

Forging a Self: An Examination of Gender Identity in  
Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*, *Paris, Texas*, and *Simpatico*

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EH 499—Senior Colloquium  
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December 2005  
Graduation date: May 2006

The appeal of Shepard's characters to an audience is their rejection of middle class values for the pursuit of self-identity, even if it involves violence and the abandonment of others. Sam Shepard is often criticized for focusing on the “male side ‘a things,” but has progressed during throughout his career, shifting male identity from a “macho” self to a more balanced one and blending female voices into his works. Shepard often manipulates gender roles, particularly the implications of what is it is to be “masculine” and how that affects relationships with others. Although female identity tends to be secondary to the male, their roles are largely based on the guidance of men to their identity and place in society. Women shift from being seen as a stepping-stone for male identity to gaining more personal voice and identity. They escape violence, hold jobs, and defend themselves from abuse. Three works that showcase this evolution are *Fool for Love* (1983), *Paris, Texas* (1984), and *Simpatico* (1999). These works show that Sam Shepard has shifted from the misogynist critics accuse him of being to focusing on a male identity based less on violence and more on the balance between self and others and giving women a voice.

Shepard's male identity can be broken into categories based on the emphasis on masculinity. A critic, Felicia Londre describes Shepard's works as “unconsciously developing

male identity,” which can be found in three phases. The first of these phases is referred to as “early masculine fantasies,” which characterized his earliest plays. Following are the middle period, those written during 1976-1980 that show the “coming to awareness of a young adult masculinity,” and finally, the “mature masculinity” of the 1980’s (Londre 155). Each phase should reflect a growing awareness of the need for a balance between maleness and a more modern, feminized masculinity. While male identity in Shepard’s plays can be found in the aforementioned phases, the time periods are more flexible than Londre suggests. Her labels can be applied to the male characters in the following fashion. The early period male character represented here is Eddie, the middle, Travis, and the late, by Simms. Londre also ignores the fact that female voice is present, even if secondary.

Critics, like Londre, that label Sam Shepard’s works particularly *Fool for Love*, *Paris*, *Texas*, and *Simpatico*, as purely misogynistic ignore subtle textual cues which have been inserted to portray women as the fairer sex. Although many feminist readings find fault with the representation of women as “symbols” and the victims of male violence, Shepard’s ideas on the superiority of women are subverted within the texts of the aforementioned plays. The female characters, suggesting that they are the more reliable of the two genders, shoulder the burden of assigning and guiding men to their full identity. They are also granted the ability to function in a modern society, especially in the social and economic realms, in which males are not. Men, meanwhile, are portrayed as self-centered, violent beings that must label themselves in terms of environmental cues because they are unable to form internal identity cues. While the concentration on the development of the masculine identity is indeed the focal point of each of these texts, ignoring the power and survival skills attributed to female characters is an

incomplete reading of Shepard's works.

During Sam Shepard's early career, the basis of identity was often a violent struggle to gain masculinity and almost exclusively male. Men are often characters that are tied to the land, their fathers, and masculinity. The male characters must "deal with the influence of their roots," including attention to violence, father-son relationships, and "male resentment toward women and the feminine" (McDonough 38-39). The problem with identity in Sam Shepard's world is that identity is often invested in the relationships and world that they are trying to escape: "A man is a man when he owns his own identity, yet he is able to establish that identity only in relationships within the very civilization that he wishes to escape" (McDonough 39). The men flee their homes, families, and careers to pursue an independent identity, but the problem is they need personal interaction with the other characters to fully form an identity. The flight from their surroundings thus inhibits the full formation of self—they are at the same time, pursuing and preventing self-awareness.

A significant portion of male self-awareness deals with father-son relationships. Male characters must prove themselves as "masculine." Stemming from this is often the issue of fatherhood, either a lack of a father figure in a character's life or acceptance of a fatherly role. As with many of his predecessors, Shepard places the conflict between fathers and sons at the heart of male identity. Many of Shepard's works feature a son who must come to terms with the role of fatherhood, the implications of a fatherly role, and must capture the positions of power that fathers possess. For many of Shepard's male character, there is no other way to define oneself. A son must dethrone his father in some way, either through the death of his father and a declaration of rights to property (*Buried Child*), carrying on the cycle of abandonment and

violence of the previous generation (*Fool for Love*), or forfeiting the fatherly role for the greater good (*Paris, Texas*). This cyclical relationship of fathers and sons mimicking the actions of one another is the heart of the conflict of identity. The males see their traits and behaviors mirrored in the actions of their fathers and must decide the extent of the legacy that is appropriate to inherit. Inherent in this masculine realization is the scope of free will and extent to which they are able to govern their actions. They must question themselves; do they treat women badly or act violently because a male predecessor did? Thus, as one of Shepard's prolific critics notes:

Father and sons wrestle for possession of the past and the future. At stake is the question of responsibility and the nature of identity. It is a battle for power and self-knowledge as the father stares into the mirror of the son and sees himself and vice versa. It is an argument about the nature of reality and the extent of freedom. (Bigsby 173)

It is fair to conclude here that the power struggle in parent-child relationships stems from this "knowledge." The father figure will not peacefully relinquish his status and the son is unable (usually) to capture this power by chance. Thus, the imitation of the elder is a method employed by the male to gain control. This causes Shepard's men to assume their fathers' identities and carry on the cycle of their behavior. Male characters in two of the three works, *Fool for Love* and *Paris, Texas*, address the importance of father figures in the formation of self-awareness. Often, masculinity also includes participation in violent acts.

Inherent in Shepard's masculine identity is the representation of male violence. This is the reason many of Shepard's plays feature men as cowboys, rodeo riders, and musicians. The male characters are unstable because not only are they struggling to positively connect with each other but they are also disconnected from themselves. Because of this disconnect, Shepard's men lack the ability to be emotionally consistent and instead turn to violence and domination. Identity in Shepard's work is repetitive and

violent in nature because the characters are so focused on their own struggle that they ignore the experience and needs of others. Bigsby states “But beneath all this drama of alienation is a unifying repetition” (170). This type of characterization can explain the need for males to dominate the female characters Part of the identity process for men in Shepard’s early plays was to gain power and self-esteem through the abuse of individuals around them.

This violence and abuse is a by-product of the male quest for identity. Because Shepard’s characters lack the ability to relate their feelings, wants, needs, and fears to their family and peers, they act violently to appear “tough” and in control. What the men cannot command through peer interaction, they capture through their fists. Their inadequacies, real or perceived, personal or work related, become catalysts for their outbursts. The recipients of these lashing outs are family members and coworkers, who are often victims of circumstance and happened to be in the vicinity of the male. Thus,

In Shepard’s work, men are violent, striking out at one another, at the women they love and at inanimate objects. Like so many demented Billy Budd’s they are unable to articulate their feelings, unable even to understand their motives. They seldom have jobs and if they do it is occasional or marginal. They are failed farmers, minor rodeo performers. They ride on the intensity of their emotions...they live by instinct.” (Bigsby 169)

The destructive nature of masculine identity is a result of men not knowing themselves, and therefore modeling the behavior of generations of violent men who value the domination, masculinity, and physicality of the “Old West.”

Middle and later Shepard works stress the importance of a balanced male and recognize the dangers of relying solely on violence and chauvinism as a definition of self. This balance is found between adhering on some level to traditional masculinity while at the same time avoiding the dismissal and abuse of women. In his later works, Shepard

more clearly opposes the idea of a “macho male” in favor of a more “modernized” and thus moving from the realm of the physical to the social and emotional:

The nature of Male both the archetype and the modern male who must somehow integrate his primal nature and allow this nature to function within the confines, possibilities and realities of modern culture and in relation to the modern female...how does he distinguish between the archetypal (and to Shepard natural and thus necessary) *machismo*, that undefinable essential “maleness” or that which is not female and sexist chauvinism. (Graham302)

Shepard attempts to present later male characters as a medium between a masculine violent figure and a more feminized male. They must retain certain masculine attributes, but at the same time, they must not violently stifle female voice. Although Shepard recognizes the need for a gender distinction, he condemns its use as justification for the exploitation or abuse of females. Shepard, through this shift in “maleness” opens the door for a more developed female voice and point of view.

Developed female voice has never been the focus of Shepard’s work; rather it is often secondary to the male. As a result early Shepard works portrayed women as the recipient of violence, “male aggression or victims of uncontrolled passion” (Bisgby 169). Women’s identity was largely constructed through female-male relationships and could not be realized without confrontation of their male counterparts, or their acceptance of masculine characteristics, namely their willingness to participate in violent acts when necessary. Although by the 1980’s Shepard began addressing female identity, it was in following decades that women were treated with more consideration. Shepard speaks during a 1997 interview, of the wives of World War II veterans on whom his women characters are based. Although his work may reflect a lack of sympathy and understanding toward female characters, Shepard respects the strength of women. He cites the women of the 1940s because they were emotionally strong and stable, and, rather than flee potentially abusive or unhappy relationships, carried on with life as they

always had:

Midwestern women from the forties suffered an incredible psychological assault, mainly by the men who were disappointed in a way that they didn't understand... [The] women took it on the nose, and it wasn't like they said, "Hey Jack, you know, down the road, I'm leaving." They sat there and took it...there was a sort of heroism in those women. They were rough and selfless in a way. What they sacrificed at the hands of those maniacs. (353)

The emphasis that is placed on "rough" and "selfless" is a reflection of what Shepard believes to be important in identity. Also echoed in Shepard's statement is the secondary nature of women's identity in favor of the emphasis on men. He speaks of the alienation the men felt as a cause of the women's "heroism." The women stood by their husbands and men, supported them and took their abuse, that's what made them "strong" and selfless.

Women characters are the guiding force of male identity, often because they display the strength and resiliency necessary in their dealings with Shepard's characters. Shepard's early plays feature women who were archetypal sex objects, which facilitate the definition of "maleness" (Graham 304). Women are objects, which are needed to give male characters status. Female characters provided male characters with an example of what *not* to emulate. Women looked inward for their identity cues, while males depended on external ones, which created the dialectic nature of identity Shepard's plays:

In the earlier plays, the female character is a type, a symbol and/or fragment; she is a sexual object, the maternal aspect of the dysfunctional family or an emblem of the intuitive, right-brain element of the modality of dualism...she facilitates definition of the male through the provision of contrast—what are the outward limits of duality and where does duality merge. (Graham 304)

The female characters serve as mothers, lovers, and sisters, which are present to be an opposite

figure for the males to compare themselves to. The contrast between masculinity and femininity help the males label themselves and act accordingly. Explained through this contrast is also the initial differences between male and female self-identity, men tend to look outward and shift inward, whereas women first search inward and then outward for cues. It also allows, in later works, Shepard's exploration of interconnectedness of maleness and femaleness.

Dependency on the opposite sex for identity is common in Shepard's works. Female-male relationships in Shepard's works provide an outlet for identity. Subordination of the female is seen as "natural" because the male is traditionally the dominant figure. The male is defined through his treatment of and relationship with the female characters (Graham 304). The implication here is that Shepard's characters are seeking self-awareness through relationships. Women have been conditioned to believe that men define them and, relationships for men are both an identity builder and cause for identity crisis. In later plays, however, Shepard emphasizes this dependency less, instead highlighting the commonality of identity, relaxing of gender roles. Shepard attempts to show the interrelation of gender roles to reach beyond stereotypical roles and find a broader connection. For males to become complete, they must come to terms with femininity and reject violent masculinity, and females must adopt male characteristics. This can be seen as Shepard's "desire to reach back beyond the social to the archetypal" (Bigsby 166). Identity thus depends less on exploiting others and relies more on realization that male and female identity are closely related. The dependence on male-female relationships for identity can be found in the following Shepard works.

Eddie, the main male character of Shepard's *Fool for Love* spends much of the play searching for his identity in the context of his relationship with the Old Man, his father. Eddie is

the “cowboy” character seeking to prove his masculinity but also to fill a void left by the absence of his father. Because Sam Shepard’s male identity is largely determined by the actions of and relationship with the father figure, Eddie emulates the Old Man character. This implies that his relationships are characterized by the domination and abandonment of his partner, as well as infidelity; which continues the father-son cycle. “They’re doomed to repeat the obsessive behavior of the fathers” (Auerbach 55). The Old Man character fits a typical Sam Shepard archetype: the absent, yet important, father figure. Shepard’s Old Man seems to represent what Eddie is aspiring to be; he follows in his father’s adulterous footsteps. The Old Man carries on relationships with two women, Eddie and May’s mothers, which he describes as, “the same love. Just split in two, that’s all” (Shepard 48). Doris Auerbach states in *Who Was Icarus’s Mother* “Eddie is both the son who has been abandoned and the husband who abandoned, unable to rid himself of his obsession with the father and his compulsive sadomasochistic tie to May, who is both abandoned child and wife” (59). He can’t let go of his relationship with May because she is his link to the Old Man biologically and also the object of his desire. Eddie states of his relationship with May, “You know we’re connected, May. We’ll always be connected. That was decided a long time ago” (Shepard 25), reinforcing the idea that May is a means for Eddie to connect with his father. Eddie’s love is also divided between May and the Countess, suggesting that Eddie is trying to gain pieces of his identity by imitating the behavioral patterns of his father. Because Eddie’s father emphasized that a “real man” is masculine, Eddie is doomed to repeat that role.

Part of Eddie’s identity is linked with asserting his masculinity. May states of Eddie, “Anyone who doesn’t half kill themselves falling off horses and jumping on steers is a twerp in

your book,” suggesting Eddie thinks of “men,” as tough, physical and domineering (Shepard 30). A physical description of Eddie, “When he walks, he limps slightly ... There is a particularly broken-down quality about his body in general, as though he’s aged long before his time,” suggests that his insistence on a masculine identity has taken its toll on his body (Shepard 11). His profession is rodeo performance and he is linked to the land. Eddie promises May a better life; he has “a piece of ground up in Wyoming” with a “garden” and “chickens” (Shepard 25). When May responds, “It makes me puke to even think about it,” Eddie states, “You’ll get used to it,” insinuating that she could adjust and accommodate his desire (Shepard 17). Eddie is adamant that May can never escape the relationship and threatens any man that she might become involved in. He has no regard for her feelings or actions; he is concerned with preserving their relationship. Inherent in this assertion, is Eddie’s insecurity and resortion to violence to fulfill his needs. He tells May:

I’m not leaving. I don’t care what you think anymore. I don’t care how you feel. None a’ that matters. I’m not leavin’. I’m stayin’ right here. I don’t care if a hundred “dates” walk through that door—I’ll take every one of ‘em on. I don’t care if you hate my guts... You’ll never get rid of me. You’ll never escape me either. I’ll track you down no matter where you go. I know exactly how your mind works. I’ve been right every time. (Shepard 36)

He makes several attempts to physically take her from her hotel room, “I’m taking you back, May” (Shepard 24), and “I’m not lettin’ go of you this time, May,” (Shepard 17) suggesting that she has no say. Eddie attempts to woo May with his lassoing skills, “He spins the rope above his head in a flat-horn loop, the ropes on the bedposts...takes the loop off the bedpost, rebuilds it, swings and ropes another bedpost...roping every post and never missing” (Shepard 28). This act of masculine talent is presented by Shepard as a means for Eddie to prove himself superior to other men that May is dating.

Eddie is contrasted with Martin, a “normal” man, who is dating May. Martin

wanted for May to choose the movie and Eddie thought that was a sign of weakness to allow the woman to make a choice was to lose control. Eddie also contrasts himself to

Martin:

If you called him a 'guy,' I'd be worried about it but since you call him a man' you give yourself away. You're in a dumb situation with this guy by calling him a 'man.' You put yourself below him. (Shepard 30)

Here, Eddie is trying to assert his power over May's choice of partners ironically, by attempting to convince her that she is giving Martin "too much power" through her labeling him as a "man," thus implying that she is not searching for an equal, but a caretaker or father figure (Hall 160). He also states, "This guy's gotta' be a twerp. He's gotta' be a punk chump in a two dollar suit" (Shepard 23), in an effort to further place himself in a superior position. Eddie also accuses Martin of "having a lotta' problems" because he is an orphan (Shepard 39). He goes onto say, "orphans are supposed to steal a lot aren't ya? Shoplifting and stuff. You're also supposed to be the main group responsible for bumping off our Presidents" (Shepard 39). Eddie is trying to assert himself as a better choice over Martin, labeling Martin as "rootless," which is symptomatic of being weaker and immoral.

In a twisted way, through the exchanges Eddie has with Martin, an orphan, he plays a sort of fatherly role. With lessons such as, "the guy's always supposed to pick the movie" (Shepard 45) and the dialogue about men's control over women, Eddie becomes a fatherly mentor:

Martin: What would we do here?

Eddie: Well, you could uh—tell each other stories.

Martin: Stories?

Eddie: Yeah.

Martin: I don't know any stories.

Eddie: Make 'em up.

Martin: That'd be lying wouldn't it?

Eddie: No, no. Lying's when you believe it's true. If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying.  
(Shepard 45)

The audience knows that Eddie practices what he preaches. Eddie is passing on advice to Martin, which is reminiscent of what his fathered offered him. He is bringing Martin into the world of maleness, which means the “fantasist side,” first exposed in the scene with the Old Man and Eddie:

Old Man: I thought you were a fantasist, right? Isn't that basically the deal with you? You dream things up. Isn't that true.

Eddie: I don't know.

Old Man: You don't know. Well, if you don't know I don't know who the hell else does. I wanna' show you somethin'.

Eddie: Sure

Old Man: Take a look at that picture on the wall over there. (He points to the wall stage right. There is no picture but Eddie stares at the wall.) Ya' see that? Take a good look at that. Ya' see that?

Eddie: (staring at wall) Yeah.

Old Man: Well, would you believe if I told ya' I was married to her (Barbara Mandrell)

Eddie: (pause) No.

Old Man: Well, see now that's the difference right there. That's realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that?

Eddie: Sure

Old Man: Good. I'm glad we have an understanding.  
(Shepard 19-20)

It is in this scene that Shepard establishes the gendered perspective. The Old Man, who first establishes that masculine realism values, belief rather truth, that one is allowed to believe what they feel, is right. Basically, instead the ideal is better than reality. If one consciously tells a lie, it is not a lie but the male belief in it makes it true. Eddie gains a part of his identity through playing the father's role, which he then passes to Martin. May, who is Eddie's female counterpart, is also heavily influenced by the masculine roles set by Shepard's society.

May, the main female character of *Fool for Love*, plays both male and female gender roles. Because May is a woman, she will fall into her mother's role of being both obsessed with and waiting for the male to claim her. Like her mother, who searched endlessly for the Old Man, May waits for Eddie to find her. May states, "I don't need you," (Shepard 14), "Nobody asked you to come," (Shepard 15), but she also rushes to embrace his legs (Shepard 13), and begs him to stay a number of times. She also says, "I get sick everytime you come around. Then I get sick when you leave. You're like a disease to me" (Shepard 24). This statement mirrors the plight of May's mother. Despite her claims that she does not need Eddie, May's behavior is characteristic of her mother's during her relationship with the Old Man. The audience can see that like Eddie, May can't seem to label or deny the connection that they have. Like her mother, she has to imagine her lover with another woman. Because she does not have the "fantasist" viewpoint, or the ability to live in denial, the image she sees is more painful than those conjured up by the Old Man or Eddie, instead she has to label and accept her feelings.

May says:

I don't understand my feelings. I really don't understand how I could hate you so much after so much time. How, no matter how much I'd like not to hate you, I hate you even more. I can't even see you now. All I see is a picture of you. You and her. I don't even know if the picture's real anymore...The two of you. It cuts me up. It cuts me so deep I'll never get over it. And I can't get rid of this picture either...Kinda' like a little torture. And I blame you more for this little torture than I do for what you did. (Shepard 21)

Because May is a female, with "internalized identity," the psychological and emotional effects of Eddie's betrayal cut deeper than the physical act (of abandonment). However, her realization of its existence will cause her to eventually come to terms with it.

Although May possesses elements of feminine ideal and therefore, a separate viewpoint, she must also contain male characteristics, which would allow her to be competitive with Eddie for survival.

May possesses the violent element common in Shepard's male characters. She is the first female character given a voice that is semi-independent from the husband/boyfriend character. What separates May from earlier female characters is her movement beyond "the inner quest," to "the opposing and active journey outward," meaning that she is the first of Shepard's women to go further than an internal struggle for identity. May takes the initiative to physically remove herself from a situation (Graham 304). She is "tough" like Eddie "because of her previous subjugation," her realization of wanting a life different than Eddie was providing allowed her to survive independently (Graham 304). May is firm in her stand against Eddie's image of their idyllic life in the West. "You keep comin' up here with this lame country dream life with chickens and vegetables and I can't stand any of it" (Shepard 17). She also states "[you] suckered me into some dumb little fantasy and then dropped me like a hot rock. How many times has that happened" (Shepard 18). She has been manipulated Eddie enough to realize that his "country dream" is contrary to her independence. "Women—like May refuse to stay in place, refuse, finally to be faithful to the self-centered fantasies of their men" (McDonough 59). These statements illustrate May's search for a better life outside of her relationship with Eddie.

Another component of May's identity is the adoption of violent behavior. There are many instances of May's "masculinity:" she knees Eddie in the groin, (Shepard 19),

and states “ I’m not gonna’ lay here on my back with you on top of me and get shot by some dumb rich twat. Now lemme up Eddie,” threatening to physically confront the Countess (Shepard 34). The most striking assertion of May’s violence is her warning to Eddie. She speaks of murdering Eddie and the Countess with knives, even resorting to torture. May informs Eddie:

I’m gonna’ kill her and then I’m gonna’ kill you. Systematically. With sharp knives. Two separate knives. One for her and one for you... So the blood doesn’t mix. I’m gonna’ torture her first though. Not you. I’m just gonna’ let you have it. Probably in the midst of a kiss. Right when you think everything’s been healed up. Right in the moment when you’re sure you’ve got me buffaloed. That’s when you’ll die. (Shepard 15)

This can be compared to Eddie’s statement of “taking on” any man that May chooses to have a relationship with and also his putting on spurs and cleaning his shotgun before Martin’s arrival. They are acts of jealous aggression. Both genders are presented as being violent, although the burden seems to lie on the male side. This seems to suggest that a resolution without violence is not yet congruent with the male identity.

The play offers no real resolution, which suggests that although May has gained some independence from male dominance, the cycle will continue. Eddie’s pursuit of the Countess and abandonment of May sets a pattern; he is caught in cycle of his father, but has adopted the feminine role of May’s mother. This may suggest that in addition to the roles that their parents have set forth for them to follow, there has also been a role reversal. Eddie and May will continually run from and pursue each other because that is the only way they can truly “fulfill” their roles.

Eddie is constantly pursuing an identity that evades him, both in the body of his father and in the body of his lover. The two lovers are not really repeating themselves as much as they are repeating the lives of their parents—recapitulating a pattern of interaction they have inherited rather than created and upon which they have structured their identities. (McDonough 62)

Because early Shepard works are defined more in terms of identity and its relation to family history, *Fool for Love* offers little room for personal growth or advancement. May leaves but only because Eddie has abandoned her and she must move to a new location to be pursued and Eddie abandons to chase a different prospect, the Countess.

*Paris, Texas* features Travis, a male character who must forge his identity through the process of regaining memory and coming to terms with past transgressions. Travis is full of guilt and self-hatred. Another Shepard character, Tilden, from *Buried Child* (1979), anticipates Travis. Tilden states, “I was alone. I thought I was dead. I thought I was dying but I just lost my voice...you gotta talk or you’ll die,” Likewise, Travis refuses to speak because he doesn’t want to face his past (Shepard 57). He flees to the Texan Desert, where he can “opt out of a complex world of desire and competing needs; [it] leads him to abandon language and seek a form of self-annihilation in a world stripped of social demands” (Bigsby 165). He can avoid the societal pressures of controlling a wife, heading a family, and holding a job by retreating physically into the desert and emotionally into himself. A physician, the first person Travis interacts with in the film, states, “something must've cut your tongue off. Either that or you've got something to hide” (Shepard Paris). Travis, who is restored to his family, must go through a process to regain his memory, voice, and identity. Indeed Bigsby agrees that, “[Shepard] turned the slow acquisition of language, by a character who had deliberately desocialized himself into an ironic account of the repossession of social responsibility and the enactment of a profound and damaging anxiety” (189). Travis must regain his position as a father, a member of society, and gain ownership of his violent past. Travis’ use of language becomes more complex as he meets the qualifications for each of Shepard’s identity stages. It is through his social interactions with family that he is able to find himself in the context of the modern environment that causes him discomfort.

Travis' reintroduction to civilization is necessary for his gain of self-awareness. Walt, Travis' brother attempts to reintroduce him to society. He states of Travis, "What the hell happened to you anyway. You look like 40 miles of rough road" and "We thought you were dead boy," (Shepard Paris). An aspect of Travis' journey toward "normalcy," is "cleaning up," which is facilitated by Walt, who gives him new shoes and clothes. The road trip, which Travis and Walt must take because Travis refuses to fly, provides time for the characters to interact and more specifically, for Walt to question Travis. "You're not gonna' clam up the whole way are you," Travis' silence starts to wear on Walt, who wants to discuss four years worth of issues (Shepard Paris).

Travis, as many other Shepard characters, invests his identity in the actions of his parents, particularly in the actions of his father. For example, he can recall why he purchased a plot of land in Paris, Texas. Paris, Texas represents Travis' roots; he feels that he began life there. Because he feels that connection to the land, Travis will be drawn to it. "That's where she and Daddy first made love...I figured that's where I began. I mean, me Travis Clay Henderson. They named me that. I began there" (Shepard Paris). Travis inherits his father's namesake and legacy. Travis' father may have set the pattern for how Travis will interact with women. Throughout his life, Travis' father placed his mother on an unrealistic pedestal. Travis admits that his father, "never saw her," and eventually "he just saw what he wanted" (Shepard Paris). He asserts of his mother, "She never wanted to be a fancy woman, never pretended to be one. She was good, very good. But my Daddy he had this idea, this idea in his head that was kind of a sickness. An idea about her and he looked at her but he didn't see her. He saw this idea" (Shepard Paris). Though Travis does not reveal the relationship between his actions and those of his father until later in the film, his relationships with women are characteristic of those his father had. The similarities are striking.

Travis' wife, Jane, is subject to the same treatment. Travis describes his relationship with Jane as a tale of abuse, jealousy, alcoholism, and obsession. Travis is silent for all of those years because he has to mull over the consequences of his possession of his father's treatment of his mother, of the fact that he "saw" and "heard" her, but never understood her needs and desires. During their first encounter, in a booth with a two-way mirror, Travis was unsuccessful at communicating with Jane. However, a second visit to the "sex parlor," provides the opportunity for Travis to explain and apologize for his dark past. The audience discovers the reason for his silence. His jealousy and abuse of Jane harks back to the way early Shepard works treat women as a "symbol" or an object to possess and control. His moment of redemption and apology to Jane is the one moment he can describe and understand the past and his actions:

He started to get kind of torn inside...He knew he had to work to support her but he couldn't stand to be away from her either...And the more he was away from her, the crazier he got except now he was really crazy. He started imagining all kinds of things. He started thinking she was seeing other men on the sly. He'd come home from work and accuse her of spending the day with somebody else. He'd yell at her and break things in the trailer ...He wanted her to get jealous but she didn't...He tied a cowbell to her ankle so he could hear her at night if she tried to get out of bed. But she learned how to muffle the bell by stuffing a sock into it and inching her way out of the bed and into the night. He caught her one night when the sock fell out and he heard her trying to run to the highway. He caught her and dragged her back to the trailer and tied her to the stove with his belt. He just left her there and went back to bed, and lay there, listening to her scream. Then he listened to his son scream. (Shepard Paris)

Like many other male characters Shepard has created, Travis used his wife as an object by which to judge himself. "Possessing" her gave him a sense of power, control, and confidence. The idea of her escaping him led him to go to extreme measures, abusing her, physically preventing her from moving without being detected. The cowbell and belt signify his admittance of a lack of control; he resorts to holding Jane captive, fearing that if not physically restrained, she would leave him.

Travis' trip to Houston to find Jane typical of a Shepard male yet shows a new maturity not present in other works. Although, Walter has already tried unsuccessfully to locate Jane, Travis is adamant about his ability to locate her. He must go on a quest to find the woman who fled.

Travis: I'm gonna' find Jane.

Walt: How are you gonna' find her...She's completely disappeared. I tried everything. I couldn't find her.

Travis: I haven't tried yet. I can find her.  
(Shepard Paris)

Travis feels that because he "knows" her, he will be able to locate her. This belief is a reflection of two things, his masculinity and his perceived superiority over Walt because he is intimately acquainted with Jane. His journey differs from those of past male characters due to the intentions and the result. Rather than find her and force her to rekindle their past relationship, as Eddie in *Fool for Love* attempts, Travis' intentions are selfless, reuniting a family that was broken by his actions. He comes to terms with his obsession and recognizes that he cannot carry on a healthy relationship and therefore must not stay with her. He sacrifices his desire for Jane, in order for her to take on a motherly role. Travis tells Hunter that he must leave so he and Jane can be a family and shoulders the responsibility for the past.

In person, it can't come true; you belong together with your mother. It was me that tore you apart and I owe it to you to bring you back together. But I can't stay with you. I could never heal up what happened. That's just the way it is. I can't even hardly remember what happened. It's like a gap. But it left me alone in a way that I haven't gotten over. And right now, I'm afraid...afraid of walking away again...afraid of what I might find...but even more afraid of facing this fear...I love you more than my life. (Shepard Paris)

It is through this realization and sacrifice that Travis reaches a larger self-awareness. He

doesn't want to "walk away" and is "afraid" of facing his past, but he does it. Viewers get the sense that the audiotape signifies Travis' inability to break his bond with Hunter in person. The action of father abandoning son here is one of necessity. Travis examines his past and is able to make a decision, which will benefit those in his life.

Because fatherhood is a common Shepard identity marker, this is a role Travis attempts to tackle. Travis, though absent for four years, has a son, Hunter, whom he must learn to interact with. "Travis is fertile but incapable of maintaining the social structure of family" (Clum 178). He has the model father in his brother, Walt, who has been raising Hunter with his wife, Anne, yet seeks out the Mexican maid, an independent female character to help him define a father's role. Travis asks, "What does a father look like?" and searches for a model in magazines. Ultimately, it is the maid who is able to make Travis look and "act" the part. The maid makes him practice "fatherly" posture, which is to "walk stiffly" with a raised chin. "To be a rich father Senor Travis, you must always look to the sky and never at the ground. Walk stiff Senor Travis" (Shepard "Paris"). The next scene in the film features him dressed in a white suit and fedora, Walt's clothes, which stand for authority and affluence. These fit the maid's suggestion that wealth is important to fatherhood and as well as Travis' desire to share Walt's role as father to Hunter.

Although accepting of Travis, Hunter finds him out of touch with "how things are," which is probably a result of the suburban environment Hunter occupies with Walt and Anne (King 220). In addition to lost time, Travis must also learn to interact with Hunter in a foreign environment. Travis bonds with the Hunter through daily walks home from

school. Despite Hunter's assertion, "No one walks, everybody drives," he comes to look forward to seeing Travis rather than Anne's automobile. Travis is successful in his attempts to become a father figure for Hunter, even if a secondary one. Examples of this success can be found in Hunter's acceptance of him. He refers to Travis as "Dad," trusts Travis enough to make a trip to Houston with him and is relatively upset by the notion of Travis leaving. When told that Travis was leaving to locate Jane Hunter replies, "What about me? You just found me. Can I come with? I want to come with. I want to find her too" (Shepard Paris). Hunter also refers to Travis and Walter as his "fathers." "He's my father's brother...No, they're both fathers. My father...Just lucky I guess" (Shepard Paris). He also states that he could feel Travis was alive during his absence. "I never felt like you were dead. I could always feel you walking around and talking...somewhere" (Shepard Paris). Even though Travis was missing for half of Hunter's life, Hunter instinctively believes that he is not dead. This is contrasted with an earlier situation in which Travis admits that he could not always feel the life and movements of his father. These statements are an attest to Hunter's attachment to Travis. Travis appears successful in his attempt at fatherhood, at least as far as temporarily filling the role. Although Travis abandons his role as father initially and will do so again at the end of the play, his effort and growth must be recognized.

Jane, one of the main female characters, has the masculine components necessary to gain an identity, yet manages to adhere to some female gender characteristics. Like female characters before, she must overcome male violence and struggle to gain independence. One of the characters states of Jane, "[we] tried to locate her. She

vanished too,” which relates to conflict between her and Travis over his dominance of her. Part of Travis’ monologue suggests that Jane had made attempts to flee and gain independence:

She dreamed about escaping...She saw herself at night, running naked down a highway, across fields, running down riverbeds. Always running. And always, just when she was about to get away, he’d be there. He would stop her somehow. He just appeared and stopped her. (Shepard Paris)

Although Travis prevented her from “running,” she manages to escape by setting fire to the trailer while he is asleep. This can be seen as an act of aggression, similar to those taken by Shepard’s male characters. Her flight also harkens back to May from *Fool for Love*, who fled for a better life. Like Travis, Jane also likes silence. Perhaps this is her way of avoiding the pain of the past. She states, “It’s okay if you don’t want to talk. I don’t wanna talk either sometimes. I just like to stay silent” (Shepard Paris). Along with silence, Jane and Travis share other characteristics, like that of abandonment.

Jane commits an act of abandonment and must regain the parental role. Jane leaves her son, Hunter, with Anne and Walt, fearing that she would be using him to fill a void. Although Jane loathed her actions, she wanted what was in Hunter’s best interest. She explains to Travis, “I couldn’t keep him Travis. I didn’t have what I knew he needed. I didn’t want to use him to fill my emptiness I wanted him so bad I didn’t dare even imagining him anymore...I couldn’t stand the pain of seeing him grow up and missin’ it (Shepard Paris). What makes Jane’s abandonment different from Travis’, however, is that she continued to support her child financially even though she was physically absent. Anne, who has cares for Hunter states, “She asked me to open a bank account for Hunter... [She] wires money for Hunter...sometimes a hundred dollars. Sometimes fifty. Or five. For Hunter’s future” (Shepard Paris). Anne recognizes Jane’s effort to provide Hunter with economic stability. This supports Jane’s claims that she

wanted Hunter to have stability and resources that she could not provide.

During the scene, which shows the reunion of mother and son, the audience is presented with a powerful snapshot of their bond. There is no substantive dialogue in the scene, yet the images of the mother and son merging are powerful. Both figures, mother and son, are dressed in green, both have longish blonde hair, and they meld into a single figure on screen. The image of oneness is shared with the viewer and also, Travis, who watches the reunion from the street. Jane's feminine role, as defined by the ability to forgive and reprise an earlier component of identity, can also be found in later Shepard characters. Her reunion with Hunter appeared to have fulfilled that process more quickly than Travis was able to regain his position. Hunter accepts her affection and position, as mother immediately. There is no quest or education for Jane to complete. She simply silently enters a room and embraces her child, unlike Travis who must learn to be a father. Perhaps, that is Shepard's comment on the strength or superiority of the mother-son bond.

In *Simpatico*, Simms overcomes the limitations of his professional and personal life to become a less macho and a more balanced individual. The target of blackmail, Simms was a corrupt womanizing horse racing official. However, throughout the course of the play, Simms' character evolves into a new figure, with a new name, outlook on life, and priorities. Throughout his exchanges with Vinnie, his story begins to unfold. No longer bent on revenge, Simms concentrates on preserving his new identity and perhaps, even passing his advice onto other characters, namely Vinnie, who could benefit. Simms denounces the masculine need for revenge because he has moved beyond it and sees it as a progression of the violence that resulted in the loss of his previous life. He accepts blame for his affair with Rosie and realized that revenge will not alter the outcome. His new life has afforded him a fresh start. "[Simms] discusses casual sexual impropriety and

how 'justice' operates to no rightful system of balance and exchange, yet he admits no desire for recompense or restitution. ... The violence it breeds, but does not allow the seed of vengeance to find ground in himself" (Wade 268). Simms' comfort in his roles, suggests transcendence of traditional male gender expectations that Shepard utilizes. Evidence of this includes his refusal of an opportunity for revenge and his adherence to a newly acquired identity. Rather than be consumed by his past, Simms accepts personal responsibility and refuses to involve himself in further violence.

Unlike Shepard's male characters, Eddie, and Travis, Simms is able to forge a new complete identity. Approached by another character, Vinnie, who is offering him incriminating evidence from an indiscretion of Simms' past, he refuses and cryptically admits that although he was the man subjected to blackmail, he was not interested. The first mention of Simms' new self is during a discussion between Carter and Vinnie, the men who blackmailed him. Carter, who has helped Simms form a new career, tells Vinnie that Simms now goes by the alias "Ryan Ames." "He's changed his name you know...Calls himself "Ames" or something. Ryan Ames, I think it is" (Shepard 32). It is during an exchange with Vinnie, who seeks out Simms to presumably clear his name and also to ruin Carter, that Simms' transformation has taken place. Simms' does not seem interested in Vinnie's offer; although many of his statements suggest that his fall from his professional life and personal life wasn't easy. He makes statements like, 'He must've paid the piper...this "party" (56), "probably paid 10 times over. Didn't he? Must've suffered very dearly for his little transgression. Maybe suffered far more than any of his revilers could've imagined" (56), and [he was] "vilified in the press, as I remember. Slandered. Railroaded outa' town...wife and kids packed it up on him. I believe he lost everything. Bottomed out completely...Why should you be sorry? Loss can be a powerful elixir" (65). These statements suggest that Simms has come to terms with his

past, a requirement for the acceptance of a fuller self-awareness. He acknowledges his pain and loss, as a result of the encounter, but has moved on, labeled it as “life,” and tried to build a new life. Although Vinnie approaches Simms with “absolute proof,” he would rather “let sleeping dogs lay,” and as not interested in “festering souls and all their dirty laundry” (Shepard 65-66). Most telling are his statements, which suggest that vengeance is not worth losing self-identity. He also in this statement accuses Vinnie of doing just that and suggests that maybe he ought to reinvent himself, as well:

Simms: How many lives do you think a man can live, Mr. Webb? How many lives within this one...Well, say for instance, you could put the past to death and start over. Right now. You look like you might be a candidate for that.

Vinnie: That’s not possible. I mean—

Simms: No? Vengeance appeals to you more...Yes, Blood. Now why is that? Why is blood more appealing than rebirth?

(Shepard 61)

Unlike Vinnie, Simms has moved beyond blaming Carter for his past. He has accepted that his act with Rosie, which was documented, is something he is to blame for. Others benefited from it, but it was his responsibility. Simms is content with being “Ames,” who is old-fashioned, “prefers to stumble around with the old-fashioned dirty paper,” instead of “electronic mail,” and looks for “something tangible in the midst of all the abstract frenzy” (Shepard 53). Wade suggests that this symbolizes “Shepard’[s] dynamic that propels his male characters to radical postures or states of consciousness that rend communal bonds” (267). Though Shepard is often criticized for his use of violence and abuse of women, those behaviors provide the opportunity for his characters to grasp for an identity beyond the physical realm, to come to terms with their past and gendered roles in order to become self-reliant.

Not all of the male characters from *Simpatico* are independent or self-assured. Vinnie and Carter are like two parts of a whole identity. Shepard creates them as a pair;

which will eventually switch roles. Carter is able to survive in the mainstream society, while Vinnie is struggling alone, not passable as a “regular citizen.” “His characters change roles as easily as they change clothes. They invent new identities, switch identities with other characters, metamorphose into other forms of life, or simply disappear” (Harriot 3). While all of Shepard’s characters presented in this paper have that ability, the characters of this play are the most obvious example. Vinnie lives in Cucamonga, California, which is close to a desert. This is in conjunction with his social and vocational failure is evident of his removal from society. It is stated that he lives on “the edge of nowhere” (Shepard 16). Vinnie uses his knowledge and photographs involving the blackmail as a way to force Carter to financially support him. As far as a profession, he pretends he is a private investigator. Carter, on the other hand, owns a successful thoroughbred company in Kentucky is married to Rosie and has children. Shepard describes him as, having “a green swimming pool, white Mercedes, blue car phone,” which signifies his corporate success (Wade 266). This lifestyle, however, is as much a façade for Carter as it would be for Vinnie. As a member of the same class and social background as Vinnie, Carter must “act” the part, rather than actually “be” one of the upper class or elite. Implied in this accusation is Carter’s disconnection from his true self. He accuses Carter of “slapping divorced buddies, collecting football pools and swapping putters,” in order to pass for something he is not:

That must be something new and different for you...Must’ve been difficult at first. Fitting in. Pretending you had something in common. Kissing ass with the gentry...Like your seedy past is long forgot. Might never have really taken place. Might actually have belonged to another man. A man so remote and dead that you’ve lost all connection. A man completely sacrificed in honor of your bogus membership in the High Life. (Shepard 20-21)

The ending of the play features a role reversal between Carter and Vinnie. Free of the incriminating evidence, Vinnie sets off to begin a new life, perhaps taking Simms’ advice

to forget the past and move on. Carter, however, reverts to an unsure, drunken stereotypical Shepard male. He appears physically ill; his “teeth chatter,” he’s “rolling side to side,” he has been drinking Bourbon, and abandoned his cell phone (a symbol of his affluence) (Shepard 120). Although Vinnie refers to this illness as a “breakdown,” Carter is convinced he’s “dying.” This results in Vinnie abandoning Carter and severing all ties. He asserts, “You can die with your tongue hanging out. I don’t give a shit,” as the play closes with an image of Carter; “he shakes in his blanket as lights dim slowly. Phone rings on darkness than stops” (Shepard 135). Vinnie has taken the control Carter once had and Carter has assumed the position of living in solitude and darkness.

*Simpatico* features female characters that are more self-reliant but are still largely controlled by the masculine ideal. Although Cecilia and Rosie are not subjugated throughout the entire play, there are definite snippets where these women are pawns for male characters. Like Jane, in *Paris, Texas*, and May from *Fool for Love*, these women are seen as symbols in some point throughout the work. Both are described in terms of their appearance. Rosie is described as “in the pink,” which suggests that she is beautiful or healthy despite her age (Shepard 124). Similarly, Cecilia is referred to as “stunning,” “gorgeous,” and “attractive” (Shepard 105, 106, 107). Both women have their beauty exploited for the male colleagues’ benefit. For Rosie, this meant that she have a sexual encounter with Simms, which was photographed and documented. Although she benefited from the blackmailing by becoming Carter’s wife, she is obviously haunted by the act. Rosie takes pills, defines herself in the context of her relationship with Carter and finds security in the fact that he can never leave her. She states that Carter is indebted to her for her actions:

Rosie: I’m the wife of someone...Someone of tremendous power and influence...He’s deeply indebt to me, all from that one little brainstorm of mine, way back then. That one little night on the edge of Azusa...I turned the trick. It

was me who caused the heads to roll and don't you ever forget that.  
(Shepard 102-103).

Rosie compares herself to a prostitute, and is therefore, forced to take comfort in her position as a wife of a powerful man. Her power is secondary and by association, but she knows as long as Carter stays in authoritative position, she be powerful. One could also argue that her power over Carter supersedes his own because she can expose him at any time.

Carter also uses Cecilia for his personal gain. In addition to manipulating Cecilia into believing that Vinnie is at risk of incarceration, he offers her an opportunity to attend the Kentucky Derby in exchange for her bribing information out of Simms. She must endure Simms sexual innuendoes and is accused of prostitution. "You're not a high-paid chippie then? A Class Act? Something found in the Yellow Pages under 'Executive Escorts?'" (Shepard 112). After several attempts to buy the "negatives" from Simms, she finally admits, "I'm not cut out for this" and that her true motivation was to attend the Derby. "It was foolish to get suckered in by something like that but—I love the Derby" (Shepard 115). The two elements that suggest Cecilia transcends her female roles are her return to Cucamonga and the return of the cash to Carter and her acceptance of an invitation to the Kentucky Derby with Simms (no strings attached). "Your money's all here. You can count it if you want. I only used a little bit for sandwiches and tea. I'll pay you back, I promise" (Shepard 135). Unlike Rosie, Cecilia does not exploit Carter's manipulation of her. She simply confronts him for using her. Cecilia also does not succumb to Simms' advances as Rosie had in the past. Cecilia does not allow herself to be manipulated by males. Unlike Rosie, whose identity is dependent on the male figure, Cecilia tries to rise above that and strikes out on her own.

Despite Shepard's attempts to represent women as having identities separate from men, he is not fully able to portray an independent female character. While Shepard has

recently created women characters that contain elements of independence and self-assuredness, they are still largely tied to the desires and labels of femininity and to male perception of femaleness. This is evident in the reasoning for actions taken by the female characters. They must escape their male counterparts in order to survive, thrive on any sort of independent level, and yet take actions dictated to them by men. Jane's flight to a sex shop in Houston, Rosie's tryst with Simms, and May's date are all examples of this double standard. Women can have the freedom from men, as long as they are running to another establishment where they are secondary, inferior, and objectified by males. Regardless whether this is the intention of Shepard; it is a consequence of his promotion of the masculine identity as a primary need. Women play the role of promoting male identity; it is the female maid that facilitates Travis' transformation into a father figure, and Rose who sparks Simms' downfall and "rebirth." Shepard's earlier works are even guiltier of labeling women as symbols than the later works presented here. However, it is important not to dismiss Shepard's efforts. While the images of the images of the superiority of men and the male experience are evident in the three works *Fool for Love*, *Paris, Texas*, and *Simpatico*, female voices are present and it is largely the women who allow the male transformations to take place.

It is important to recognize Shepard's effort to define female characters, even if he does often fail or subjugate them in favor of male growth. Shepard's later works celebrate the female perspective. Many of Shepard's critics, such as McDonough and Bigsby, take issue with Shepard's unequal attention to male identity and accuse him of stifling female voice. However, women, while often not the focus of Shepard's works, are credited with the ability to survive and adapt more easily in modern society than men. Evidence of this functionality are May and Jane's ability to find work independent of the domestic sphere. Although these jobs are menial, May is a line cook, Jane, a sex worker,

and Cecilia, a cashier at a local grocery store; they are still able to function in a larger socioeconomic world. Rosie, does not have a profession, per se, but has found a position of power, which has afforded her economic security. Although she may not be content in her marriage, she prompted the arrangement fully aware that Carter would be obligated to support her. None of the women in these plays is struggling to support themselves. On the contrary, the women are able to maintain residences and keep up with expenses. This is unlike the men, who either breakdown mentally as a result of their professions or cannot hold steady jobs. In addition, the women are not subjected to the same evolutionary identity process. When presented in the text, these women have already taken the initiative to search for an “external” identity, which is leaving those (men) who oppress or suppress their needs. An example of this is May’s refusal to live the “country dream,” by the time the audience is exposed to her, May has already escaped Eddie’s rule. Likewise, Rosie had already fled Vinnie, who could not provide for her and married Carter, the wealthier of the two. Similarly, Jane has already fled to the sex shop in Houston, where she is able to live free of abuse and gains back her role as a mother instantaneously. Compared to Travis, Jane’s male counterpart, this role is captured much quicker. She does not have to convince Hunter that she can be a mother, she just acts and he accepts. This evidence supports the claim that Shepard’s portrays woman as “survivor[s];” and the male as “incapable of functioning effectively in the modern world” (Graham 304-305). Some of the women’s success may be attributed to their adoption of some masculine characters, which Shepard presents as a negative for male characters, but it must also be attributed to Shepard’s intention to comment on the character of women.

Shepard’s condemnation of masculine violence and “machoism” is evident in the three works presented. The male characters, Eddie, Travis, and Simms, all commit acts of violence against women, which they must overcome to become complete individuals.

With the exception of Eddie, whose violence may be attributed to his placement in early Shepard gender identity, these characters are less explicit in their abuse of females. Even Eddie's actions seem less violent and more macho. Although he physically restrains May, it is mostly through indirect acts like cleaning his rifle, lassoing bedposts, and wearing spurs that signify his violent nature. He is more concerned with the preservation of his masculine status through relationships he carries on with women, than his behavior. The females around him also counter Eddie's violence. The Countess, for example, sets fire to his horse trailer as well as firing at the motel room and Eddie's pickup truck. May meets Eddie with equal physical force. These acts of feminine violence seem to feed Eddie's preexisting violent tendencies. *Paris, Texas* should be recognized as such, for its commentary on the necessity male sacrifice. Despite Travis' apparent desire to rekindle a relationship with Jane, he resists, knowing that the cycle of abuse may continue due to his inability to define himself outside of his possession of her. His confession and apology serve as an acknowledgment of the inappropriateness of his past abuse. Although Jane is the subject of abuse, the audience never experiences it directly; the only exposure to it is through a monologue. Inherent in Travis' abandonment and sacrifice is also the interruption of the inheritance of abuse. Hunter does not remember the abusive relationship of his parents and Travis, by leaving, ensures that he will not witness it in the future. *Simpatico* is also successful with promoting inter-sex relations based not on abuse but common interest. Though there is no direct physical abuse in the play, Simms' flashbacks of the violent nature of his one night stand with Rosie serves as an example of it. Contrasted with this representation is the positive interaction between Cecilia and Simms. While this relationship starts as sexual banter, it ends with the only honest cross-gendered relationship. Simms moves from an abusive male to one of the only men who is able to see a woman as an equal.

Fatherhood is also an important facet of Shepard's male identity. Eddie is able to perform a sort of fatherly role, through mentoring Martin. Although this is a brief experience, and other motives are present (such as discrediting Martin as a valid mate), it does seem to give Eddie a confidence, which he did not hold in previous scenes. This exchange may also have promoted Martin to adopt a more masculine viewpoint, which is the same effect that the Old Man had on Eddie. Travis' experience with fatherhood should be read as commentary on the importance of motherhood and the male sacrifice for the success of the family unit. Because he is a middle period male, Travis, from *Paris, Texas* is also able to come to terms with the portion of his identity invested in fatherhood. Although he abandons his family once he reunites mother and son, it is more an act of sacrifice for a greater good than a lack of caring or ability. The audience is left with the implication that Travis will "disappear" but will return once he has become acquainted with himself and regain his position. While Simms does not seem to play an overt fatherly role like Eddie and Travis, he was a father in his "old" life. He also, like Eddie to Martin, counsels Vinnie on ways to improve his life, particularly adopting a new identity. Carter is also a father, although Shepard chooses to never show the audience his children. This may be Shepard's way of commenting on his inability to be true to his "roots," an incapability to be honest about his past of modest means prevents him from evolving into a complete self. Carter is Shepard's more subdued critique of masculinity and male identity.

Although authorial interest seems to lie with male characters such as Eddie, Simms, and Travis, there is a definite difference in which Shepard represents the sexes. Shepard concentrates on the plight of male characters as a way to comment on their inability to function effectively in contemporary setting, *not* as a means of elevating them to a higher status. This disparity is principally evident through the process by which male

characters attain their identity. They must go on a quest or fall from grace and then pick up the pieces in order to gain a complete awareness. Shepard, if read closely, is an advocate of a male identity which is balanced, meaning that it is a mixture of traditionally male and female components, not a violent one. Despite the assertion of certain critics, many of which are represented here, that Shepard promotes the inferiority of women, he should be credited with presenting male characters that adhere to the traditional male gender roles as incomplete and unsuccessful (in most facets of life).

Each of the male characters is subjected to a series of obstacles, which must be overcome for the formation of identity. Eddie, from *Fool for Love* must drive a great distance, fail to win the woman, coach Martin on life, and hunt down the Countess, all to gain an independence that he never fully attains. Rather, he gets caught in the inertia of his father, Old Man. It would be no surprise to catch up with Eddie driving along the edge of the Mojave searching for May because he is Shepard's opportunity to critique and condemn men who value masculinity (and masculine violence) as the only measure of manhood. Travis is granted more consideration most likely because he is willing to sacrifice his own needs and desires, in favor of a child and woman's. Although he too must journey around Texas until he is found and forced back into civilization, his process is more complex than Eddie's. Travis must address the wife and child he left behind. With the help of a female character, he is able to successfully recapture of his role as father (to Hunter). Also, by freeing Jane from her obligations to him, he is able to break the violent ties of his past. It seems, at the end of *Paris, Texas*, that Travis is done promoting violence, yet still must run away. He still must come to terms with the masculine characteristics that promote the labeling of women as property. Simms is the only male character of this evolution that is created with a full identity, which does not rely in some way on violence, or the inferiority of women. His new life is free from the

constraints of the expectations of masculinity, except for his sexual banter with Cecilia, which is a means for him to question her motives. Although he initially accuses of her being a prostitute sent by Carter, it is a fair question considering the blackmail of the past. The ending seems to be an indication of Simms seeking companionship rather than a sexual relationship, which seems to be a realization of the equal status of the sexes. He also attempts to school other characters on the evils of selling out for revenge or status, rather he stresses the importance of doing what one loves.

Those who focus solely on the subjugation of women in *Fool for Love*, *Paris, Texas*, and *Simpatico* are valuable for their emphasis on the importance of presenting both sexes with equal consideration, however it is necessary to examine Shepard's texts as a whole, rather than pigeon hole them into the promotion of males as superior. Those critics, who do so, dismiss his subtleties, which celebrate the strength and independence of women. It is valuable for Shepard's audience to recognize the need for a reading "with the grain," rather than against. This would lead to a greater understanding of the positive representation of women, as well as understanding the reason they are needed as catalysts for the male change. Because these male characters are incomplete, the drama unfolding is much more interesting to both the author and audience than an already fully bloomed female identity. They watch as the men grasp at fatherhood, decent relationships with members of both genders, and the abandonment of violence.

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