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The Onomastic Sam Shepard

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Abstract

Fascination with names, especially personal names, has been a hallmark of Sam Shepard's life and career. Born Samuel Shepard Rogers VII, he dropped his last name as a result of friction with his father; this act foreshadowed the theme of father-son conflict in a number of his plays. Until recently Shepard has used suggestive nomenclature extensively, including not only famous living or historical figures and stereotypical macho cowboy names but also fanciful, symbolic names which display his poetic inventiveness and wit.

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> Here's a few of my favorite words: Slipstream,...Wichita, Choctaw, Apache, Switchblade, Bootleg, Fox, Vixen,...Coyote, Crow,...Appaloosa,...Cajun,...Mojo, Shadow, Cheyenne,...Ghost, Saint, Aztec, Quaxaca, Messiah,...Antelope, Python, Yucca,...Moxie, Hooch, Wolf,...Pistol, Abalone, Cowboy, Stranger.[2]

The playwright we know as Sam Shepard was actually named Sam Shepard Rogers, the seventh to bear that name. Born on November 5, 1943, he was nicknamed Steve by his mother in order to distinguish him from his father, and he changed the name at the beginning of his Off-Off Broadway career (1964). In Shepard's words, "I just dropped the *Rogers* part of it. It had been in the family for seven generations and my grandmother wasn't happy over it" (Oumano 22). But as Ellen Oumano wryly points out, he could have dropped *Shepard* rather than *Rogers*; she considers the change "a deliberate break with his heredity, an attempt to construct his own identity." Though Steve loved his father and pitied the father's wartime wound and subsequent psychological problems, he also chafed under the parent's "drinking bouts and military-style discipline" (20). Conflict between father and son became a frequent theme in Shepard's plays—notably *Holy Ghostly* (1969), *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), *Buried Child* (1978), and *A Lie of the Mind* (1985).[3]

The change of name is given a different explanation by Charles Mingus III, son of the great jazz musician. Mingus and Sam had known each other slightly and disliked each other in high school, but the relationship

improved when both were beginning their acting careers in New York City. Mingus remarked:

> All his life he was Steve Rogers, never a hint of an English-type name. Until the infamous Midwestern Dr. Sam Sheperd[4] murdered his wife, in the early sixties, Sam Shepard never called himself Sam Shepard. All of a sudden, he changed his name. It was too coincidental in a way, and in a way, it was a good trigger because it was excellent publicity. The guy I knew would exploit that—he was a little sad about it, to tell the truth, but it was viable and it was humorous because people would actually go to the play or piece thinking "I wonder what this guy who killed his wife and got away with it wrote?" There were people like that and that was fascinating to Sam and to me and probably to the people in the crew. And Sam was freaking out and laughing, and, at the same time, there was a profit motive involved. He was aware of box office (Oumano 22).

In an interview with Pete Hamill, Shepard said:

> I always thought that Steve Rogers was a corny name... because of Roy Rogers and all the associations with it. But Samuel Shepard Rogers was kind of a long handle.... Now in a way I kind of regret it. But it was, you know, one of those reactions to your background.... Years later I found out that Steve Rogers was the original name for Captain America in the comics (Shewey 30-31).

When a son was born in 1970 to Sam Shepard and his wife, O-Lan Johnson, he was named *Jesse Mojo*, the *Jesse* being inspired by Jesse James and *Mojo* being a Cajun good luck charm (Shewey 76).[5] There would be no Samuel Shepard Rogers VIII.

Not only were names and naming important in Shepard's personal life, but they became a central area of concern in his plays as well. Nomenclature is an organic part of his technique. Before examining individual plays, however, it might be useful to make some generalizations about the ways in which he uses personal and placenames. Shepard's fascination with personal names is reflected throughout his plays, often in very important ways. The names are of three kinds. First, there are names of famous living or historical figures such as movie stars, rock musicians, Indian warriors, etc., or (occasionally) individuals with whom he associated in his private life.[6] Secondly, there is what might be called the stereotypical (or generic) moniker; the central character bears a usually monosyllabic macho cowboy name such as *Slim*, *Chet*, *Clem*, *Doc*, *Duke*, *Jeep*, *The Kid*, etc. The third kind of name is more fanciful or consciously symbolic, such as *Forensic* in *Forensic and the Gladiators*, *Kent* and *Salem* in *La Turista*, *Kosmo* in *Cowboy Mouth*, or *Crow* in *Tooth of Crime*. The first kind of name is useful in establishing time references for

the action of the play. The stereotypical name is a handy shortcut which enables the audience instantly to identify the character, and Shepard sees his people mainly as types rather than individuals. Characterization, as even his warmest admirers admit, is not Shepard's forte.[7] His inventiveness and wit are displayed best in the third kind of name. These are the names that carry the message of the play or set its tone.

Placenames play a lesser role in Shepard's drama. The setting is usually the generalized desert Southwest, the region he loves best. To Shepard the desert represents freedom, escape from the corruptions and constraints of civilization and family life. It is the area where a man may liberate his spirit through contact with the Indians and their magical rituals. Shepard rarely uses a particular place name. When he does specify, there is usually a point to be made. Azusa, the small city in Southern California, becomes a symbol of middle-class American materialism and patriotism ("Everything from 'A' to 'Z' in the USA," in *The Unseen Hand*, 1969). Los Angeles is the setting for Shepard's rather heavy-handed satire on Hollywood movie-making in the play sarcastically entitled *Angel City* (1976). Placenames, in short, function symbolically, like the third kind of personal names mentioned above.

Shepard's first full-length play, *La Turista* (1967), depends greatly upon a witty use of names. The title itself, literally "the tourist," is a euphemism for what is sometimes called "Montezuma's Revenge," amoebic dysentery. The play was written while the author actually had the ailment. It is a satire on American middle-class values, on commercialism, cultural imperialism, and medical practices. It is also a hilarious parody of horror movies, *Frankenstein* in particular. The plot concerns the visit to Mexico of a middle-class American couple named from popular cigarette brands, *Kent* and *Salem*. Kent, the husband, is a "kind of filtered young American," and his wife, Salem, is "all springtime freshness and edgy optimism" (Frutkin 113). They are lying in their beds, trying to deal with "la turista." Incompetent medical help arrives in the form of a Mayan witch doctor, later a European doctor, and still later a doctor in American Civil War costume, who overdoses Kent on benzedrine and causes him to fantasize a horror-movie script in which the monster takes the form of an evil, smooth-talking owner of a cigarette factory who tries to bribe Kent's father, dying of a mysterious ailment. The bribe is an offer to set up Kent's father in business, providing he "change each one of the stupid names you gave your eight kids, from whatever it is now, to one of the eight brands of our cigarettes" (in *The*

Unseen Hand and Other Plays, 284). It also follows from this speech that they are brother and sister, at least in Kent's fantasy. The incest theme is one that Shepard would use later on, much more seriously, in *Buried Child* (1978) and *Fool for Love* (1983). As the play continues, Kent has a second fantasy in which he has been converted into the Frankenstein monster, but a talkative one, not the inarticulate Boris Karloff version. The play concludes with the doctor and Salem chasing Kent through the set and the audience, but he eludes them as he swings over their heads on a rope and crashes through the back wall of the set, leaving his outline behind.

In the same year as *La Turista* (1967) Shepard wrote a one-act play with the odd title *Forensic and the Navigators*. It was the first of a trilogy on the subject of revolution, the others being *Operation Sidewinder* and *Shaved Splits* (both in 1970). The title *Forensic and the Navigators* reflects the political confusion and inconclusiveness of the sixties and the counterculture movement. *Forensic*, as Mottram points out, is "a form of argumentative debate, more an exercise than a practical application." Its use as a character name "calls into question the seriousness of the revolutionary characters." The term *Navigators* "indicates the charting of a course, yet the planning of the revolutionary characters never leads to action." The combination of the single name, *Forensic*, and the plural *Navigators* makes the play's title resemble a sixties rock group(62).

Operation Sidewinder, although as dated as the previous play, is a much funnier work, a veritable *tour de force* of comic imagination. The play's eclectic inspiration is shown by its dedication to the Italian film director Antonioni, for whom Shepard had worked on the script of the movie *Zabriskie Point*, and also to the Indian Crazy Horse, the rock groups Rolling Stones and the Holy Modal Rounders (who provided music for the play), the Hopi Indians, Gabby Hayes, Mickey Free (a half-breed Apache associated with the legend of Geronimo), the year 1968, and Shepard's wife, O-Lan. Free's name was evidently chosen because he is a free man and fits in with Shepard's love of freedom. The sidewinder is a large electronic rattlesnake which functions as a computer. It was invented by an Air Force scientist, Dr. Vector, clearly modeled after Dr. Strangelove, *vector* of course being a mathematical term. Disobeying his instructions, Dr. Vector sets the sidewinder free in the desert so that it can gather knowledge from the "realm of extraterrestrial consciousness" held by beings from other planets. Mickey Free,

however, cuts off the head of this two-billion-dollar experiment in order to use it in a Hopi snake-dance ritual.

The middle-class characters include Honey, described in the *Dramatis Personae* as "a very sexy chick with long blonde hair and tight pants, high heels, etc.," and her husband, Duke. Duke, despite the straw cowboy hat he wears and his hairy chest, fails to live up to his macho name. Perhaps the tip-off is that he is wearing Bermuda shorts and Hush-Puppies. At any rate, while photographing the movements of the sidewinder with his fancy movie camera, he cannot prevent the serpent from grabbing Honey. Duke simply tells his wife to relax while he goes to find a forest ranger. As it later turns out, Honey partly enjoys the experience: she has an orgasm in the snake's coils. The cast also includes a hippie type simply called *Young Man*; an Indian shaman named the *Spider Lady*; an old prospector named *Billy*, modeled on Gabby Hayes; three Black Panther type revolutionaries appropriately named *Blood*, *Blade* and *Dude*; and *Captain Bovine*, chief inspector for the CIA. The latter is as dumb and plodding as an ox. His stupidity is illustrated by the fact that he has to ask Billy what a fortnight is when Billy uses the word. The absurdist plot involves a fantastic plan by the Young Man and the black revolutionaries to put drugs into the Air Force water supply. The play ends with the Hopi ritual, during which the sidewinder succeeds in making contact with a UFO which carries off the Indians, Honey, and the Young Man. Shepard satirizes everybody in *Operation Sidewinder*—the middle-class, the revolutionaries, and the establishment. Only the Indians, who have a spiritual tradition and mystical grace, come off well.

The third play, *Shaved Splits*, is the least effective of the revolutionary trilogy because Shepard cannot make up his mind whether to satirize violent revolutionaries or narcissistic women. However, their names are well chosen, sometimes ironic. One of the two absurd characters, who opens the play as she lounges luxuriously in her pink bedroom with mirrored ceilings, is named *Miss Cherry*. Needless to say, she is not a virgin. Her home is called *Castle Cherry*. While revolution is raging in the streets below, she spends her time gobbling chocolates, watching television, and reading pornographic novels which are stacked by the dozen around the bedroom. Cherry is a foul-mouthed nymphomaniac who frequently curses her rich but absent husband, appropriately named *D.T.*, the implication being that he drinks. The revolutionary is named *Geez*, which may or may not be suggestive of Jesus. He is as foul-mouthed as Cherry, whether shouting at the police below or addressing

her. The middle-class figure is Cherry's disgusting supplier of pornographic books, hilariously named *Chunky Puke*. He is a "short, fat, ugly little man with wrap-around sunglasses, baseball cap, a long funky grey overcoat with patches all over it and black tennis shoes." Shepard's gift for comic invention can be seen in the titles of the books which Puke supplies, including such titillating entries as "Martian Matron," "Bon-Bon Beauty," "Surfer Queen and Her Fantastic Machine," "Star Ship War Lord," "More Tales of Lust and Passion," "Annette Funicello Tells All," "I Slept with Al Capone," "Borscht Belt Broad," and "Hippie Harlots." The list goes on in this vein for a whole page of text.

Three of Shepard's plays center on rock-and-roll stars—*The Mad Dog Blues* (1971), *Cowboy Mouth* (1971), and *The Tooth of Crime* (1972). Shepard's father was an amateur musician, a drummer in a local Dixieland band. Sam, before he turned to writing plays, also became a drummer, in a rock group called the Holy Modal Rounders. Rock lyrics, some of them written by Sam himself, rock music, and rock personalities (actual and fictitious) are very often referred to in Shepard's plays. The rock-and-roll star, like the cowboy (sometimes he *is* a cowboy), becomes a metaphor for the rugged, lonely, creative individual, presumably like the author himself.

Significant names abound in these plays. *The Mad Dog Blues* includes characters named *Kosmo*, *Yahoodi*, and *Waco Texas*, together with *Jesse James*, *Captain Kidd*, *Paul Bunyan*, *Marlene Dietrich*, and *Mae West*—characters from history, legend, or the movies. The play was suggested in part by John Huston's film *Treasure of Sierra Madre*, which concerns a search for gold, with various characters betraying each other. Kosmo is a rock-and-roll star "with tight pants and teased hair." He is tall, lean, angular, wolflike. He moves "from spot to spot across the planet hoping to find a home." He is engaged in a *cosmic* search, not so much for gold as for meaning in his life and status as a rock musician. Other characters, including Marlene Dietrich and Mae West, offer sexual comfort to his afflicted spirit and that of his sidekick, Yahoodi. Yahoodi is a somewhat sinister drug addict, also a loner. Kosmo and Yahoodi frequently call to each other across vast distances. The opening line, in fact, is a shout by Kosmo: "Yahoodi! Hey, Yahoodi!" Perhaps the name is suggested by "Yoo-Hoo."[8] If this name seems a bit obscure, all the others are clear enough. Those seeking for gold include Yahoodi, who needs money for his next fix; Captain Kidd, whom Yahoodi fights for his treasure, a treasure that turns out to be a bag of worthless

bottle caps; Jesse James, the outlaw; and the two movie stars, especially Mae West. Paul Bunyan is on a quest to find his great ox, Babe, but finds instead some consolation in the arms of Marlene. Waco is the sourdough old-timer who "got nowheres to go and nothin' to see." He hankers to be the new Jimmie Rogers. The play also makes mention of other figures from the music world – Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, etc. The mixture of folklore with fact, past with present, fantasy with reality is typical of Shepard.

Cowboy Mouth is a one-act companion piece to *The Mad Dog Blues*. The characters include the cowboy, Slim; a woman oddly named *Cavale*; and the Lobster Man, a man actually dressed like a lobster. The play is a surrealistic fantasy which apotheosizes the rock-and-roll performer as the modern replacement for Jesus. Cavale has kidnapped Slim at gunpoint from his wife and children to make a rock-and-roll savior out of him. She says:

> The highest form of anything is sainthood. A marvelous thief like Villon or Genet....They were saints 'cause they raised thievery to its highest state of grace....Some say Jesse James was one...and me....I dream of being one. But I can't. I mean I can't be the saint people dream of now. People want a street angel. They want a saint but with a cowboy mouth. Somebody to get off on when they can't get off on themselves. I think that's what Mick Jagger is trying to do...what Bob Dylan seemed to be for a while. A sort of god in our image...Ya know? Mick Jagger came close but he got too conscious....Well, I want it to be perfect, 'cause it's the only religion I got. It's like...well, in the old days people had Jesus and those guys to embrace.... They created a god with all their belief energies...and when they didn't dig themselves they could lose themselves in the Lord. But it's too hard now (*Angel City and Other Plays* 207-08).

When the Lobster Man enters, he is merely delivering lobsters they have ordered. But as Slim sings a song called "Loose Ends" (he and Cavale are at loose ends), the Lobster Man slowly cracks open his shell to reveal himself as the rock-and-roll savior. A competition now begins between the two would-be saviors, and Slim loses. Before he leaves, he hands Cavale's gun to the Lobster Man. Cavale turns to him and gives the last speech of the play "very simply and softly." As she talks, the Lobster Man spins the chambers of the gun, almost in rhythm with the speech, staring at the audience. It is in this speech that we learn the reason for Cavale's odd name, as she talks about the decadent French poet Nerval:

> He had visions. He cried like a coyote. He carried a crow. He walked through the Boulevard Noir inhuman like a triangle. He had a pet lobster on a pink ribbon. He told it his dreams, his vision, all the great secrets to the end of the world. And he hung himself on my birthday. Screaming like a coyote. The room was cold and full and his visions and the crow and the lobster went on *cavale.* That's where I found my name. Cavale. On my birthday. It means escape. (214)[9]

As she finishes, the Lobster Man raises the pistol to his head and squeezes the trigger. There is a loud click as the hammer strikes an empty chamber. The lights slowly fade to black. The meaning of this ending is clarified somewhat by the fact that there is an earlier tale which Cavale tells of a great rock singer named Johnny Ace who thrilled an audience by climaxing his great act with a successful (i.e., fatal) Russian Roulette number. We are to understand that Slim wants to deprive his rival of the opportunity to thrill Cavale that way just yet, for Slim must have removed the bullets. Slim has escaped, but the Lobster Man will have to stay under Cavale's spell.

Cavale is an ambiguous figure in this play. Her vision of the great rock-and-roll savior seems attractive to the author, and yet she is ominous, witchlike, perverse, sadistic. Note that the stage directions say she looks like a crow and is dressed in black. Presumably we are to associate her with Nerval's crow. The part was written and played by Patti Smith, the rock poet and singer with whom Shepard was living at the time (Oumano 90; Shewey 77-79). Did he resent her? The playwright seems confused also as to whether it really is worthwhile to be a rock-and-roll savior.

The crow figure and the competition between saviors are both picked up in the last of these rock-and-roll Western plays, *The Tooth of Crime*, whose title came from a poem called "Anguish," by the French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé.[10] The play is set "in a futuristic present in a world defined by the language and ethics of the music industry" (Mottram 102). The central character, Hoss, is an aging rock star threatened by the cool, deadly, confident youngster, Crow. Critics have seen in this situation a broader metaphor for the conflict between generations, even Oedipal jealousies. But these considerations aside, the play is very effective as sheer theatre on its own terms. Shepard has a field day with language as he constructs a verbal duel between the two rivals that is as exciting as the walkdown scene in a cowboy movie. The speeches are not realistic but a highly poetic mixture of Western slang, rocker jargon, automobile jargon, gangster slang, obscenities, and

neologisms, all conveyed in vigorous, staccato rhythms and brilliant metaphors. It is vintage Shepard, inimitable and powerful.

Hoss, whose name reminds us of Hoss Cartwright of the television series *Bonanza*, wears black rocker gear with silver studs and black kid gloves. He holds a microphone instead of a gun, though he has a whole arsenal of guns. He is singing a song called "The Way Things Are." They will not be that way for long. He has an entourage – every rock star must have an entourage. These include Becky Lou, Doc, Star-Man, and Cheyenne. All of them are familiar Western figures, but Shepard gives each one a sharp, ironic twist. Becky Lou is not the ingenue in crinoline we recall from so many cowboy films, but one of Hoss' promoters. She is a healthier figure than Cavale in the previous play. She has helped to bring him along and worries about keeping him successful. The other promoter is Star-Man, who watches not merely astronomical charts but the top-forty music charts. He tells Hoss, "You gotta listen to management." He sounds like a sheriff here; remember that the Western sheriff wears a star. Cheyenne, Hoss' sidekick, a veteran of other battles in the past, is now his chauffeur, driving his Maserati. Early in the play they are visited by a big-time disc jockey, Galactic Jack, who shows up with his charts and reports that Hoss is still "a shootin' star...high flyin' and no mistake." Presumably a man named *Galactic* should know who is or who is not a star in the music galaxy. "Jack" of course is a slang term for money. At the conclusion, when Hoss is defeated by Crow, he puts a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger. Becky will get his Maserati and Crow his position on the charts. The aborted suicide of *Cowboy Mouth* has become a real suicide in *The Tooth of Crime*.

In the dozen or more plays since *The Tooth of Crime* Shepard has paid somewhat less attention to personal names, though there are some examples which should be noted. In *Curse of the Starving Class* (1977), the son's name, *Wesley*, resembles the father's name, *Weston*; similarly the daughter's name, *Emma*, resembles the mother's name, *Ella*. Shepard may well be pointing out the resemblances between the two characters in each set to counterbalance their differences. The other names in the play are undistinguished. In the next family drama, *Buried Child* (1978), the father is called *Dodge*, which well suits his penchant for avoiding family responsibilities; it is of course also the name of an automobile (Shepard loves cars) and a Western city. The wife's name, *Halie*, may come from the fact that she frequently has to yell at her husband because of the physical and emotional distance between them; that

is, she hails him. The grandson, representing Shepard himself, is named *Vince*. Here the name may be ironic; he is not successful (*Vincent* means "conquering") in reestablishing his family roots. The really interesting situation in this play is that *the buried child has no name*. That fits in with the mysterious circumstances of his birth. He may be Halie's son, but who is the father—Dodge, or his son Tilden, or even a perfect stranger? The battling brothers in *True West* (1980) are called *Lee* and *Austin*, both stereotypical southern or southwestern names with obvious associations with Robert E. Lee and Stephen F. Austin. The flaky mother is given the generic appellation of *Mom*; a comic figure, she is as vague and unconcerned as Ella in *Curse of the Starving Class*. If this is a picture of Shepard's mother or motherhood in general, it is a disturbing one. Shepard's mothers are hardly more appealing than his father figures. The Hollywood producer is given the vaguely Jewish name of *Saul Kimmer*, the only Jewish name in Shepard's plays and one of the very few examples of the inclusion of a family name together with a first name. The title *True West* appears to be as significant as the names of the characters. The West of myths and legend may well be dead as Austin, contrary to Lee, affirms. In *Fool for Love* (1983) the passionate incestuous lovers are called simply *Eddie* and *May*, two lower-class names. May's date, Martin ("warlike"), is ironically named, for he is a very mild mannered, gentle, and naive individual, in a contrast to Eddie. The father is simply called *The Old Man*. Like Dodge and countless other fathers in Shepard, he is selfish and repugnant.[11] In his latest and longest play, *A Lie of the Mind* (1985) the names are totally unremarkable, although the title itself is a clever pun ("lie" as "layout," "lie" as "falsehood").

The five dramas of family conflict just mentioned mark a turn in Shepard's career to a greater degree of seriousness and realism together with a simultaneous diminishing of reliance on significant personal names. It is as though the comic imagination which marked the earlier absurdist and satirical plays (those prior to 1972) lent itself more easily to fanciful, imaginative naming. The recent dramas have become more somber, more violent, and much more ugly, containing no single character with whom we can identify. For this reader, at least, *The Tooth of Crime* in 1972 is Shepard's high point, the one play so far in which Shepard has succeeded in creating a sympathetic central character who might be called tragic in the Sophoclean sense. His downfall is truly majestic, awakening pity and fear in the audience. Aristotle would recognize Hoss, the rock-and-roll cowboy with *hubris*. *The Tooth of*

Crime is also a play which contains a very imaginative use of names. There might just be a lesson here. Seriousness is not incompatible with a comic imagination, and any play, whether serious or not, can profit from a judicious selection of names.

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Notes

1. The present paper is based upon a talk given at the Annual Meeting of the American Name Society held in December, 1986, in New York City. I am grateful to Professor Leonard R.N. Ashley, of Brooklyn College, for suggesting the topic and for his criticism of my first draft.

2. From Shepard's program for *Cowboy Mouth*, as quoted by Shewey (80-81).

3. In *The Holy Ghostly* the father is called *Pop* and the son (significantly) *Ice*. The conflict is related to the geological conflict of fire and ice. Readers may recall Robert Frost's poem of the same title. On the importance of the father- son conflict in Shepard see Mottram (46, 132ff.). Mottram also notes that the conflict shifts from father-son relationship to man-woman relationship in *Fool for Love* (1983) and adds that May in that play, opposite to Eddie, is "free of fantasies, a realist capable of lasting human commitment, and the only fully developed and significant female character in all of Shepard's works...perhaps a forecast of what is to come"(157). Mottram's book appeared before *A Lie of the Mind* (1986), and his "forecast" was only partly correct. The play deals almost equally with the father-son relationship and the man-woman relationship. One of the sons, Jake, has provoked his father into having a fatal accident; he later matches this brutality by beating his wife into a severely brain-damaged condition. The other father is still alive but very selfish and cold to his wife, son, and daughter. Both fathers are inspired by the author's father. Tender love between men and women is as elusive as ever in Shepard, but the blame is put here mainly on the men. The play contains no really admirable characters, male or female.

4. The doctor's name is actually spelled "Sheppard."

5. It is characteristic that Shepard would name a son after a romantic outlaw, presumably akin to himself. If the child had been a girl, she was to be named Kachina, after the Hopi Indian spirit, reflecting Sam's interest in American Indian lore and in the supernatural. As for his wife's name, it is the same as that of the heroine in Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth*. O-Lan, Shewey points out, is the name of a small red flower that grows wild in China (75).

6. The character of Joy in the early play *Chicago* (1965) was modeled upon Joyce Aaron, an actress with whom he had been living at the time. The title of the play may simply have come from the fact that Shepard followed her when she had to move to Chicago (Oumano 18). Shepard's wife, O-Lan, appears as Oolan in *Forensic and the Navigators*.

7. Mottram remarks: "From the beginning, Shepard has rejected traditional notions of character in favor of figures lacking the precise definition as psychological and social entities. This makes for characters who do not encourage audience identification but rather function as flexible mouthpieces of the author. It also necessitates separating action from character and ascribing its motivation to the author directly. The audience's sense of character, therefore, comes less from mimesis than it does from the language itself and from the signifying aspects of gesture, props, setting, lighting, and music" (113). Shewey observes that by 1973 the thirty-year-old playwright "was getting old enough to realize that underneath the variety of images he had been playing out in his life and work—cowboy, rock star, musician, playwright, father, lover—underneath all those masks was something constant, steady, possibly as old as the hills, something that defines identity, character. If only he could figure out what it was" (161-162). Robert Mazzocco, in a very thoughtful and well-balanced overview of Shepard's achievements, finds his characters "rarely separable or memorable; they have none of the distinctiveness, the embroidery of portraiture of Blanche Du Bois, or Willy Loman....(His) characters, as Elizabeth Hardwick has observed, are not so much characters as *actors*, members of some sort of

revolutionary repertory company where the impresario is of course Shepard himself" (22). In 1980 the playwright himself told an interviewer that although he thought character a "corny idea," he was becoming interested in it "on a big scale" (see Coe 122). Nevertheless, recent criticism continues to complain about Shepard's characters. Sheila Rabillard remarks, "Shepard's characters seem to exist in a vivid present only.... (Their) behavior seems inexplicable, obsessive, or perhaps merely conventionalized" (64).

8. The Yahoos in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* may also come to mind; they too are depraved creatures constantly searching for treasure.

9. Despite Cavale's own explanation, her name remains rather unclear. *Cavale* is not a proper name in Romance languages. The idea of "escape" may follow from the French root *cheval.* Perhaps Shepard was thinking that the visions, the crow, and the lobster formed a cavalry parade and thus a kind of "escape." Another possibility is that Cavale's name relates to her *cavalier* attitude toward the men she controls.

10. Shewey (91) identifies the title and gives an English translation.

11. If not personally attractive, he is theatrically interesting in the way that he serves as a kind of Greek chorus commenting on the action. Some readers may also find him reminiscent of the Ghost in *Hamlet* in that he can be seen and heard only by his son. Though he addresses his daughter, May, she cannot see or hear him.

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