

A Playgoer's Guide to

A note on plot

The jealous and altogether unstable Jake beats on his partner Beth — so badly that he's convinced he's killed her, and she refers to herself as “dead.” The event shocks Jake into a desperate infantile state: his delusional and overprotective mother Lorraine pampers him, convinced that keeping Jake in his room is the only way to stop him from causing more trouble.

Meanwhile, the seriously injured and mentally rattled Beth recovers at her parents' home where her parents' bicker over her recovery (and everything else) and a brother who transforms from gentle guardian to all-out hothead.

The story bounces between these two dysfunctional families, and the revelations and confrontations within each carry us through to tense family crossovers. Jake's brother Frankie first sets out to find his “dead” sister-in-law, and the abusive husband himself follows shortly thereafter.

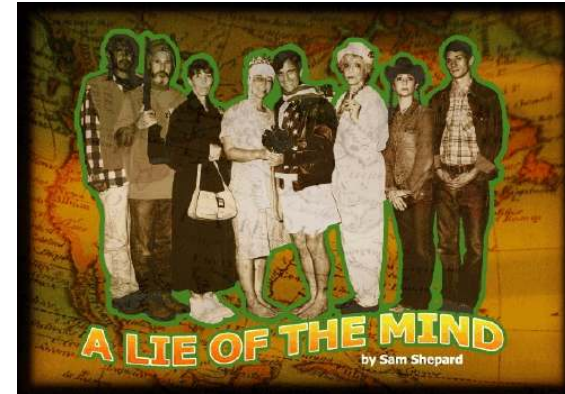
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by Sam Shepard

Sam Shepard

As a youth, Shepard worked a variety of different jobs including herdsman, stable hand, orange picker, sheep shearer, waiter and musician, before becoming a playwright. He began his career as a playwright in 1964 in New York with the Theatre Genesis Production of two one act plays, *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden*. His plays combine wild humor, grotesque satire, myths and a sparse haunting language to create a subversive pop art vision of America. His characters are usually troubled loners and drifters confused with everything around them; caught in a “mythical past and mechanized present.” His plays were said to be bizarre, and he never revised his work. Once a script was completed, he put it on stage.

Awards

Shepard's work has earned him a long list of awards. His screenplay for *Paris, Texas* won the Golden Palm Award at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival. Eleven of his plays have won Obie Awards. In 1979, he received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Buried Child*. In 1984, he gained an Oscar nomination for his acting in *The Right Stuff*. Shepard was elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1986, and he received the Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy in 1992. In 1994, Shepard was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Works

As time went on, Shepard got into more than just playwriting; he dabbled in film. He acted in *The Pelican Brief*, *Resurrection* and *Black Hawk Down*; directed *Far North* and *Silent Tongue* and wrote the screenplays for *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Fool for Love*. Shepard also wrote poetry, including *Cruising Paradise*, *Hawk Moon* and *Motel Chronicles*. Some of his plays are *Cowboy*, *Buried Child*, *Action*, *Fool for Love*, *La Turista* (his first full length play), *The Rock Garden*, *True West*, and *A Lie of the Mind*. Throughout his career, Shepard has written over forty plays and starred in over twenty movies.

Recurring themes in Shepard's plays

Shepard has been writing plays for over forty years, during which time he's experimented with different genres and approaches. In fact, he has written musicals (*The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife*), texts meant to accompany dance pieces (*Jacaranda*), and more modern pieces involving a marriage between the sound of the human voice and that of a percussion instrument (*Tongues*). Yet, most remember him for writing his plays that deal with haunting subject matter. Critics have summed up Shepard's style as mixing "horror and banality."

Buried Child deals with family secrets and dysfunctional relationships. In the same way, Shepard criticizes family structure in his plays *A Lie of the Mind* and *Curse of the Starving Class*.

Also, many of his plays deal with the "mythical West" and the notion of being a cowboy. The cowboy, the all-American hero, is also metaphorical in many plays. The "cowboy figure" may be disguised as a football player or a war hero, for Shepard seems to find importance in America's idolization of these "mythical heroes."



Shepard often attacks the American Dream and traditional "Americana." There is an obvious stab at patriotism in *A Lie of the Mind* when Baylor folds the American flag. He forgets everything relevant to his life, but not the ability to correctly fold a flag.

Shepard deals with issues varying from

violence towards women, relationships, family, Americana, pop culture, the Old West and patriotism. Although certain themes resurface in his plays, each work is unique and offers a new perspective to the world of Sam Shepard.

Music in *A Lie of the Mind*

Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind* was first performed at the Promenade Theater in New York City on the 5th of December, 1985. The play was fortunate enough to have an original score written for them by the Red Clay Ramblers.

"In the original New York production, which I directed, I had the good fortune to encounter a bluegrass group called The Red Clay Ramblers, out of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Their musical sensibilities, musicianship, and great repertoire of traditional and original tunes fit the play like a glove. . . . Working intimately with these musicians, structuring bridges between scenes, underscoring certain monologues, and developing musical "themes" to open and close the acts left me no doubt that this play needs music. Live music. Music with an American backbone. . . . I would also like to thank The Red Clay Ramblers for their tremendous contribution to our original production of this play." --SAM SHEPARD

In the original production of *A Lie of the Mind*, the Ramblers performed on a balcony above the stage. They performed by opening the show, playing between acts, and closing the show. The music did not connect to the plot but helped throughout the play. Theater critics John Simon said "The Red Clay Ramblers supply transitions of bouncy country music on quirky instruments, not the least of which is their vocal cords."

The Red Clay Ramblers formed in 1972 and have traveled all over the United States and have also toured internationally. The disc for *A Lie of the Mind* was released in 1986 with many of the Red Clay Ramblers' original works as well as old country favorites. The score for *A Lie of the Mind* is still The Red Clay Ramblers' most acclaimed album



