

# Kicking A Dead Horse

by Sam Shepard



## PROJECTS PACK

compiled by  
Samantha Lane and Charlie Payne

**ALMEIDA**  
PROJECTS



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

**Welcome** to the Almeida Theatre's presentation of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin's production of *Kicking A Dead Horse* by Sam Shepard.

The Almeida last produced Sam Shepard's *The Late Henry Moss* in 2006, then directed by Artistic Director Mike Attenborough. We are thrilled that Sam is returning to us, this time directing the London premiere of his new play, which has recently completed a triumphant run in New York, after its opening last November at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland's national theatre.

*Kicking A Dead horse* also reunites Sam Shepard with actor Stephen Rea.

The Almeida Projects Team are really excited about exploring some of the key ideas and questions posed in *Kicking A Dead Horse*. Thanks to all of the creative team and the cast who have been so generous in their enthusiasm and support of the Projects work. We very much hope that you and your students are able to draw energy both from its ideas and the skill with which they are presented.

We look forward to welcoming you to the Almeida soon.

**Samantha Lane and Charlie Payne**  
Almeida Projects



## ALMEIDA PROJECTS

Under the artistic directorship of Michael Attenborough, the Almeida presents an eclectic programme, ranging from redefined major classics to the cutting edge of brand new work. Our Projects reflect the main programme's ambition by finding ways to challenge and excite our participants about the work you come to see at the Almeida. We hope to inspire you to approach your own theatre work in the same spirit of generosity and risk-taking that we encourage in our rehearsal room.

## PROJECTS PACK

This pack aims to provide an insight into our process in taking the production from research stage to performance. We hope you will use it to help you in your own investigations into the play both before and after your visit to the Almeida. This pack contains quotations from the play which use strong language.



## INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOPS

Before you see the production, one of our Projects Team may be visiting you for a workshop, bringing some of the techniques explored in the rehearsal room, the challenges the play presents and some questions. The sessions are designed to be practical and participatory so please come energised, ready to work and wearing appropriate clothes and shoes.

## GROUP HOSTS

When you come to the theatre, you will be met by one of the Projects Team who will be on hand to answer your questions and listen to your feedback about the production. Please do take advantage of this opportunity to find out more about how the production has evolved.

### PROJECTS PACK

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Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

## Kicking A Dead Horse By Sam Shepard

### Cast:

Hobart Struther	Stephen Rea
Young Woman	Joanna Crawford

### Creative team:

#### For the Abbey Theatre, Dublin:

Director	Sam Shepard
Set Design	Brien Vahey
Lighting Design	John Comiskey
Costume Design	Joan Bergin
Sound	tbc
Drummer	tbc
Deputy Stage Manager (Abbey)	Elizabeth Gerhardy
Voice Director	Andrea Ainsworth
Dialect Coach	Brendan Gunn
Casting Director	Holly Ní Chiardha
Photography	Ros Kavanagh
Horse Construction	Sean McArdle
Construction team	Eric Berninghausen Gloria Sun Desiree Maurer Dieter Willis Charlotte Scannell Meghan Buchanan

#### For the Almeida Theatre:

Production Manager	James Crout
Company Manager	Rupert Carlile
Stage Manager	Laura Flowers

#### For Almeida Projects

Director, Almeida Projects	Samantha Lane
Projects Coordinator	Natalie Mitchell
Projects Administrator	Charlie Payne



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

*“You ask yourself, how did this come to be? How is it possible? What wild and woolly part of the imagination dropped me here. Makes you wonder.”*

Hobart Struther has embarked on a journey into the American prairie, with just his horse for company. A successful art dealer in his mid-sixties, Hobart has left behind his New York apartment on Park Avenue for a ‘cowboy’ pilgrimage complete with tent, camping equipment and riding paraphernalia, and of course the obligatory cowboy hat. Hobart made his money buying lost masterpieces of the Wild West, neglected paintings found and bought for a few dollars in numerous saloons, barns and attics in the American West, selling them on to wealthy urbanites for thousands of dollars. Disillusioned with a life he felt had no real purpose or meaning, he has come into the Wild West in search of the ‘authenticity’ he needs to validate his existence.

Unfortunately however, just a short ride into the journey, his horse has keeled over and died. Hobart is digging a hole in which to bury the corpse, but the horse won’t budge. There follows a struggle for Hobart to manoeuvre the dead horse into the hole that he has dug.

Hobart speaks about his life and his reasons for leaving the city for the desert. He speaks to himself, but often in a sort of dialogue, voicing the opposite conflicting opinions in his mind. He talks about a ‘she’ he has left behind. He is angry that the horse has gone and died on him, thereby halting his journey and thwarting his search for



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

***“I’ve got to get this horse down in the hole. That’s all I know”***

‘authenticity’. He scans the landscape, uncertain of his next move. He begins to throw all his equipment down into the would-be grave. At one point he ruefully throws his expensive cowboy hat into the hole. A short time later, a young woman emerges from the hole and places the hat back on Hobart’s head; she is not seen by Hobart. Later, he throws the hat back into the hole.

He talks about his childhood; those days of ‘authenticity’, growing up and working on a ranch. But those days are long gone. He struggles to pitch his tent and it keeps falling down. A violent storm is approaching. Hobart cannot understand why he is having so much trouble ‘taming the wild’. He compares his journey to that of the Goldrush and the western pioneers closing the frontier. Finally he erects the tent and climbs inside. It is getting dark. The storm subsides in the distance. Hobart contemplates praying, but can’t bring himself to think of God.

Dawn starts to break. Hobart climbs down into the hole. The horse suddenly slams forward into the hole, but the hole is not quite big enough to accommodate the entire corpse. The legs hang up, its body precariously straddling the pit. The dust begins to settle.



Sam Shepard

Sam Shepard is an American playwright, writer, director and actor. Born Samuel Shephard Rogers in Illinois in 1943, he has been writing for theatre since the 1960s and, to date, has published over forty-five plays and appeared in more than thirty films.

Shepard grew up in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, working on a ranch in his teenage years. Both his parents were teachers; his father also farmed and served as a bomber in the Air Force during World War II. Shepard dropped out of college to join a theatre group, and during the 1960s was a drummer in rock band Holy Modal Rounders, and was using illegal drugs – he avoided the draft for Vietnam, claiming to be a heroin addict.

From his late teens, Shepard was involved in the off-off-Broadway theatre scene, staging productions of his early plays. He had also written a couple of screenplays. He lived in England for a period at the end of the 1960s, before relocating to San Francisco Bay, and there became playwright-in-residence for the Magic Theater, where many of his plays received their premiere productions. It was here that he began to direct his own work, believing that his unique vision as a writer required nothing less than his own directorial hand for their inaugural productions. He has very rarely directed work by other playwrights. Shepard continued to write steadily through the 1970s, slowing only through the 1980s due to his rising success as a screen actor. In 1983 he was awarded an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *The Right Stuff*.

By 1980, Shepard was the second most produced playwright after Tennessee Williams. In 1986 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, receiving the and Gold Medal for Drama in 1992. He was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1994.

Shepard has been married twice, first to actress O-Lan Jones and later to actress Jessica Lange, his current wife. He also had a long and famous relationship with musician and singer Patti Smith.

### **Sam Shepard As A Writer**

As a theatre-maker and writer, Shepard was influenced by the absurdist movement. He read Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a teenager and certainly his early plays show strong absurdist characteristics. Two pervading themes in Shepardian drama, are the lost connection between myth, land and community, and a feeling of the purpose in life being broken. His plays express a sense of loss, nostalgia for the original rural world and the national myths, destroyed by pragmatism, money and power. Shepard's characters often find themselves deprived of their dreams or lost in a literal or figurative wilderness with no apparent resolution.

# Sam Shepard Bibliography

- 1964 *Cowboys*  
*The Rock Garden*
- 1965 *Chicago*  
*Icarus's Mother*  
*4-H Club*
- 1966 *Red Cross*
- 1967 *La Turista*  
*Cowboys #2*  
*Forensic & the Navigators*
- 1968 *Me and My Brother* (screenplay)
- 1969 *The Unseen Hand*
- 1970 *The Holy Ghostly*  
*Operation Sidewinder*  
*Zabriskie Point* (screenplay)
- 1971 *Mad Dog Blues*  
*Back Bog Beast Bait*  
*Cowboy Mouth* (co-written with Patti Smith)
- 1972 *The Tooth of Crime*
- 1975 *Action*
- 1976 *Suicide in B Flat*
- 1977 *Inacoma*
- 1978 *Buried Child*  
*Curse of the Starving Class*  
*Tongues* (co-written with Joseph Chaikin)
- 1980 *True West*
- 1981 *Savage/Love* (co-written with Joseph Chaikin)
- 1983 *Fool for Love*
- 1984 *Paris, Texas* (screenplay)
- 1985 *A Lie of the Mind*  
*Fool for Love* (screenplay)
- 1987 *A Short Life of Trouble*
- 1988 *Far North* (screenplay)
- 1991 *States of Shock*
- 1993 *Simpatico*
- 1994 *Silent Tongue* (screenplay)
- 1995 *Buried Child* (revised)
- 1998 *Eyes for Consuela*
- 2000 *The Late Henry Moss*
- 2004 *The God of Hell*
- 2005 *Don't Come Knocking* (screenplay)
- 2007 *Kicking a Dead Horse*



The Abbey Theatre, Dublin  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

**Kicking A Dead Horse** is the Almeida Theatre's presentation of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin's production.

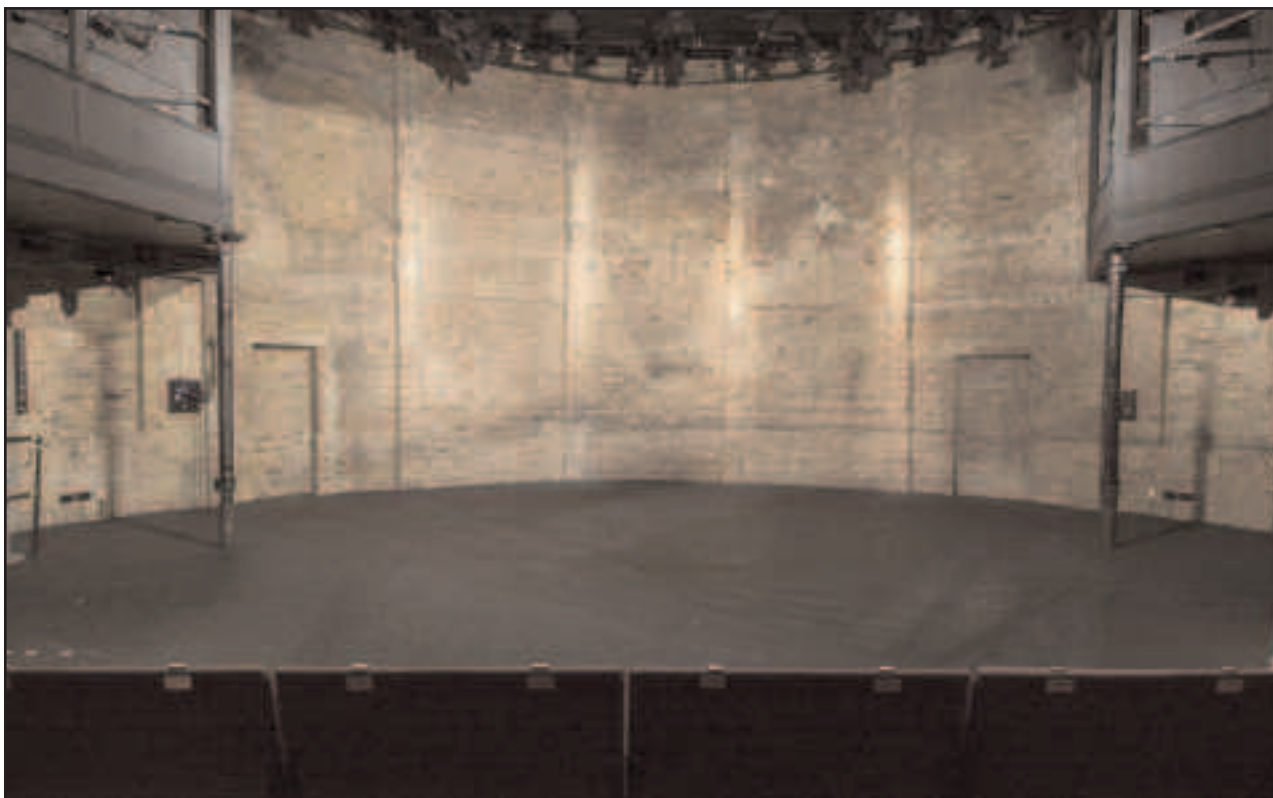
The Abbey Theatre is Ireland's national theatre. Since it first opened its doors in 1904 the theatre has played a vital and often controversial role in the literary, social and cultural life of Ireland. The Abbey continues to produce an annual programme of diverse, engaging and innovative Irish and international theatre and to invest in and promote new Irish writers and artists.

Over the years, the Abbey Theatre has contributed some of the world's greatest theatrical works from writers such as J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey as well as contemporary classics from the likes of Marina Carr, Brian Friel, Frank McGuinness, Tom Mac Intyre, Tom Murphy and Mark O'Rowe.

In 2005, Fiach MacConghail became Director of the Abbey Theatre. Passionate about all things to do with cowboys and the Wild West, he had admired Sam Shepard's work for many years. He decided to embark on a survey of Sam Shepard's work, starting with a production of **True West** in 2006. Later that year he met with Sam Shepard in New York. Sam mentioned he might want to write a play for Stephen Rea, with whom he had worked closely in the early 1970s at the Royal Court. In fact, it was Stephen who encouraged Sam to direct. And so, it was through **Kicking A Dead Horse** that Sam Shepard and Stephen Rea were re-united.

Their creative partnership continues next year with Sam's new play **Ages of the Moon**, which will premiere at the Abbey in February 2008. **Ages of the Moon**, was specially written for leading Irish actors Seán McGinley and Stephen Rea and will be directed by Jimmy Fay.

For more information about the Abbey Theatre and our work see [www.abbeytheatre.ie](http://www.abbeytheatre.ie)



The Almeida Theatre - empty space  
Photo: Lara Platman

**Design is one of the most thrilling aspects of theatre craft. The look of a show helps to set mood, atmosphere, time and place. Design elements for any production include set, lighting, sound and music.**

The Almeida Theatre is a “found space”, and was not originally built as theatre. Designing for our theatre requires great ingenuity because there is no conventional backstage space (wings), nor is there a fly tower to allow us to lower and raise big pieces of scenery. This means each designer has to choose whether to reveal the building as it was, or to transform it into a conventional theatre space.

*Kicking A Dead Horse* is unusual in that it was not originally designed for the Almeida Theatre. The show was created by and premiered at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, in their studio space, the Peacock Theatre. With a capacity of 127, and a playing space of roughly 20 square feet, this is approximately half the size of the Almeida Theatre. The relatively simple design for *Kicking A Dead Horse* meant a new location posed less of a problem when it came to transfer the production.

As a writer, Sam Shepard gives clear and definite stage directions regarding the placement of properties and even lighting states. Whilst some dramatists’ scripts are open to interpretation regarding staging, it is a feature of Shepard’s theatre that set is as much a written part of the script as the dialogue, and its realisation needs to be treated with equal respect. As the director, Shepard has been able to work closely with a designer to realise the effects he describes in his text. The design for *Kicking A Dead Horse* clearly illustrates the epic expanse of space that is Hobart’s halting place in the middle of the desert. A cyclorama covers the back wall, onto which different lighting states can be



The set of *Kicking A Dead Horse*  
 Designer:  
 Photo: Ros Kavanagh

*“The dead horse should be as realistic as possible with no attempt to stylise or cartoon him in any way. In fact, it should actually be a dead horse.”*

## Stage Directions

projected, creating the effect of a vast sky and depicting the passage of time through the day. The cyclorama thus also adds to a sense of infinite space, flat desert as far as the eye can see. The idea of being ‘lost’ in the wilderness, the untameable Wild West, is suggested by the lack of feature in the landscape, a vacuum of natural detail marking the contrasted environment with Hobart’s life of materialism in the city. The desert as a location is key within the play, and can be seen both literally, as a featureless, barren landscape, or subtextually as a physical and emotional ‘no-man’s land’, the ironic landing place of a man on a journey without a fixed destination.

The floor of the set is textured to look like the dry yellow-brown sand of the American desert. The main feature of the floor is the gaping hole, the eponymous dead horse’s would-be grave, and the piles of displaced dirt at its side. It also functions as the set’s sole entrance and exit: it is from the hole that Hobart emerges at the start of the play, and into which he descends at its close; it is also from this hole that the mysterious figure of a young woman appears and promptly disappears.

The dead horse is the obvious visual focus point, and effectively a silent character in its own right. Whatever symbology the audience might want to read into the horse within the play, Shepard is clear in his stage directions that its depiction be no less than literal. Similarly, the script is explicit about the equipment that Hobart carries with him and its arrangement on the stage. By keeping the set is neutral and any props realistic the audience are drawn into the spoken text: objects only acquire their own subtext through their importance to the character to whom they belong. Shepard is pointing to the real absurdity of the manmade clutter of modern day living, the ultimate inadequacy of materialism in the face of a life and death situation.



Photo: Ros Kavanagh

The term Theatre of the Absurd was coined by the critic Martin Esslin, as the title of a book first published in 1961. In his study, Esslin identified a number of playwrights whose work contained formal and stylistic similarities.

Theatre of the Absurd originates in Paris in early 1940s and evolved through Europe and beyond well into to the 1960s. However its influence still pervades in theatre today, with contemporary writers, as seemingly 'naturalistic' as David Mamet, incorporating elements of the 'absurd' into their writing.

Most absurdist drama can be described as tragicomic. Tragicomedy itself can be traced back to Shakespeare, whose use of comic elements such as clowns in his great tragedies added a surreal, superfluous relief to the central plot, for example Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Hamlet. Absurdist plays tend to feature broad comedy, bordering on Vaudeville in style, often contrasted against terrible or tragic images and situations. Time and place are often vague. Characters frequently find themselves trapped in hopeless situations with no means of escape, and plots tend to be cyclical, often ending as they have begun. Beckett's Endgame is a good example of this; as is Kicking A Dead Horse: at the opening of the play we see Hobart Struther climbing out of the hole he has dug for the horse and the play ends with him climbing back down into it. These elements can be seen as a deliberate dismissal of the rules of naturalism and the 'well-made play', breaking down the 'fourth wall', held up in works written by 19th and early 20th century writers such as Chekhov, and a rejection of reliance on a Stanislavskian style of inner motive-based acting.

Traditional plot structures are rarely a consideration, common features being emptiness, 'absence' of something or someone (but this is often vague and undefined) and a lack of resolution. There may often be a mysterious and menacing 'outside force', posing an ambiguous but very real threat.

Whilst the scenario in absurdist drama may be extraordinary, the dialogue tends to be written in naturalistic language. Hobart Struther talks with ease and a conversational rhythm, contrasted against the absurdity of his situation stranded in the desert with only a dead horse for company. Absurdist dialogue generally reflects the character's inability to connect with the world around him, and it is purposefully elliptical, often repetitive, which can add a rhythmical or musical quality. Characters tend to be 'lost' in some way, in a world they fail to understand; consequently they are led to abandon rational action, as an inadequate tool for survival in the 'wilderness'. So can be seen Hobart's obsession with burying the corpse of his horse in Kicking A Dead Horse, as a way of stalling time and filling the void of his uncertainty.

*“So, this is the way you wind up – not like some gallant bushwhacker but flattened out babbling in the open plains. What the hell did you have in mind anyway? What was it?”*



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

Many plays tend to feature characters in interdependent pairs, often with a grudging reliance on each other. Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* make a good example of this rule, and to take a later example, Aston and Davies in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* have a verbally violent but ultimately needy relationship. Hobart Struther's 'duologue as monologue' bears many of these features – he argues with himself but is ultimately only a sum of his two parts:

*Your self is giving your own self the impression that there may be someone else?*

*Something like that.*

*You're one sick puppy.*

*Maybe so. ...*

*...No insult intended.*

*None taken.*

It can be argued that the random nature of absurdist plays masks a tight underlying structure and meaning. Seldom is absurdist drama completely accidental; rather it is organised chaos, a dis-ordered world with a deliberately theatrical remit. Dialogue and plot become secondary to the image on stage, the objects may take on a metaphorical or poetic power to the viewer, although many writers warn against making 'easy' readings of their work. Harold Pinter is notoriously reluctant to speak about 'meaning' in his work, and Sam Shepard's stage directions are quite mischievously deadpan in their description of the horse, for example:

*The dead horse should be as realistic as possible with no attempt to stylise or cartoon him in any way. In fact it should actually be a dead horse.*

***"I ask myself who is this person I blindly follow. Who's placed me in this precarious situation without any concern whatever for my welfare or safety. Who is this dangerous person?"***

Any reading of an absurdist play needs to bear in mind that it is always going to be fruitless if you do not see it as theatre – text for a live performance.

#### **Some Theatre of the Absurd Writers:**

Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Edward Albee, Friedrich Durrenmatt, Sam Shepard, Vaclav Havel

#### **Further Reading:**

Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*  
Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*  
Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*  
Vivien Mercer, *Beckett/Beckett*  
[www.wikipedia.org/Theatre\\_of\\_the\\_Absurd](http://www.wikipedia.org/Theatre_of_the_Absurd)



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

The American West refers to the region comprising the westernmost states of the United States. The meaning of this term has changed over time, as the US expanded westwards after its founding, but the ideas of the West, the Wild West, and the Old West have always played important parts both in American history and folklore.

The thirteen states that officially comprise the American West are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

The geography of the area is varied. Between the wet Coast Range on the Pacific coast, and the looming line of the Rocky Mountains in the east lies a vast stretch of arid land encompassing much of Nevada, Utah and Arizona. Here you find the Mojave Desert and the Sonoran Desert. This is the Wild West, mythical – and real – home of cowboys and Indians, where battles for territory were fought and won in the hot dry dust of the desert.

The American West's history has acquired a certain cultural mythos, largely through cinema, music and popular culture – the Hollywood Western genre and Country and Western music. Whilst celebrating a certain tribal identity, popular culture seized on the image of the cowboy, took real events of the homesteader on the ranch and the expansion into the west, and glamorised and transmuted them into a myth that has been influencing American culture to this day. Since the 1920s, the cowboy has been seen as an iconic American figure, cowboy culture is now firmly embedded in American experience as a common cultural touchstone. Art and culture stemming from the American West celebrate the supposed sense of isolation and independence of spirit, inspired by the harsh climate, barren landscape and low population density. The image of the 'lone ranger', the cowboy on horseback riding off into the sunset, is an icon of the American legacy – a symbol of courage and independence, of man taming the wild.

Sam Shepard has made the American West a feature in a number of his plays. From the 1960s onwards, he has explored a poetic theatrical language rooted in the landscape of the West – the *True West*, as the ironic title of his best known play puts it. His dramatic terrain is the desert – cultural, physical, emotional. His central characters are often loners, emerging from or escaping to empty space: Lee, blown in on an ill desert wind into the life of Hollywood screenwriter Austin in *True West*; Brothers Ray and Earl returning home to dusty New Mexico after the death of their estranged father, to fill the vacuum of a lost childhood in *The Late Henry Moss*; and now Hobart Struther setting out into the wilderness with

*“What about the whole idea?”*

*Which one's that?*

*The West? The 'Wild Wild West'?*

*Sentimental claptrap.”*

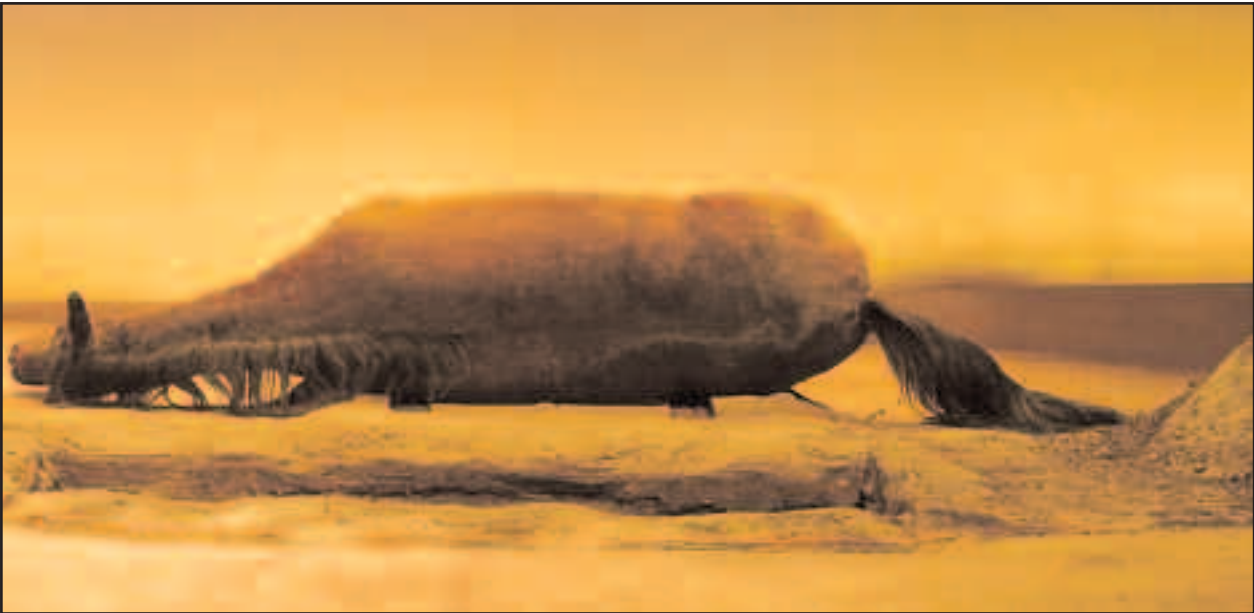


Photo: Ros Kavanagh

just his childhood horse for company in *Kicking A Dead Horse*.

Hobart Struther's journey into the desert in *Kicking A Dead Horse* is in fact a variation on the great staple of American popular culture – the road trip. As a way of combining a search for inner knowledge with the simple objective of seeing more of the world in change of scenery and environment. It is about the journey being more vital than the destination. Central to the play is the notion of the cowboy, as an 'authentic' existence in a life of no meaning. Shepard specifies in his stage directions that there should be no attempt to make Struther look like a cowboy: he should appear more like 'an urban businessman who has suddenly decided to rough it'. Struther may have made his money selling - and thereby preserving - original art of the American West, but when it comes to living out the dream he has sold to so many wealthy urbanites, his search for 'authenticity' will not prove as simple as donning a cowboy hat and saddling a horse. For what can become of a cowboy without his horse?

**Further reading:**

[www.wikipedia.org/American\\_west](http://www.wikipedia.org/American_west)  
[www.wikipedia.org/Western\\_\(genre\)](http://www.wikipedia.org/Western_(genre))  
Sam Shepard, *True West*  
Sam Shepard, *The Late Henry Moss*



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

The following practical exercises may be of benefit to students studying the play, and relate to the themes and theatrical techniques used in *Kicking A Dead Horse*.

## Transformations 1

What are the key changes that Hobart has gone through to embark on this journey? This exercise encourages a physical response to Hobart's life; and is a good starting point for examining the idea of making a change, but also considering the absurdist idea of exaggerating an idea, but keeping it natural.

Create an image for his life as a younger man – his reminiscing about the fresh air and open countryside; another for his life selling original, lost masterpieces of the Old West; another showing how out of touch he is with his life in modern, bustling New York; and a final one for the position he is in now – realising that his horse is dead. Start in neutral. You will then have the count of ten beats to move into image one. Hold. Now a further ten beats to move into image two. Move slowly and take the full ten beats. Now image three, etc, until you are back to neutral. Repeat the exercise using five beats; and then one beat. Try adding a musical soundtrack. What music might assist in the transition between the different stages of Hobart's life?

## Transformations 2

You can further explore this idea of change. What causes you to make changes in your life? In groups, create three freeze frames. One before a significant moment of change (reflecting the monotony of the everyday); a second showing the moment of change (what sparks it off?); and a final one illustrating the effect of the change (how is your life different now?) Work on ways of linking the images together – perhaps using repetitive, monotonous actions to move from the first image into the moment of change, helping to emphasise the exact moment of transition; and then a more energetic, positive series of movements to illustrate the effect of the change.



Stephen Rea  
Photo: Ros Kavanagh

*“This could really be it, now.  
To lose the hat. It’s not a  
good sign. This could finally  
be it.”*

## Monologue as Duologue

There are a number of occasions in the play where Hobart is quite literally having a conversation with himself. It is almost as if his alter ego is questioning his choices. This is much more dramatic than a simple, one-sided monologue, but requires a skilled actor to execute the lines affectively.

Take a situation where you have wanted a change – maybe a change of scenery, like a holiday; or maybe a change of lifestyle/image – losing weight or a having a new haircut. Write down all of the reasons for why this change is a good idea. Try to think of as many reasons as possible and back them up with evidence – e.g. I deserve a holiday because I’ve worked for eight days in a row without a break and I’m exhausted. Once you have compiled the list, write another list – this time with all of the counter arguments for why the change isn’t such a good idea. E.g. If I work another 8 days in a row I’ll have saved enough money to go on a couple of holidays, so it’s pointless stopping now... etc.

Now think about how you might perform these lists. You could start by working in groups of three, with one person being the subject and the other two acting like good and bad angels. Think about how you might physically manipulate the subject to win your side of the argument. Can this style be replicated in some way when you reduce the scene to one actor?

You could also consider playing this exercise physically with no words at all. Perhaps using objects – like a ball, rope or cane between the subject and their alter ego. In most absurdist drama, objects take on an allegorical meaning, for example in *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon struggles to remove his shoe, and gives up, muttering, “Nothing to be done.” Vladimir takes up the thought and muses on it, the implication being that nothing is a thing that has to be done and this pair is going to have to spend the rest of the play doing it. Likewise, the horse in *Kicking a Dead Horse* is a metaphor for Hobart’s futile attempts at change – like the horse, they die. How could the ball, rope or cane signify the character’s struggle / be a metaphor for change/transition?



## ***Kicking A Dead Horse* Projects Pack**

Compiled by Samantha Lane and Charlie Payne

*Kicking A Dead Horse* by Sam Shepard was produced at the Almeida Theatre from 5 - 20 September 2008.

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Script extracts from *Kicking A Dead Horse* by Sam Shepard.

Design images by  
Production Photography by Ros Kavanagh  
Almeida Projects photography by Bridget Jones.

*Almeida Projects draws on the expertise of theatre artists in the UK and brings them together with our community partners, promoting innovative creative exchange between the Almeida and its local community.*

Since our launch in 2003, we have worked with over 5,000 people from schools and other organisations across Islington on a diverse range of projects based on the Almeida's plays and operas.

We also run introductory workshops for students from across the UK visiting our unique theatre building.

For more information about Almeida Projects, please visit the Almeida's website, [www.almeida.co.uk](http://www.almeida.co.uk) or contact us directly by emailing [projects@almeida.co.uk](mailto:projects@almeida.co.uk) or by calling 020 7288 4916.

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[www.almeida.co.uk/projects](http://www.almeida.co.uk/projects)