

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

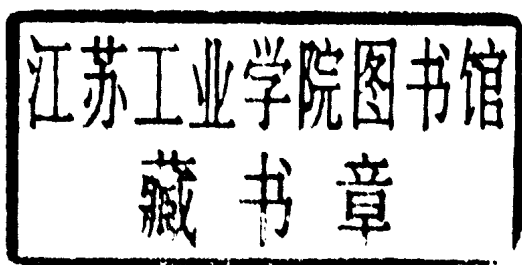


SAM
SHEPARD

Edited by Matthew Roudané

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COMPANION TO
SAM SHEPARD

EDITED BY
MATTHEW ROUDANÉ
Georgia State University



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THE CAMBRIDGE
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SAM SHEPARD

Few American playwrights have exerted as much influence on the contemporary stage as Sam Shepard. His plays are performed on and off Broadway and in all the major regional American theatres. They are also widely performed and studied in Europe, particularly in Britain, Germany, and France, finding both a popular and scholarly audience. In this collection of seventeen original essays, American and European authors from different professional and academic backgrounds explore the various aspects of Shepard's career – his plays, poetry, music, fiction, acting, directing, and film work. The volume covers the major plays, including *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*, as well as other lesser known but vitally important works. A thorough chronology of Shepard's life and career, together with biographical chapters, a note from the legendary Joseph Chaikin, and an interview with the playwright, give a fascinating first-hand account of an exuberant and experimental personality.

For SUSAN and NICKOLAS

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I am grateful for the help of Judy Boals, Shepard's agent, who patiently answered my many questions and passed along several key requests to Shepard. Thanks to Shepard and his publishers for permission to quote from his work.

I especially want to express my gratitude to Sam Shepard. After years of seeing his plays, writing about them, and trying to teach them well to my many students, it was a great inspiration to meet him for our interview. He has been enormously helpful throughout the production of this book. He was also kind enough to share with me a manually typed version of *The Late Henry Moss*, which gave me the chance to offer some speculative thoughts on this drama at the end of the *Companion*.

Finally, as always, much thanks to my wife, Susan Ashley.

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CHRISTOPHER BIGSBY is Professor of American Studies at the University of East Anglia. He has published more than twenty-five books on British and American culture, including *Confrontation and Commitment: A Study of Contemporary American Drama 1959–1966* (1967), *Albee* (1969), *The Black American Writer* (1969), *The Second Black Renaissance* (1980), *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (1982–85), *David Mamet* (1985), *Modern American Drama 1945–2000* (2000), and, as editor, *Contemporary English Drama* (1981), *Arthur Miller and Company* (1990), and *The Portable Arthur Miller* (1995). His most recent book is *Contemporary American Playwrights* (2000). Bigsby is co-editor, with Don Wilmeth, of the three-volume (1998, 2000) *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*. He is also the author of three novels: *Hester* (1994), *Pearl* (1995), and *Still Lives* (1996).

STEPHEN J. BOTTOMS is a lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, where he specializes in contemporary American theatre and performance art. He is the author of *The Theatre of Sam Shepard: States of Crisis* (1998) and *Albee: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, both for Cambridge University Press, and of several widely published articles. His piece for this volume draws on his extensive original research into the history of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway movement, which forms the basis of a forthcoming book. He also writes, directs, and performs with the Glasgow-based Flexible Deadlock theatre company.

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(1993), *Acte(s) de Présence: Teksten over Engelstalig theatre in Vlaanderen en Nederland* (1996), and *From Middleton and Rowley's "Changeling" to Sam Shepard's "Bodyguard": A Contemporary Appropriation of Renaissance Drama* (1997). Among his more recent editions are a double Shepard issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* (1998) and an English-language issue of *Degrés* on intermediality in the performing arts (2000). He serves on the editorial boards of the *European Journal of American Culture* and the Flemish theatre quarterly *Documenta*.

JOSEPH CHAIKIN is one of America's leading directors, actors, and producers within the alternative theatre world. The winner of six Obie Awards, including the Obie's first Lifetime Achievement Award in 1977, Chaikin is the founder of the Open Theatre, the Winter Project, and the Other Theatre. His collaborations with Shepard include *Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard: Letters and Texts, 1972-1984* (edited by Barry Daniels), *Tongues, Savage/Love, The War in Heaven*, and *When the World was Green: A Chef's Fable*. He has also published the influential *The Presence of the Actor*. As a member of the Living Theatre, he acted in Jack Gelber's *The Connection* in 1959, and his involvement in American theatre since then has influenced a whole generation of playwrights.

JOHN M. CLUM is Professor of English and Professor of the Practice of Drama at Duke University. Recent books include *Something for the Boys: Musical Theatre and Gay Culture* and *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*, both from St. Martin's Press, and a new anthology: *Asking and Telling: Gay Drama for the Millennium*. He is the author of numerous essays on twentieth-century American playwrights. John Clum is also a playwright whose works have been produced in theatres around the United States.

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LESLIE KANE is Professor of English at Westfield State College. She is the author of *The Language of Silence: The Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama* and *Weasels and Wisemen: Ethics and Ethnicity in the Works of David Mamet*. She has edited *David Mamet: A Casebook*, *Israel Horowitz: A Collection of Critical Essays*, "Glengarry Glen Ross": *Text and Performance*, and *David Mamet in Conversation*. President of the David Mamet Society and co-editor of the *David Mamet Review*, Kane's work has appeared in *The Printer Review*, *American Drama*, *Theatre Journal*, *The Yearbook on English Studies*, and collections of essays.

KIMBALL KING, Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is co-editor of the *Southern Literary Journal* and has written books on Thomas Nelson Page and Augustus B. Longstreet. His primary field of interest is contemporary British and American drama and he is the author of *Twenty British Playwrights* (1977), *Ten Irish Playwrights* (1979), *Ten American Playwrights* (1982), *Sam Shepard: A Casebook* (1988), and *Hollywood on Stage: Playwrights Evaluate the Culture Industry* (1998). Currently he is General Editor for Garland Publishing of two series: Casebooks on Modern Drama and Studies in Modern Drama.

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MARC ROBINSON is the author of *The Other American Drama* and editor of *The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes* and *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*. He teaches at Yale College, where he is the Director of Theatre Studies, and at the Yale School of Drama.

MATTHEW ROUDANÉ is Professor of English at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he specializes in American drama. He has published *Understanding Edward Albee* (1987), *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (1987), *American Dramatists* (1989), "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Necessary Fictions, Terrifying Realities" (1990), *Public Issues, Private Tensions: Contemporary American Drama* (1993), *Approaches to Teaching Miller's "Death of a Salesman"* (1995), *American Drama Since 1960: A Critical History* (1996), and *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams* (1997). Some of his more recent work appears in Don Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby's *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. III (2000). Roudané is editor of the *South Atlantic Review*. He served as a dramaturg for 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta, where he worked with Joseph Chaikin, who directed Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance* (2002).

SAM SHEPARD has written nearly fifty plays, eleven of which have won Obie Awards. His first plays, *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden*, were produced in 1963 by Theatre Genesis in New York City. For several seasons he worked with Off-Off-Broadway theatre groups, including La MaMa and Caffe Cino. From 1975 to 1983, he was Playwright in Residence at San Francisco's Magic Theatre. In 1979 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Buried Child*, and in 1984 he gained an Oscar nomination for his performance in *The Right Stuff*. His screenplay for *Paris, Texas* won the Palme d'Or award at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival, and he wrote

and directed the film *Far North* in 1988. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1986. In 1992, he received the Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy and was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1994. He has appeared in over thirty films, including *Days of Heaven*, *Francis*, *Country*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Voyager*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Hamlet*, and *The Pledge*. His drama *When the World Was Green: A Chef's Fable*, written with his long-time collaborator, Joseph Chaikin, and commissioned by 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta, premiered at the Olympics Arts Festival in 1996 and then opened in New York as part of the Signature Theatre Company's season devoted to his work. He wrote and directed his last play of the twentieth century, *The Late Henry Moss*, in 2000.

LESLIE A. WADE is Associate Professor at Louisiana State University's Department of Theatre. A doctoral graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Wade has presented his work at national and international theatre conferences and has published essays in numerous journals, including *Theatre Studies*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Theatral Annuaire*, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, *Theatre Symposium*, and *Western European Stages*. His book *Sam Shepard and the American Theatre* was published by Greenwood Press (1997). He serves on the editorial board of *Theatre History Studies*. Recipient of a Louisiana State Arts Council's fellowship in playwriting, Wade has also received writing awards from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the Los Angeles Arts Council, and the American College Theatre Festival. He has twice directed the grant-project "Native Voices and Visions," a script-writing competition for Louisiana playwrights. Wade currently serves as the LSU Theatre Department's director of graduate studies and co-director of LSU in London.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1943 November 5: Samuel Shepard Rogers, named Steve, is born, Fort Sheridan, Illinois.
- 1949 Starts school in South Pasadena, California.
- 1961 Graduates high school and begins training in animal husbandry.
- 1963 Moves to New York and finds work as a busboy at the Village Gate nightclub in Greenwich Village. Changes name to Sam Shepard.
- 1964 October 10: *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden* premiere at Theatre Genesis (dir. Ralph Cook).
November 23: *Up to Thursday* premieres at the Village South Theatre, under the sponsorship of Edward Albee's Playwrights Unit (dir. Charles Gnyss).
- 1965 February 10: *Dog and Rocking Chair* premiere at Café La MaMa (dir. John Banks).
April 16: *Chicago* premieres at Theatre Genesis (dir. Ralph Cook).
September: *4-H Club* premieres at the Cherry Lane Theatre with the backing of the Playwrights Unit (dir. Charles Gnyss).
November 16: *Icarus's Mother* premieres at Caffè Cino (dir. Michael Smith).
- 1966 January 20: Premiere of *Red Cross* at Judson Poets' Theatre (dir. Jacques Levy).
Spring: *Fourteen Hundred Thousand* premieres at the Firehouse Theatre, Minnesota (dir. Sydney Schubert Walter). The play is later filmed for National Educational Television (dir. Tom O'Horgan).
- 1967 *Five Plays* is published by Bobbs-Merrill.
March 4: *La Turista* premieres at the American Place Theatre (dir. Jacques Levy).
May 18: *Melodrama Play* premieres at Café La MaMa (dir. Tom O'Horgan).
November: *Cowboys #2* premieres at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles (dir. Edward Parone).
December 26: *Forensic and the Navigators* premieres at Theatre Genesis (dir. Ralph Cook).
- 1968 Begins work on a screenplay for Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. He soon resigns and begins touring as a drummer with Holy Modal Rounders, with whom he records *The Moray Eels Eat the Holy Modal Rounders* (Elektra).

CHRONOLOGY

- 1969 June 17: Kenneth Tynan's musical *Oh! Calcutta* premieres at the Eden Theatre, New York, and includes the final scene of Shepard's play *The Rock Garden*.
November: Shepard weds O-Lan Johnson at St. Mark's Church.
December 26: *The Unseen Hand* premieres at La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (dir. Jeff Bleckner).
- 1970 January: US premiere of *The Holy Ghostly* at the McCarter Theatre, Princeton, NJ, in a production by Tom O'Horgan's New Troupe, after touring in 1969 with La MaMa troupe.
March 12: *Operation Sidewinder* premieres at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (dir. Michael Schultz).
May: Jesse Mojo Shepard is born.
July: *Shaved Splits* premieres at La MaMa ETC (dir. Bill Hart).
- 1971 Shepard briefly separates from O-Lan to live with Patti Smith at the Chelsea Hotel.
March 4: *The Mad Dog Blues* premieres at Theatre Genesis (dir. Robert Glaudini).
April 29: *Cowboy Mouth*, written with Patti Smith (dir. Glaudini) and *Back Bog Beast Bait* (dir. Tony Barsha) premiere at the American Place Theatre. *Cowboy Mouth*, with Shepard in the leading role, closes after one performance when Shepard inexplicably leaves.
Summer: Shepard and family move to London.
- 1972 July 17: *The Tooth of Crime* premieres at the Open Space Theatre, London (dir. Charles Marowitz).
Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, New York, presents *Nightwalk*, a collaborative work including textual contributions by Shepard.
- 1973 July: BBC Television airs *Blue Bitch*.
Shepard's prose collection *Hawk Moon* is published.
The Tooth of Crime premieres in the US. Staged by Richard Schechner's Performance Group, the production is surrounded by controversy.
- 1974 February 21: *Geography of a Horse Dreamer*, directed by Shepard, premieres at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London.
March 25: *Little Ocean* premieres at the Hampstead Theatre Club, London (dir. Stephen Rea).
Summer: The Shepards leave London for California.
October: *Action* opens at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs (dir. Nancy Meckler).
- 1975 April 15: *Action* and *Killer's Head*, the latter starring a young Richard Gere, have their US premiere in a double bill at the American Place Theatre (dir. Nancy Meckler). The same program, directed by Shepard, opens at the Magic Theatre, San Francisco, shortly thereafter.
Fall: Shepard joins Bob Dylan's *Rolling Thunder Review Tour* as the writer of a proposed screenplay.
- 1976 July 2: *Angel City* premieres at the Magic Theatre (dir. Shepard).
October 15: *Suicide in B-Flat* debuts at the Yale Repertory Theatre (dir. Walt Jones).

CHRONOLOGY

- October 22: *The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife* opens at the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival (dir. Robert Woodruff).
- 1977 March 18: *Inacoma* premieres at the Magic Theatre. The performance is developed by a company of actors and musicians and directed by Shepard. April 21: *Curse of the Starving Class* premieres at the Royal Court Theatre (dir. Nancy Meckler). *Rolling Thunder Logbook* published. Director Jacques Levy acquires Shepard's manuscript, *Jackson's Dance*, wishing to stage the 1972 play about painter Jackson Pollock at the Public Theatre. Pollock's widow Lee Krasner refuses to give the necessary legal permission.
- 1978 April: Premiere of *Seduced* at the Trinity Square Repertory Theatre, Providence, RI (dir. Jack Gelber). June 7-11: *Tongues* begins a limited run at the Magic Theatre with Shepard and Joseph Chaikin appearing in it. June 27: *Buried Child* opens at the Magic Theatre (dir. Robert Woodruff). Summer: Shepard makes his film debut in Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*.
- 1979 June 7: *Jacaranda* premieres at St. Clement's Church, New York. The performance includes a Daniel Nagrin dance piece and libretto by Shepard. September 5: *Savage/Love* premieres at the Eureka Theatre Summer Festival, San Francisco. *Buried Child* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
- 1980 July 10: *True West* premieres at the Magic Theatre (dir. Robert Woodruff). The play moves to New York's Public Theatre, but the shift is marred by clashes with producer Joseph Papp. Shepard appears in the film, *Resurrection* (dir. Daniel Petrie).
- 1981 O-Lan Shepard and the Overtone Theatre construct *Supersitutions* from pieces in *Motel Chronicles*. Shepard appears in the film *Raggedy Man* (dir. Jack Fisk).
- 1982 *Motel Chronicles*, a prose collection, published. Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago revives *True West*. John Malkovich plays Lee to Gary Sinise's Austin. A film of this production, directed by Sinise, appears on Public Broadcasting Service television the following year. While filming *Frances* (dir. Graeme Clifford), Shepard begins a relationship with the film's star, Jessica Lange.
- 1983 February 8: *Fool for Love* premieres at the Magic Theatre (dir. Shepard). Shepard acts in the movie, *The Right Stuff* (dir. Philip Kaufman), for which he receives an Oscar award nomination as Best Supporting Actor. Shepard and Lange move to Santa Fe, New Mexico.
- 1984 March: Shepard's father, Sam Rogers, dies. July: Divorce from O-Lan is finalized. *Paris, Texas*, a Shepard screenplay directed by Wim Wenders, is released and wins Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

CHRONOLOGY

- While working in Massachusetts with Shepard and others, Chaikin suffers a stroke. Shepard writes *The War in Heaven* with Chaikin while he convalesces.
- Shepard and Lange appear in *Country* (dir. Richard Pearce).
- 1985 January 8: *The War in Heaven* premieres on WBAI radio.
 December 5: *A Lie of the Mind* premieres at New York's Promenade Theatre (dir. Shepard). Wins New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play.
 Robert Altman's film version of *Fool for Love* is released with Shepard as Eddie and Kim Basinger as Mary.
- 1986 Shepard and Lange move to Scottsville, Virginia.
 The pair appears together in the film *Crimes of the Heart*, adapted from the Beth Henley play (dir. Bruce Beresford).
 "Brownsville Girl," a song written by Shepard and Bob Dylan, appears on Dylan's album, *Knocked Out Loaded*.
 Shepard is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
- 1987 *Esquire* Magazine publishes "True Dylan," an interview with Dylan conducted by Shepard and presented as a one-act play.
 Shepard appears in the film *Baby Boom* (dir. Charles Shyer).
- 1988 Shepard, in Minnesota, directs his screenplay *Far North*. Lange appears in the film.
- 1989 Shepard appears as Dolly Parton's husband in Herb Ross's film *Steel Magnolias*.
- 1990 Shepard appears in *Bright Angel* (dir. Michael Fields), a movie adaptation of Richard Ford's short story collection *Rock Springs*.
- 1991 April 30: The premiere of *States of Shock* at the American Place Theatre (dir. Bill Hart).
 Shepard acts in the movie *Defenseless* (dir. Martin Campbell), and lands the lead role in Volker Schlöndorff's *Voyager*.
- 1992 Shepard directs another of his screenplays, *Silent Tongue*, in New Mexico.
 The film *Thunder Heart* (dir. Michael Apted), in which Shepard plays a part, is released.
 The American Academy of Arts and Letters awards Shepard the Gold Medal for Drama.
- 1993 Shepard appears in Alan J. Pakula's movie, *The Pelican Brief*, based on a John Grisham novel of the same title.
- 1994 Shepard's mother dies.
 Shepard appears in *Safe Passage* (dir. Robert Allan Ackerman) with Susan Sarandon.
 Film version of *Curse of the Starving Class* (dir. J. Michael McClary) is released.
 November 1: *Simpatico* premieres at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre (dir. Shepard).
 Shepard is inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.
- 1995 October 4: The Steppenwolf Theatre premieres a revised version of *Buried Child* (dir. Sinise). This version moves to Broadway in 1996.

- Shepard and Lange move their family to Minnesota.
 Shepard acts in the movies *The Streets of Laredo* (dir. Joseph Sarjent) and *The Good Old Boys* (dir. Tommy Lee Jones).
- 1996 *Cruising Paradise*, an account of Shepard's experiences starring in Volker Schlöndorff's film, *Voyager*, is published.
- July 19: *When the World Was Green: A Chef's Fable*, written with and directed by Chaikin, premieres at the Olympics Arts Festival during the games in Atlanta.
- November: The Signature Theatre Company of New York dedicates a season to Shepard's plays. The festivities open with the premiere of a revised version of *The Tooth of Crime*. With the added subtitle, *Second Dance*, this new version replaced Shepard's original score with music and lyrics by T-Bone Burnett.
- Horton Foote's screenplay *Lily Dale* is filmed (dir. Peter Masterson) with Shepard appearing in the film.
- 1997 Shepard appears in the movie *The Only Thrill* (dir. Peter Masterson).
- 1998 February 10: *Eyes for Consuela* opens at the Manhattan Theatre Club at City Center Stage II in New York City (dir. Terry Kinney, starring David Straithairn and Daniel Faraldo).
- July 8: The PBS series, *Great Performances*, airs a special on Shepard entitled *Sam Shepard: Stalking Himself*. The program includes a view of eight of Shepard's plays and is followed by a screening of the filmed production of *True West*.
- The Magic Theatre in San Francisco renames one of its stages the Sam Shepard Theatre.
- 2000 Shepard acts in a film version of his *Simpatico* (dir. Matthew Warchus).
- March 9: Opening of a revival of *True West* at the Circle in the Square Theatre, New York (dir. Matthew Warchus).
- Shepard plays the ghost of Hamlet's father in a film adaptation of *Hamlet* (dir. Michael Almereyda).
- November 14: *The Late Henry Moss* opens at the Magic Theatre, San Francisco. The play, directed by Shepard, stars James Gammon, Sean Penn, Nick Nolte, Woody Harrelson, Cheech Marin, and Sheila Tousey.
- 2001 Appears in the film *The Pledge*, starring Jack Nicholson and Sean Penn, who also directed.
- September 5: The Signature Theatre Company stages the New York City premiere of *The Late Henry Moss*, directed by Joseph Chaikin.