [. . .] Except for those occasional times when she’d explode and call me an asshole. Those were the moments I suddenly realized the depth of her anger. How much she deeply resented me. [. . .] Then we’d inevitably go silent” (31). A man’s life previously defined by his position at work or in society, yields opportunities in which Hobart has clearly been unable to indulge.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between Hobart’s lack of fulfillment and the three horses—red, white, and black—that the young prince rides within Iron John. As I’ve noted
above, each horse represents a stage in the initiation of a young man. Hobart describes his work as “the thrill of the kill” and “the ecstasy of power” (16, original emphasis). Hobart’s life’s work then embodies the first stage of initiation: Hobart is a red knight. Despite his success, Hobart also notes that the excitement he once felt for his cutthroat business has “eluded” him (16). Bly would argue that because he did not continue on his ritual path, he lacks the ability to progress, and become either a white or black knight, which would provide him with a sense of fulfillment in his later years. Hobart’s career figures prominently in his perception of self, but has proved dangerous by miring him within the first stage of development towards obtaining a unified self, or wholeness. In Hobart’s words he “took truckloads of booty out of that country before anyone even began to take notice” (21). Hobart perceives his procurement of forgotten and famous Western art as an act of theft that has tainted his past self’s identity. In other words, it has locked him in the first stage of initiation and prevents him from moving towards true “authenticity” as defined by Iron John. June Singer’s Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung’s Psychology points out that “if [a man is] flexible enough then to turn [his] attention to activities in which the anima has an opportunity to be expressed, [he] will find other types of endeavors that will continue to stimulate [him] and enable [him] to give of [his] long experience to guide others in some way” (191). Hobart’s inability to deal with his declining fulfillment at work, has left him questioning his self-actualization, his “authenticity.”

Kenneth Clatterbaugh states, “the man who is in harmony knows both his shadow and his anima, and accepts them as parts of himself. That acceptance, in turn, is self-knowledge, and it restores the unity lost in childhood” (99). Hobart’s solution to finding equilibrium seems to focus on the shadow archetype (like Bly’s Iron John), which is associated with animalistic male characteristics like aggression, assertiveness, and dominance, and which will lead to an unbalanced adult male. In fact, Shepard draws attention to the conflicting archetypes within Hobart’s psyche by splitting the character and allowing Hobart to dialogue with himself. The two personas clearly have differing temperaments that possibly mark them as shadow and anima:

---

8 Red, is the first stage where the boy unleashes his anger, aggression, desire, agency, intensity, and initiative. White, the second stage, represents a man who follows the rules, fights for good, and engages in relationships instead of domination. Finally, Black depicts a man who has come to understand humanity (202-206).

9 Shepard begins a new line of text each time that a new archetype or persona speaks.
She? You’re not going to tell me you’re actually missing someone now, are you?

The wife? The kids. The mom. The Dead.

She was amazing to me. She was.

Was?

Is. Still. But then—

In the past?

Yes in the past. She was beyond belief. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

Oh please—spare me.

She was—

What? Authentic, I suppose?

Beyond—

What’s that? What’s beyond authentic?

More—more than you can imagine.

Don’t make me puke. You put yourself in this situation, now face the music. (29-30)

The first persona to speak dominates the other, does all the questioning, and doubts the importance of personal connections that the second persona seems to feel for women, specifically his wife. In this way, the first persona presents the shadow archetype while the second reveals the anima. The distinction between the two, specifically with respect to their goals, makes it clear that Hobart’s divided self is in conflict rather than harmony. The shadow is focused on survival and basic corporeal needs, while the anima seems preoccupied with the past, personal relationships, and their importance to Hobart’s life. The anima remembers the wounds of Hobart’s past, while the shadow attempts to goad Hobart into moving on and ignoring all the pain he has experienced. Both of these perspectives are important to the creation of a unified whole. Shepard’s use of the fragmented and disjointed identity of Hobart illustrates the failure of traditional patriarchy to create a self-actualized identity. On another level, it indicates the battle between the extreme masculine and feminine modes of identity creation, and how traditional masculinity’s failure to recognize and partner with the anima—feminine—creates the problems of patriarchy.

Hobart’s inability to deal with his wounds has led to this split in his own perception of the world. Bly suggests there are two primary paths a man can follow as he copes with his
wounds; like the shadow, he can forget and forego by “climbing up above the wound and the shame” or, like the anima, he can “live inside the wound” and explore his victimhood (*Iron* 33-34). A balance of both of these perspectives is required for the self to take advantage of the wound and begin to use it as a tool. Hobart’s self—the unifying balance between the anima and the shadow—tries to reemerge in the moments during which Hobart is not speaking with himself, but is clearly too weak to affect any lasting reunification. In this mode Hobart criticizes himself for thinking that his journey into the wilderness would cause him to “somehow feel miraculously at peace? One with the wilderness? Suddenly—just from being out here, I’d become what? What? Whole? After a whole lifetime of being fractured, busted up, I’d suddenly become whole?” (28). In this line Hobart recognizes he is fractured, and in his conversation with himself he sees that there is “more then [he/himself] can imagine” beyond the “authenticity” he is searching for. Hobart knows the “authenticity” he seeks is only a lesser form of what is possible. In fact, Hobart’s plan to return to the wilderness to heal his wounds places him at the starting point of the mythopoetic ritual to obtain the “deep masculine.” While Hobart’s initial actions are indicative of what the mythopoetic movement might point towards, his failure to move through the stage suggests the movement’s inability to create or resurrect the “deep masculine.” Hobart’s struggle and failure in the desert creates a contradiction of belief in the masculine identity embodied in the horse, the cowboy and the West, while simultaneously suggesting the inability, impracticality, and failure of modern American masculinity to adapt new forms of identity.

The mythopoetic movement would identify the reason for Hobart’s failure with the fact that he is only putting himself through the first half of the process of unification. Hobart’s journey into the wild and his recognition of his shadow set him on the path to healing, but unless he recognizes his anima by learning humility his wounds will not heal. The prince in the story of *Iron John* accomplishes this by re-entering civilization and working as a caregiver on the king’s estate. While working, he comes into contact with the princess, hides his identity from her, and eventually reveals himself as both the knight who saved her father’s armies and the careful gardener who attended the flowerbeds. In this moment the prince achieves unity. Within the play, Hobart’s shadow archetype maintains dominance and does not allow his anima the ability to manifest in any other way besides dialogue. The shadow maintains power, the anima is suppressed, and Hobart fails to achieve the sort of unity of self that the prince enjoys.
One battle between Hobart’s anima and shadow that provides particularly salient information about Hobart’s search for “authenticity” can be found in the disposal of the cowboy hat, a new “Quadruple X Beaver” that signifies, like the horse, both the embodiment of the Western cowboy and the wounds which Hobart’s shadow desires to ignore. Hobart’s anima attempts to save the hat from the shadow’s desire to dispose of it, as seen in the following exchange between these two parts of Hobart:

Not the Hat!
You’re breaking my heart. Toss it.
What about the sun?
It’s setting.
What about rain and wind?
You can’t predict it.
What about the whole idea?
Which one’s that?
The West? The “Wild Wild West.”
Sentimental claptrap. (36-37)

Initially attempting to save the hat for practical reasons, eventually the anima informs us of the true purpose of the hat: “the whole idea.” The anima recognizes the importance of retaining the hat for the purpose of remembering wounds and moving out of the first stage of initiation to which Hobart has attempted to return. The shadow on the other hand, further shamed by the death of the horse and the failure of the trip, which was supposed to have been his reawakening, wishes to bury the hat and move away from the wounds by forgetting and moving past the failure. The past, the West, the cowboy—everything that was supposed to have been a wonderful form of “authenticity”—has been exposed as “sentimental claptrap.” The shadow insists that the “deep masculine,” unity, wholeness, “authenticity” are all nothing but a farce of manhood that is no longer viable. Mythopoetics, again, would argue that Hobart’s divided and fractured self prevents him from recognizing his own potential to move on towards unity. In this way, the play clearly suggests that the ideals of American masculinity, which are entrenched in the mythopoetics’ search for essential manhood, are nothing more than “sentimental claptrap.” Thus, Hobart violently beats the dead horse—masculine ideals—throws the hat into the pit, and wonders if “this could finally be it” (40). His actions against the embodiment of his
masculinity—the horse—indicate a rejection of the traditional systems to which he once prescribed. The question remains as to which “it” Hobart refers to. He could be referring to his own demise, the end of traditional masculinity, the fraud that is his search for “authenticity,” or perhaps the discovery of his “truer” self.

The disposal of the cowboy hat signifies a removal of the cowboy archetype and a former type of masculinity that dominated the American West. In fact, while the hat remains buried, Hobart becomes able to discuss the importance, nobility, and manliness of Crazy Horse, who was killed in the same region in which Hobart is stranded. Hobart laments, “Don’t you think there ought to be a National Day of Rest for someone like that? A true American Hero. Close the schools. Close the post office. Five minutes of pure silence across the nation” (42). The mythic ideal of the cowboy, considered the enemy of Native Americans, disappears with the disposal of the cowboy hat, allowing Hobart to assert the greatness of a man who was destroyed by Hobart’s brand of “authenticity.” Hobart laments Crazy Horse’s death, labeling him “a man of his people” who died because “[they] promised him land—hunting rights—promised him freedom—that’s the worst of it. ‘Freedom’ they called it” (42). Hobart goes on to compare Crazy Horse to Jesus Christ: “Bayoneted. Not unlike Christ” (41). In total, Hobart admires Crazy Horse as a “true American Hero,” for standing up for his rights to life, protecting his people, and sacrificing his life for freedom. For Hobart it seems the freedom Crazy Horse sought ties in with his conception of “authenticity.” Crazy Horse acts as something of a model for what Hobart comes to believe he must do, sacrifice himself along with his dead horse in order to illustrate the importance of his identity and become a “true American Hero.”

It is interesting that in the moment in which Bly’s prince achieves unity he also becomes engaged to the princess. Thus, while Bly certainly argues for a particularly strong break from the mother in order to achieve initiation into manhood, he also requires not only the anima within men to manifest, but possibly the actual physical presence of a mate to acquire unity. The only female figure to appear within Shepard’s play is that of a Young Woman whom Hobart never acknowledges. The Young Woman emerges from the horse’s grave wearing Hobart’s new cowboy hat, which he discarded moments earlier. Entirely unnoticed by Hobart:

The Young Woman turns slowly toward Hobart, then moves slowly toward him as he sings the chorus. She stops directly behind him as he continues singing, unaware of her presence. [. . .] The Young woman takes off the hat and gently
puts it on Hobart’s head as he continues singing. She turns away and slowly returns to the pit and descends, disappearing. (44)

The return of the cowboy hat by the only female character in the play suggests that the “deep masculine,” “authenticity,” or wholeness can only be obtained through the assistance of women or the anima. Despite Robert Bly’s constant addition of the phrase “and wild women” within his text, there is actually only one female character that is remotely integral to the tale of Iron John. Perhaps this occurs, as Bly suggests, because the U.S.A. lacks boys who are initiated into manhood due to minimal parental guidance by male role models and an excess of female involvement. Regardless of his reasons, it is clear that the feminine is necessary for the creation or discovery of the “deep masculine.” The princess can be characterized by the phrase “the woman who loves gold” (135). The princess primarily functions as a creature of desire, one who pursues the young prince, and after being sufficiently turned down is finally pursued. The representation of the only woman in the story is denied any sort of agency, and given as a reward to the young prince, though she is also enthusiastic about the match. The princess is portrayed as almost nothing more than an object who must learn her place by being denied the ability to pursue the young prince. Kicking a Dead Horse similarly creates a female character that is more object than human being. The Young Woman is silenced, effectively invisible, and wears only a sheer slip. She is simultaneously oppressed intellectually and physically. Further, Hobart does not recognize her presence and only notices the return of the hat after she is gone. According to the stage directions he “question[s] how the hat could have reappeared” (45). Then, Hobart promptly discards the hat again, reestablishing the dominance of his shadow archetype over the anima and the feminine. While the prince in Iron John perhaps recognizes the princess’ importance in the creation of his identity, Hobart’s failure to notice the female character and discard her actions indicates his blatant ignorance. The Young Woman’s invisibility signifies both the presumed unimportance of the female role in masculine identity creation and the actuality of her role in the creation of Hobart’s identity. She returns the cowboy hat, metaphorically attempting to place Hobart back on the road to the “deep masculine,” and implicating traditional femininity in this flawed and archaic process of gender creation.

Throughout Kicking a Dead Horse, Shepard complicates the symbols of the great American West literally and metaphorically, embedding the concept of a defined, “authentic” masculinity within the simulated playing space that is the theatre. Perhaps the most significant
metaphor in the show first appears in the title—*Kicking a Dead Horse*—which signals the character’s anger and frustration at having lost the comfort and control he once maintained over his identity. The central image and the title of the play—combined with Hobart’s disgust with the literal death of his horse—point to a critique of mythopoetic ideals and their attempted resurrection of “deep [essential] masculine” characteristics. In effect, the play operates with the purpose of anthropomorphizing the types of masculinity celebrated by mythopoetics within the body of the horse. Symbolically then, the play argues that this type of masculinity is dead and expresses frustration at its failure to provide a meaningful identity. Shepard demonstrates this theatricality again in his clear construction of the playing space, a setting that emphasizes the theatricality of the space; that is, it points towards the *inauthenticity* of the theatrical environment:

The stage is entirely covered with a sky-blue silk sheet concealing irregular mounds. No special lighting and no music or sound effects of any kind. A blank white muslin scrim covers the entire upstage wall in a wide sweeping arc, floor to ceiling. No special light in scrim other than work lights. (7)

Of course, sound effects and theatrical lighting are an integral part of the show, but the audience has been made aware of the mechanisms of the stage that create the reality presented there. This asks the audience to recognize the inauthenticity of the theatrical experience, and extend that understanding to the subject matter in the play—the mythic Western world of the cowboy. In this way, the audience is encouraged to read the cowboyesque surroundings, properties, and costuming—which represent Hobart’s ideals of masculinity, and his journey towards “authenticity”—as always suspect of inaccuracies, hyperbole, and possibly outmoded versions of traditional manhood. Besides the actual corporeal actor playing Hobart, Shepard requests that “the dead horse should be as realistic as possible with no attempt to stylize or cartoon it in any way. In fact, it should actually be a dead horse” (8). The reality of the horse, contrasted with the theatricality of the beginning of the play, suggests a complicated relationship between the reality of the brand of masculinity that the horse represents and the metatheatricality offered up

---

10 Of course, the reality of actually using a dead horse in production, while unlikely, offers a brief respite of humor in Shepard’s description of the theatrical elements of his show. According to Nicholas De Johngh’s review of one of the initial runs of *Kicking a Dead Horse*, the horse was presented as “life like” and “very dead.” Thus, while the possibility of using an actual dead horse seems absurd, the prop is rendered in the most realistic way possible.
to discount that masculinity’s “authenticity.” The one realistic characteristic, the horse, indicates the play’s object of interrogation: traditional masculine identity.

Towards the end of the play Hobart stops the dialogue between his two personas and begins to speak directly to the dead horse: “Maybe the two of us—huh? Maybe that’s it. Both of us were meant to go down in the hole. Do you think so? Maybe that’s exactly it. Both of us” (57). The transition comes after a heated fury of kicks lands on the horse’s body and Hobart falls, physically and emotionally exhausted. In this way, the horse and Hobart’s shadow persona are linked into the same being. They are both manifestations of his desire to return to the first step of his masculine initiation, and both fail him in his hour of need. Recognizing or projecting his shadow into the body of the horse allows Hobart to understand the necessary death of that part of him, and, with it, his own destruction. It seems that Hobart’s constant battle to bury the horse was the same irreconcilable struggle he faced within his own fractured identity. Finally, Hobart announces:

Hat like that shouldn’t be down in a hole. Brand-new hat. Hardly even got a chance to break it in. Slowly, he climbs back down into the hole where he originally made his entrance, disappearing. Long pause, then the dead horse slams forward, this time downstage, with a mighty boom accompanied by bass timpani offstage, dust billowing up, filling the stage. The horse falls into the hole with just its head sticking out. (66-67)

It is only when Hobart chooses to join his hat at the bottom of the hole that the horse falls in with Hobart; moreover, the funeral song, Didn’t He Ramble, heightens this significant moment as it emerges from the grave. Hobart, in effect, digs his own grave and successfully buries himself. In fact, every aspect of the traditional Western masculinity is deposited in the grave: the hat, the horse, and the cowboy. Hobart was unable to accomplish the necessary changes to his masculine identity, which R.C. Peck suggests a man must do as he ages. Nor was he able to return to the first step and progress forward in the male initiation ritual described by Robert Bly’s Iron John. Ultimately, Hobart has no alternative but to die.

---

11 Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson originally wrote the song in 1902 under the pen name Will Handy. The song was written by African Americans and according to Eileen Southern, “the song was particularly associated with the music performed by brass bands as they paraded back to town after a funeral ceremony” (109).
With Hobart’s death and the burial of the hat, the horse, and the cowboy, the play produces an image of traditional masculinity that has only one alternative: death. In this way, *Kicking a Dead Horse* suggests the need to move away from patriarchal domination and veiled “spiritual” attempts to regain masculine power. Unfortunately, the play also fails to provide any other options for a man like Hobart. The play asks and struggles with the important question of how to initiate and maintain a strong masculinity that adjusts to the needs of a man as he ages. Although *Kicking a Dead Horse* shows similarities to the mythopoetic movement, it seems to critique and make visible the issues and challenges that the mythopoetic model of initiation and development contains. If failure to adjust and maintain one’s unified self-identity indicates a physical or emotional death, then success could mean a chance at self-actualization and perhaps a new form of masculinity. Ultimately, the only answer provided is an unacceptable one: men who can’t change die.

Sam Shepard’s play, *Kicking a Dead Horse*, offers a unique perspective on the crisis of masculinity in American culture. It becomes clear that even Hobart Struther, who has endeavored to maintain a traditional masculinity, is aware of the need to change the American male; but for him a solution does not exist. By presenting the question of contemporary men’s crisis of identity and failing to find a solution, the play challenges audience members to engage and find an answer for themselves. Through Hobart’s death, *Kicking a Dead Horse*, in some ways attempts to gain the sympathy of the audience and resurrect or heal the victimized masculinity Hobart represents. The play echoes the ideas of the mythopoetic movement, which is one of the most popular solutions to the supposed crisis of masculinity that has surfaced in the last twenty years. *Kicking a Dead Horse* condemns the masculinity of the American West, but fails to suggest any alternative. Ultimately, the play provides a look at the American male at the end of his life, after he has raised a family, become rich and successful, and lost his sense of “authenticity.” The lack of fulfillment in the life of Hobart Struther begs for a new model of masculinity, and serves as both a warning to men who give their lives to masculine ideals that will prove destructive and a plea to the same society to have pity on the traditional form of masculinity. Regardless of whether the play attempts to garner pity or begs the creation of a new masculinity, the fact remains that the horse is dead, and the need to replace it is great.
CHAPTER 2

NEIL LABUTE’S RENEGOTIATION OF MASCULINE MISOGYNY:

*REASONS TO BE PRETTY AS REASONS TO POSSESS IT*

I’ve got a little something interesting that has flared up here as of late and I’m gonna just . . . see where the day takes me—which is what most guys do, right? We ride that wave. Yep. Ride it to shore and see what comes of it. Hey, that’s how it’s done—’s the way we get by. It pretty much is.

—Neil LaBute, *Reasons to Be Pretty* (65)

*Reasons to Be Pretty*, according to Neil LaBute, looks closely at four characters as they “stare in their own mirrors and wonder if they too are good and pretty and smart and liked. Or at least good and pretty and smart enough” (LaBute, *Reasons x*). The title professes the play to be an examination of “pretty.” Who is “pretty?” What is “pretty?” How does one become “pretty?” In fact, the word “pretty” is an interesting choice. LaBute selects a word that when applied to a person always already indicates the feminine—male or female. Given the title, and its undeniable link to feminine beauty, one might assume that the play would revolve around feminine characters critiquing or supporting the (un)importance of physical beauty. On the contrary, the primary characters are male in this drama, and frankly they do not seem overly concerned with their physical appearance. Rather, they are preoccupied with female beauty. Sheila Jeffersy’s *Beauty and Misogyny* points to “masculine aesthetics that caused women to feel their bodies were inadequate and to engage in expensive, time-consuming practices that left them feeling that they were inauthentic and unacceptable when barefaced. ‘Beauty’ was identified as oppressive to women” (1). *Reasons to Be Pretty* then, might be more aptly named *Reasons to Possess Pretty.* In this way the male characters judge, manipulate, and oppress the female characters within the play based on their respective levels of attractiveness. The men, in fact, portray masculinity at its very worst. They are immature, misogynistic, and cruel—a staple of much of LaBute’s work.
Unlike his previous plays, which often include misogynistic characters that fail to renegotiate their identity to allow for female equality, _Reasons to Be Pretty_ depicts the journey of one man through his previously misogynistic thoughts on beauty, women, and life. The potential for the renegotiation of the misogynistic form of masculine identity is the object of my analysis. Ultimately, does the play work in a way that allows the reader to recognize the possibility of change, or does it reassert a dominant masculinity, which while not outright misogynistic still oppresses women? To approach this question I will employ Michael Kimmel’s sociological theory of Guyland, which examines the guy culture that exists in a liminal space between adolescents and adulthood. By examining the cultural position of these characters I will begin to distinguish between the possibilities of change and the recreation of dominant masculinity.

_Reasons to Be Pretty_ tracks the destruction of two relationships. Greg and Steph break-up when Steph learns of Greg’s off-hand comment that her face is “regular.” Kent and Carly, who are married, run into trouble when Kent begins an affair with a younger woman. Throughout the play Greg tries to make amends for his rude comment, but eventually sees the ending of their relationship in a positive light. As the first act of the play comes to an end, Greg is sworn to secrecy about Kent’s affair and Kent justifies the paradox of his extreme jealousy of Carly and his own sexual exploits. During the second half of the play, we learn that Carly is pregnant, that Kent has switched to day shifts in order to secretly spend more time with his mistress, and that Steph has moved on with another relationship. Greg begins the act by lying to Carly about Kent’s affair, but slowly becomes aware that he does not want to be complicit with Kent’s choices. On the baseball field Greg confronts Kent about his behavior and informs him that he will no longer lie for him. Finally, Greg comes to terms with the end of his relationship with Steph, and concludes the play explaining what he has learned.

Greg and Kent exist, behave, and think within a world between adolescents and adulthood that Michael Kimmel outlines in his book _Guyland_. The world of guys exists in three primary arenas: physically, relationally, and ideologically. Physically, located in fraternity houses, sports bars, and athletic fields it represents a place, usually separated from women. 

---

12 Throughout this chapter I will be using the term “guys” as Michael Kimmel does within his book _Guyland_. That is, any male between the ages of 16 and 29 that participates in the cultural position of Guyland. Racially and economically, Kimmel seems to most frequently speak about white middle-class guys, though he does leave open the possibility for other racial and economic groups to be included. Importantly, women can and are involved in the culture of Guyland, but they are rarely allowed the classification of “guy.”
Relationally, men experience a laissez-faire, homosocial smorgasbord where guys can be “unhassled by the demands of parents, girlfriends, jobs, kids, and other nuisances of adult life” (Guyland 4). Ideologically, Guyland is about proving one’s manhood via a strict adherence to what Kimmel terms the Guy Code. Within Guyland, young men attempt to define their masculinity through misogyny, immaturity, sexual exploitation, cruelty, opposition to homosexuality, and, most importantly, positive evaluation from other men (peer pressure).

The rules of Guyland are many, and vary along the lines of race, class, and sexuality. In general, the Guy Code represents “the collection of attitudes, values and traits that together compose what it means to be a man” (Guyland 45). In order to gain a sense of what types of rules might be included within the social contracts of Guyland, Kimmel compiled a list of what guys think of when they hear the phrase “Be a man!” The top three, respectively, are: “Boy’s Don’t Cry,” “It’s Better to be Mad than Sad,” and “Don’t Get Mad—Get Even” (Guyland 44-45). Thus, “Be a man!” seems to indicate a surprising lack of emotion, which becomes an important distinction within LaBute’s play. Kimmel summarizes the Guy Code—the attitudes expressed by most guys—described by psychologist Robert Brannon in four distinct categories. First, “masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.” Second, “masculinity is measured more by wealth, power, and status than any particular body part.” Third, “What makes a man is that he is reliable in a crisis.” Fourth, a man “exude[s] an aura of daring and aggression” (Guyland 45-46). These four overarching concepts and a multitude of similar attitudes provide the foundation for the three cultural dynamics that define the Guy Code: entitlement, silence, and protection.

The culture of entitlement is the brashly strong sense of male superiority shared by many men within Guyland. Here, men believe they have a right to power, money, and prestige based on the simple fact that they are male. According to Kimmel, “even when they feel powerless, unlike women, men feel entitled to power” (Guyland 60, original emphasis). Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege and Male Privilege” speaks to a similar concept: “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (94). Kimmel’s guys, who seem to be predominantly white and middle-class, thus misrecognize power, money, and prestige as always already belonging to them. They view both their male privilege and white privilege as a right that they are entitled to.
The second element of the Guy Code, the culture of silence, marginalizes and shuns men who do not keep silent about acts of violence or cruelty towards others. The silence can be as simple as ignoring sexual harassment enacted on or by one’s peers, and as serious as keeping silent about rape or hazing. Guys ascribing to the Guy Code are afraid to oppose what they know are immoral acts because they fear violence, and the reenactment of that violence against themselves. The culture of silence propagates out of the fear of becoming the next victim.

The culture of protection, the third foundational category, draws heavily on the culture of silence within Guyland’s ranks, but expands out to the larger community that will ignore acts of violence in an effort to support and protect their boys (Guyland 44-64). An excellent example of both the culture of silence and protection resides within the brutal gang rape of a fifteen-year-old girl in Richmond, California in October of 2009. While several men raped the girl, between ten and twenty others watched, took pictures, and recorded video with their cell phones, but did nothing to help the victim. As shocking as the initial inaction of all of those who knew what was taking place is, the aftermath perhaps better illustrates why the witnesses did nothing, and how the larger community of the school protected the perpetrators. The New York Times article “Community Continues to Grapple with Rape” utilized several quotes from the affected community that illustrate the mindset of protection and silence:

‘She got drunk one time and messed with the wrong crowd and provoked some dude and got raped, that’s it.’
‘Even girls said this was O.K. because she went on her own.’
‘What happened was bad, [...] I’m not going to lie, but she shouldn’t have put herself in that situation’
‘People didn’t speak up because they were afraid’ (Shih 37A)

These comments are not representative of the entire community, but we can begin to see how the culture demands the victim’s responsibility in order to vindicate the perpetrators. Further, the Times article articulates a “no snitching’ ethos” by explaining threats that were being made to those students believed to have exposed the guys responsible for the rape. Even more horrifying was a plan to beat up the victim when she returned to school, blaming her for the perpetrators possible life sentences in prison (Shih 37A). In this situation, the inaction of the actual witnesses exemplifies a culture of silence, while the larger community’s discounting of the victim, threatening of those who break the culture of silence, and plans to re-victimize the fifteen-year-old...
old girl illustrate the explosion of the culture of silence into that of protection. The last line quoted above sums up many of these reactions; people were afraid. Witnesses failed to report the incident because of the fear they had of being victimized, ridiculed, or threatened. Others within the school minimized the crime for the same reasons. Between the cultures of silence and protection one can begin to see a nuanced difference. The culture of silence certainly assists in protecting the perpetrators of the crime: no witness called the police, went for help, or tried to stop the rape. Neither did all of the witnesses actively participate in the crime, but instead just sat by and watched, or left and told no one. The culture of silence then embodies inaction, neither directly helping nor hindering the perpetrators of a crime. On the other hand, the culture of protection directly assists the perpetrators. In this situation, it is known that several pictures and videos were being texted and e-mailed around the school. Receiving a picture and choosing to do nothing about it is indicative of the culture of silence. Blaming the victim, threatening those who would break the silence, and minimizing the gravity of the situation takes the culture of silence further and into an act of protection. As Kimmel notes, Guyland’s cultures are not only operating within horrific situations like those described above, but instead “the cultural dynamics that enable the most extreme and egregious offenses in Guyland are equally present even in the more everyday aspects of guys’ lives” (Guyland 64). Thus the cultures of Guyland run the gamut from extreme examples to common everyday occurrences. Taken in sum, Guyland represents some of the most negative ways in which young men define their masculinity.

Women, particularly during their twenties, are inundated with Guyland. According to Kimmel, women are subjected to:

The constant stream of pornographic humor in college dorms or libraries, or at countless workstations in offices across the country; the constant pressure to shape their bodies into idealized hyper-Barbies. Guyland sets the terms under which girls try to claim their own agency, develop their own senses of self. Guyland sets the terms of friendship, of sexual activity, of who is “in” and who is decidedly “out.” (Guyland 14)

Importantly, Kimmel’s description of women being “pressured to shape their bodies into idealized hyper-Barbies echoes Jeffery’s identification of “beauty” as oppressive to women. The masculine conception of “beauty” is read as the unrealistic, harmful, and cruel ways in which guys objectify the women around them. There is no doubt that beauty is found in a diverse array
of races, body-shapes, and genders; however, the “reason to be pretty”—as defined by dominant male society—is often a mode of survival, a way to guarantee acceptance and garner male attention. Within Guyland, women are faced with a choice either to conform to guy standards and be labeled a “babe” or to assert their independence, maintain their self-respect and be labeled a “bitch” (Guyland 249). Thus, Guyland represents a hyper-masculine oppressive system that only allows women two options, neither of which is particularly positive: “bitch” or “babe.”

First, I will situate the two men from Reasons to Be Pretty, Greg and Kent, within the realm of Guyland, exposing the ways in which the three major cultures of Guyland (entitlement, silence, and protection) are deployed and used by the two men in order to maintain their fragile masculine identities. Then, I will discuss the options given to the female characters within the play, and how they are labeled and demeaned as always either a “bitch” or a “babe.” Within Guyland, women are constantly seen as a threat, an enemy, or something to be conquered. Next, I will establish the ways in which Greg’s masculinity is broken down, primarily by Steph, and how he reestablishes a more adult and responsible manhood by breaking his loyalty to Kent. Finally, I will discuss Greg’s possible exit from Guyland and it’s less than desirable form of masculinity.

Greg and Kent live within the culture of entitlement. Each believes that they should be granted certain privileges based on their maleness. A perfect example resides within the very first scene of the play. Greg and Steph are fighting about Greg’s description of Steph’s face as “regular.” Greg off-handedly remarks on Steph’s temper: “you’re acting a little like one of those chicks from the seventies who started taking shots at President Ford or somebody . . . a fucking nutcase!” (14). Throughout the scene Steph maintains agency and control over the (dis)continuance of their relationship. Greg equates Steph’s anger at being labeled “regular” with the assassination attempts made by Sara Jane Moore and Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme on President Ford. The metaphor, while a ridiculous comparison, depicts both the entitlement that Greg feels as well as his misogynistic position at the beginning of the play. In this metaphor, Steph becomes a Presidential assassin and Greg equates himself to the President of the United States. By painting Steph in this light, Greg suggests that she threatens his entitlement to power, manifested by equating himself to one of the most powerful men in the world. Greg reacts to Steph’s agency by equating her usurpation of his privileged male position with morally dubious
(and unsuccessful) assassination attempts. Greg uses the metaphor in an attempt to label Steph’s actions as wrong, and regain control of the conversation and their relationship.

Kent similarly expresses his frustration with Carly possessing the masculine job of a security guard. While Kent is waiting for Carly to come by the breakroom he jokes, “she’s out on rounds. (Grins.) How gay is that?” (22). On the surface the term gay, according to Kimmel, “has become a free-floating put-down, meaning bad, dumb, stupid, wrong. It’s a generic bad thing” (Guyland 48). On a deeper level it represents blatant homophobia. Kimmel defines homophobia as “the fear of other men—that other men will perceive you as a failure, as a fraud. It’s a fear that others will see you as weak, unmanly, frightened” (Guyland 50). In this instance Kent labels a duty of Carly’s job as “gay” in order to identify and attack the ways in which her success affects his relationship with other men. For Kent, who packs boxes in the factory, having a more successful wife emasculates him, thus he minimizes its importance by describing it as “gay.” The emasculation operates as a fear of other men judging him as a failure based on his wife’s success.

Further, Kent describes how Carly came to be a security guard:

It’s humiliating, really, even having her at my place of work, but we’re stuck needing two incomes. That’s a fact. She was gonna just be on the line at one point, that’s what she first came in and applied for, but then they had an opening in security and one of these big cheeses out front—this dumbshit over in human resources says he’d like to help her out and suggests an easier job, up near him where she can sit and watch all the video cameras, sign vendors in and out at the door [. . .] hell, I dunno, terrorists came rolling through there on a mission [. . .] you think Carly’s actually gonna be any use in that situation? (64-65)

Kent’s frustration stems from the fact that Carly received a job that for all intents and purposes is traditionally associated with large, strong, masculine men who are able to enforce or regulate some form of order. In reality the job does not require the ability to put a person on the ground, but rather requires a careful and watching eye. Carly watches monitors, walks the building, and signs vendors in and out. None of these tasks exceeds Carly’s ability. In fact, Kent has to imagine a situation in which terrorists would target their plant in order to obtain “crates of Kleenex as part of their master plan” (65, original emphasis) to even begin to imagine a situation where Carly could not successfully fulfill her duties. In fact, the security guards do not carry any sort of weapon besides a set of keys and a flashlight (65). In this situation Kent seems to believe
that a job reserved for men, possibly even himself, has been given away to an unqualified
woman. Despite the fact that it is unclear whether or not Carly earns more than Kent—she does
receive full benefits—he views the security job as more desirable than his own position. Kimmel
notes an old colloquialism that seems to apply here: “men are unsexed by failure, but women are
unsexed by success” (Guyland 251). Kent describes his career frustration: “[I] can’t believe
sometimes that this is the life that God’s staked out for me in his infinite plan—then I think,
who’m I kidding?! He hasn’t got any ‘plan’! I’ve got a job in some warehouse and a limited
number of skills and a Chevrolet” (65). Kent feels entitled to easier, more rewarding, and
possibly higher paying jobs, which he believes have been given away to a woman; not any
woman, but his wife. Also, he clearly lays the blame for his failures at God’s feet, blaming him
for both having an initial plan, and for not planning his fate sufficiently. In this way, Kent’s
perception of Carly’s success begins to unsex her and allows Kent to rationalize his pursuit of
other women. As these examples illustrate, Greg and Kent experience the world from a point of
view of entitlement. They believe certain privileges, jobs, and powers are always already given
to them and men like them.

The culture of silence revolves around two separate types of men within Guyland: those
who demand silence so they can continue to behave amorally, and those who remain silent or
complicit in the amoral behavior. Often those who remain silent do so out of fear of being
emasculated or feminized. Also, these men are always in danger of losing the approval of their
peers, which defines their masculinity. As we have seen in the examples above, the culture of
entitlement causes a good deal of guys’ misogynistic behavior, while the culture of silence
reinforces and allows the behavior to reproduce. Silence allows guys to feel validated in their
exploitation of women, cruelty, and irresponsibility. As previously noted, the construction of a
guy’s masculine identity is largely based on the acceptance and validation of his peers (Guyland
61-62). Throughout most of Reasons to Be Pretty Greg remains in silence while Kent perpetrates
acts of cruelty and misogyny. For example, Kent maintains an affair while Greg keeps it quiet,
and Kent often uses derisive terms when describing women, while Greg either ignores or
participates to a lesser degree. This agreement between guys relies heavily on one of the major
tenets of the Guy Code: “Bros before Hos.” This colloquialism pervades guy culture and
contains a particular signification. In essence it hails all men to become brothers linked
communally, while demonizing, degrading, and sexually objectifying all women. Within three
words an understanding of male priorities is clearly stated. The homosocial relationship will always trump the heterosexual relationship. The threat that women represent to the fragile masculinity of Guyland—the reason that “bros” must always come before “hos”—can be easily explained as a fear of feminization and emasculation. Recall the first of Robert Brannon’s four categories of masculinity: “the relentless repudiation of the feminine.” Prioritizing female relationships, or spending time with women hardly “repudiates the feminine.” Thus, women, as sexual objects, can be used to reify masculinity within Guyland, but can also threaten that masculinity if the relationship requires a higher priority or even a partnership. The common contemporary labeling of a man who spends too much time with his partner as being “pussy whipped” provides an excellent example. Literally, the term indicates that the female genitalia has power over the man. To be controlled by the embodiment of femininity is to be emasculated. Thus, the fear of emasculation by a failure to repudiate the feminine justifies, for guys, their misogyny and amoral behavior.

Kent evokes the loyalty of the Guy Code throughout the play by demanding Greg’s silence with regards to his affair. Greg coaxes Kent into telling him about the affair and immediately denies his responsibility for his actions:

KENT. I mean, you think she looks good in those dress clothes you should see her in a pair of shorts. Fuck.
GREG. Great.
KENT. Hey, don’t judge. It’s just a thing, it happened, I can’t help it.
GREG. No, I’m sure . . . you probably didn’t have much to do with it really.
Right?
KENT. Actually, no. Few smiles, “How’s tricks?” and that was about it. / Came to one of our games and asked me out for a drink. I said OK and there you go.
. . . (59)

Of particular importance within this dialogue is Greg and Kent’s hasty desire to displace the blame of what they clearly both know is an immoral act (cheating on one’s wife). Greg suggests that Kent didn’t have much to do with the affair’s beginnings and Kent places the responsibility at his mistress’ feet. By displacing the blame for their behavior on the world, Kent’s mistress, or nature, it becomes justifiable to keep the act silent. As I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Kent believes guys simply have to “ride that wave. Yep. Ride it to shore and see what comes of
it” (65). Not only are guys entitled to ride whatever wave comes their way, which might include sexual exploits, jobs, or even violent control of others, they are also allowed to avoid the consequences of their actions through the culture of silence.

Kent insists to Greg that “You know I’d do the same for you . . . totally would, and us guys gotta stick together, right? We’re like fucking buffaloes out here” (62). Kent’s use of buffaloes suggests that, as men, he and Greg are prime, easy targets for the attacks of women. He invokes the rights of the Guy Code, specifically their shared peril in repudiating the feminine, in order to ensure Greg’s support and silence in the matter of his affair. Despite Kent’s assertion of shared loyalty, he does not actually seem to support Greg as he navigates the ruins of his relationship with Steph. In fact, at the beginning of the play, Kent was not willing to assist in the displacement of Greg’s responsibility in calling Steph “regular.” Kent simply states, “good, because you’re the one who said it” (22). He refuses to allow Greg the ability to displace responsibility for the breakup on Carly, who informed Steph about Greg’s “regular” comment, and later actually stops a physical altercation between the two. Initially, we might read this as a form of protection and loyalty to one’s spouse; however, Kent makes it quite clear to Greg immediately after Carly has left that he is a “hundred percent” on Greg’s side, calls both Carly and Steph “cunts,” and exclaims that he can’t upset Carly because he is “not willing to make lunch for [him]self all week” (30). Why can Kent bend the rules of Guyland, side with women strategically, and abandon his “bro” for personal interest and satisfaction? Put simply, Guyland, like all other communities, has built-in social hierarchies that allow the guys with more power to exploit lower status males like Greg. The difference can be seen in the ways Kent and Greg use Guyland. Kent applies the Guy Code to exploit others and fulfill his desires, while Greg follows the Code in order to gain acceptance and validation of his masculinity. Kent gains sex and power by enforcing the Guy Code as a dominant male, while Greg only gains superficial masculine validity by allowing himself to be submissive to Kent.

The culture of protection operates with similar justifications to the culture of silence, with one large difference. The culture of protection expands past the confines of silence and allows us to see the active protection of guys by those both within and outside of Guyland. Within Reasons to Be Pretty we are not given strict examples of people outside of Guyland participating in the culture of protection. Instead, I suggest that we can see the culture of protection at work within Greg’s movement from simple silence to outright lying in order to protect Kent’s secret. Within
the course of a single scene Carly asks Greg in three separate sections to verify that Kent is not cheating on her:

    CARLY. Little things. A change in his routine, this day schedule, and how he’s out of the house a lot when I call him—he says he’s sleeping but I’ve asked the neighbors and they say that his car’ll be gone sometimes—just stuff.
    GREG. It’s . . . Carly, it’s probably nothing.
    CARLY. You know what? “Probably” is so far from being my friend right now.
    GREG. I’m sure it’s not. / Promise.
    [...] 
    GREG. I’m sure that’s not the case.
    CARLY. I’m not saying he’s not . . .
    GREG. Good, because I’m almost one hundred and ten percent sure that’s the story . . . but I am not his priest, I don’t see into the heart of Kent like an old-time prophet . . .
    [...] 
    CARLY. So I’m asking you then. [...] 
    GREG. Oh, right, right! Sorry . . . this is making me a little, sorry. Friends of ours, from day shift. We all met up—don’t see them very often—and we had dinner. / Simple. (85-91)

The first assurance reaffirms Kent’s loyalty for Carly. For Greg, each iteration seems to become more strained and less unequivocal when compared to his initial assurance of “I’m sure it’s not.” In Greg’s second assurance he basically denies any ability to have knowledge on the topic. Finally, Carly forces a straight answer from Greg that makes him lie outright about the specific circumstances surrounding a dinner he had with Kent and his mistress. Greg confesses that he and Kent had dinner, but specifically lies about who else was at the restaurant. He tells Carly they had dinner with some guys, “friends of ours, from day shift,” when in reality they ate with Kent’s mistress and one of her friends. Carly pushes Greg for more detailed answers because she is privy to the ways in which Guyland operates. Greg reaffirms Kent’s loyalty but also denies any actual knowledge of Kent’s day-to-day life. Here, we can see the nuanced difference between protection and silence. Greg’s silence does not require any personal risk; he remains quiet about the affair, and takes no responsibility. He rationalizes his silence by claiming it’s
none of his business, or not his problem. When Carly forces Greg into a direct lie, Greg’s ability to displace responsibility is lost. Greg becomes fully complicit in Kent’s actions. The difference is one of minding one’s own business compared to fully condoning another’s actions. The announcement of Carly’s pregnancy, and the emotional hug and appreciation that Carly shows Greg reinforces the cruelty that both Greg and Kent are enacting on Carly. Greg too, seems to be more affected than he’d like by Carly’s show of affection and her pregnancy: “GREG sits down and pulls out his cell phone. He stares at it. Exhales sharply. Makes a call” (92). Greg continues to follow through with what the Guy Code dictates, but one can begin to sense bitterness in his enslavement to the Code. He seems to doubt himself as he pauses to stare at the phone and finally lets out a sharp breath of air before calling Kent. The moment foreshadows Greg’s eventual dismissal of the Guy Code and its main proponent throughout the play: Kent.

Before I continue to examine Greg’s journey throughout the play it is necessary to expound on the concept of “babes” and “bitches” as it applies to Reasons to Be Pretty. As I have already stated, the difference between a “babe” and a “bitch” within the world of Guyland is simply whether or not a woman chooses to conform to guys’ perception of how they should behave, dress, and acquiesce to guys desires and attitudes. Within the play Steph and Carly become “bitches” in the moment that they confront Greg with the reality of his passing, but cruel, comment about Steph’s “regular” face. Carly’s rebuttal perhaps best exemplifies this switch:

GREG. Why’d you tell her? Huh? Why?!

CARLY. Why’d you say it?! Right back at you, OK? Why would you ever say a thing like that about someone . . . and particularly a person you supposedly like. Care for. I’m sorry but nobody, no-body, even the most clueless of guys, is gonna make that kind of mistake. You were being honest . . . (26)

Greg does not understand why Carly would break the culture of silence, which he assumed she had always agreed to because of her relationship with Kent. Even within her own words she reifies Guyland culture when she states that the mistake was not necessarily the comment but his honesty. Up to this point, Greg thought of Carly as a “babe,” a woman who adheres to the tenets of Guyland and participates in its culture. A woman is allowed within the ranks of guys so long as she maintains subservience to the codes in place and guys in general. In this moment though, Carly refuses to conform to Greg’s explanations of his behavior, and she maintains a stronger
loyalty to her friend Steph. Her refusal to protect Greg by silence, or other means, and Steph’s refusal to continue to let Greg define both her self-image and self-worth immediately throws doubt on Greg’s masculinity. Within Guyland, masculinity is defined by power, entitlement, and control over others. Greg’s loss of power, a relationship, and control over the situation can be read as an attack on his masculinity, and leaves Greg open to the possibility of negative peer evaluation.

On the opposite side of the “bitch”/”babe” dichotomy we are presented with Kent’s mistress, Crystal, as a quintessential “babe.” Kent describes his mistress’ acceptance of their affair:

GREG. God. . . / And she knows about Carly?
KENT. Fuck yeah. Whole deal is square with her, why I don’t know. Some girls like that . . . The whole competition thing. Maybe she looks at her and thinks, “this dude must be worth it, a woman like that on his arm.” I dunno, I’m not Nostradamus.
GREG. Yeah, good, thanks for clearing that up, ‘cause I was pretty confused. . .
KENT. I’m just saying—she gets it, she’s aware and there’s no problem. And she is fine, man, lemme tell you. Twenty-three, so, you know, only starting to fade a bit. (59-60)

Kent’s mistress complies with standards of beauty and sexuality, and accepts any caveats that Kent places on their relationship. Because of her willingness to comply, fulfill Kent’s desires, and maintain her status as a mistress, Kent labels her a “babe.” Kent’s entitlement also comes into play within this quote, and serves as an excellent example of that culture. Kent perceives himself as extremely desirable because of the beauty of both his wife and the women supposedly jealous of her. Further, Kent refers to Crystal as “only starting to fade a bit,” indicating his misogynistic attitude towards the female body and his entitlement to the youngest, and prettiest, females available. Crystal never actually appears within the text and operates as a stereotypical “home-wrecker” character—she affects the previous relationships of both Greg and Kent. In other words she serves as a scapegoat for Kent’s behavior, a location in which to displace his responsibility. Importantly, the scapegoat presented in the play is feminine, and offers a constant example of the masculine repudiation of the feminine. Meanwhile, Carly’s pregnancy, the changes her body is going through, and her possession of a higher status job allows Kent to
justify his lack of interest in Carly and his redoubled time investment in his mistress. Kent’s stereotypical behavior towards his pregnant wife and extended interest in his mistress indicates Guyland’s objectification of women in two separate ways. First, it announces the unacceptability of the female body being pregnant, differently shaped, or in power. Second, it points to exactly what is acceptable for women: super-model good looks, sexual availability, and subservience to guys’ demands. Regardless of position, women within Guyland are demeaned. Within the play the dichotomy between the “bitch” and the “babe” forces Greg to begin to realize the pitfalls and immorality of Guyland and its Code.

Throughout the play the emasculation of Greg, primarily by Steph, serves as a catalyst for his development and change. The clearest example of this is in the first act, when Steph meets Greg at a mall food court and presents a list of physical inadequacies for the whole of the mall to bear witness to:

Your nostrils make me sick and I always have to look up into them because we have the most unimaginative sex that a person could ever come up with . . . I think you’re gay, maybe—seriously, you should check into that because you sure have trouble doing it with me and I’m fine. I know I liked it. [. . . ] I’ve never thought you had a great body, It’s OK, but nothing really special. [. . .] and sometimes you smell. (47-48)

Steph attacks Greg’s ability to perform in bed, his sexuality, his physical body, and his scent. While the presentation of this list of flaws in front of a crowd of strangers could not help but be embarrassing and emasculating, one learns by the end of the scene that Steph “made that up. To hurt [Greg]” (50). Steph assures Greg that all the made-up flaws she listed would never be true, and therefore could not truly hurt him, but she insists that what he said in passing, even though it was only one comment, “[is] completely and for all-times sake true” (51). Steph claims that she could say all of those cruel things and still love Greg. Greg attempts to equate his passing comment to Steph’s tirade in order to explain his love, and gain forgiveness. His argument suggests that Steph’s tirade in the mall is no different than his passing comment. If she can say such cruel things and still claim to be in love with him, then why can’t he say her face is “regular” and maintain his love for her? Despite what Steph claims, it seems that her comments, true or not, can in fact hurt Greg, and Greg’s argument proves ineffectual and Steph leaves. To some small extent it seems that Greg begins to realize the cruelty he enacted on Steph as he
himself has to face rejection. After she goes, he un-crumbles her list and reads. His acceptance of the list, or rather his willingness to read through the hurtful things that Steph attempted to make true, suggests he may be willing to accept the consequence of his action and understand the harm he has done. Guyland supports the creation of a particular type of masculinity, and defends against the emasculation of its members. Steph’s emasculation of Greg then, represents a breaking down of the Guyland system, which was supposed to have protected him. Emasculation acts as a punishment used by both proponents of Guyland and outsiders attempting to reveal the negative effects of guy culture. Attacking sexuality, sexual ability, and male power will emasculate a man who breaks the culture of silence. In Greg’s situation, Steph effectively polices the boundaries of Guyland that she attempts to break down. By attacking his sexuality, she actually re-equates the masculine with good, and the feminine or homosexual with bad. Even as she gains the label of “bitch,” she continues to support guy culture by subconsciously reaffirming its repudiation of the feminine. Essentially, one cannot voluntarily exit Guyland or be kicked out of Guyland on the basis of emasculation. As long as one continues to support the cultures of Guyland, consciously or unconsciously, one remains ensnared in its rules, beliefs, and behaviors. Exiting Guyland requires a hyper-conscious decision to reject its tenets and cultures.

Steph’s emasculation of Greg becomes more complicated in the second act when Steph and Greg bump into each other at a restaurant. Within their encounter Steph manages to emasculate Greg in three separate ways. First, she is wearing a new skirt and has spent extra time molding her appearance to be “pretty.” Steph notes that Greg finds her attractive and accuses him of “totally miss[ing] me. My body” (75). The fact, that Greg admires the looks of his former girlfriend is not in itself emasculating. Instead, he is emasculated because Steph points out his attention to her body, and that he no longer has access to what she claims he misses. Greg is emasculated because he is presented with something he wants and cannot have. Second, Steph slaps Greg across the face when he implies that she is a slut for getting as dressed up as she has for a first date. Greg maintains his composure, but within Guyland an act of violence can both destroy and reinstate one’s masculinity. In this case, Greg lashes out verbally in order to reinstate his authority and rebuke Steph’s accusations of missing her body. Instead, Steph slaps Greg and further damages his masculine ego. Third, Steph is actually on a date with a man whose financial future is more secure. Steph’s date owns a convertible, with vanity plates, which indicates that he is a man of personal wealth or at the very least familial wealth. Greg attempts to
make Steph realize that her date belongs to the same guy culture that he belongs to, “you’re not gonna be able to [... ] call me when this miserable shithead that you’re out with tonight hurts you, because he is gonna, he will, he’s a guy and so it’s a done deal” (77). So, it seems that Greg still believes whole-heartedly in the dominant Guyland from which he has subscribed throughout the play. Greg seems to believe that this man, by virtue of his maleness, will no doubt hurt Steph like all men inevitably do within the realm of Guyland. Yet, Greg does make a final attempt to compliment Steph’s looks before she goes back to her date.

At this point, Greg has been humiliated by his ex-girlfriend and made to recognize the severity with which Kent’s actions are hurting Carly. Greg has realized his actions against Steph were cruel and his complicity with Kent’s amoral behavior. Finally, Greg informs Kent that he will no longer be party to his affair:

I just you know... I felt like shit when I did that to Carly. Even though we don’t always get along—and then she whacks me with the baby thing!—it was crappy, it was, and I don’t wanna be that guy to her anymore, alright? / I’m—this isn’t being judgmental or saying anything about your lifestyle or whatnot, I’m just saying it needs to quit for me. Being that guy. (100)

Despite Greg’s plea to be removed from the situation, Kent continues to insist on his guilt and complicity in the affair, whether or not he chooses to no longer be involved: “You said ‘go for it’ [... ] you went out to dinner with us, lied to my wife about it, practically took the pictures of us” (101). In this way Kent begins to attack Greg in order to force him back into the world of Guyland. Kent goes on to emasculate Greg by calling him a “frightened pussy” and threatening him with physical violence that will end in the emasculation of Greg. If Greg wants to leave Guyland, then Kent will ensure he leaves without his masculine identity. Throughout the altercation Greg comes to the defense of Steph’s beauty, and finally takes away the all-important ability to win a sports trophy by refusing to play ball. When Kent continues to push and violence becomes necessary, Greg soundly beats Kent, thereby emasculating him. Thus, Greg reconstitutes his masculinity by standing up to Guyland’s cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection. By emasculating Kent, Greg has damaged Kent’s social position among his peers, but has not replaced him in the ways he benefits from Guyland. Kent will continue to utilize Guyland in order to structure his masculinity and gain sex, power, and prestige. He will effectively go on to reconstruct his masculinity and use the cultures of silence and protection to
get what he feels entitled too. Greg on the other hand, consciously desires a break from the cultures of Guyland that have transformed him into “that guy.” Sadly, Greg uses an act of violence and emasculation to obtain the break he desires. Like Steph, Greg in some ways remains mired in the ideologies of Guyland. At the very least he begins to change himself within the Guyland culture by standing up to Kent and refusing to validate his choices and actions, but it remains clear that this is only the first step of many needed to transform or leave guy culture.

Since Kent—the epitome of all that is wrong with Guyland—has been emasculated by Greg, and Greg has made a choice to end his participation in the culture of silence or protection, then one is left with the final question of the degree in which Greg succeeds in renegotiating his masculine identity. To answer this question, LaBute has only provided two short scenes, the second of which was cut for the Broadway production.

The first scene begins with a relatively promising but nuanced action by Greg and ends with a type of reconciliation between Greg and Steph. Greg and Carly hug, and begin polite conversation where Greg makes an effort to ensure that Carly knows she is beautiful even though she claims to be “the size of a milk cow.” Greg responds by telling her she is “the most beautiful cow out there” (111-112). Then Greg convinces Carly to use a sick day and head home early, so that Carly will catch Kent at home with his mistress: “Take off—just tell your supervisor that you’re feeling sick and go home. Jump in bed with Kent and surprise him” (112). When she resists, Greg insists: “No, tonight. / I’d really do it now if I were you . . . right now. You should go” (112). According to Kimmel “the only way to transform Guyland is to break the culture of silence that sustains the Guy Code” (Guyland 280). In this moment Greg breaks the culture of protection, but in some ways continues on with the culture of silence, which he swore to earlier in the play. Greg does not simply tell Carly that Kent is cheating on her, but rather provides the circumstances that will allow her to make the discovery. Allowing Carly to discover the truth about Kent rejects all the tenets of Guyland that would suggest Greg’s actions were wrong. On the other hand, Greg’s choice to not implicate himself by telling Carly the whole truth, including how he lied to her, suggests his inability to assume responsibility for his actions. While Greg has made progress towards obtaining a masculinity not tied to misogyny, irresponsibility, and cruelty, he clearly does not accept the full consequences of his actions. Thus, Greg’s rejection of Guyland seems incomplete.
In the final interaction between Steph and Greg I find the stage directions to be more illuminating than the actual dialogue. Shortly after Carly leaves, Steph arrives, well-dressed and wearing a diamond ring. Steph searches for the words to tell Greg she is engaged, but Greg notices the ring and saves her the trouble. The two joke about the upcoming wedding and Greg seems genuinely happy for Steph: “So go be happy then. / Yes. That’s what I want for you . . .” (122). However, Steph has not just come to let Greg know she is getting married, but rather to share her doubts about the wedding and gain a more substantial end to their relationship. Below I have listed the stage directions of the scene in chronological order; if I have skipped one it is indicated with ellipses:

They have a good laugh that builds for a moment. (113)  
GREG looks STEPH up and down—she can’t meet his eyes. (114)  
She searches around for the right word—GREG takes her by the hand. Gently. (114)  
STEPH slugs GREG a good one on the arm, just for old time’s sake. He smiles. (115)  
[ . . . ] STEPH nods and inches closer to him. (116)  
They grow silent and just look at each other for a bit. GREG reaches over and touches the ring. (116)  
[ . . . ]  
She turns to GREG now, taking his hand in hers. A smile. (119)  
[ . . . ]  
Greg reaches over and gives STEPH a little sort of hug. (123)  
STEPH leans forward now, moving slowly toward a kiss. GREG meets her halfway. A lovely moment. STEPH starts to cry but catches herself—grabs up her purse and exits. (123)  

By looking at only the stage directions we see the back and forth nature of both Greg and Steph as they attempt to discover what their relationship meant, what went wrong, and where it has lead them. For the first time in the play Greg and Steph seem happy together; they laugh, hold hands, comfort one another, and discuss their relationship in a civilized way. Steph sums up the way she is feeling in two distinct sentences: “part of me is still waiting for you to sweep me off my feet or something, some last-ditch thing to win me back” and “the other side of me, the
reliable part, was screaming, ‘Thank God ya came to your fucking senses! This setup is not for you. Get out and stay out. Now” (119-120). Greg too, recognizes that while he was comfortable, maybe even happy, in their relationship, that parting was the right choice to continue to progress: “I was just drifting, and the four years we spent together probably could’ve gone on another four or ended in a month and I’d’ve been fine either way—and that’s how it was, we were just getting by on fumes at that point” (121). Greg is going to go to college and earn some “respect,” and Steph has found a secure relationship. Despite all the agreement that what happened was for the best, the scene closes with a slow and beautiful kiss that causes tears and ends the conversation. In many ways it seems Greg became the man Steph wished he was throughout the entire play. He was honest, calm, and kind to her throughout the scene. He allowed her to speak her mind, and took responsibility for his actions towards her. Most importantly, he recognized the importance of their breakup. The end of the scene marks the reality of their relationship’s conclusion and provides further evidence for Greg’s attempt to change his Guyland masculinity. Throughout, Greg shows respect for Steph’s feelings and relinquishes control over the conversation, allowing Steph to speak her mind. He does not attempt to sabotage her current relationship or insist that their relationship shouldn’t have ended. Greg acts in a mature and responsible fashion, and despite all of their history he agrees with Steph that it is time to move on, recognizing that it would be best for both parties.

The final monologue, and all the other monologues within the play, was cut when the play moved from its off-Broadway production to its Broadway premier. At this moment the Broadway production script remains unavailable. Theatre critics reviewing the new changes in the Broadway production presented different perspectives. David Rooney noted that “the play benefits considerably from the removal of four extraneous monologues in which each character addressed the audience to articulate themes now more fully apparent in their shared scenes” (More then Skin Deep 31). In contrast, David Sheward claims that the monologues “gave the play richness it now lacks. We could see deeper into the lives of these blue-collar combatants; it was almost like reading a complex novella” (15). Initially, I would agree with David Sheward; the monologues do seem to add a depth of character that I would miss if the monologues were cut. Regardless, the effect of cutting these monologues must have altered the depiction of LaBute’s characters making one wonder about the motivations behind such a change.
Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to discuss this apparently fundamental shift with LaBute himself via a series of email exchanges.

According to LaBute, the producers drove the decision to remove the monologues. LaBute noted “[he] was fine with the idea—i like trying new things—but i also, like the director terry kinney, felt that we should wait a bit and see how the monologues played on broadway with an audience. this didn't happen. they asked us to try it immediately and we did. I knew the show would work without them as they didn't forward the plot so much as illuminate character [sic]” (LaBute, “Questions”). When asked about how he felt the removal affected the themes and meaning of the play, LaBute responded:

i do think the audience naturally felt more emotional at the end of the broadway version because they experienced a more emotional ending; the off-broadway ending, with greg’s monologue intact, created to a more intellectual effect [ . . . ] i was completely satisfied watching this [off-Broadway ending] on stage and i wrote it, so i obviously liked this approach. Ultimately, though, i was probably more moved by the broadway ending than what happened off-broadway [sic] (LaBute, “Questions”).

While LaBute clearly states that he was happy with the end result of the changes, he also indicates that it was not his preference. He marks the difference between the two productions as the difference between an emotional and an intellectual ending. LaBute stated that he wrote a new ending for the Broadway version to make up for the loss of Greg’s monologue, but he did not reply to my subsequent inquiry regarding that new ending.

This discussion with LaBute raises the question: what does it mean that the play became more emotional as opposed to intellectual? Traditionally, emotional/intellectual is compared to the binary of feminine/masculine, where the feminine is characterized as more emotional while the masculine is characterized as more logical or intellectual. By concluding the play in a more feminine, emotional way, it is possible that Greg also moves away from Guyland’s traditional masculinity and towards a more open and emotional form of identity. Because I cannot experience the Broadway production, I can make no direct analysis or conclusions, but a final comment by LaBute when I asked him about the degree in which the monologues were integrated into the other scenes might shed some light. LaBute replied:
once we knew the [monologues] were going out i tried to keep key bits of business and information and squeeze those into various scenes, especially for characters like ‘carly’ and ‘kent,’ and even ‘steph’ to some extent. The less time these characters had on stage, the more important the [monologues] felt in rounding out their fictional lives. [ . . . ] greg was on stage the most so suffered the least, also because his [monologue] was more summational at the end of the play [sic]” (LaBute, “Questions”).

From LaBute’s perspective, Greg’s final monologue repeats or sums up what has occurred within the play, and adds little if any new information about his transformation. In essence, Greg’s character “suffered the least” from cutting the monologues. While I can see clearly why LaBute feels Greg “suffered the least,” I argue that we do miss the most exact enunciation of Greg’s journey by cutting the final monologue. Yet without reading the revised script, and the new ending of the play, it is impossible to conclude whether the Broadway production removed too much detail and milieu as David Sheward suggests, making it impossible to see the ways in which Greg has changed. Contrarily, it is equally impossible to conclude the show “benefited considerably” from the cuts as David Rooney claims, allowing a more focused presentation of the themes LaBute wanted to articulate. Without clear knowledge of the new script of Reasons to Be Pretty I will confine the rest of my analysis to the published text.

Greg’s final monologue is best summed up with the first line of the scene “What’d I learn from this—all that’s happened to me?” (125). Basically, it puts together all the missing pieces of Greg’s journey and allows him to express what he feels most strongly about his own personal growth. The answer to the question of whether Greg has changed is spoon fed to an audience, but seems contradictory with regards to the degree of his transformation. Greg claims he’s “learned to make [him]self clear, to try and be a bit more straightforward about [his] feelings—to try and have feelings” (125). This coincides neatly with what Kimmel suggests manhood is all about within Guyland. As I listed above, the number one item on Kimmel’s “Be a Man!” list is “Boys Don’t Cry.” Within Guyland displaying or having emotions admits weakness and casts doubt on a man’s masculinity. The very fact that Greg demonstrates a willingness to have and share his feelings disconnects him from Guyland and its structure of masculinity. Moreover, Greg does not just want to share feelings, but states he will be more “straightforward” about his feelings. The word “straightforward” indicates a more masculine take on having feelings. Greg, as a man, will
not “share” his feelings, as if he were giving a gift to a friend. Rather, he will be “straightforward” when discussing his emotions, as if to declare his feelings efficiently and directly to those interested. In this way Greg distinguishes his new, direct form of feeling from that of the more feminine mode of sharing. That said, having emotions becomes the least ambiguous of the ways in which Greg has developed.

Greg’s monologue goes on to deal with the realization of how men are socially constructed to chase after women that supposedly have ideal bodies:

   Not just that beauty and stuff like that is only skin deep—we always hear that—but that it may not even actually exist. It’s this mirage . . . some nonexistent thing, really, that we see on people’s faces or in what we imagine their bodies to be and it has so little, I mean, absolutely almost no real value with anything important or tangible in our lives, and yet we can’t stop from chasing it. (125-126)

Greg has learned that the ideals of beauty are constructed and actually have little real value. In this way Greg has grown to learn something that will undoubtedly help him to understand his world and adjust his own identity to be more understanding of the issues of gender and physical sexuality, but the final line insinuates something else. Greg recognizes that “we can’t stop from chasing” ideals of beauty, gender, or sexuality. In fact, Greg plans on going back to college because he recognizes that “the smart guys [ . . . ] were busy studying, getting scholarships and good jobs . . . which then allow[ed] them to actually marry all those beautiful girls whom the rest of us will never get to touch!” (125-127). Despite what Greg has learned about the constructed nature of gender ideals and physical beauty, he still desires the same thing: a beautiful wife that he thought he’d never be able “touch.” Greg simultaneously recognizes the unimportance of gender ideals even as he reinforces the gender ideal he seeks to obtain. In this way, Greg’s new manhood, while perhaps more self aware, still ascribes to the same ultimate goal regarding the objectification of feminine beauty that he would theoretically escape in moving away from Guyland. But, has Greg actually exited the world of Guyland? In order to answer this question I will look at both the ways in which Greg has broken with the tenets of Guyland, and the ways in which he reifies Guyland’s masculine definitions.

Greg exhibits several behaviors and attitudes in his final monologue that seem to indicate his movement away from Guyland. Greg explains that he has become a better person because of Steph. Greg says he is “less judgmental about what a person is like [ . . . ] In theory I know
better how to treat people. Girls. Or women; I guess they like it when you say ‘women’” (128). In essence, he believes he handles his relationships in a more mature and responsible way. He respects others enough not to make a snap judgment based on their physical appearance. He has declined to behave by labeling women either “babe” or “bitch,” which Guyland suggests as the norm. Further, Greg has rejected the culture of silence by refusing to cover for Kent or further participate in his affair. He has stopped the culture of protection by convincing Carly to go home and catch her husband. Greg feels he has grown-up and become an adult by the end of the play. In many ways he has grown. He has vowed to be more “straightforward about his emotions,” seems to have the desire to stand up to cruelty enacted on others, and has come to handle his own rejections and shortcomings in a mature way.

On the other hand, many of the ways Greg has changed might reassert masculine dominance, if a somewhat gentler version of it. He does not demonstrate why his newfound respect towards women is so important, but only that it allows him to better deal with his relationships, as if the end goal is not to create equity and take responsibility, but rather maintain power by manipulative means. Also, Greg’s actions to help Carly discover her husband’s affair are veiled by a lack of acknowledgement of his own complicity in the affair. It seems Greg’s new sense of self represents nothing more than a tool with which to better navigate his social world. Despite Greg’s apparent break with the cultures of silence and protection, he has not broken with the culture of entitlement. It is best evidenced above when Greg states his desire to go to college so that he can marry a beautiful women who would have been previously unavailable to him. The correlation between money, education, and success with that of marrying (obtaining) some sort of a trophy wife indicates that the culture of entitlement is not something Greg has left behind.

Bearing this in mind, it seems that Greg has taken several steps towards a more egalitarian form of masculinity, but falls short of fully releasing the traditional masculinities found in Guyland. Frankly, it seems that Greg’s position parallels that of many contemporary men familiar with removing sexist jokes from the work place, allowing women into previously male-dominated professions, and beginning to recognize themselves as emotional beings. All of these things are possible, just so long as it doesn’t affect an individual man’s ability to succeed, gain power, or marry a woman with “supermodel” good looks. Greg seems willing to change, but stumbles when it comes to fully giving up masculine privilege. The new masculinity presented
within this play represents one step in the right direction, but ultimately remains tied to ideas of entitlement, male power, and privilege. *Reasons to Be Pretty* critiques several negative aspects of guy culture, but falls short of presenting a fully renegotiated masculine identity.
CHAPTER 3

SARAH RUHL’S LATE: A COWBOY SONG:
“A GIRL / WHO RIDES LIKE A MAN—”

Grosz proposes that we think of the body—the brain, muscles, sex organs, hormones, and more—as composing the inside of the Möbius strip. Culture and experience would constitute the outside surface. But, as the image suggests, the inside and outside are continuous and one can move from one to the other without ever lifting one’s feet off the ground.

—Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body (24)

Almost always constructed on a male body, the masculine identity becomes a monolithic signifier for patriarchy, power, social legitimacy, misogyny, and domination. Defined in this way, it becomes difficult to construct a masculinity that does not always already indicate an oppression of minority masculinities or women. Traditionally, the average audience member reads stereotypical gender behavior as being biologically based, the inside of the Möbius strip. A clear connection can be made between Anne Fausto-Sterling’s Sexing the Body and Sarah Ruhl’s Late: a cowboy song. Specifically, Ruhl gives special thanks to Anne Fausto-Sterling and her book Sexing the Body in the published version of Late: a cowboy song. The special thanks suggests that Ruhl recognizes the complex interconnectedness between the body’s biological basis and the cultural experience of an individual as expressed by theories set out by Fausto-Sterling in her book. Sexing the Body challenges traditional concepts of the construction of sexuality, and allows for the possibility of multiple identities within both the overarching categories of male and female. The question of how masculinity can be constructed or what it can mean lies within the interaction between both the biological and cultural factors, which Fausto-Sterling interrogates, that create the masculine identity. Judith Halberstam claims that

13 “A Möbius strip is a topological puzzle, a flat ribbon twisted once and then attached end to end to form a circular twisted surface” (Sterling, Sexing 24).
“far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (emphasis added Female 1).

Halberstam’s discussion of female masculinity and Fausto-Sterling’s interrogation of both the cultural and biological factors of gender identity provide a frame through which to analyze Sarah Ruhl’s *Late: a cowboy song*. The play cleverly explains sex and gender throughout by exposing the multifarious ways in which a masculine, or feminine, gender identity can operate. By looking at female masculinity and the necessary combination of cultural and biological factors that determine gender identity within Sarah Ruhl’s play, I will analyze the construction of the masculine gender on both the female and the male bodies. Recognizing that masculinity exists and changes apart from maleness will allow one to see the interconnection between sex and gender as it is expressed in the Möbius strip metaphor. While my analysis of Shepard and LaBute depicted the crisis of masculinity painted on traditional male bodies, Ruhl’s play allows for an understanding of how masculinity can be constructed differently. The play creates an ideology of diversity about what masculine can mean and how society constructs it.

First, I will situate the problematic connection of masculinity to maleness by exploring, understanding, and challenging the assumed connection between the binaries of masculinity/femininity and male/female, which can be understood through *Late: a cowboy song*. Then, I will analyze the journey and relationship of a wife and husband (Mary and Crick) as the wife moves to an ever more complicated vision of both her own gender and gender at large. Finally, I will discuss masculinity as it is presented in Red, the female character Ruhl explicitly describes as “no cowgirl” but “a cowboy” (121).

Sarah Ruhl’s *Late: a cowboy song* is the story of Mary’s journey through the complexities of gender and sexuality within the twenty-first century as she tries on different gender roles before ultimately finding her preferred identity. Mary and Crick are in a relationship that performs a perfect inversion of traditional society’s gender binary in which Mary assumes the more masculine breadwinner role, while Crick takes on a feminine role by remaining at home and playing housewife. The entrance of Red into Mary’s life serves as a catalyst for the destabilization and eventual destruction of Mary and Crick’s relationship. When Mary becomes pregnant with Crick’s child it solidifies their relationship (in marriage) and reformulates their gender positions into traditional roles. Mary takes on the more traditional gender role of stay-at-home mother and wife, while Crick must go out and find a job to support the family. Despite the
pseudo-stabilizing effect that Mary’s pregnancy has, Red continues to slowly become a larger part of Mary’s life as she recognizes her unhappiness with traditional gender identities. The birth of Mary and Crick’s intersexed child confirms for Mary the necessity of larger gender diversity, while pushing Crick further into traditional roles that clearly make him unhappy. As the play continues, Mary and Crick’s relationship deteriorates until Mary leaves Crick, taking her child with her. In the final scene Red and Mary, in a vast landscape, sing a revision of Red’s initial cowboy song. Taken in total, the play shows the destruction and negativity that can accompany strict traditional gender stereotypes through the breakup of Mary and Crick, and instead advocates Red’s practical cowboy wisdom: individuality and acceptance of others brings fulfillment and happiness.

General knowledge about gender and sexuality propagates binary myths that entrench themselves in every aspect of human life. From the limitations of the construction of language that requires the gendering/sexing of both subjects and objects, to the concrete and invasive forms of gender/sex assignment that rely on surgical reconstruction and hormone therapy, human beings—through a wide spectrum of differing tactics—create binaries that define gender and sexual identities. Because of the great myth of the male/female physical divide and subsequent assumptions about behavior and psychology, larger categories used to define the characteristics of male or female were created: masculinity and femininity. The ideologies of these categories are tied up in deeply held beliefs about behavior and physiology. Fausto-Sterling’s Sexing the Body reiterates the distinction between the terms gender and sex that were first enunciated by John Money and Anke Ehrhardt in 1972. Fausto-Sterling explains Ehrhardt and Money’s categorizations: gender is “the internal conviction that one is either male or female (gender identity) and the behavioral expressions of that conviction.” Meanwhile, “sex refers to physical attributes and is anatomically and physiologically determined” (3). These terms thus create an, albeit more complex, binary division that relies on, interrogates, and often reifies other binaries such as male/female, gay/straight, and masculine/feminine. The gender/sex binary allows scientists and theorists to strategically defend a position on gender or sexual difference. For example, early feminist scholars might rely heavily on the socially constructed nature of gender to interrogate inequality. Similarly, child development psychologists might attempt to locate mathematical ability within the development of the fetus’ brain in order to unequivocally
“prove” that male brains develop with a predisposition to mathematical ability.\textsuperscript{14} In other words, the separation of gender and sex is often used to discuss problematic binaries like nature/nurture, real/constructed, and male/female.

Recognizing that sex and gender was yet another binary, several feminist scholars—including Anne Fausto-Sterling—have attempted to rectify the duality of sex and gender. Fausto-Sterling argues, “that sexuality is a somatic fact created by a cultural effect” (21). Physiology affects the way individuals experience their gender identity while at the same time physiology is plastic and constructed by the culture one lives in. A complex system of influence resides within the concepts of sex and gender. Thus, when talking about masculinity or femininity one speaks always already of both gender and sex. By allowing for a more fluid definition of gender identity that makes visible the interconnections between behavior, culture, and physiology, Fausto-Sterling and other gender theorists create a method of thinking about gender that is inclusive and adaptable to different gender identities. These new theories can account for homosexuality, heterosexuality, femininity, masculinity, intersexuality, transexuality, etc. Importantly, none of these labels necessarily must be attached to a male, female, or intersexed body, nor do they denote a specific type of gender identification. A homosexual man is not necessarily feminine, and a heterosexual man is not necessarily masculine. Only by allowing for a multiplicity of human bodies and their equally diverse gender identifications can we begin to position and understand the masculine identity.

Unfortunately, much of masculinity and men’s studies focus on male centered visions of masculinity that do not allow for such diversity. Judith Halberstam points out this glaring deficiency stating, “masculinity studies as a field has largely been formed in response to a perceived neglect of the topic in feminism, the work produced there has largely and almost exclusively addressed men and maleness” (The Good 345). By situating masculinity only within the male body, masculinity studies perpetrates the same act of exclusion that Halberstam claims they argue against. As feminist scholars have shifted theories to include a larger variety of sexual and gender experience, so too must masculinity studies begin to situate its ideas within a larger

---

\textsuperscript{14} While there are those who still contend that males are simply better at math, more recent scholarship has now indicated that mathematic achievement is largely based on cultural and social attributes rather than gender. One excellent example is Meredith M. Kimball’s “Gender and Math: What Makes a Difference?”
body of gender positions. Sarah Ruhl’s play explores such options for masculinity within *Late: a cowboy song*.

Mary’s journey through the spectrum of gender identity begins the play depicting characteristics that can be read as an inversion of traditional gender stereotypes. Mary works a job while Crick, her boyfriend, tends to the home, cooks dinner, harasses Mary when she arrives home late, and occasionally borrows money. Crick exhibits several of the characteristics of the stay-at-home wife stereotype. Crick questions Mary about her day explaining, “I want to be able to imagine your day—every moment—like a beautiful detailed painting” (125). Mary, on the other hand, dodges his questions and becomes increasingly aggravated until she finally leaves to visit her mother. Mary controls the money, ignores her partner’s attempt to provide dinner, and is emotionally withdrawn. Crick on the other hand, prepares dinner, wants to talk about their respective days, and is upset not only because Mary is late but because of the reason behind her tardiness: Red. Throughout the conversation, Crick becomes jealous of Red and carefully attempts to obtain the details of their chance meeting:

CRICK. What’d you talk about—you and Red?

MARY. I told you—horses falling asleep.

CRICK. Did she make a pass at you?

MARY. Yeah—I fucked her. No, she didn’t make a pass at me. Jesus.

CRICK. What’s wrong with you? Using language like that? (131)

Throughout the first scene Crick stereotypically takes up the position of a housewife, while Mary embodies characteristics of the masculine breadwinner. Crick even becomes upset by the fact that Mary and Red had coffee in their restaurant, the Green Shutters. By beginning the play with an inversion of stereotypical gender identities, Ruhl prevents the audience from ever thinking that either Crick or Mary’s behavior is natural or biologically based. Fausto-Sterling’s Möbius strip metaphor points towards an explanation of the importance of inverting genders in the beginning of the play. Ruhl situates socially constructed gender behaviors on opposite bodies to force the audience to explore the outside surface of the Möbius strip—to search for cultural, environmental, and societal reasons for the reversed behavior. Thus, Ruhl lays the foundation for a nuanced discussion of gender diversity, challenging the audience to complicate its conception of gender identity.
Having positioned Mary and Crick in a way that forces the audience to experience their genders from a cultural position, the play almost immediately redefines the characters’ gender identities in more traditional ways. Mary becomes pregnant, demands that Crick acquire a job, and, after giving birth, remains at home to care for the child. In this way, the physical imperative of Mary’s pregnancy drives a move to the inner surface of the Möbius strip—the body—and biological underpinnings for behavior. Importantly, the corporeal necessity of pregnancy creates the cultural circumstances of Mary and Crick’s marriage. Mary’s behavior slips along the Möbius strip from the inner to the outer surface and back again. From the third scene to the last scene of the play, Mary attempts to understand her gender position as she moves from an inverted gender identity to a traditional mode. Mary’s desire for traditional gender classifications is best exemplified metaphorically in her preference for clear soup:

I love this soup. I’m going to learn to make it at home. The clear soup—with vegetables—all bright and clear and separate in the broth. You know how in Campbell’s soup the vegetables get all mushed together? [ . . . ] I like it when the vegetables are separate so a carrot really looks like a carrot. (141-142)

The clear soup does not allow for any ambiguity; all the vegetables are clearly identified and separated from one another. Read as a metaphor for gender, the clear soup embodies the ideology of distinct sex and gender differences that are static and easily understood. Clear soup is the male/female binary writ in broth. The complexity of this metaphor only gets stronger as Mary reads about how to make the soup:

Most of us assume that [clear soups] have high nutritional value. [ . . . ] It disappoints me to have to tell you that, while they are unsurpassed as appetite stimulators, the experts give them indifferent ratings as food. [ . . . ] Instead of calling for things young and tender, remember that meat from aged animals and mature vegetables will be most flavorsome. Bones are disjointed and crushed; meat is trimmed of fat and cut up. Bones, especially marrow bones with gelatinous extractives, play an important role in stock. [ . . . ] Add lean ground beef, one egg white and crumpled shell, and several uncooked fowl carcasses. Beat these additions into the stock. (152, original emphasis)

The creation of this soup is a brutal, dehumanizing process. Moreover, the stage directions note that Mary’s “excitement mounts as the process becomes more and more violent” (152). The soup
metaphor implies that looking at gender through the static binaries of male/female is unhealthy and emphasizes the violence that is inherent in that system. To create the “clear soup” that is the simple gender binary, the ingredients must be ground, crumpled, beat, disjointed, crushed, and killed. An illustration of Ruhl’s metaphor, the current gender system contorts and violently changes the bodies and identities of our society to force the replication of static gender binaries. Recall Mary’s position before and after becoming pregnant. Prior to becoming pregnant, she had a career and was relatively independent; once she becomes pregnant, she is constrained by the cultural prescriptions of what motherhood should entail. Mary’s impulse to have a traditional nuclear family, in which she remains at home with her child and Crick works to provide financial security represents the contortions and violence that has written stereotypical behavior into her identity. Not only does she give up her job, which is never explicitly named, but Crick is forced to take a job outside of the home. Both are made to do things that have initially seemed outside their character. Having subscribed to traditional gender systems, Mary and Crick allow society to reshape their former gender identities. At this point, the play has forced the audience to examine its characters through a cultural lens and critiqued the traditional gender system that creates the binary of male/female. Mary’s phase of exploring gender dichotomies continues throughout her pregnancy as she tries to bring strict order to a varied and unique world of people, but as soon as the child is born she begins the process of rediscovery and change.

Crick, on the other hand, remains mired in the constructs of traditional gender systems, which ultimately make him seem pathetic, lonely, and sad. Crick obtains a job and attempts to become the responsible male breadwinner that he is expected to be within the nuclear family. He desires his child’s life to be as “normal,” simple, and clear-cut as possible. Interestingly, Crick purchases a painting for Mary’s Christmas present, which illustrates a different portrayal of his frivolous spending and reliance on Mary for financial support. When he initially purchased the painting, it could be seen as a representation of his irresponsibility and idealized vision of the world. The physicality of the painting cleverly evokes a different image: “we see only a frame” (149.) Initially the painting establishes Crick’s non-normative identity that he possesses at the beginning of the play when his gender is hardly traditional. He even evokes a socialist ideology while convincing Mary to give him the money for the painting: “In a just society people with more money give money to people with less money” (128). The painting represents Crick’s dependence on Mary and becomes the physical manifestation of his initial subservient role. Then
the frame transforms, along with Crick’s gender role, to the strictures and guidelines of how Crick comes to view the world. In fact, an entire scene is dedicated to Crick simply looking at the painting. He looks at it from many different directions and we can see how it begins to frame his world. It helps in the creation of his masculinity: “He does a push-up over it and looks at it” (151). The physicality of the push-up and the masculine bravado of doing one over a piece of art serve as physical manifestations of his manhood. The painting—frame—becomes the indicator of Crick’s acceptance of his traditional gender role throughout the play, and the position from which the audience generally watches. It comes to signify what Jill Dolan refers to as the ideal spectator: “Historically, in North American culture, this spectator has been assumed to be white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male” (1). After Crick’s transformation into the traditional breadwinner, he becomes obsessed with his male view of the world, but importantly he is depicted as having a relatively sad existence. He attempts to make every day a holiday, but ends up simply repeating actions that force all things special about life to become banal. For example, Crick watches It’s a Wonderful Life repeatedly throughout the holiday season, but the celebration has lost all degree of excitement. He illustrates this loss and subsequent loneliness in a phone call with Mary’s mother: “Well, Happy Thanksgiving to you, too [. . . ] you could come over here if you want. I have ingredients for turkey sandwiches” (189). Crick invites his mother-in-law over for Thanksgiving dinner but has nothing to offer but the most basic turkey sandwich. His celebration of repeated holidays has digressed to the point in which celebrating a holiday means watching a specific movie. The holiday has lost its excitement, ritual, and purpose. Through the play Crick’s masculine identity is written on him. When he takes up the position of the traditional breadwinner and begins to reify patriarchy, his life becomes lonely, banal, repetitious, and ineffective. The play provides a model of stereotypical masculine behavior in order to illustrate the problems, side effects, and issues of the masculine identity, while refusing to excuse Crick’s poor behavior. The play situates Crick so that he comes to represent the negative expression of traditional masculinity or gender.

Unlike Crick, Mary recognizes the ways in which traditional gender roles are actually constricting and harmful to the individual. Mary’s journey represents the possibilities of multiple gender and sexual identities, and allows the audience to make a clear distinction between Mary (fluid gender and sexuality) and Crick (traditional masculinity and gender). Mary gives birth to an intersexed baby that marks her ideological transformation from attempting to fit into a strict
binary logic of male/female to a greater understanding of sexual and gender diversity. In a telephone call with her mother, Mary explains how the doctors informed her of the intersexed nature of her child and performed a sex assignment surgery:

So—something weird happened at the hospital. [. . .] When I was holding the baby—a doctor came in and said to me:
There’s something urgent.
We aren’t sure if the baby’s a boy or a girl. [. . .]
They said: It’s sort of like a boy and a girl too.
There are some implications, they said. We’re going to do a little surgery. No need to tell the baby. And then they did a little surgery. Crick got—upset. But the doctors said: Everything will be fine. (163-164)

Mary doesn’t understand “why they couldn’t have left well enough alone,” and simply allowed the child to exist as it was naturally born (164). Interestingly, Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough* points out the biological need for a greater number of sexual classifications based on the fact that around “4 percent of births” are neither male nor female but intersexed in a diverse array of possibilities (25). Mary desires what Fausto-Sterling suggests we need: “a greater number of sexual classifications.” While it is clear that Mary had little agency in the matter of her child’s sexual reassignment surgery, it seems Crick was more upset at the ambiguity of his child’s sex. Throughout the rest of the play Crick demands that the baby be treated like a girl, despite the fact that s/he was/is intersexed. In contrast, Mary wishes they had simply left her child alone. The difference between Mary and Crick’s positions can be seen in the naming of the child. Crick wants to name the baby Jill, while Mary wants to name her/him Blue. Jill indicates a clear gender identity choice made by Crick, while Mary’s selection allows the child to grow and make her/his own decisions. Jill indicates a normative view of the world, and exemplifies Crick’s framed vision. In contrast, Blue evokes uniqueness, suggests diversity, and Mary’s changing views of identity. Mary understands that the child’s sexual organs are different and fears that it will cause confusion in her/his life to be unaware of her/his actual biological beginnings. Mary recognizes that the biological side of her child’s Möbius strip of identity, if hidden, will prevent her/him from understanding her/himself. I suggest that Mary’s newly discovered biological reason to abandon a strict two-gender system actually allows her to question and confront her own confusion about gender identity. By
understanding the diversity that occurs on the inner side of the Möbius strip, Mary realizes the
diversity that can occur on the outer side. In effect, the birth of her intersexed child acts as a
catalyst, allowing her to take the next step and begin processing the possibilities located within
and around masculinity and femininity.

After examining the ways in which *Late: a cowboy song* challenges heteronormativity
through Mary and Crick’s relationship, it becomes important to focus on the female masculinity
present throughout the piece in the character of Red. Ruhl creates a female character described as
“no cowgirl, she’s a cowboy,” and specifically suggests the environment of her cowboy: “an
image of the Marlboro Man hover[ing] in the distance” (121). To begin to understand Red’s
identity one must look at her primary characteristic: she’s a cowboy. William Savage’s *The
Cowboy Hero* notes the seemingly contradictory dual function of the American cowboy:
educational and economic. The cowboy is educational in the sense of “transmitting social
values” and economic in that the cowboy image is used to sell goods. According to Savage, the
dual functions of the cowboy:

Within the context of what is known as ‘the American way’ [. . . ] are merely
opposite sides of the same coin. Truth, honor, justice, preparedness,
righteousness, free enterprise, and a great many more noble nouns are of a piece
in the commonly accepted system of beliefs that Americans think separates them
from other people. (150-151)

The cowboy represents traditional visions of the American identity and a clearly delineated
concept of what virtues one should inhabit. By creating the belief in such “noble nouns”—and
thereby the cowboy image—the cowboy becomes economically fruitful when attached, even
serendipitously, to purchasable products. Ruhl’s delineation of Red’s status as a cowboy invokes
a position of societal knowledge and power traditionally reserved for males. Thus, Red operates
within the play on the level of transmitting social values, while the economic portrayal of the
Marlboro man suggests the marketing of those social values. In this sense, the economic power
of the cowboy image—its stately, stoic, strong, and mythic signification—sells the complex
gender identity of Red within the more receptive, safe, and known image of the cowboy. Red’s
embodiment of the cowboy’s characteristics questions not only the power or position of
traditional patriarchy, but also indicates a more inclusive vision of which genders or sexes might
be attracted to the image and mythology of the cowboy. The audience is confronted with the
comfortable image of the Marlboro man, which is then revealed to be a woman, thus destabilizing their version of the cowboy icon and asking for a redefinition that includes female masculinity. In American culture, the cowgirl maintains a subjugated position to that of the male cowboy. Ruhl subverts this ideology and forces the audience’s conception of a female cowboy that echoes what Candace Savage notes about her childhood dream of being a cowboy instead of a cowgirl: “being male had certain advantages” (Savage, Cowgirls vii). Being a cowgirl simply does not afford the same meaning as a cowboy. Red, the female cowboy, then embodies a traditionally male and masculine position and might be read as a keeper of societal values or knowledge—a teacher who exemplifies a specific set of values within the play. These values are not the traditional values of the American cowboy described by William Savage, nor does Red specifically inhabit an apparent economic position within the play. Instead, Ruhl uses this popular image to subvert traditional gender systems and suggest or teach society, within the play and at large, a new way of thinking about gender. Red’s lessons are directed towards Mary within their interactions, and she is the only character that directly addresses the audience, which she accomplishes through cowboy songs.

Throughout the play, Red demonstrates the lessons and ideologies of the idealized cowboy way of life and enacts that way of life for Mary, thus ushering Mary into a new world of expectations and behaviors. Mary has been having trouble making decisions. Indecision, stereotypically a feminine characteristic, prompts Red to suggest a stereotypical masculine trait, active decisiveness, as a solution. In fact, Red initially suggests learning to ride because “when you’re riding a horse, there’s no time to think, should I jump over this fence of shouldn’t I? All of a sudden you’re just jumping over a fence” (155). Red instructs Mary to “be brave” and kick her horse, despite her fear of the large animal. Mary must be taught to act violently and against the stereotypical construction of women as passive. Once convinced to take control of the horse, Mary successfully begins her ride through the hills accompanied by the sounds of “Kick-ass cowboy music” (172-173). In this way, Red acts as a conduit for Mary as she explores her independence, assertion, aggression and other conventionally masculine proclivities. Unsurprisingly, many of the ideas Red explains line up with a traditional masculine perspective. On the other hand, Red provides faulty or illogical information at different moments. Red “knows” that there is better Chinese food in other cities, but she has never been to these cities to try the Chinese food. When Red is questioned about the opposing forces in the Vietnam and
Korean Wars she simply replies “the north, the south. It’s always the north and the south” (143). Red’s character reduces complex issues and problems into simplistic and straightforward explanations and answers. Her character functions, in a masculine modality, as a purveyor of knowledge, but also falls into the masculine trope of possessing *all* knowledge. While Red functions as teacher and model for Mary, it seems that Mary must also recognize the limits of Red’s traditional form of masculinity as effective for her own identity.

Red’s indifference to the more complicated world around her is furthered as she explains, “All I know is what a cowboy needs. Simple food. No fancy spices. [. . . ] I don’t cook for other people. I cook for me. One soul, eating under the night sky” (144). Red indicates the importance of her individuality and the way in which she cares for her own identity and physical needs. Red’s confidence, strength, individuality, and independence—her masculinity and American-ness—attr act Mary in such a way that she desires the same type of life for herself and her unborn baby. By positioning masculinity within the female body the play displaces and redefines who can embody masculine characteristics. The female body announces to other women and men that it too can contain confidence, individuality, and strength. Mary names her child Blue, after Red, in hopes that s/he will “be a real individual-type person. Like Red is” (147). Red’s attitude towards life—take care of yourself before worrying about others—suggests an expression of American culture and society that ambiguously echoes the clear soup metaphor of separate and distinct types of people while recognizing and accepting the variety and complexity of individual difference. In this way, it seems that Red advocates allowing each individual the ability to construct their own identity, but demands that each of those identities be as separate and varied as the vegetables within the clear soup. On this level, Red represents the possibility of a different life, gender identity, and simple ability to behave outside of society’s prescribed norms by demanding an individuality and absolute acceptance of the differences of others.

Of particular importance to understanding Red are the cowboy songs she sings throughout the play. Generally, these songs are solos directed to the audience, but they slowly gain a second voice as Mary makes her choice to leave Crick. According to Douglas Branch, the cowboy song traditionally deals with the cowboys’ work (166). By looking at Red’s cowboy songs one can examine the function of Red as a character within the play. With that in mind, I will explore both the first and last songs that Red sings. The first song is entitled “Red:”
Oh, as the sun sets
The horses do sleep
The fields they are long
And the crick it is deep...

Oh, find me a child
Who grows into a man
Who cries like a bird
And flies like a—crayon... (133)

Throughout the play, the scene titles indicate either the place or the action of the scene. This short song, entitled “Red,” implicates her as the topic of discussion. The first stanza, at the surface level, appears to evoke the outdoor life of a cowboy or rancher. I suggest a deeper reading of the stanza that points to a more sexualized understanding found beneath the initial interpretation. Within the last two lines of the stanza the imagery of long fields and deep cricks suggests a connection to both male and female genitalia. Meanwhile, the first two lines suggest patriarchal and phallic power located within the masculine images of the sun and the horse. In other words, as the horses sleep and the sun sets, the vast fields and deep crick are allowed their freedom. Interestingly, the song does not discuss a single field, but multiple fields, perhaps signifying the existence of multiple masculinities traditionally suppressed by patriarchal and phallic power. Despite the fact that there is only one crick described in the stanza, it is unusual to describe a crick as deep, when generally they are shallow. Thus, “deep” serves as a double entendre signifying both the female sex organ and the depth of variety that is located within femininity. The first stanza seems to suggest a place where one can recognize the diverse array of sexuality and gender that occurs within the human race.

In contrast, the second stanza describes the specific variant of gender identity in the character of Red. Red was a child who grew into a man (cowboy, not cowgirl) “who cries like [the more feminine image of] a bird.” Finally, the character “flies like a—crayon.” The crayon is a tool of expression, a way to color or create an image or ideal. To fly like a crayon might indicate Red’s ability to define herself as she pleases: to write her own identity. Red’s name indicates one of the primary crayon colors. Thus, Red “colors” her own identity by using the

---

15 Within the play’s cowboy songs I have retained the original spacing.
crayon as a means of expression. Red, along with Blue, is a primary color, which when mixed can create a multitude of variety and difference. Thus, Red becomes the initial form of identity necessary for the creation of other fluid genders. By naming the child Blue, Mary effectively states her desire that Blue will grow to influence and unlock the differences within others. The poetic beauty found in what I argue is the creation of Red’s identity evokes the power to write oneself with non-gendered tools. Red functions within the play as both a model of this concept and a guide to the vast fields and deep cricks that is the diversity of gender and sexuality. Red’s song teaches us to color our own identity.

In the final lines of the play Mary, who has just left her husband Crick, takes their child Blue, and joins Red in her song. The scene is entitled “Coda,” indicating a repetition of the initial musical phrase followed by a different concluding element. In this case, the first stanza repeats Red’s song as above, while the second stanza concludes the piece:

Oh, find me a child
Who grows into a girl
Who rides like a man—
With a mask. (219)

This is a variation on the first song of the play. The first stanzas are identical and the second stanza refers to another specific variant of gender identity. The child now “grows into a girl,” but instead of crying “like a bird” she “rides like a man,” and instead of flying “like a—crayon,” she wears “a mask.” While one might argue that the second stanza describes Mary’s child Blue, I suggest that the stanza characterizes Mary herself. Mary, unlike Red, has no desire to leave her femininity behind as she embraces parts of the masculine identity. Mary claims that she would “like to be a real lady” (210), insinuating that her current femininity cannot provide her with that title. Mary also desires to ride “like a man.” In the context of horseback riding, “like a man” would indicate straddling the horse as opposed to the outdated feminine sidesaddle method of riding. Riding sidesaddle offered less comfort and control. Riding “like a man” then suggests the ability for greater control, autonomy, and dominance of the animal on which you ride. Recall Mary’s struggle with feminine passivity and indecisiveness, which I analyzed above. In this context, to ride “like a man” means taking control of your life and making both the simple and difficult decisions, thus gaining agency and independence. Mary “rides like a man—/with a mask” because she chooses not to fully accept a masculine identity, but rather creates a hybrid of
masculinity and femininity that allows her to embrace a multifaceted identity of self not centered on a traditional gender system. The mask, in this instance, represents the constructed identities that all people wear. She dons a mask (or gender) of her own creation instead of a mask/gender constructed for her by society.

Throughout the play Red remains a static figure of an idealized masculinity. Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* notes: “gender variance, like sexual variance, cannot be relied on to produce a radical and oppositional politics simply by virtue of representing difference” (173). Red’s embodiment of the masculine, then, does not necessarily provide a radical change to the current gender system. Instead, Red might actually reinscribe some of traditional masculinity’s faults. A woman who performs traditional masculinities without dramatically changing them might simply subvert the system of oppression for herself, but to no larger end. The change would become less about equality and new forms of masculinity and more about the individual’s power over others. For example, Red is extremely chivalrous. While watching colts out in the field Red insists on protecting Mary from the elements:

RED. You cold?

MARY. No, I’m fine. Red gives Mary her denim jacket. Thanks. Red tips her hat.  
(179)

Despite Mary’s assertion that the cold is not bothering her, Red gives Mary her jacket, thereby ignoring Mary’s ability to gauge her own comfort level. Red literally takes control over Mary’s choice to wear or not wear a jacket.

Red’s desire to care for and protect Mary is not only limited to the casual enforcement of winter wear, but also becomes visible in Red’s willingness to protect Mary from Crick. During Red and Mary’s first interaction on stage, Red questions Mary about whether or not Crick is physically abusive. Red asks because she believes that Mary talks about him like she is “afraid of him” (146). Once Red learns he is not abusive, she drops the topic. By remembering Red’s cowboy status one might paint a more complex picture of her behavior. Douglas Branch’s *The Cowboy and His Interpreters* describes his version of the cowboy’s gallantry towards women in matters of physical abuse:

The courtesy of the cowboys and the residents toward women was proverbial; and some one [sic] unsteady on his feet who jostled a lady—a lady of whatever sort—
would find himself knocked down by his nearest companion, as a warning against insulting a lady in Dodge City. (151)

According to Branch, the iconic cowboy did not tolerate even the accidental jostle of a woman by a man. While more fiction than fact likely resides in Branch’s account of cowboy chivalry, the myth of idealized cowboy masculinity, realized within Red, gives credence to the idea that Red might go so far as to defend Mary from Crick.

In a final moment of chivalry, Mary and Red discuss the reasoning behind the idea of “ladies first.” Red insists that Mary open her fortune cookie first because she is a lady:

```
RED. Ladies first.
MARY. You’re a lady.
RED. I’m no lady.
MARY. I guess you’re not a lady like that.
RED. Nope.
MARY. You ever wonder about “ladies first”? I wonder about “ladies first.”
RED. What do you wonder?
MARY. I mean: When a man says, ladies first, and opens the door, and follows right behind you, I wonder if it’s so he can look at your butt.
RED. Sounds about right. (209)
```

In this scene Red performs two separate roles: she introduces the social convention of “ladies first” (and eventually enforces it), and also acknowledges the sexual oppression that such acts can represent. By instigating and enforcing the ritual, Red actually implicates herself in a sort of sexual pursuit of Mary when she acknowledges the sexual tie to “ladies first.” Mary’s uncertainty about Red’s identity position within the scene requires her to assert, “You’re a lady,” which Red quickly denies. Red identifies herself as more masculine and, as such, sexually available to Mary. Importantly, the distinction of not being a lady does not always already indicate masculinity, but rather can be seen as a variation from the particularly feminine idea of “lady.” Red’s denial indicates a movement away from hyper-femininity towards masculinity.

The relationship between Mary and Red remains necessarily ambiguous throughout the play so that the audience can focus on Mary’s changes without automatically identifying Mary or Red as lesbians. Ruhl carefully skirts this line in *Late: a cowboy song*, because in the moment that Mary and Red become lesbians, the audience will begin to reestablish the connection of masculinity.
with the binary of specific sexual roles. This connection becomes dangerous when the audience begins to identify lesbians as males trapped in female bodies, or similar ideologies that reinscribe the male/female binary.

As I have illustrated, Red’s masculinity can be read as yet another example of how masculinity is built on the subjugation of minority masculinities or women, whether attached to the male or female body. Halberstam argues that “alternative masculinities, ultimately, will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent to which they fail to be feminist, antiracist, and queer” (Female 173). If alternative masculinities persist in being oppressive to women, racist, and homophobic, then instead of actually breaking down the systems of oppression that exist within current gender hierarchies they actively participate within them by claiming a new role. Red’s acquisition of an alternative masculinity—female masculinity—fails to the extent that it does not foster equality and diversity, but rather portrays a traditional masculinity on a female body. Red succeeds in empowering Mary to pursue her own happiness and combine her feminist and queer tendencies with the independent proclivities with which Red teaches her to engage. In this way, Mary becomes actively involved in feminism, and thus succeeds, to that extent, in forming an effective alternative masculinity that can change society. The character of Red becomes proof that the female body can take on the attributes of masculinity, and serves to challenge traditional gender systems while providing a model from which Mary carefully selects the attributes she desires and dismisses the rest.

Red possesses a subaltern position within the spectrum and hierarchy of gender and sexuality in twenty-first century America. Halberstam notes that female masculinity “has been vilified by heterosexist and feminist/womanist programs alike [. . .] female masculinity is generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach” (Female 9). Red has obtained an alternative masculinity that is not normally seen as acceptable to either heterosexual or homosexual males or females. She is variant to all groups, and as such has the most to gain by a common acceptance of diversity. While Red’s gender sometimes reinforces the problems of patriarchal, traditional, and oppressive masculinity, she maintains a persona of acceptance towards differently gendered individuals. Red’s masculinity is not specifically politically situated in feminism, antiracism, or queerness as Halberstam recommends for all alternate masculinities. Red’s possible queerness and feminism, while
certainly visible, do not actively engage in politics. Instead, Red maintains her ideology of taking care of herself before worrying about others. Red alone does not “change existing gender hierarchies,” but her interaction and influence over Mary within the play does. Thus, Red’s gender identity serves as the catalyst for Mary’s examination of gender and sexuality. Mary is a unique character in that she shifts her gender identity along with her ideas about gender systems at least three separate times throughout the play. She takes on the roles of masculine breadwinner, feminine domestic, heterosexual wife, and possibly even femme lesbian. Eventually, she finds herself in a hybrid gender identity that maintains her femininity (her “ladyness”) while selectively choosing aspects of masculinity that allow her power and control over her life.

I suggest that the future of masculinity resides in such hybridizations of gender ideology. In fact, the play might even suggest a queering of the ideal spectator’s gaze as indicated in the final stage directions of the play: “Crick looks at his painting. He carries the empty frame to the edge of a vast landscape. He holds it in the air, framing a field of color. He tilts the frame, crooked” (219). The act of taking a perpendicular, perfectly framed, strict gaze and skewing it suggests a new and different way to view the world. The frame is held in the air, if not for Crick to recognize and begin to see gender differently, then as a representation of the ideal spectator’s gaze, embodied by the audience, being adjusted as a means of conclusion. To end patriarchal masculinity’s oppression of women and alternative masculinities, society must recognize and celebrate the vast array of gender diversity that resides within each person or group. At the end of Late: a cowboy song, Mary dons a cowboy hat in a vast landscape. She wears the symbol of masculinity with pride, but she is no cowboy.
CONCLUSION

I decided to focus my research on masculinity after I realized that my own masculine identity was ill-defined, and often strained. Throughout my life I have struggled to prove I was a man. I am ill-equipped physically, have had more female friends than male, and clearly want to discuss my feelings more than I should. In a way this thesis has been a project of masculine exploration. I have tried to discover the ways in which men define themselves as masculine, noting the problematic reality of many of these constructions, and attempting to distinguish a masculinity free from the strict and ambiguous guidelines that police the boundaries of gender. To accomplish this, I have interrogated three separate models of masculine identity creation: The mythopoetic/Jungian creation of self through ritual initiation; the culture of Guyland and how it constructs identity through specific rules, cultures, and pressures; and the fluid and complex theories of gender and sexuality as presented by Anne-Fausto Sterling and other leading feminist scholars. Simplified to the utmost, I see these three categories as forming a spectrum of masculine possibilities that I have attempted to explore through dramatic representations.

On one end of the spectrum, Kicking a Dead Horse constructs a masculinity built on the American way of life, patriarchal power, and a belief in an essential masculinity found through a return to nature and the past. The play simultaneously calls for the construction of a new “authenticity,” and continues to mythologize and idolize the power of men’s dominance in the United States. Within this play I see a clearly presented crisis of masculinity as Hobart struggles to rediscover his identity as he shifts into his later years, away from work, raising children, and a failing marriage. Hobart enacts countless blows on the body of the horse, which contains in it the “authenticity” and masculine identity he desires to recover. Each blow reiterates the death of his traditional masculine identity, and his frustration at the inconceivability of change. Hobart’s failure to (re)initiate himself into traditional masculinity, or recognize any other possibility for adaptation leaves the man with no other option but death. The play combines a recognition of the failures and problematic concepts of traditional American masculinity with the unsavory dual death of both the masculinity and the man who embodies that identity. In this way the play begs
the question of masculine identity construction, but fails to actually present any possibilities for change.

On the other side of the spectrum, *Late: a cowboy song* interrogates the subject creation of Mary as she navigates various gender identities searching for a self that ultimately transcends multiple stereotypical identities including masculinity. The fluidity with which the play allows gender to operate calls attention to the depth and complexity of any given individual’s gender construction. The play provides multiple and varied examples of gender identity including female masculinity, male femininity, traditional masculinity, traditional femininity, intersexed sexuality, and various indications of both male and female homosexuality. Thus, the play attempts to broaden, or skew, what Jill Dolan would call the ideal spectators gaze to include a perspective that allows for a fluidity of ever changing gender construction. The play calls for a complex and free forming hybridization of gender identity that creates innumerable sexualities and identities from which to choose. In this way, the play expresses a progressive and inclusive form of gender construction.

Between the traditional and progressive forms of gender identity seen in the other two plays, *Reasons to Be Pretty* depicts the journey of a young adult through the culture of Guyland. Within this work Greg attempts to renegotiate traditional, misogynistic, irresponsible, and entitled forms of masculine identity towards a masculinity that seeks to share power, responsibility, and respect with women and other men. Despite Greg’s failure to make any large shifts in the construction of his identity, he does express a desire and effort to foster a more egalitarian form of masculinity. His failure to fully renegotiate his identity is paired with the small successes of his journey away from misogyny. The play offers a location in which I believe the reality of masculinity’s current mode of construction can be found. It expresses knowledge of the necessity of change and adaptation, while at the same time seeking many of the same goals of traditional patriarchy in less overtly oppressive ways. Thus, the play attempts to renegotiate the construction of masculinity, but fails to change the goals or ideology of the masculine characters it presents.

Each of the modes of gender construction I have explored call for a change in the construction of the masculine identity. The need and desire to change the way we construct our gender identities seems to constitute an ever-shifting problem that lacks many sustainable solutions. The first two chapters argue that the recognition of the need to shift the construction of
masculinity, while a beginning, falls short of providing any new and egalitarian modes of sustainable identity creation. The third chapter and the feminist ideas of gender construction discussed there provide the most promising possibility for a new form of masculinity, but sometimes fails to recognizing the positive aspects of dominant masculinity and how they could be integrated into new formations of gender. My project has dealt with a microcosm of the actual variety of masculinity that exists within the United States. I’ve dealt exclusively with white American constructions of masculinity, and while I do believe my work may connect on some levels with the construction of minority, gay, and global masculinities, it is clear that the complexities and variance of other masculinities far outweigh the similarities with white, heterosexual conceptions of gender. The construction of masculine subjectivity that I have explored becomes important with the recognition that most white, middle class, American men continue to base their identities on visions of masculinity that do not serve society or the individual. The failure of most contemporary concepts of the masculine to provide a stable, healthy, egalitarian, and fulfilling identity for American men begs for both an examination of failed models and a recognition of new possibilities. Within this document I’ve attempted to further this project by examining dramatic representations of masculinity through three specific conceptions of masculine identity construction. By understanding the possibilities, one can begin to conceptualize new concepts and forms of gender.
APPENDIX

IRON HANS

Iron Hans is the original Grimm fairy tale from which Robert Bly develops his book Iron John.
Because I use Bly’s analysis of this story extensively throughout the first chapter of this thesis, I have included a copy here. For more information on Bly’s reading of Iron Hans or his translation of the text see his book Iron John.


There was once upon a time a king who had a great forest near his palace, full of all kinds of wild animals. One day he sent out a huntsman to shoot him a roe, but he did not come back. 'Perhaps some accident has befallen him,' said the king, and the next day he sent out two more huntsmen who were to search for him, but they too stayed away. Then on the third day, he sent for all his huntsmen, and said: 'Scour the whole forest through, and do not give up until you have found all three.' But of these also, none came home again, none were seen again. From that time forth, no one would any longer venture into the forest, and it lay there in deep stillness and solitude, and nothing was seen of it, but sometimes an eagle or a hawk flying over it. This lasted for many years, when an unknown huntsman announced himself to the king as seeking a situation, and offered to go into the dangerous forest. The king, however, would not give his consent, and said: 'It is not safe in there; I fear it would fare with you no better than with the others, and you would never come out again.' The huntsman replied: 'Lord, I will venture it at my own risk, of fear I know nothing.'

The huntsman therefore betook himself with his dog to the forest. It was not long before the dog fell in with some game on the way, and wanted to pursue it; but hardly had the dog run
two steps when it stood before a deep pool, could go no farther, and a naked arm stretched itself out of the water, seized it, and drew it under. When the huntsman saw that, he went back and fetched three men to come with buckets and bale out the water. When they could see to the bottom there lay a wild man whose body was brown like rusty iron, and whose hair hung over his face down to his knees. They bound him with cords, and led him away to the castle. There was great astonishment over the wild man; the king, however, had him put in an iron cage in his courtyard, and forbade the door to be opened on pain of death, and the queen herself was to take the key into her keeping. And from this time forth everyone could again go into the forest with safety.

The king had a son of eight years, who was once playing in the courtyard, and while he was playing, his golden ball fell into the cage. The boy ran thither and said: 'Give me my ball out.' 'Not till you have opened the door for me,' answered the man. 'No,' said the boy, 'I will not do that; the king has forbidden it,' and ran away. The next day he again went and asked for his ball; the wild man said: 'Open my door;' but the boy would not. On the third day the king had ridden out hunting, and the boy went once more and said: 'I cannot open the door even if I wished, for I have not the key.' Then the wild man said: 'It lies under your mother's pillow, you can get it there.' The boy, who wanted to have his ball back, cast all thought to the winds, and brought the key. The door opened with difficulty, and the boy pinched his fingers. When it was open the wild man stepped out, gave him the golden ball, and hurried away. The boy had become afraid; he called and cried after him: 'Oh, wild man, do not go away, or I shall be beaten!' The wild man turned back, took him up, set him on his shoulder, and went with hasty steps into the forest. When the king came home, he observed the empty cage, and asked the queen how that had happened. She knew nothing about it, and sought the key, but it was gone. She called the boy, but no one answered. The king sent out people to seek for him in the fields, but they did not find him. Then he could easily guess what had happened, and much grief reigned in the royal court.

When the wild man had once more reached the dark forest, he took the boy down from his shoulder, and said to him: 'You will never see your father and mother again, but I will keep you with me, for you have set me free, and I have compassion on you. If you do all I bid you, you shall fare well. Of treasure and gold have I enough, and more than anyone in the world.' He made a bed of moss for the boy on which he slept, and the next morning the man took him to a
well, and said: 'Behold, the gold well is as bright and clear as crystal, you shall sit beside it, and take care that nothing falls into it, or it will be polluted. I will come every evening to see if you have obeyed my order.' The boy placed himself by the brink of the well, and often saw a golden fish or a golden snake show itself therein, and took care that nothing fell in. As he was thus sitting, his finger hurt him so violently that he involuntarily put it in the water. He drew it quickly out again, but saw that it was quite gilded, and whatsoever pains he took to wash the gold off again, all was to no purpose. In the evening Iron Hans came back, looked at the boy, and said: 'What has happened to the well?' 'Nothing nothing,' he answered, and held his finger behind his back, that the man might not see it. But he said: 'You have dipped your finger into the water, this time it may pass, but take care you do not again let anything go in.' By daybreak the boy was already sitting by the well and watching it. His finger hurt him again and he passed it over his head, and then unhappily a hair fell down into the well. He took it quickly out, but it was already quite gilded. Iron Hans came, and already knew what had happened. 'You have let a hair fall into the well,' said he. 'I will allow you to watch by it once more, but if this happens for the third time then the well is polluted and you can no longer remain with me.'

On the third day, the boy sat by the well, and did not stir his finger, however much it hurt him. But the time was long to him, and he looked at the reflection of his face on the surface of the water. And as he still bent down more and more while he was doing so, and trying to look straight into the eyes, his long hair fell down from his shoulders into the water. He raised himself up quickly, but the whole of the hair of his head was already golden and shone like the sun. You can imagine how terrified the poor boy was! He took his pocket-handkerchief and tied it round his head, in order that the man might not see it. When he came he already knew everything, and said: 'Take the handkerchief off.' Then the golden hair streamed forth, and let the boy excuse himself as he might, it was of no use. 'You have not stood the trial and can stay here no longer. Go forth into the world, there you will learn what poverty is. But as you have not a bad heart, and as I mean well by you, there is one thing I will grant you; if you fall into any difficulty, come to the forest and cry: "Iron Hans," and then I will come and help you. My power is great, greater than you think, and I have gold and silver in abundance.'

Then the king's son left the forest, and walked by beaten and unbeaten paths ever onwards until at length he reached a great city. There he looked for work, but could find none, and he learnt nothing by which he could help himself. At length he went to the palace, and asked
if they would take him in. The people about court did not at all know what use they could make of him, but they liked him, and told him to stay. At length the cook took him into his service, and said he might carry wood and water, and rake the cinders together. Once when it so happened that no one else was at hand, the cook ordered him to carry the food to the royal table, but as he did not like to let his golden hair be seen, he kept his little cap on. Such a thing as that had never yet come under the king's notice, and he said: 'When you come to the royal table you must take your hat off.' He answered: 'Ah, Lord, I cannot; I have a bad sore place on my head.' Then the king had the cook called before him and scolded him, and asked how he could take such a boy as that into his service; and that he was to send him away at once. The cook, however, had pity on him, and exchanged him for the gardener's boy.

And now the boy had to plant and water the garden, hoe and dig, and bear the wind and bad weather. Once in summer when he was working alone in the garden, the day was so warm he took his little cap off that the air might cool him. As the sun shone on his hair it glittered and flashed so that the rays fell into the bedroom of the king's daughter, and up she sprang to see what that could be. Then she saw the boy, and cried to him: 'Boy, bring me a wreath of flowers.' He put his cap on with all haste, and gathered wild field-flowers and bound them together. When he was ascending the stairs with them, the gardener met him, and said: 'How can you take the king's daughter a garland of such common flowers? Go quickly, and get another, and seek out the prettiest and rarest.' 'Oh, no,' replied the boy, 'the wild ones have more scent, and will please her better.' When he got into the room, the king's daughter said: 'Take your cap off, it is not seemly to keep it on in my presence.' He again said: 'I may not, I have a sore head.' She, however, caught at his cap and pulled it off, and then his golden hair rolled down on his shoulders, and it was splendid to behold. He wanted to run out, but she held him by the arm, and gave him a handful of ducats. With these he departed, but he cared nothing for the gold pieces. He took them to the gardener, and said: 'I present them to your children, they can play with them.' The following day the king's daughter again called to him that he was to bring her a wreath of field-flowers, and then he went in with it, she instantly snatched at his cap, and wanted to take it away from him, but he held it fast with both hands. She again gave him a handful of ducats, but he would not keep them, and gave them to the gardener for playthings for his children. On the third day things went just the same; she could not get his cap away from him, and he would not have her money.
Not long afterwards, the country was overrun by war. The king gathered together his people, and did not know whether or not he could offer any opposition to the enemy, who was superior in strength and had a mighty army. Then said the gardener's boy: 'I am grown up, and will go to the wars also, only give me a horse.' The others laughed, and said: 'Seek one for yourself when we are gone, we will leave one behind us in the stable for you.' When they had gone forth, he went into the stable, and led the horse out; it was lame of one foot, and limped hobbity jib, hobbity jib; nevertheless he mounted it, and rode away to the dark forest. When he came to the outskirts, he called 'Iron Hans' three times so loudly that it echoed through the trees. Thereupon the wild man appeared immediately, and said: 'What do you desire?' 'I want a strong steed, for I am going to the wars.' 'That you shall have, and still more than you ask for.' Then the wild man went back into the forest, and it was not long before a stable-boy came out of it, who led a horse that snorted with its nostrils, and could hardly be restrained, and behind them followed a great troop of warriors entirely equipped in iron, and their swords flashed in the sun. The youth made over his three-legged horse to the stable-boy, mounted the other, and rode at the head of the soldiers. When he got near the battlefield a great part of the king's men had already fallen, and little was wanting to make the rest give way. Then the youth galloped thither with his iron soldiers, broke like a hurricane over the enemy, and beat down all who opposed him. They began to flee, but the youth pursued, and never stopped, until there was not a single man left. Instead of returning to the king, however, he conducted his troop by byways back to the forest, and called forth Iron Hans. 'What do you desire?' asked the wild man. 'Take back your horse and your troops, and give me my three-legged horse again.' All that he asked was done, and soon he was riding on his three-legged horse. When the king returned to his palace, his daughter went to meet him, and wished him joy of his victory. 'I am not the one who carried away the victory,' said he, 'but a strange knight who came to my assistance with his soldiers.' The daughter wanted to hear who the strange knight was, but the king did not know, and said: 'He followed the enemy, and I did not see him again.' She inquired of the gardener where his boy was, but he smiled, and said: 'He has just come home on his three-legged horse, and the others have been mocking him, and crying: "Here comes our hobbity jib back again!" They asked, too: "Under what hedge have you been lying sleeping all the time?" So he said: "I did the best of all, and it would have gone badly without me." And then he was still more ridiculed.'

The king said to his daughter: 'I will proclaim a great feast that shall last for three days,
and you shall throw a golden apple. Perhaps the unknown man will show himself.' When the feast was announced, the youth went out to the forest, and called Iron Hans. 'What do you desire?' asked he. 'That I may catch the king's daughter's golden apple.' 'It is as safe as if you had it already,' said Iron Hans. 'You shall likewise have a suit of red armour for the occasion, and ride on a spirited chestnut-horse.' When the day came, the youth galloped to the spot, took his place amongst the knights, and was recognized by no one. The king's daughter came forward, and threw a golden apple to the knights, but none of them caught it but he, only as soon as he had it he galloped away.

On the second day Iron Hans equipped him as a white knight, and gave him a white horse. Again he was the only one who caught the apple, and he did not linger an instant, but galloped off with it. The king grew angry, and said: 'That is not allowed; he must appear before me and tell his name.' He gave the order that if the knight who caught the apple, should go away again they should pursue him, and if he would not come back willingly, they were to cut him down and stab him.

On the third day, he received from Iron Hans a suit of black armour and a black horse, and again he caught the apple. But when he was riding off with it, the king's attendants pursued him, and one of them got so near him that he wounded the youth's leg with the point of his sword. The youth nevertheless escaped from them, but his horse leapt so violently that the helmet fell from the youth's head, and they could see that he had golden hair. They rode back and announced this to the king.

The following day the king's daughter asked the gardener about his boy. 'He is at work in the garden; the queer creature has been at the festival too, and only came home yesterday evening; he has likewise shown my children three golden apples which he has won.'

The king had him summoned into his presence, and he came and again had his little cap on his head. But the king's daughter went up to him and took it off, and then his golden hair fell down over his shoulders, and he was so handsome that all were amazed. 'Are you the knight who came every day to the festival, always in different colours, and who caught the three golden apples?' asked the king. 'Yes,' answered he, 'and here the apples are,' and he took them out of his pocket, and returned them to the king. 'If you desire further proof, you may see the wound which your people gave me when they followed me. But I am likewise the knight who helped you to your victory over your enemies.' 'If you can perform such deeds as that, you are no gardener's
boy; tell me, who is your father?' 'My father is a mighty king, and gold have I in plenty as great as I require.' 'I well see,' said the king, 'that I owe my thanks to you; can I do anything to please you?' 'Yes,' answered he, 'that indeed you can. Give me your daughter to wife.' The maiden laughed, and said: 'He does not stand much on ceremony, but I have already seen by his golden hair that he was no gardener's boy,' and then she went and kissed him. His father and mother came to the wedding, and were in great delight, for they had given up all hope of ever seeing their dear son again. And as they were sitting at the marriage-feast, the music suddenly stopped, the doors opened, and a stately king came in with a great retinue. He went up to the youth, embraced him and said: 'I am Iron Hans, and was by enchantment a wild man, but you have set me free; all the treasures which I possess, shall be your property.'
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Curtis, Nick. "Sam Shepard Rides into Town; PREVIEW." *The Evening Standard (London)* September 5 2008: 44.


---. *Seven Plays*. New York: Dial Press, 2005


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Scott C. Knowles grew up in St. George, UT. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Southern Utah University in 2007 with a B.A. in Theatre. He plans to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theatre studies. This thesis comprises a full year of work in the field of masculinity studies, and he hopes to continue to explore the construction of identity not only within masculinity, but also within larger cultural contexts.