

# Revisiting “Axis of Evil”: *Liberal Ironist* and Shepard's *God of Hell*

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## Abstract

United States adopted the nineteenth century British model of colonialism for the twentieth century, specially in the exercise of controlling people's perspectives within the country while undertaking the adventure of directly interfering in other countries' affairs. When President Bush addressed three countries around the world as Axis of Evil on January 29, 2002, he was following the same route. Nevertheless, coining the phrase was not enough, and making people believe it required the main task that became possible through creating an intellectual atmosphere in which the focus was to promote the picture of good and evil embedded in the addressing of Axis of Evil. Consequently, any voice out of tune was hushed instantly, even if it meant Sam Shepard who had previously won great fame on the American stage by his family plays. Shepard never stopped on the notion of revealing the multiplicity of self, interacting with different geopolitical situations. As such, it is no wonder that his *God of Hell* is pursuing the same aim, a play totally neglected by the critics and reviewers for being too political and incoherent. Nevertheless, the research at hand is to demonstrate that Shepard is a true intellectual or, in Rorty's term, a liberal Ironist, able to entangle himself from the tissues of the aforementioned cultural war by considering people's susceptibility to humiliation.

**Keywords:** axis of evil, liberal ironist, cultural war, Shepard's God of Hell, Rorty

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## Introduction

The collapse of the Twin Towers and the World Trade Center complex on September 11 created a shocking image for the people around the world. Karlheinz Stockhausen, a German modernist composer, described 9/11 attacks as "the greatest work of art of all time" (Harris, 2004, p. 4). Besides the description being derogatory, it is truthfully referring to how the 9/11 attacks, same as a work of art, is attracting viewers' attention from around the world. However, given corrective lenses on the Stockhausen's artistic view of the 9/11 attacks, Elise Christine Silva attempted to consider it more than "an objectified spectacle" and deem it as a "terror-as-theater metaphor" which is performed for the people around the world (2015, p. 3). If the 9/11 attacks are understood as theatrical performances delivered to people around world, the theater curtain is not to be pulled closed soon and the performance will be continued by other actors. In this vein, President Bush made a theatrical gesture by addressing three countries worldwide as the *Axis of Evil* on January 29, 2002. Therefore, as previously noted by Edward Said that "think tanks, media, and academic centers converged on the necessity of United States force and the ultimate justice of its projection" (2014, p. 288), United States' cultural war tailored a platform on which all the submissive voices are raised and heard through the channel established by the government, even some local voices from the countries situated within the *Axis of Evil* are promoted in the United States to serve the same function<sup>1</sup>. The censored publication of the post 9/11 is clearly shown in the following comment:

In 2004, it came to the attention of the publishing community that the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which monitors transactions with nations under embargo, had for a number of years been requiring any publisher wishing to bring out a work by an author from a so called "enemy nation" to apply for a license. (Borders, 2010, p. xiv)

In a time that even the voices of expatriate writers in America are censored, and only those types of literature are promoted which are used as "propaganda by dictators of every stripe and by fascists of many nations as an opiate to blunt consciousness and to block action" (Borders, 2010, p. xi), there is still hope that literature at its best can be adopted as "a powerful tool of representation and allegory: a tool of recognition, resistance, and transformation" (2010, p. xi). Therefore, remarkable as it is to notice that amidst these wars of words and weapons, literature is finding some validation to "subvert, through its inventive strategies, the violent rhetoric of U.S. Empire" (2010, p. v). This being the case, the originality of this study lies not in

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Donadey and Huma Ahmed-Ghosh in their article entitled "Why Americans Love Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*" explicate the reason behind the sudden popularity of a work written by an unknown author like Azar Nafisi to the American audience. His study mainly focuses on how the American political ideology has been decisive in the promotion of this work and the usage of the work for its own purposes. They continue by relating the treatment of Azar Nafisi to the case of authors from the former Soviet Union, such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who "served to bolster a rabidly anti-Communist U.S. ideology" (2005:632).

analyzing those expatriate writers highly affected by the construction of *Axis of Evil* but in addressing Sam Shepard, an already well-known American author whose dissident voice was neglected amidst the powerful rhetorical violence of the American government. Reasoning from this fact, it is no wonder that Sam Shepard's later plays like *God of Hell* is disregarded by the critics or labelled as too political. In this regard, the study at hand tries to form the basis on which Shepard is introduced as a reliable intellectual with regard to Edward Said's viewpoint and Rorty's Liberal Ironist theory, respectively, and then his *God of Hell* is read contrapuntally to demonstrate that Shepard portrays the horrible experience that emigrants (naturalized citizens) and the American people are facing in the United States after the coinage of *Axis of Evil*. However, they are not fully aware of how they are made to behave horribly toward each other.

### Theoretical Framework

The relation between the intellectuals and the shaping of public opinion is undeniable. Gramsci elaborated on this relation by extending the notion of an intellectual into the traditional and organic ones. Considering these two types of intellectuals as having different bases, he maintained that a traditional intellectual is dispensed with the economic, social and political situation of his society while an organic intellectual "gives his class homogeneity and awareness of its own function, in the economic field and on the social and political levels" (Cammett, 1971, p. 202). To Gramsci, an intellectual serves the society as a channel through which a norm gets more acceptable and legitimized; however, the current of this channel is formed persuasively, not coercively. Later on, this latter feature is more closely studied by Edward Said. From Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and Benda's treatise *La trahison des clercs* to Michel Foucault, Said focuses on the relationship between an intellectual and the shaping of the public life and how it is further connected with the politics. He reaches the fine line of defining an intellectual based on certain dualities:

The intellectual, in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. (1996, p. 23)

Said's definition of an intellectual is reactionary to the concentration of power. The constructed power intends to control the intellectuals for their potentiality to control the public opinions. And since the possible relationship between an intellectual and the central power is inevitable, Said considers it as "[intellectual's] special duty to address the constituted and authorized powers of one's society, which are accountable to its citizenry" (1996, p. 98). Said recognizes the challenge that is facing the intellectual when they are encountered with a central power but also regards it as necessary for the intellectual "to ensure the community's survival during periods of extreme national emergency," (p. 41). Furthermore, he adds that the role of an intellectual in defending his country is undeniable, but he should be cognizant that there are also some "alternatives that are too often marginalized or pushed

aside as irrelevant to the main battle at hand" (p. 41). Said's intent of laying responsibility on the intellectuals to take into consideration the marginal groups of society is stemming from his view of American government after the Gulf War in 1991. He refers to the Gulf War of 1991 as the time that the United States became active in imperialism with a global perspective. He believes that the United States is not solely focusing on sending troops to distant places but also "manufacturing consent" from its public sphere. Employing this term, he makes an effort to make the public tightly hold the idea that the government of the United States is determined to help the people around the world even at the cost of attacking their governments whereas in reality they are more harmful than beneficial. And in his further analysis, Said admits how at last a prevailing view was publicly shared with the dominance of the "rhetoric of the government" (2014, p. 288) which warns that the independence of the nations in the late twentieth century is more threatened by "the new electronics than was colonialism itself" (p. 291). Said's explication of the new type of imperialism in the twentieth century is highlighting the point that imperialism is not only comprised of sending troops to other countries and conquering them; but also needed the direction of everybody's perspective to play the music of the American government. Arriving at 9/11 and the designation and the introduction of *Axis of Evil* to the world by the American government, Said's warning of the new type of imperialism is clearly reiterated to us as the American government attempted to portray certain countries as evil to the eyes of the public.

Nevertheless, in our opinion, Said's definition of an intellectual can become ambiguous as he positions the intellectual in a situation that is dispensed with offering a solution to the society. He claims that intellectuals should never follow a fixed set of formulas or clichés and should always investigate the alternatives. However, as common people are highly tended to admire the intellectuals as the problem-solvers, they would distrust intellectuals if they change their perspectives very often, with this in mind, we suggest that to better comprehend the function of an intellectual in the society, Rorty's theory of liberal ironist should be proposed to create a platform in literature for this purpose. Rorty critically asks for a platform shift on which we are building our lives in the hope that "culture as a whole can be "poeticized" rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be 'rationalized' or 'scientized'" (1999, p. 53). Rorty's thinking lends considerable pervasiveness to literature in which the literary author is never after crystallizing a single truth to the reader because in his mind, authors like "Cervantes and Shakespeare began to suspect that human beings were, and ought to be, so diverse that there is no point in pretending that they all carry a single truth deep in their bosoms" (2007, p. 93). Rorty considers sensitivity to the pain and humiliation of others as the most important factor in the shaping of his society. This imaginary society would be Rorty's ideal since no one is trying to find the truth and everyone's opinion should be respected or as Rorty puts it, "all touchstones are such artifacts, would take as its goal the creation of ever more various and multicolored artifacts" (1999, p. 54). In Rorty's society, certain words have new meanings. Accordingly, true or right is not to be firmly attached to some definite ideas forever, whereas they would be the "outcome of undistorted

communication ... in a free and open encounter" (1999, p. 67) and consequently the "traditional epistemological-metaphysical image" would be substituted with a liberal society. His society is based on the "susceptibility to humiliation" (1999, p. 91) and what appears radically different from any other sorts of existing solidarity among the individuals of a society is "the human solidarity that is based on a sense of a common danger, not on a common possession or a shared power" (1999, p. 91). We considered it necessary to expand Rorty's definition of liberal ironist since it could provide us with a type of intellectual who contributes to the society. Moreover, this type of intellectual is giving priority to people's susceptibility to humiliation, and not the blind following of a saying promoted to the public eyes as a truth. Indeed, due to this reason, Rorty's path can be ideal for anyone, more specifically an intellectual, to be followed since, instead of changing the direction concerning the center of power and constructing a truth that might be tainted with political power, the intellectual is to focus on how to avoid one's humiliation and to develop human solidarity among people. In this respect, Shepard's later works are to be considered as the ones in which Shepard distanced himself from the center of the power and underlined the necessity of promoting solidarity among the people in the society rather than attaching to the center of the power.

## Discussion

Sam Shepard's beginning in American literature was promising to the extent that he was even categorized as one of the "certain iconic figures of American culture" (Wade, 2007, p. 298). However, after the publication of *States of Shock* (1991), he fell into a steady decline on the eyes of the critics more to their amazement who considered it unusual of Shepard to be a political writer (Mirowska, 2017, p. 371). His first phase was readily analyzed by American critics in every aspect that even critics like Gary Grant, publishing two prominent articles<sup>1</sup> on Sam Shepard, tried to discuss Shepard concerning his family plays that had already won him great fame. Grant's main focus is on how Shepard is breaking a new journey on studying the "mystery of the self and mapping its states of consciousness" (1991, p. 553); nevertheless, he adds that Shepard has never deemed the isolated self by itself but in relation "with the roots of family tradition, in the dimly perceived vestiges of ancestral ties with the American landscape" (1991, p. 555). As such, he observes how Shepard's characters are shifting their roles with different places and geographical situations to the extent that Shepard's consciousness changes from a single-point perspective on the self to a multiple perspective (1993, p. 124). His view of Shepard that focuses on geographical sites can more or less be seen in other critics' views who believe that Shepard has "documented the ever-changing cultural landscape of America: from its obsessions with rock 'n' roll and a mythic West to the realities of its class consciousness and broken families" (Crank, 2012, p. 2). Altogether, Shepard's new way of seeing the world in the

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Grant has published two articles in *Modern Drama Journal* entitled "Writing as a Process of Performing the Self: Sam Shepard's Notebooks" and "Shifting the Paradigm: Shepard, Myth, and the Transformation of Consciousness" respectively in 1991 and 1993.

70s and the 80s was well praised and welcomed by American critics as he was leveled with "such great figures like Woody Guthrie and John Steinbeck" (Wade, 2007, p. 298). The sudden rise of Shepard to fame in 80s can be mainly explained with respect to the publication of his works at the most appropriate time in American history when the image of America was suffering greatly during the presidency of Jimmy Carter due to the Iran hostage crisis which showed how weak American foreign policy had become (Strieff, 2007, p. 172). Following this conflict that lasted until the end of Carter's presidency, Regan's election evoked a great nostalgia to the great American heritage, which was defined for many Americans as the "images and values of the West... one in which the American character could find its fullest realization" (Wade, 2007, p. 297). Then, the symbol of the west became the Regan's tool to revive the American image, which was shattered into pieces. Therefore, Shepard's great acclaim in 80s "as the poet laureate of the American West" (Coe, 1980, p. 122) can entirely be comprehensible as he got into the heart of this matter and conveyed "the cultural nostalgia of the 1980s and its appetite for long-held attitudes toward American character and promise" (Wade, 2007, p. 298). Through this new perspective, as will be demonstrated, Shepard's popularity is related to its appearance after an appropriate historical time; therefore, with this in mind, we might not hesitate to conclude that Shepard is actively producing some other works after important historical events when and where America is involved. As such, we should go beyond simply relating *States of Shock*, which is written after six years of silence to his "distaste with the public celebration of the 1991 Gulf War" (2007, p. 298), and to consider Shepard as the one who is minutely reading the underlying sociopolitical situations of the time while writing his plays. Also, as Said pointed out in his analysis of Austen's novels that "Austen synchronizes domestic with international authority .... She sees that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it" (2014, p. 104), we believe that Shepard is treading on the same path by domesticating the concerns of an international issue. Undoubtedly, "late Shepard" (Willadt, 1993, p. 150) is more experienced and has a broader perspective to put America in its global context in his late plays like *God of Hell*. If early Shepard was very astute at detecting the cultural transformations, late Shepard was not less smart to see through the American foreign policy in the Middle East where America broke out the Persian Gulf War:

The notion of this being a heroic event is just outrageous. I couldn't believe it. I still can't believe it. I can't believe that, having come out of the '60s and the incredible reaction to Vietnam, that voice has all but disappeared. Vanished. There's no voice anymore. This is supposed to be what America is about? (Rosen, 1993, 9)

America during late the 70s was no longer carrying the image of a powerful country due to the Iran Hostage crisis and the power of the Soviet Union; however, the beginning of the 90s presented a different image of America. While being recovered by the reworking of Western principles during the presidency of Ronald Regan, America seemed undefeatable as its longstanding opponent, the USSR, "embracing defeat by capitalism, finally

became part of the global capitalist club, capitalism did not have any common enemy, and a new domain of thought was necessary to be constructed" (Islam, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, Shepard's *States of Shock* is centered on conveying this domain of thought even to the point of exaggeration and mockery when certain phrases like "To the enemy" (Shepard, 1993, p. 16), "Without the enemy we're nothing!" (1993, p. 16) or "The enemy has brought us together" (1993, p. 17) are repeated through the play. Shepard never tries to insinuate a point. Instead, he yells it out loud to the face of the audience to grab them and tells them to note that we should never search outside of our borders for enemy whereas "United States is facing an enemy within, posing a threat far more problematic than either Communist Russians or Arab Islamists" (Mirowska, 2017, p. 381). A decade after Gulf War, Shepard reacted to another crucial historic incident in the history of America by writing *God of Hell*, but almost no immediate feedback was provided on his play. Surprisingly, rarely can you find an academic article<sup>1</sup> published in a prestigious journal in America reflecting on Shepard's *God of Hell*; besides, Broadway critics never welcomed it with open arms. Critics mainly attacked Shepard's new play based upon a lack of coherence or having a hasty political fervor that made it stand far away from Shepard's heydays<sup>2</sup>. But Shepard, as an American writer, has noticed and discussed the immediate impact of the designation of the *Axis of Evil* on the interactions between immigrants and American people.

The unprecedented act of calling three countries around the world as the *Axis of Evil* can highly affect everyone related to these countries especially when some have migrated from these countries to United States and have become naturalized American citizen. Though almost a year later, the United States with its president loaded with "a cowboy tone and demeanor" (Wade, 2007, p. 299) attacked Iraq to destroy one of the evil countries and wipe it off from the surface of the earth, the other two countries are still there with the same ruling system and the possibility of invading them still exists there. As such, the compelling metaphor would carry the message that "there is no way to make a deal with evil, except to include in this deal even a greater evil, not for you but for others. Therefore, the Forces of Evil have to be destroyed totally by the Forces of Good" (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007, p. 425). We can see that good and evil are the two adjectives which are frequently employed for labelling three countries as evil and the other one as the savior; the god-sent doer on earth. To prove the fabrication of this labelling, it suffices to consider Dick Cheney's note, Bush's vice president in *New York Times* on October 17, 2004 in which he asserts that "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality We're history's actors... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do" (Suskind, 2004). Their attempt of creating history in

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<sup>1</sup> Our claim is based upon a thorough research in two online databases of peer-reviewed academic journals named JSTOR and Project MUSE.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Brantley of The New York Times, Frank Scheck of The New York Post David Rooney of Variety and Michael Kuchwara of The Associated Press are expressing this view. You can see that in the following links:

<https://www.broadway.com/buzz/93897/did-critics-find-a-slice-of-heaven-in-shepards-god-of-hell/>

2004 is exactly what Said prophesized in 1993; "in America there has been a cultural war against the Arabs and Islam" (2014, p. 301) which consequently leave us with "a flow of trivial instant books by journalists flooded the market and gained currency for a handful of dehumanizing stereotypes" (2014, p. 301). Such a cultural war took a new form after the coinage of *Axis of Evil* by creating an intellectual atmosphere in which the focus was to promote the picture of good and evil embedded in the addressing of *Axis of Evil*.

As such, we can better see why Shepard named his play *God of Hell*. Most probably, he is referring to the source that is labeling other peoples as evil and forwarding the question that probably the source itself is evil. Indeed, Shepard's use of this title serves as "a satire on Republican fascism" (Prohászka Rád, 2009, p. 62). This kind of representation is highly problematic and the situation can get critical reminding the fact that many emigrants from these countries are now living in the United States as naturalized citizens. These people are unwillingly situated on this axis. Currently, studying the hard situation that these people encounter is part of our contrapuntal reading. Shepard's play can give us the access to feel and understand their suffering. Edward Said raised the point that when we read a text contrapuntally, we expend effort to "act to give those absences a presence" (2014, p. 194). As such, reading the text contrapuntally would raise our understanding above "the author or the intended audience could be expected to endorse" (Wilson, 1994, p. 267). Consequently, we are allowed to take the initiative to our background assumptions to reveal hidden facets of the work. United States' interests in the Middle East are directly related to Iran due to "the geopolitics of the region in which Iran is squarely located" (Dabashi, 2008, p. 185). United States should either put aside its imperial globalization or continue dealing with Iran as long as they are interested in looking for adventures in the Middle East. Though United States never openly waged war on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the "designation of the Islamic Republic as a member of the *Axis of Evil* amounted to an open declaration of war against Iran" (2008, p. 202), and consequently any form of consensus between the two countries became almost impossible since the *Axis of Evil* is working as a "system of demonization ... not just pure political terms but in extended moral and aesthetic terms" (2008, p. 202). Being so, considering the large number of Iranian people immigrating to the United States up to 2002<sup>1</sup> would assuredly be an important issue to be seriously discussed with respect to the coinage of *Axis of Evil*.

By clarifying how this system of demonization works, our contrapuntal reading is centered on a mysterious character in Shepard's *God of Hell* named Haynes whose role in the play is never certainly clarified to the audience. He begins as a friend staying for a while with Emma and Frank but then continues to play other roles. The play begins when Emma and Frank as a couple living in a Midwestern farmhouse, Shepard's favorite setting, are chatting over Frank's friend, Haynes. Frank feels uncertain about everything and finally evades

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the growing tension between the two countries during the last decades, there has been a wave of emigrants arriving at the U.S. from Iran. Indeed, the 1990 U.S. Census has "enumerated about 285,000 foreign born Iranians in the U.S" (Rumbaut and Gold 12).



answering Emma by relating his friend's occupation and status to things which are "all top secret" (Shepard, 2005, p. 9). The very first moment that sparks controversy is Haynes's involvement with some incidents in Rocky Butts though he refuses to discuss it with Emma or Frank and even rejects owing any positions as a scientist or researcher in his dialogues with Emma and Frank; "HAYNES: I'm not in research. I'm not doing any research" (2005, p. 36). However, his resistance against Welch, an official government, is futile. Haynes is made to bow to Welch's command as he soon initiates talking of the incident occurred in Rocky Butts to Welch as follows:

HAYNES: I'm not going back there! The whole state's going to explode. Colorado is going to be blown off the map.

WELCH: Why do you people have this incredible propensity for wild exaggeration? There's some minor leakage—we've acknowledged that. That's why you were hired in the first place, if you recall...

HAYNES: This wasn't lightning! This wasn't some renegade Boy Scout campfire like you ordered the press to print! (2005, p. 52)

Their point of contention is almost clarified; it may be related to the gradual leakage of plutonium from 1952 to 1989 or the fire breaking of 1957 (the day) But in his conversation with Frank, Haynes also explains the plutonium as "the most carcinogenic substance known to man" (2005, p. 33) and its effect on the plants growing on the earth as the same thing that happened in Denver. Seemingly, Shepard is considering Haynes as the one who has tried to reveal this appalling incident to the public though he may have been told to cover it up to the public. The other significant point regarding this character is his originality. He is introduced as Frank's friend but when Frank is forced to consider him as an enemy by Welch; he is marked as a camel-loving person (2005, p. 67). Moreover, in a dialogue between Haynes and Emma, Haynes is surprised to see that Emma has been born and raised in the same place: "HAYNES: Oh—a native? I didn't know that. EMMA: Yes. I was born in this house, as a matter of fact. Right in this room. Right on the spot you're standing, actually. HAYNES: Oh—" (2005, p. 38). Haynes' surprise is to imply the great number of emigrants in the U.S, for indeed America has been founded on the emigrants. Altogether, Shepard has chosen a character who is firstly an emigrant to the United States and secondly a person to reveal a danger to Americans, but instead he is described as the source of danger to Americans, which was an expectation "in the aftermath of 9/11 and the systematic demonization of 'the Arab' and 'the Muslim' as 'the enemy'" (2005, p. 185).

What is noticeable is the process through which Haynes is situated on this *Axis of Evil*. When Welch first meets Emma, he tries to get close to her by presenting "a large cookie in the shape of an American flag, with red, white, and blue frosting" (2005, p. 10). Despite being rebuffed by Emma, Welch continues his intrusion by talking about Emma's husband and calling him "pretty American" (2005, p. 12). Their other point of contention is regarding their view of the land in which Emma and Frank are living as Emma calls it a "Dairyland" but Welch calls it "The Heartland". Afterward, as Emma is hardly justified

regarding Welch's business in her house, she hears this response: "we're on a kind of a talent search for solid citizens who own their own land outright" (2005, p. 15). Welch's emphasis on advertising America and reminding it to Emma is followed by his purpose of searching for solid citizens that can illustrate the point that in Welch's eyes, there is a difference between the Americans and naturalized citizens in the United States and the likely suspect identification of the latter ones. This means an easy scapegoat to bear the blame of their reprehensible actions. This may not be a horrendous act by other countries but surely is by the Americans since "America is not a land or a people: France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea" (Jillson, 2016, p. 97). The idea fully known as American Dream provided the chance of coming to America from different originalities but it is still standing on the chance of progressing and achieving the unreachable goals. Nevertheless, the decay of those respected perspectives is left. This being so, we can readily see the reflection of this in Welch's words addressed to Haynes:

WELCH: (continues stapling) We can do whatever we want, buddy-boy. That should be clear by now. We're in the driver's seat. Haven't you noticed? There's no more of that nonsense of checks and balances. All that red tape. All that hanging around in limbo, waiting for decisions from committees and tired-out lobbies. We're in absolute command now. We don't have to answer to a soul, least of all a couple of Wisconsin dairy farmers. (Shepard, 2005, p. 52)

This may not be irrelevant to deem the above paragraph as Shepard's rewording of Bush's vice president who claimed of creating a new history but at the cost of denying the traditional myths and the idea on which America has been founded. And here Shepard is mainly attacking those falling to the impact of such a fallacious claim. Shepard's *God of Hell* is also unique in terms of the male western character. Generally, "Shepard's male characters unable to escape the nightmares of war and disillusioned with the family's inability to comprehend their trauma, express their frustration through verbal and physical violence" (Weiss, 2009, p. 1); however, Frank is not alike, on the contrary, a submissive person who is not contentious and easily agrees with others' opinion. Nevertheless, Emma is the one who stands up to Welch's intrusion and tries to support Haynes though their first encounter never goes very well. To Emma, Welch defines Frank as a "descent—hereditary-wise. Authentic! He looks authentic" (Shepard, 2005, p. 12) and when he is asked by Emma to explain on this subject more, he adds that "He could be one of those middle Europeans or something. Latvian maybe. Belarusian" (2005, p. 12). Welch's view of Frank is striking the note that Welch as a government agent is inspecting the individuals and tracing their origins. This is highlighted regardless of the fact that they are citizens or not, moreover, this perspective is arising from the circumstances of 9/11 that individual's originality became government's target of attacking as the evil sources. Also, Welch makes Emma aware of the route of his journey that he is "traveling from west to east" (2005, p. 13). If America expanded with the journey of the emigrants from east to west, Welch's journey is affording the view that the government is making an effort

to purge the nation of certain originalities. Moreover, Welch accuses Emma of being indifferent to her originality by pointing to their flagpole which is "empty. Barren. Just the raw wind slapping the naked ropes around. Sickening sound" (2005, p. 17) and continuing by referring how their inner house is also empty of any sign of pride and loyalty to United States: "No miniature Mount Rushmore, Statue of Liberty, no weeping bald eagles clutching arrows. Nothing like that. We could be anywhere" (2005, p. 18). Welch tries to direct Emma's attention toward the American symbols and how they have been neglected by her. This scene is soon followed by Emma's first interaction with Haynes which is really frightening for Emma since he is given a static shock by Haynes for which he has no explanation: "Static shock. I'm sorry. I apologize. I never know quite how to explain this" (2005, p. 25). When the *Axis of Evil* is deemed as "a creative metaphor; that is, a metaphor that is capable of giving us a new view of the world" (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007, p. 421). People's perspective on both sides of this metaphor is restructured to see the world differently; in other words, the side suffering from the *Axis of Evil* is allowed to describe the other side in whatever preferable ways; criticizing, blaming, and even deserving of being harshly punished. Here, a cursory reading would make this moment ridiculous but Shepard is delicately referring to the interactions of Americans and emigrants, those who could be in contact without any problem; nonetheless, their relationship is shocked without anyone being able to justify the main reason for the static shock. This shocking moment between them is undoubtedly related to the *Axis of Evil* and how different people are situated in that though they may have never been involved in any evil deeds. Moreover, between Frank and Emma, the latter one is the one to detect this shocking feeling since she is the one who is defying this imposing system of thought. Emma's resistance to this systematic way of looking at the world is offered "through overwatering the flowers and burning the bacon she proves to herself that she is in control and has the freedom to choose among a set of activities as well as among a variety of methods of performing these" (Prohászka Rád, 2009, p. 66). Furthermore, blatant usage of this systematic method is manifestly uttered by Welch when she is addressing Haynes while he is taken into her control. This is the moment when Welch tries to rhyme Haynes name with other words and associations of meanings like:

Well, well, well—Mr. "Haynes," is that it? Mr. Haynes? Very inventive. Deceptively simple. Almost poetic. "Haynes"—rhymes with "pains," or is it "shames"? Possibly. Could even be "blames." The choices are endless. Well, not exactly endless. Everything has its limits, I suppose. Everything runs into a brick wall sooner or later. Even the most heroic ideas (2005, p. 50).

Welch is able to lure Haynes out of the basement by conditioning that it may be possible for you to play your own music: "HAYNES: (getting closer to stairs) Do you think I could—I could have my music too? Do you remember my music? Welch: It might be possible. I'll try to pull some string" (2005, p. 56). If we see Haynes as an emigrant coming to the United States in search of his dreams, we easily understand why he is after playing his music because that is

what the country used to generously offer to the emigrants. Indeed, Benjamin's writing was a real comfort for the emigrants coming to America as it clearly encompassed the notion that "though many arrive in America as poor 'servants or Journeymen ... if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters" (Jillson, 2016, p. 4). However, Haynes is not to be the one who should achieve that moment whereas to be denigrated to live in the basement in Frank and Emma's house and, when arrested by Welch, is promised to probably be able to achieve his dream and live freely as he wants. But considering how Welch is urging Frank to sell all his heifers, it is strongly implied that America is going to move against its basis, not to be the Promised Land anymore. Again Emma is the one reacting to this action and gets really angry and urges Frank to refund the money and take back the heifers, nevertheless, Frank refuses on the basis that he has come from the government. At this moment, Emma who is shocked, answers back like this; "I don't know what our government is anymore. Do you? What does that mean, 'our government'?" (2005, p. 59). And again when Frank persists that he knows better than us and is able to recognize the enemy, Emma interrupts him by saying; "What big picture is that? What enemy?" (2005, p. 59). Frank, who has totally changed, tries to persuade Emma that his friend has been a traitor, "a pretender. They look like us. They act like us. But underneath they're deadly" (2005, p. 60). The unpleasant fact is that Frank has become antagonistic to his friend and considers him as an evil person though Emma is still doubtful about the whole thing. After Welch appears again and talks about how evil Haynes is, suddenly Frank who is almost convinced that his friend is a traitor, while her wife is arguing with Welch, gives a lecture to the audience as follows:

It's times like this you remember the world was perfect once. Absolutely perfect. Powder blue skies. Hawks circling over the bottom fields. The rich smell of fresh-cut alfalfa laying in lazy wind rows. The gentle bawling of spring calves calling to their mothers. I miss the Cold War so much. (2005, p. 66)

In addition to Frank's nostalgic longing for the great past, Frank is claiming to have missed the Cold War. Shepard is telling it to the audience that being in direct contact with a real enemy even at the cost of being threatened by a third world war is better than creating an enemy in the most disgusting way and playing with them like puppets for certain ugly aims. Interestingly, Frank who is wishing this moment, talks back to Emma and says that Haynes is no friend of his anymore since "He's a two-faced, camel-loving-" (2005, p. 67). Shepard never ends Frank's sentence with a period and instead ends it with a dash, a pause that can hint us to read the text contrapuntally, and to read out of it all the emigrants from different nations coming to United States including three hundred thousand Iranians. Moreover, it is revealed that Frank has promised Welch to sell all his heifers for the sake of national security but he is disappointed when he hears that they are going to be used for another purpose; "Rocky Buttes? I thought you told me they were going to be air-dropped into exotic foreign lands. That's what you said. Palm trees! Desert oasis! Parachutes floating! (2005, p. 69)". The first question that arises here is why heifers are given this significance. Shepard, as the poet laureate of the American west, points to a common image in the American west; cattle grazing on western

open lands. The picture is often associated as one of the symbols of the American west though the first generation of Spanish conquistador brought horses and cattle to the New World as draft animals and food sources (Cook, 1992). This means that one of the established image of American west is also an imported product to America by emigrants. Apart from emphasizing the importance of immigrants in forming the United States, this can be implied that Shepard is formulating the notion that American people are duped into believing that by attacking people in the foreign lands, they are gaining national security whereas this is destroying the national solidarity within the country. In this regard, the coinage of *Axis of Evil* was like a new page in the history of United States to change the perspective of Americans to take action against all these people coming to United States just like how Welch at the end of *God of Hell*, is urging Frank to take action against Haynes:

WELCH: You've got to drop all that for now, Frank. Leave the simple past behind. We've got to get a move on here. We're dealing with a ruthless diabolical, treacherous, despicable force. What's the matter with you people? Don't you get it? (2005, p. 69)

The main problem of the usage of *Axis of Evil* as mentioned by Dabashi is that a kind of estrangement and bitter feeling is formed as the consequence of this system of demonization beyond political realm between the natives and the naturalized citizens. Coincidentally, the majority of Iranian people immigrated to the United States who are settled over the Western areas of America: "according to the 2000 U.S. Census, over half of Iranian immigrants 55% lived in California, with Los Angeles still having the largest concentration of Iranian immigrants in California and the U.S." (Rumbaut et al., 1999, p. 12), would get affected by this system. Sam Shepard as a playwright born and brought up in America is pondering over the whole concept of *Axis of Evil* in a radically different perspective away from the mainstream of power in America. Shepard is scrutinizing not a situation in the Middle East or one crisis in America but the impact of this simple coinage on the relationship between the naturalized citizens and the Americans, those who were formerly friends but now looking at each other like enemies. From the beginning of the play, Welch could arrest Hynes by his authority but tried to work upon the couple to hate Haynes. Shepard is trying to depict the pain and misery that people would suffer in their relationship with their friends when a political stance is coining a phrase like the *Axis of Evil*. For Shepard, being humiliated and alienated is unbearable; people should be able to communicate freely in their society. Likewise, the ending of his play is at a moment when Emma is left alone after talking to Welch. She never believed the righteousness of Welch. And therefore, at the closing scene, she closes up the scene without uttering any word but just keeps the door open and rings the bell. This can be concluded that by ringing, she is trying to make people aware of the destructive connotation of this simple coinage, and by leaving the door open, hoping that the Americans are still hospitable to the emigrants coming from different places around the world as it has been the way America has been founded.

## Conclusion

The present paper focused on a contrapuntal reading of Shepard's *God of Hell* with respect to the coinage of *Axis of Evil* after 9/11. It was argued that the theatrical performance of *Axis of Evil* following the horrific incident of 9/11 created a platform on which the American government supported particular controlled and directed voices of the intellectuals. This meant any reading of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 had to be compatible with the perspective of the government. However, Sam Shepard, in his *God of Hell*, shed new light on the destructive effect of 9/11 on the solidarity among the people from various backgrounds in American society. In his *God of Hell*, he has utilized Hayne's character to portray the serious complication that may develop between the naturalized citizens and the American people after the coinage of *Axis of Evil*. His play revealed an acute understanding of the necessity of promoting solidarity instead of hostility in the society; otherwise, multicultural society like the United States would soon collapse into divided states. Additionally, the paper maintained that an intellectual should be, in Rortyan terms, a liberal ironist. Thus, the paper concluded that Shepard as a liberal ironist, could dismiss the claim of the government which was based upon the truth of the *Axis of Evil*. In the end, proving the falsity of good and evil embedded in the *Axis of Evil*, Shepard attempted to show how the coinage of the *Axis of Evil* has only scattered the seed of hatred among the individuals and has made friends into enemies.

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