



Well, there are many, many alternatives. But I think it's all dependent again on the elements that you start with and what your interest is in those elements. If you're only interested in taking a couple of characters, however many, and having them clash for a while, and then resolve their problems, then why not go to group therapy, or something?

What do you do?

I think of it more like music. If you play an instrument and you meet somebody else who plays an instrument, and the two of you sit down and start to play music, it's really interesting to see where that music goes between two musicians. It might not go anywhere you thought it would go; it might go in directions that you never even thought of before. You see what I mean? So you take two characters and you set them in motion. It's very interesting to follow this thing that they're on. It's a great adventure—it's like getting on a wild horse.

But aren't you, the playwright, controlling everything? You're creating it, aren't you?

I'm not creating that.

It doesn't happen by itself, does it?

No, but in a way, it's already in the air. I really believe that's true. These things are in the air, all around us. And all I'm trying to do is latch onto them. I don't feel like it's a big creative act, like I'm inventing all of this. I mean, I'm not putting myself in the same category as Mozart at all, don't get me wrong, but the story with him was that he heard this music. It was going on, and he was just open to it somehow, latched onto it, and wrote it down.

Shepard and rock poet Patti Smith, opposite page, co-authored Cowboy Mouth and performed the play together one night only in 1970 at the American Place Theatre in New York. The world premiere of Shepard's Pulitzer play, Buried Child, above, was staged at the Magic Theatre by Robert Woodruff.

True West is like that. *True West* is following these two guys, blow by blow, just following them, trying to stick with them and stick with the actual moment by moment thing of it. I mean, I wrote that thing... it took me a long time to write that play.

Why?

Because I went down a lot of blind alleys. I tried to make them go in one direction, and they didn't want to go that way.

How did you know when it was right, then?

I just know. Just like you know it's right when you're with somebody. You don't know it through the head—you have a feeling.

How did you know when to end it?

Well, I've always had a problem with endings. I never know when to end a play. I'd just as soon not end anything. But you have to stop at some point, just to let people out of the theatre. I don't like endings and I have a hard time with them. So *True West* doesn't really have an ending; it has a confrontation. A resolution isn't an ending; it's a strangulation.

Is the point then to leave the audience hanging?

No, no. I'm not intentionally trying to leave people up in the air. But I also don't want to give people the impression that it's over (*laughs*).

Do you write for an audience?

Well, you know, that's an interesting question because, here again, the question comes up, what is the audience? Who is the audience? In a way, you