Fool for Love Study Guide

Fool for Love by Sam Shepard

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Introduction

Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* is arguably the playwright's best known play. Focusing, as many of Shepard' s plays do, on the dark side of life in the West, *Fool for Love* was first produced at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco in February, 1983, before moving to Off-Broadway at the Circle Repertory Theatre in May of that year. Shepard himself directed these original productions, winning Obie Awards for his writing and directing as well as the award for best new American play.

Critics gave *Fool for Love* mixed reviews. The play is primarily a struggle, mostly of words, between two on-again/off-again lovers, Eddie and May. By the end of the play, it is revealed that this is an incestuous relationship between half-siblings. Some of the dissenting critics found the dialogue between them, especially at the beginning of the play, to be cliched. Others believed that Shepard was covering territory and themes that he had dealt with to better effect in plays such as *Buried Child* and *True West,* adding nothing new and going nowhere fast. Critics who praised the play found the character of May to be one of the first strong, autonomous women created by Shepard. Some critics also found the device of the Old Man, a ghostlike presence on stage, to be very effective.

Most critics agreed that with this new play, Shepard continued his exploration of the mythic American West□particularly as it was portrayed in the pulp entertainment of the 1950s and 1960s□and its extrapolation to contemporary environments and relationships. As Frank Rich wrote in the *New York Times, ' 'Fool for Love* is a western for our time. We watch a pair of figurative gunslingers fight to the finish□not with bullets, but with piercing words that give ballast to the weight of a nation's buried dreams."

Author Biography

Shepard was born Samuel Shepard Rogers III on November 5, 1943, in Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He was the son of Samuel Shepard and Jane Elaine (Schook) Rogers. His father was an Army officer, and Shepard grew up on military bases. The family eventually settled in Duarte, California, where Shepard's father bought a farm. Shepard attended Mount San Antonio Junior College in Walnut, California, for several years, studying agriculture.

As a teenager, Shepard's home life grew increasingly difficult; his father had become an abusive alcoholic and father and son frequently were at odds. In 1963, Shepard left home for New York City, seeking work as an actor. On the bus ride to New York, Shepard changed his named from Steve Rogers, as he had been known all his life, to Sam Shepard. The next year his first play, entitled *Cowboys,* was produced. Through his work as both a writer and actor, Shepard became something of a cult celebrity in New York City's East Village in the 1960s and early-1970s.

Shepard wrote numerous Off-Broadway and Off- Off-Broadway plays (several of which won Obie Awards), several screenplays (including *Zabriskie Point,* with four others), and appeared in numerous experimental theatre productions. Many of Shepard's plays featured characters and myths culled from the vanishing American West as well as more general topics pertaining to American culture. Shepard was married in 1969 to actress O-Lan Jones, with whom he had a son, Jesse. Shepard and his family spent 1971-74 in England, where he wrote some of his best-known early plays, notably 1971's and 1972's The Tooth of Crime.

Upon his return to the United States, Shepard's work took on new dimensions. By the late-1970s, Shepard began acting in feature films. He also continued to write important plays, many of which focused on broken families, difficult relationships between men and women, and the individual's quest for identity. In 1979, Shepard received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play, *Buried Child*. Shepard's career as a movie actor also grew. He appeared in such notable films as *Days of Heaven* (1979) and *The Right Stuff* (1983). In 1983, he worked with Jessica Lange in Frances, becoming romantically involved with her. After divorcing his first wife, Shepard and Lange became a couple and had two children together, Hannah and Sam Walker.

The year 1983 was big one for Shepard, in addition to appearing in two high profile films and meeting his life partner, Lange, he expanded his theatrical influence considerably. He directed the original production of *Fool for Love* at Circle Repertory Company in New York City. He received two Obie Awards, one for his directing effort and the other for the best new American play. Two years later, in 1985, Shepard wrote the screenplay for Robert Altman's film adaptation of *Fool for Love* and played the role of Eddie in the film.

Since then, Shepard has continued to write and direct plays, including the 1986 family play *A Lie of the Mind*. He has also written several screenplays, including *Paris, Texas*and *Silent Tongue*. Shepard spent much of the late-1980s and 1990s acting in

numerous films and television movies, including *Baby Boom,* Thunderheart, Purgatory, and *Dash & Lilly,* while experimenting with different theatrical forms including adaptation and comedy. By the late-1990s, his reputation was solidified as one of the greatest living American playwrights.

Plot Summary

Fool for Love opens in a cheap, sparsely furnished motel room on the edge of the Mojave desert. May, a woman in her early thirties, sits on the edge of the bed, staring at the floor. Eddie, a man in his late thirties, is dressed in cowboy gear and sits in a chair at the table. Eddie assures May that he is not leaving her. May accuses him of having another woman's smell on his fingers. May worries that he will erase her and threatens to kill the other woman. Eddie tries to calm her down, saying that he has come thousands of miles to see her. May still accuses him of being with a rich woman. Eddie admits he took someone out to dinner once, but May believes there is more to it.

Eddie tries to change the subject. He tells May that he is taking her back. He bought land in Wyoming. May does not want to move because she has a job now as a cook and does not want the kind of life Eddie is offering. Eddie promises to take care of her. He rises to get his things from his car, but May is not sure. Before he gets out the door, she kisses him, then knees him in the groin. Eddie falls to the ground. She goes into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Eddie lies on the floor and begins to talk to the Old Man, who has been on stage since the beginning of the play. Like Eddie, the Old Man is dressed in cowboy gear. He sits in a rocking chair, drinking whiskey. It is indicated that he is not a real person but a figment of May and Eddie's imaginations. May comes out of the bathroom and changes into a sexy red dress. She tells Eddie that she hates him and that she has someone coming to visit her. Eddie immediately becomes jealous and leaves. May pulls her suitcase out from under the bed and quickly packs it. When she hears Eddie returning, she hides it.

Eddie returns with a shotgun and some tequila. He offers May some of his alcohol, but she claims she is on the wagon. Eddie questions her about the man who will visit. Eddie tells May they will both sit and wait for him. May does not want Eddie to meet her date. May complains that Eddie has disrupted her life for far too long. Eddie reminds her that they will always be connected. May asks him to leave. Eddie calls her a traitor and leaves with his gun.

As soon as Eddie leaves, May calls out his name and sinks to the floor. The Old Man begins to tell a story that indicates that he is May's father. The story concerns a car ride the Old Man, May, and her mother took through Utah. May hears Eddie coming back, and she quickly scrambles to sit on the bed, staring at the tequila. Eddie comes in and May takes a drink. Eddie tells May that he almost left, but then he realized that May was probably making up the story about the date to get even with him. May says that she can never get even with him.

May accuses Eddie of not realizing that it is over. Eddie wants to know if she has had sex with this man yet. She does not answer him but wants to know what he plans on doing when the man comes. Eddie says that he will hurt him. May tries to leave, but Eddie grabs hold of her. May screams, and Eddie takes her inside. Eddie promises to be good and introduce himself as her cousin, not her brother. May does not want Eddie

to meet the man and threatens to call off the date. Just as she is about to leave, headlights stream into the window. Eddie promises May that he will not hurt the man.

May opens the door and realizes that it is not her date because the car is a Mercedes-Benz. Eddie tells her to close the door and come back in, but May says someone in the car is staring at her. Eddie hides behind the bed. He tells May to get away from the door. The woman in the car fires her pistol at Eddie's truck, flashes her headlights, and honks continuously on her horn. May begins fighting Eddie as he drags her down to the ground. May accuses him of bringing this woman here, asserting that this is the woman she suspects Eddie of dating. Eddie forces her to stay down. The woman in the Mercedes leaves. Eddie admits that woman is crazy. May asks if he has had sex with her yet. Eddie finds that his windshield has been blown out.

May turns on the lights, but Eddie turns them off. Eddie wants them to leave. May tells him that she is not going with him. The Old Man starts to speak again, about how Eddie and May both look their mothers not like him or his family. The focus returns to Eddie, who tells May that he will not leave, and he will track her down wherever she goes. May does not believe his love will last, because he has professed his fidelity before and left her numerous times over the past fifteen years. May tells him she does not want him anymore. Eddie tries to push her into the bathroom, but she screams. At that moment, Martin, May's date, pushes himself inside. Martin tackles Eddie and almost punches him before May stops him. Martin says he heard the screams and thought something was wrong. May introduces Eddie as her cousin. Eddie immediately contradicts her, calling her a liar and presenting himself as her half-brother.

Martin explains his tardiness. He forgot that he had to water the football fields. Martin apologizes for knocking Eddie over, saying that he thought May was in trouble. Eddie says that she is in trouble. May says that they were going to leave right before he came, but Eddie contradicts her again and continues to toy with Martin. May tries to get Martin to leave with her, but Eddie says that it would be better to stay and tell stories. May goes into the bathroom. Martin tries to leave, but Eddie stops him and slams him against the wall. Eddie tells Martin that he and May know each other from high school, that she is his half-sister. Eddie continues with his story, informing Martin that they did not know they were related until after they began a sexual relationship.

Eddie elaborates the story further, and the Old Man chimes in on the details. The Old Man had two separate lives with two women, May's mother and Eddie's mother, and he would go back and forth between them. One day, the Old Man took Eddie to May's mother's house, and that is when Eddie met May. May breaks in and tells Eddie that he is crazy and a liar. Martin tries to leave several times, but Eddie makes him stay and listen to the story. May finishes it for him, telling Martin that her mother figured out something was going on and followed the Old Man around until she found the other woman. The Old Man left both women soon after, and by this time, Eddie and May were seeing each other. May's mother tried to break them up, but it did not work. Eddie's mother eventually committed suicide. The Old Man claims not to have known this. The Old Man is appalled as Eddie and May come together and kiss.

Outside, the rich woman in the Mercedes returns and sets fire to Eddie's truck, freeing his horses. Martin informs Eddie of this, and Eddie goes out to check on it. May continues to pack. Martin offers to help May, asking if she will be going with Eddie. She says that he is already gone. May leaves the room.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Fool for Love is a one-act play that focuses on two characters, Eddie and May, and their periodic attempts at a relationship. As the play opens, May sits despairingly on the edge of a bed in a rundown desert motel, while Eddie tries to convince her that he will not leave her this time. May's disbelief stems from Eddie's recent affair with a wealthy woman, whose scent still lingers on him. May wants Eddie to leave, yet is in anguish when he does.

May tells Eddie that she plans to kill him, along with the woman with whom he had an affair. The fact that Eddie has driven over two thousand miles to see May does not alter her disbelief in his sincerity about staying with her this time. Eddie says that his plan is to take May with him to live in his trailer in Wyoming, but she is not swayed, telling him that she has a job as a cook where she is and doesn't want to interrupt her life again just because he has shown up.

Having made the decision to take some revenge, May lures Eddie into a kiss and then knees him in the groin so that he drops to the floor in pain. May shuts herself in the bathroom, and for the first time, an old man is revealed on the stage; he asks Eddie whether or not he believes himself to be a fantasist, telling him that being a dreamer is a way of allowing anything to come true. Eddie agrees.

At this point, May emerges from the bathroom dressed to go out and reveals that she has a date coming for her at any time; her announcement enrages Eddie, and they fight once more. This argument is a scene that is all too familiar to the pair, and Eddie exits to get his clothes from his truck. While he is out of the room, May hurriedly shoves some of her clothes in a suitcase and puts it back under the bed before Eddie comes back in.

Returning with a bottle of tequila and a shotgun, Eddie interrogates May about the man she is interested in and resolves to stay put to meet him. Then jealousy overtakes Eddie; he calls May a traitor and storms out. May dissolves in grief and claws the walls, eventually sinking to her knees.

From the corner of the stage, the old man resurfaces and relates a story as if he is speaking to May; she cannot hear him, though. He tells of driving with May and her mother through Utah one night when May was a baby. May was crying and wouldn't be comforted by her mother. Finally, the old man had stopped the car and walked with May out into the dark night, until they realized they had wandered into the middle of a herd of cattle. According to the old man, May was silent in the car for the balance of that trip.

Suddenly, May hears Eddie, and she composes herself so that he won't be able to tell that she's been crying. Eddie taunts May for having a drink, and May can't understand what Eddie is doing by lassoing the bedposts with his rodeo ropes. Eddie admits that

he's still trying to impress her and that this should prove that the spark between them hasn't died. Eddie's real intention is to pass the time until May's date shows up, and he can challenge him to fight over May.

As the two of them continue their argument, the light from two headlights shines in the front window. Assuming that it is her date, May opens the door and is surprised to see a woman sitting in the car staring back at her. When May tells Eddie that it's not her date, but a woman driving a Mercedes sedan, he knows right away that his ex-lover has tracked him down.

Fortunately, Eddie is able to push May out of the doorway and down to the floor just as gun shots ring out. Finally, the car leaves, and Eddie looks out to find that the windshield of his truck has been shot out. Swearing that the woman means nothing to him anymore, Eddie tries again to convince May to leave with him and forget about everyone else.

Lights come up on the old man again as Eddie and May stand looking at each other, suspended in time. The old man says he thinks neither of them looks like him, and that there's really no guarantee that they are his children. The circumstances of their conceptions are long lost facts for him. The light fades on the old man and he is silent once more.

Trying to convince May of his sincerity is quite a task, as Eddie's promises have now run on for fifteen years with no result. More headlights appear in the window, and thinking that they signal the return of the woman, May threatens harm as she grabs Eddie's shotgun.

The door crashes open, and in jumps Martin, May's date. The commotion has led him to believe that May is in trouble, and May stops him just before he punches Eddie in the face. May is able to calm both men and introduces Eddie as her cousin. Immediately, Eddie begins to challenge Martin on his intentions toward May, and the two men spar verbally until May intervenes.

Retreating to the bathroom to freshen up, May takes the chance of leaving them together again; Eddie takes the bait, trying to humiliate Martin about his job and his suitability for May. Finally, Eddie reveals that he and May are not cousins; Martin understands his meaning immediately and tries to leave. Eddie is not finished toying with Martin yet though, and blocks his exit, forcing him to sit and have a drink.

Lights hit the old man again, although he is visible only to Eddie; he extends his Styrofoam cup. Eddie looks at him for a long moment, and then fills the glass, and the three men drink. Emboldened by the liquor, Eddie shares the family secret with Martin; Eddie and May are half brother and sister. Unfortunately, the two had not been aware of the fact until after they had become intimate.

In a state of shock, Martin is hesitant to proceed, so Eddie fills in the missing information for him. Quite simply, they have the same father, who just happened to fall in love twice. Their father was a rambler and would split his time between Eddie and his

mother and May and her mother. Neither woman ever knew what was going on or that the other woman and child even existed. All Eddie remembers is his mother's grief whenever his father was gone and how he and his mother would run outside to meet him when they heard his old Studebaker coming toward the house.

For years, the man would just appear and disappear in Eddie's life, until one day he stopped leaving. He was restless, though, and would walk the fields all day and all night, with Eddie watching him from his bedroom window. The old man interjects that he was making a decision at that time.

To finish the story, Eddie brings Martin to his feet, and they walk the hotel room side by side. One night, his father had taken Eddie on one of these nocturnal journeys. Keeping up with his father's strides as best as he could, Eddie walked for miles beside the man. Father and son continued walking past all the darkened stores in town, until finally they reached a little white house with a red awning glowing from the porch light.

Not expecting that they were going visiting, Eddie was shocked when his father walked boldly up to the door and rang the bell. At the sight of the man, a beautiful red-haired woman fell into his arms, and they both wept at their reunion. Eddie had looked past the woman to see a girl looking back at him and knew at that moment that he and this girl would always be in love.

May has heard Eddie's story and chastises him for telling such a ridiculous tale to Martin. Anxious to leave, May tries to get Martin out the door; Eddie won't allow it though, because he wants to finish the story. May asserts her rights at this point and demands that they listen to the truth now.

May says that it's true that her mother, the beautiful red-haired woman, had been in love with Eddie's father. Obsessed with him, her mother tracked him from town to town on little scraps of information left in his trail. Apparently, Eddie's father lived in fear that the two women in his life would eventually find out about each other, so he never stayed in one place very long. May remembers the day when she and her mother came to the town where the man was living, found his house, and got close enough to see the dinner on the plates in the kitchen.

Soon after the man realized that May and her mother were in town, he disappeared, never to be seen again. The grief that overtook May's mother didn't phase May, however; she herself was madly in love with Eddie at the time and could only see her mother's grief as pathetic. Eddie and May were obsessed with one another, to the point that May got sick enough to be taken to the doctor. May's mother knew what the problem was, though, and begged her daughter and Eddie to stop seeing each other. They wouldn't be dissuaded. Finally, May's mother approached Eddie's mother-a meeting that resulted in Eddie's mother's suicide.

Light hits the old man again, and he is standing now, protesting this version of the story; no one had ever told him that Eddie's mother had killed herself. To Eddie, who cannot hear him, he demands some defense for the male point of view on the event. Instead of

speaking to the others, Eddie faces the old man and tells him that the gun had been the old man's duck hunting rifle and that that had been the first time his mother had ever held a gun. The old man is shocked that no one had ever informed him, but Eddie reminds the man that his disappearance made any form of contact impossible.

The old man now moves toward May, who cannot see him, and he tries to tell her that her mother drew him, even though he had told her he could never be in her life formally. It was impossible to resist the love that she offered him, though, because he felt complete when he was with her.

Eddie and May continue to stare at each other as the old man continues, this time speaking to Eddie. The old man implores Eddie to get May to understand the situation in a different light. As Eddie and May move closer to each other, the old man pleads for Eddie to stay away from her. If Eddie leaves, the old man has nothing, he says.

Eddie and May embrace and kiss as headlights again bounce into the room, and there is suddenly the sound of collision, breaking glass, and horses neighing wildly. Breaking briefly from the embrace, Eddie looks out to see that his ex-lover has torched his truck and that all the horses it had contained are running loose.

May begins to pack the rest of her things, and Martin offers her a ride if she needs one, although he knows she will probably be leaving with Eddie. May tells Martin that Eddie is gone, and she leaves the room with Martin staring after her.

After May is gone, the old man rises and points to an imaginary picture of Barbara Mandrell hanging on the wall. The play ends with him saying that she is the woman of his dreams and is all his.

Analysis

May is angry at the beginning of the play; having thought that she might finally be free from a complicated past, she is unhappy that Eddie has again shown up at her door. Their love-hate relationship has continued for fifteen years in spite of their being half brother and sister. Eddie suffers from the same affliction that had haunted his father; he is repeatedly unfaithful, and yet something makes him return to May time after time.

Sharing the same father, neither Eddie nor May has a healthy perspective on what constitutes a loving relationship, and yet neither can fight the attraction that is between them. Eddie's denial of the truth of their past shows his loose grasp on reality, while May fights desperately for something to hold on to, even if it is harmful.

Attempting to create a normal life, May has acquired a job and a new boyfriend, although there is an undercurrent of restlessness in her that will not allow her to stay in this ordinary place. There is a primal connection between Eddie and May, which becomes evident as Eddie shows off his rodeo skills in order to impress her, and as she claws the walls with grief when he leaves. The theme of connectedness in spite of trial

runs through this play; for the two main characters, each of them is the only link the other has to the past.

The technique of using the old man as the ghost of their father is quite effective, as he watches the action and comments on his side of the story. The old man is particularly connected with Eddie, who even looks at him at certain points during the play. It's as if in seeing his father, Eddie is looking at himself regarding the issues of alcohol and infidelity. In the end, the old man releases himself from any culpability for Eddie's mother's suicide, even though his actions had clearly driven her to that act.

The father's weakness has foreshadowed the son's; Eddie is repeating the same transient lifestyle that the old man had pursued, alternately running to and away from love that is offered by many women. In the end, it is clear that the old man has lived a fantasy life and has hoped for his son to do the same, without ever realizing the destruction that those fantasies can cause to others.

Characters

Eddie

Eddie is a cowboy-type in his late thirties. He is the older half-brother of May, with whom he has had an on-again/off-again love affair for fifteen years. Eddie is a liar and unreliable. He has appeared out of nowhere, claiming to have traveled several thousand miles to see May. From the first, May accuses him of having an affair with a rich woman, which Eddie denies. Throughout the course of *Fool for Love,* May's suspicions prove correct as the rich woman shoots out Eddie's windshield, sets fire to his truck, and frees his horses. Eddie also promises to not tell Martin, a man with whom May has a date, that they are brother and sister, but Eddie does anyway. He also tells Martin about his odd relationship with his half-sister. Eddie also has a violent streak, and threatens May physically several times. He tries to control May physically and emotionally, but she does not give in. May allows Eddie to pull her down at one point, but she ultimately rises above his pettiness. Though Eddie claims to want May throughout the play, at the end, he leaves without her.

Martin

Martin is May's date for the evening. He works as a gardener and day laborer. When he first arrives, May's room is dark and she is screaming. Martin takes action, pulling Eddie off May and slamming him against the wall. When May tells Martin that Eddie is her cousin and there was nothing wrong, Martin apologizes. May has already described him as "gentle" and he lives up to this description. Martin does not display much shock when Eddie and May reveal the nature of their relationship. After Eddie leaves, Martin offers to help May, but she refuses.

May

May is the younger half-sister of Eddie. She is in her early thirties. May lives in the motel room where all the action of *Fool for Love* takes place. She has recently gotten a job as a cook. May has been getting on with her life after putting up with Eddie loving and leaving her for fifteen years. Eddie's return upsets May. She claims to smell another woman, a rich woman, on his fingers, and she is right. When May tells Eddie that she has a date that night, Eddie becomes jealous and finds it hard to believe. He cannot accept that May might have been with another man and has her own life.May has not fully accepted it either. She has mixed feelings about Eddie and knows the trouble he can cause. When her date arrives, Eddie sabotages May's relationship with Martin by telling him that he and May are lovers as well as half-siblings. After Eddie leaves at the end, Martin asks May if she is going with him, but May knows Eddie and his habits too well. The half-siblings go their separate ways.

The Old Man

The Old Man is Eddie and May's father. Like Eddie, he dresses in cowboy gear. While he appears as a character on stage, the old man is actually a figment of their imaginations. During the play, the Old Man listens to the discussion between Eddie and May, occasionally commenting on what has been said. He becomes troubled when Eddie and May start talking about their affair and how the Old Man had two separate lives with their mothers. When May reveals that Eddie's mother committed suicide, the Old Man is surprised at the revelation. The Old Man only finds comfort in his imagined marriage with country singer Barbara Mandrell.

Themes

Memories and Reminiscence

Eddie and May's joint past fuels much of *Fool for Love*. Each of them carries their own interpretation of the memory of their relationship. Eddie wants this memory to continue as reality into the future. That is why he has tracked May down to this motel room. May wants to escape the past and move on with her life as a individual. The memories seem to make this choice impossible. At the end of the play, Eddie effectively ends May's potential relationship with Martin by telling him about the roots of he and his half-sister's incestuous affair. May gets her opinion in, too, by finishing Eddie's story from her point of view. Eddie tries to use memory to try to control May, but she has grown beyond his manipulations. May has her own memories of Eddie repeatedly abandoning her; she has learned to use her bad memories of his desertions as reinforcement in refusing him.

Memory also comes into play in another way in *Fool for Love*. According to Shepard' s description, the character of the Old Man is a figment of the siblings' imaginations. He is their father, but not really living in the same way they are. He is an independent reminiscence that addresses his children, primarily Eddie, as needed. The Old Man is more than a memory, however. Through Eddie and May's dialogue, the Old Man becomes upset when he learns that his memory of the past is wrong. While the Old Man knows his double life has caused his children's problematic situation, he learns that May's mother killed herself because of his double dealings. May also says some things that contradict the Old Man's memory of the past. He tries to get Eddie to make May see things his way but fails.

Sex, Love, and Passion

Many of the memories Eddie and May share are of a sexual nature. Their feelings of love, hate, and jealousy drive *Fool for Love*. Since the moment they first met, before they knew they had the same father, Eddie and May have had a mutual passion. Though Eddie claims to love May, he also is involved with another woman, "the countess" as May calls her. During the course of *Fool for Love*, this woman shoots out Eddie's windshield, sets his truck on fire, and frees his horses□all presumably crimes related to her sexual jealousy. Eddie wants to continue his affair with May□and possess her sexually as he has in the past.

May's love is much more conflicted than Eddie' s. When Eddie finds out that she will have a date that evening with Martin, his passion takes on a fury not unlike the rich woman's. Eddie proceeds to destroy May's potential new love with stories of their incestuous relationship. Similarly, while May wants to move on, she also retains some of her passion for Eddie.

Such uncontrolled passion is what led to the doomed situation in *Fool for Love* in the first place. The Old Man had two separate lives with two women. He fell in love with both of them. Indeed, the Old Man inadvertently introduced Eddie to May when the Old Man felt compelled to visit May's mother one evening. The Old Man's sexual sins drove Eddie's mother to suicide and live on in his children's tortured psyches.

Family

The fact that Eddie, May, and the Old Man are immediate family adds an unusual, volatile twist to the situation in the play. Over the course of the drama, Shepard drops hints that May and Eddie are related. It is not until the end that Shepard reveals that they are half-siblings and the Old Man is their father. In light of this revelation, Eddie and May's relationship is all the more disturbing. Yet while this is not a normal family, there are the same kind of misunderstandings and personal dynamics that exist in normal family relationships. For example, the Old Man led a double life with two women, resulting in May and Eddie. This Old Man is supposed to be a figment of Eddie and May's conscious, yet he disappeared while Eddie and May were still in high school. He did not know about the consequences of his disappearance. Eddie's mother killed herself, and May's mother essentially shut down emotionally. This kind of pain could be found in any kind of family, let alone the unusual one found in *Fool for Love*.

Style

Settings

Fool for Love takes place in a motel on the edge of the Mojave Desert in California. All the action is confined to one motel room, occupied by May. It is a cheap room with faded paintings and old fashioned floors and furnishings. Adjacent to the room is a bathroom and the parking lot. The Old Man sits in a rocker inside the room, from which he can observe the proceedings and comment as necessary. Because this room is May's and a symbol of her growing sense of independence, Eddie's presence seems like an invasion as he tries to control her within it and lure her out of it. May ends up leaving on her own, but the Old Man, her father, remains, as he will be part of her consciousness forever.

Sound Effects

The tensions in *Fool for Love* are economically and effectively emphasized by sound effects. Every time Eddie or May bangs into a wall, the stage directions call for it to "boom." According to the stage directions, the front and bathroom doors are supposed to be specially constructed to make the boom louder when they are slammed shut. This effect underscores the volatile emotions at hand.

Eddie's other woman, "The Countess," never makes a physical appearance, but her presence is made known by sound and light effects. The audience sees the head beams of her Mercedes and the sound of the car pulling up in front of May's room. The countess's anger is amplified by the sounds of her pistol shooting out the window of Eddie's truck,her releasing Eddie's horses from their carrier, and, finally, her setting his truck on fire. These sound effects make real May's suspicions about Eddie, and, in turn, give Eddie an excuse to physically protect May from The Countess.

Monologue

Near the end of *Fool for Love,* May and Eddie each have long monologues which allow them to tell their version of their shared past. When Eddie finds himself alone with Martin, May's date, he takes the opportunity to relate his and his sister's past. Eddie does this to shock Martin, scare him away so that he can have May all to himself. Eddie tells Martin about when he first met May, not knowing that she shared the same father as he. Eddie emphasizes the fact that they were in love from that first moment onwards. May overhears this story from the bathroom and interrupts when Eddie makes this claim. Then, in her monologue, she gets the opportunity to tell her side of the story. She finishes what Eddie has started, telling Martin what happened after they met. May describes their meeting, the discovery that their father was leading a double life. Their father left both of them. Eddie's mother committed suicide, while May's mother withdrew

into herself. While Eddie only sees the good in their loving, May sees the tragic swells that have touched other lives.

The Old Man does not like May's version. Yet he, too, has a monologue near the beginning of the play. He describes an incident from May's childhood when he was living with her and her mother. May was a child upset during a long car ride. The Old Man stopped near a field and walked her around in it. The cows they came across had a calming effect on the child, and May was quiet the rest of the time. The Old Man's story is the first time he acknowledges that he is May's father. It makes him seem human and compassionate, not the kind of unfeeling womanizer who would lead a dual life with two separate families.

Historical Context

In 1983, the United States was a country of contradictions. Its president was Republican Ronald Reagan, who served a total of two terms with his conservative, anti-Communist platform. Reagan was a former movie actor who often played western hero roles; his presidency was greatly informed by his persona as an actor, as he co-opted heroic cowboy rhetoric in his diplomatic dealings and made highly effective use of his television-ready talents. Reagan was also seen as family man, though he was the first president to have been divorced. Many Americans responded to Reagan's role as president, though a number of critics, finding the former thespian's politics superficial and showy, complained that the executive's position was little more than that, a role essayed by an actor.

In 1982, a five-year recession ended for the United States. While inflation in 1983 was only 3.2%, the economy was only relatively prosperous despite Reagan's promises. Reagan's government promoted supply-side economics and de-industrialization. There were many mergers and acquisitions as the government promoted deregulation for big industries. Tax cuts were given to the rich and the government spent a great deal of money building up the military (the era marked the largest peacetime growth of U.S. defense in history). The American stock market was in the midst of a bull market (a trading trend in which high optimism results in aggressive trading). While there were tax increases for social security, the wealthy had more disposable income.

Along those lines, the lifestyle of the wealthy became a popular topic for a large part of the country. Appearances were important and glitz ruled on television, movies, and books. Popular television shows included fictional soap operas such as *Dynasty* and *Dallas* and infotainment mainstay *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.* Material success was seen as important. Books like *Hollywood Wives* by Jackie Collins in 1983 also promoted glitzy lifestyle. In 1983, movies such as *Risky Business* and *Trading Places* promoted a ' 'have it all'' mentality. This consumer boom stretched to the common man but not far. David Mamet's 1983 play *Glengarry Glen Ross* showed the darker side of the pursuit of material wealth.

Common people did not do as well as their upper class counterparts. They did not benefit from economic prosperity. There was a decline in real wages. At the beginning of 1983, the number of unemployed was 11.5 million. By the end, it was about 35 million. There was more corporate uncertainty as heavy industry became deindustrialized and deregulated. The homeless rate increased about 25% per year in the 1980s. There was increased violence on American streets and handgun sales boomed. There was also increased tensions between races, and child abuse became a national crisis.

Some popular musicians expressed the turmoil of middle- and lower- class life. In 1983, there was a Rock against Reagan tour, organized to protest the president's economic policies that favored the minority rich while penalizing the lower- and middle-classes. Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band also were quite popular in the mid-1980s. Springsteen, a "normal guy" from New Jersey, looked and dressed like a working man.

He promoted patriotism, a hot topic at the time, yet questioned America's values in songs like his 1984 hit "Born in the U.S.A." Springsteen was also one of the earliest artists to use music videos to promote his songs on MTV.

Another segment of society that suffered in the 1980s were farmers. There was a serious farm crisis during this period. Farmers produced more than they could sell. Land prices fell sharply. Many farmers had heavy debt and numerous family farms went bankrupt. The federal government was forced to subsidize farms and farmers. In 1985, the first Farm Aid benefit concert was held to help troubled farmers pay off their debts. Several movies were also made on this subject beginning in 1984. One, featuring Shepard the actor, was called *Country*

Critical Overview

Critics of the original productions of *Fool for Love* were divided from the first. Even those that praised the play, however, qualified their kudos. For example, Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* wrote, ' 'It's a classic rattlesnake riff by Shepard, the poet laureate of America's emotional Badlands. *Fool for Love* is minor Shepard, but nobody can match the sheer intensity he generates in his dramatizing of lyric obsessiveness." Frank Rich of the *New York Times* concurred: *"Fool for Love* isn't the fullest Shepard creation one ever hopes to encounter, but, at this point in this writer's prolific 20-year career, he almost demands we see his plays as a continuum: they bleed together."

ven critics who disliked *Fool for Love* found Shepard's production worthy of note. Robert Brustein, in the *New Republic,* wrote, "There is nothing very thick or complicated about either the characters or the plot, and the ending lacks resolution. But *Fool for Love* is not so much a text as a legend, not so much a play as a scenario for stage choreography, and under the miraculous direction of the playwright, each moment is rich with balletic nuances." Brustein credited Shepard's direction and his actors for the success of the play. Brustein ended his review by saying they "exalt what in other hands might have been a slight, unfinished script into an elegiac myth of doomed love." William Kleb of *Theater* agreed, writing *' 'Fool for Love* comes across as a kind of psycho-sexual free-for-all, or nightmare, and Shepard's production magnifies and intensifies the violence of its action and imagery."

Some critics found the expression of fury in *Fool for Love* to be problematic to the point of monotony. Walter Kerr of the *New York Times* wrote, ' 'Physically and mechanically the [original] production knows what it is about. I wish we did. I say it because Mr. Shepard does not want us ever to be certain of what his door-slamming dance of rage is meant to signify." Kerr went on to say, "The evening flirts with a fundamental boredom because of a strong sense that, under the makeup, there is nobody there." His colleague Rich concurred, noting, "The knockabout physical humor sometimes becomes excessive both in the writing and in the playing; there are also, as usual, some duller riffs that invite us to drift away." T. E. Kalem of Time took it a step further, writing "Even the love play is ominous. With his cowboy spurs and boots Shepard's symbols for the untrammeled, virile male Eddie hurls himself against walls, somersaults across the floor and swings his lariat to rope in bedposts and random chairs. This is an amusing form of sexual intimidation, but it does not wholly evade silliness."

Kalem is one of several critics who found the impact of the incest angle less than satisfying. Kalem wrote that ' 'in an effort to give a vivid but scarcely mind-churning work more mythic gravity, Shepard makes known long the way that the lovers are half-sister and half-brother. Somehow this lacks impact, merely suggesting that incest is the most potent brand of sibling rivalry." Kleb agreed: "incest has little or no real function in the development of the central conflict of the play, and it is a matter of moral indifference not only to the characters but, here, to the playwright as well."

Critics who found *Fool for Love*problematic believed the play meanders. Catharine Hughes in *America,* wrote: "As in *True West,* it is the old versus the new West, lust versus love, love versus hate, with the innocent and oblivious Martin caught in the violent crossfire. And, I regret to say, it winds up going no place. Shepard seems incapable of bringing it into focus." John Simon of *New York* held a similar view, stating that Shepard ' 'makes, I regret to say, less sense of himself here than others have been known to make of him in the past, but that maybe because *Fool for Love*is a particularly opaque and inconclusive play, with the kind of open ending that does not so much make you want to speculate about it as shut the door behind it." Not all critics agreed, however. Rich of the *New York Times* felt that "it could be argued, perhaps, that both the glory and the failing of Mr. Shepard's art is its extraordinary afterlife: His words often play more feverishly in the mind after they're over than they do while they're before us in the theater."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
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Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso compares and contrasts the play and the film version ofFool for Love.

Sam Shepard wrote the stage play for *Fool for Love* in 1983. Two years later, Shepard wrote the screenplay for the filmed version of *Fool for Love* and appeared in the movie as Eddie. Thus, Shepard was able to make his mark on two different versions of the same story. He had to meld each to the demands of their respective genres but also had a chance to expand on and explore different ideas within his core story. In this essay, the differences and similarities between the two versions will be discussed, as well as what these aspects say about the core story.

At the heart of both the film and stage versions of *Fool for Love* is the tumultuous relationship between half-siblings Eddie and May. This conflict drives the plot and is the substance of the story. Eddie and May have carried on a long-time affair. There are accusations on both sides of abandonment and disloyalty. Both versions feature the lovers' rat-a-tat arguments, their ' 'coming together" and ' 'falling apart." However, the dialogue in the play seems more intense and unyielding, mostly because of the production demands. In the stage version, *Fool for Love* is performed straight through, with no intermission. There is no break from the tension, no escaping the confrontation. It is an all-out assault on the audience. In the film version, events are broken up a little more. There are breaks and pauses that last much longer because the film allows for longer silences while visual images add to or reflect on the story at hand.

The variations on *Fool for Love's* settings enhances these differences in dialogue and intensity level. The stage requires a very static setting. In the play, Shepard confines his actions to one place, May's motel room. There is no place else to go; the setting is claustrophobic and tense. When the play opens, Eddie is already inside May's space, the confrontation is already in swing. If Shepard had broken his play up into acts or scenes, there could have been more settings, but the play's confining force would have been compromised. As it stands, Eddie is intruding in May's place and invading her life. The Old Man, their father, is present off to one side, rocking in his chair. Shepard specifically says in his stage directions that the Old Man ' 'exists only in the minds of May and Eddie." The Old Man's presence is very unnatural, spiritual, when compared to Eddie's imposing, corporeal presence.

These ideas take on very different forms in the film version. The space is again confined but not merely to May's motel room. The movie uses a whole motel complex, consisting of individual, free-standing motel cabins, a restaurant/bar, a play area for children, a trailer for the Old Man, and a large parking lot. This variety of settings opens up numerous possibilities for expanded scenes. When the movie opens, Eddie is on the road and May is working in the restaurant. Eddie seems much more predatory in the movie, in part because he circles May's new life as an animal would circle its prey.Eddie pulls into the motel complex, and May hides from him within the restaurant. Eddie goes on his way, perhaps thinking he has pulled into the wrong place but returns a short time

later. By then, May has gone to her cabin and locked the front door. Then she hides in the bathroom and locks that door as well. To drive home Eddie's invasion, Shepard has the character break down May's front door. He literally invades her space in the movie.

Eddie has not only physically invaded May's space, he has also invaded her sense of security, of mental stability. The audience can see that May has a job and her own life. These facts are stated but remain questionable in the play. Eddie and May make brief mention of her car, which tipped Eddie off that he was in the right place. There is no car in the play. May seems to have moved on, left her past behind□but for one factor. In the stage play, the Old Man is confined to a rocker on one side of the stage. In the movie, he has a whole trailer to himself with remnants of his past (mostly junk) surrounding it.

At the beginning of the movie, just before Eddie comes to the complex, May watches the Old Man through a window. He watches her back. This implies that May has lived with the Old Man's presence much more than Eddie. She might have a new life, but it is lived in the shadow of the Old Man and her past. Eddie seems free of this constraint. There is nothing to indicate that the Old Man's spirit haunts Eddie the way it does May. The only moment that comes close is when the Old Man invades Eddie's space, checking out his truck while Eddie makes one of his initial confrontations with May. This detail adds a different spin on the triangle between the Old Man, Eddie, and May. The Old Man is much more mobile in the film. He walks around, sometimes hiding in corners, listening and watching events unfold.

Whether or not the Old Man is a figment of Eddie and May's imagination in the film is debatable, but Shepard uses the demands of film to enhance one mythical part of the stage version. In the play, Shepard has Eddie, May, and the Old Man each deliver a monologue that tells part of their collective story. The Old Man talks about an incident when May was a child, crying in the car during a long trip. Eddie tells the first half of the story of how he and May met. May concludes the story. These tales may or may not be true in the stage play. It is hard to tell if they are part of the mythology these characters create about themselves or actual events. In the movie, these stories are told by the same characters, but Shepard uses the visual possibilities of the genre to add to their possible reality.

Shepard enhances these stories with a theme that runs through a large part of the film. Soon after Eddie appears, he goes outside to tend to his horses. May follows him. While they are in the parking lot, a couple and a little girl drive up. The threesome is dressed in 1950s clothing. They are the Old Man, May as a child, and May's mother from decades past. The family checks into the motel. Later, the man leaves, then comes back after a short while. When the man comes back, young May is locked outside and plays on the swing set. She is retrieved by her father a short time later. Before he does so, there is a moment where the young May and the real May look at each other and hug. After the father takes the young May from the adult May, the elder woman lies down in the sand that surrounds the swing set. The Old Man comes over and tells his story about May as a child.

However, the Old Man's story, like the ones Eddie and May tell later in the film, is almost a complete contradiction of the actual events. During each flashbacks, the actual events are shown. The stories match only in places, emphasizing the mythological elements in a way the stage play could never do. For example, in the Old Man's story, he, May's mother, and May are on a car trip, but May is not crying, nor is the mother asleep as he claims. Both are wide awake and silent. The Old Man does take young May into a field filled with cows, but it does not change the child's demeanor to any noticeable degree.

Similarly, Eddie talks about the way the Old Man lived with them and the walk they took one day where he first met May. Many of the details are visually contradictory. For example, Eddie says that his father gave him the first sip of liquor after his father purchased a bottle. The visual story has the Old Man not offering his son anything. However, Eddie and his father do take a walk to a house with a red awning, and Eddie does see a young May. Of the three, May's story matches the visuals the most, implying she is the most honest of the three characters, yet her story still contains several contradictory details. May is right about the fact that Eddie's mother committed suicide, something with which Eddie agrees and the Old Man finds appalling. He cannot tolerate harsh reality as well as his children can.

The movie and the stage play diverge on ' 'reality'' on one, final point. Because the play's action is confined to one room, the audience does not see the Countess (Eddie's other woman) and her Mercedes-Benz nor do they see Eddie's truck and his horses. While there are sound effects to make these elements seem real, the mythical aspects of the play can casts doubts on their existence. In the movie, these elements are shown. Though mere visual representation does not validate reality, the case for the existence of these elements is stronger in the film than the play. Though the Countess does not speak a word, she does step out of a Mercedes-Benz toting a gun. Similarly, there are horses, making Eddie's claims about a new life in Wyoming seem possible. At the end of the movie, after the Countess sets fire to Eddie's truck and May packs her bags to leave, Eddie is shown riding one of his horses to catch up with the Countess. May walks down the road in the opposite direction. What is implied at the end of the stage play becomes reality in the movie.

The stage and film versions of *Fool for Love* retain many of the same story elements but use them quite differently. Each version of the story is distinct. The movie's intensity level is not as sustained as the play's because of the demands of the genre. The play cannot match the visual elements that the film boasts. Ultimately, the film explains what the play implies. The play's intellectual demands on its audience are much greater. The audience must decide what is truth and what is myth as it watches the play unfold. The movie limits possible interpretations because many points left untold in the play are fully realized. Neither version is better than the other but both show the depth of Shepard's ability as both a playwright and screenwriter.

Source: A. Petrusso, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Weales reviews Shepard's play in this excerpt, finding the work to be "at once ambiguous and concrete" in its depiction of a strange love affair.

Shepard's new play is *Fool for Love,* which came to New York from the Magic Theatre of San Francisco in the production Shepard directed for that theater (with which he has been allied for the last few years). Not the kind of love story that Austin was trying to write, this is a Shepard love story, which means still another confrontation, one which reveals that May and Eddie, however often they try to go their separate ways, are inextricably bound together. It is a binding which suggests that of Lee and Austin and indicates that the play, whatever its surface melodramatic plot, is about the nature□the "double nature," I suppose I should say□of love. Since May and Eddie are (or may be: evidence is always hard to verify in a Shepard play) half brother and sister, it is possible that the playwright intends the kind of split he presented in *True West,* a common personality that is at once feminine and masculine, gentle and violent, holding and escaping. I do not intend to imply that either side of these compounds be assigned solely to the man or the woman in the play. Eddie is a rodeo performer, a wanderer, who returns once again to May, who rejects him and hangs on to him, often within alternating lines.

The action takes place in Andy Stacklin's stark setting□both realistic, suggesting the cheapest kind of motel, and metaphorical□a playing area so lightly furnished that it holds little besides the bed, a table at which the characters can drink, and a host of uncontrolled emotions. It is simultaneously a trap (Shepard directed Kathy Whitton Baker's May to hug the walls as she circled like a caged animal) and a refuge, and both characters leave at the end, exiting into a blaze of light (Eddie's burning truck, set fire by an angry lover who has also shot up the motel), each going his own way but with no sense that this is other than a temporary rest before the next reunion. It is possible that their telling the story of their meeting□their high school romance, the disastrous events that followed the discovery that the father had two wives (Eddie begins, May picks it up, and the versions do not mesh)□is intended to mark a genuine change in the compulsive connection between them; but I think not, even though the Old Man, presumably the father, explains that love involves the ability to walk away, an embrace that is not a stranglehold. The Old Man is an equivocal character, a figure who sits at the edge of the stage commenting on the action, now and then accepting a drink from Eddie, a product of Eddie's imagination perhaps but one so concrete that he can eventually invade the playing area and defend his own idea of love.

Women characters□particularly mother figures□carry heavy thematic weight in Shepard plays *(Curse of the Starving Class, Buried Child,* even *True West),* usually in contrast to a male/father figure, but the roles tend to be peripheral. Not since *Cowboy Mouth* (1971) has a woman character shared the central conflict, but *Fool for Love* has more to do with a play like *True West* than it does with Shepard's work from the early 1970s. As usual with Shepard, *Fool for Love* is at once ambiguous and concrete, marvelously effective in some of its bits, a blending of the theatrical and the ideational; but

occasionally, despite the intensity of the performers and the production, it seems suddenly to go languid, to trap itself in reiteration which is not the same as repetition in the best dramatic sense. Perhaps I was simply spoiled by the Steppenwolf *True West,* which kept me constantly alert, checking for booby traps in the laughter. In *Fool for Love,* I found myself wanting to say, yes, I know.

Source: Gerald Weales, review of *Fool for Love* in the *Georgia Review,* Vol. XXXVII, no. 3, Fall, 1983, pp. 602-04.

Critical Essay #3

Despite finding Shepard's play to possess considerable theatre craft, Simon ultimately finds the work "ponderous, imponderable."

Originality may but need not be a virtue; remember original sin. It is time we stopped gushing about Sam Shepard's almost sinful originality (it amounts to no more than facility) and ask ourselves to what uses he puts it□in, say, *Fool for Love,* the current import from San Francisco's Magic Theatre, complete with his staging and cast. Since so much of Shepard's action takes place between the lines, it is good to see just what the author has in mind with his action-packed silences. And, for that matter, how he wants his often gnomic utterances to be uttered.

He makes, I regret to say, less sense of himself here than others have been known to make of him in the past, but that may be because *Fool for Love* is a particularly opaque and inconclusive play, with the kind of open ending that does not so much make you want to speculate about it as shut the door behind it. We are in a motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert, but so underfurnished and penurious that the desert might as well be running through it. Sitting on the bed is May, a waitress or short-order cook, her head hanging down, disconsolate. Circling around her is Eddie, a rancher or stunt man in westerns, her on-and-off lover since high school fifteen years ago, and perhaps her half-brother. At the edge of the set, where limbo seems to begin, sometimes in the action and sometimes out of it, The (their?) Old Man sits rocking and guzzling Jim Beam.

May has resolved to give up on Eddie; in fact, she would just as soon stab him to death during a kiss, but, in the event, she merely knees him in the privates. Eddie, denying her accusations that he has two-timed her with the Countess (whoever she is), tells May that, to see her, he has come thousands of miles from a Wyoming ranch he wants to buy for them to live and prosper on. They quarrel, fight, almost make love; she can't quite let him go, yet is expecting Martin, some sort of janitor or caretaker, who will take her to the movies. This arouses Eddie's jealous fury. Meanwhile the Old Man maunders on about being married to Barbara Mandrell, whose invisible picture he sees on the wall; later he reminisces about May and Eddie, suggesting he might have begotten them on two wives between whom he shuttled till he vanished altogether.

That's the play in a nutshell, though it's nuttier than this makes it sound. May and Eddie bounce themselves and each other against the walls and floor as if they were both players and balls in a jai alai game. When not tossing their bodies, they hurl recriminations and self-justifications; sometimes the Old Man interrupts with his bizarre ramblings, and sometimes the Countess, in her car in the parking lot outside (where Eddie's caravan and horses are also parked), races around beaming her headlights into the room and, if we're to believe Eddie (who is easily as tricky as Sam Shepard himself), aims to shoot them both. As it happens, she merely sets the caravan, and perhaps the horses, on fire. When Martin shows up, he becomes the fall guy for both May and

Eddie, though in fact it is Eddie who falls on his behind and scoots around on it chasing Martin, which adds to the production's athleticism if not to its clarity.

Ideas□mostly old but still serviceable□float or rampage around: Old West versus New West, sex versus love, lovehate between man and woman, the disintegrating family, the innocent bystander caught in the crossfire of mighty opposites, and so on; they have all done yeoman's work in previous Shepard plays. And again, what dominates here, only more so, is the absence, the powerful absence of discipline, Shepard's besetting sin. The characters are raucously idiosyncratic, the dialogue is very much the author's eccentric and evocative own, the violence is zanily original as violence goes, but what does it all add up to? Or does it merely subtract from such better efforts as *True West* and *Buried Child?*

Shepard, moreover, has overdirected his play into frenzies of violence as well as excesses of languor, until both the pregnant silences and the abortive explosions threaten to burst the play at its seams□if only those seams could be located. For disjointedness is the order of the evening. Andy Stacklin' s set is suitable and, above all, sturdy, for it has to take even more of a beating than the characters; Kurt Landisman's lighting and Ardyss L. Gold-en's costumes are equally apt. A fine cast, too: Ed Harris's Eddie, ominously lassoing the bedstead; Will Marchetti's Old Man, garrulous even when silent; Dennis Ludlow's Martin, his innocence painfully mauled. Best of all is Kathy Baker's May, with the face of a Mannerist angel fallen on its face, but sexier for being slightly out of whack; a voice husky with injury that plays xylophone on your spine; and a personality all silken menace, for which any panther would sell his skin. But *Fool for Love* is finally, despite moments of gallows or lariat humor, all portents□ponderous, imponderable.

Source: John Simon, "Soft Centers" in *New York,* Vol. 17, no. 24, June 13, 1983, pp. 76-77.

Critical Essay #4

Calling Fool for Love ' 'mysterious and unsettling, " Oliver offers a favorable appraisal of Shepard's play, also terming the work "as funny as anything he's ever done."

Sam Shepard, the California (at present) spellbinder, has brought his company from San Francisco's Magic Theatre to the Circle Repertory in his new play *Fool for Love,* which he himself has directed, and which will run through June 19th. It is as mysterious and unsettling□now you see it, now you don't□as spare and, incidentally, as funny as anything he has ever done. I cannot remember being taken aback more often, at so many unpredictable moments, and I'll try, in describing it, to spoil as few of the surprises as possible. The action takes place in a motel room in California, at the edge of the Mojave Desert. A young woman, utterly dejected, is sitting on the edge of the bed, her head in her hands and her long hair streaming over her arms. She is called May, and across the room, sitting on a chair and looking at her, is Eddie. Watching them from a porch outside the room sits the Old Man, with a bottle of liquor. Eddie tries to talk to May but gets no reply; he tentatively walks over to her, touches her neck, and strokes her hair. She grabs his legs and refuses to let go. When he shakes free, she speaks her first words to him: "You smell. I don't need you." She accuses him of trying to erase her, and then threatens to kill him and the rich woman he has been living with. He protests that he has driven more than two thousand miles to find her, crying much of the way because he missed her so. ' 'How many times have you done this to me?" she asks him. They stare at each other and then start to make love, but she hurts him and he falls to the floor. "You're a stunt man," she says, and exits into an adjoining bathroom. The Old Man speaks for the first time: "I thought you were supposed to be a fantasist," he says to Eddie, whereas he himself is a realist. Pointing to a nonexistent picture on a blank wall and then describing it, he remarks, "That's realism." For a while, I thought the Old Man was meant to be the dramatist's alter ego, the spinner of the plot, for he never takes his eyes off the action within the room, and he comments on it from time to time, but later in the play another possibility presents itself. A fourth character, who appears about two-thirds of the way through, is a hapless young fellow named Martin, who arrives to take May to the movies and becomes, poor soul, the butt of Eddie's funniest jokes and business. A fifth character, who does not appear, is the rich woman, who drives what we are told is her huge black Mercedes-Benz back and forth in front of the motel, shining the bright headlights into the room. ("How crazy is she?" May asks. "Pretty crazy," says Eddie.)

In *Fool for Love,* Mr. Shepard, his extraordinary imagination in charge, probes as deeply into the two lovers and rings as many changes on them as he did with the brothers of *True West*. Like the brothers, May and Eddie lie and love and fight and struggle for command, with no victory in sight. There is a subterranean plot, and there are several of this dramatist's incomparable monologues (well, comparable perhaps to Harold Pinter's). In *Fool for Love,* no inanimate objects fly through the air, as they did in *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child* and *True West,* but Ed Harris, the splendid actor who plays Eddie, certainly does. Stunt man indeed□he caroms off the walls and into the corners, chases Martin around the room, and ends up hardly the worse for wear. (At the

preview I saw, Mr. Harris was wearing an inconsequential bandage around one hand, which impeded him not at all.) As May, Kathy Baker is just as good, though less athletic, and Dennis Ludlow and Will Marchetti are fine, too, as Martin and the Old Man. Mr. Shepard is the most deeply serious humorist of the American theatre, and a poet with no use whatever for the "poetic." He brings fresh news of love, here and now, in all its potency and deviousness and foolishness, and of many other matters as well.

Source: Edith Oliver, review of *Fool for Love* in *New York,* Vol. LIX, no. 16, June 6, 1983, p. 110.

Adaptations

Fool for Love was adapted by Shepard for the screen in 1985. Directed by Robert Altman, the film features Shepard playing the role of Eddie and Kim Basinger as May.

Topics for Further Study

Explore the themes of *Fool for Love* via the two pieces of music called for in the stage directions, Merle Haggard's ' 'Wake Up" and "I'm the One Who Loves You."

Research the psychological implications of incest. Use your research to explore May's conflicted feelings for Eddie and Eddie's desire for May.

Compare *Fool for Love* with *Passion,* a play by Peter Nichols which appeared at the same time on Broadway. Both plays explore sexual politics, though *Passion* is about people from the upper class. What does each play say about class and sexual relationships in this time period?

Research the psychology of men who lead dual lives with two or more women, like the Old Man did with Eddie's mother and May's mother. Why do they make this choice? How does it affect their children?

Compare and Contrast

1983: Cellular phone service is tested in Chicago. The bulky phones cost $3000, while monthly service fees total about $150. The target audience is businessmen who need to keep in constant touch with clients and their home office.

Today: Cellular phone service is available throughout the United States. Palm-sized phones are available. Phones and rates are relatively inexpensive. Many people use cellular phones to keep in touch with loved ones from anywhere at anytime.

1983: Early Macintosh computers are introduced. The Lisa model is the first to feature a mouse. IBM announces its development of a chip that can story 512K of memory.

Today: Personal computers are available for under $1000. Memory capabilities can measured in the gigabytes. The mouse is obsolete on laptops, which can feature trackpads to move a cursor. With widely available access to the Internet, people can easily remain in contact with their friends and family around the globe.

1983: The United States invades the island of Grenada. Marines land to protect U.S. citizens (and interests) from the Marxist government.

Today: The United States protects its interests by participating in the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) bombing of Kosovo, among other military operations.

What Do I Read Next?

True West, a play by Shepard that was first produced in 1980. This play also concerns troubled siblings (two brothers) and their absentee father.

The Magic Toyshop, a novel by Angela Carlin that was published in 1969. The story focuses on an incestuous relationship through the eyes of a teenage girl.

Six Characters in Search of an Author, a play by Luigi Pirandello that was published in 1950. The drama employs a technique similar to the one used in *Fool for Love* in which an empty chair is placed outside the frame.

Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, a nonfiction book by James S. B. Twitchell published in 1987. In this book, Twitchell explores the use of incest in art and literature in the contemporary culture of the United States.

Buried Child, a play by Shepard first produced in 1978. In the play, a family secret of incest and infanticide is accidentally discovered years after the fact.

Further Study

Bottoms, Stephen J. The Theatre of Sam Shepard: Studies of *Crisis,* Cambridge University Press, 1998.

In this book, Bottoms takes a critical look at Shepard's life through his plays, including an extensive discussion of *Fool for Love*.

Brater, Enoch. "American Clocks: Sam Shepard's Time Plays" in *Modern Drama,* Winter, 1994, pp. 603-13. In this article, Enoch explores the critical role time plays in Shepard's *Fool for Love* and *A Lie of the Mind*.

Marranca, Bonnie, editor. *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard,* Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1981.

This collection of critical essays covers Shepard's career as a playwright and interviews with the playwright. The book also includes essays on directing and acting in Shepard's plays.

Rosen, Carol. "'Emotional Territory': An Interview with Sam Shepard" in *Modern Drama,* March, 1993, pp. 1-12. In this interview, Shepard discusses his whole career as a playwright, actor, director, and thematic concerns in plays such as *Fool for Love*.

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Kalem, T. E. Review of *Fool for Love* in *Time,* June 6, 1983, p. 79.

Kerr, Walter. "Where Has Shepard Led His Audience?" in the *New York Times,* June 5, 1983, sec. 2, p. 3.

Kleb, William. "Sam Shepard's Free-for-All: *Fool for Love* at the Magic Theatre" in *Theater,* Summer-Fall, 1983, pp. 77-82.

Kroll, Jack. "Badlands of Love" in *Newsweek,* June 6, 1983, p. 90.

Rich, Frank. "Stage: 'Fool for Love,' Sam Shepard Western" in the *New York Times,* May 27, 1983, p. C3.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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