



Buena Vista

We found two actors from a revival of *Curse of the Starving Class* that I had directed, Will Marchetti and Kathy Baker. I had been dogging Will for years to work with Sam, and Kathy had done about six roles at the theatre. Sam brought in Dennis Ludlow, a fine actor who he liked working with, and Eddie Harris, who he found in a production of *True West* in L.A.

Rehearsals started. An approximation of my "dramaturgy":

Sam: Well?

John: Well, it's not *True West*.

Sam: So what? *True West* was *True West*; this is *Fool for Love*.

John: How come the gun doesn't go off?

Sam: Why should the gun go off?

John: You know, the gun introduced in the first act goes off in the second.

Sam: First, it only has one act. Second, the gun's just there because he wants to impress her. The saddle, the lasso, the gun, the booze, he's just trying to impress her.

John: Oh... You're sure it's not starting too high? They're sweating like pigs up there. You don't want to blow its cool too early.

Sam: Why shouldn't it start high? Plays never start high. Why shouldn't it start at its highest point?

John: Shouldn't the bathroom door be a brighter yellow?

Sam: I'm waiting for the lights. We need speakers under the audience.

John: What?

Sam: Four of them. I want to wire the walls of the set for reverb.

John: What is this? Sensurround? Impossible.

(We wire the walls for sound and put four speakers under the audience.)



mail and I'm paging through it. I'm amazed. This isn't a script! This is neat, compact, projecting the apparently effortless flow of relentless logic. This is "language made strange." This has content. This is literature! How far from the mass of crossed out paragraphs, rewrites scribbled over rewrites, entire sections thrown out only to come back barely recognizable in their new form, masses of cue notes, transpositions, endless word changes, and all the other seeming chaos that goes into the development of a new script. Really, the only thing that seems the same to me now is the picture of Elvis, and the connection is there for me again.

Something in the career of Elvis informs Sam Shepard and *Fool for Love*. Perhaps the sheer weight of animal spirits, the flagging optimism over the ramifications of the American dream, the passion that is barely kept in bounds, the lurking undercurrent of violence and destruction, the ghost of the family with its grotesque eccentrics and its dark secrets, the siren song of booze and the open road. But there is much more. Elvis Presley and Sam Shepard signify a change in the structure of American society that cuts much deeper than critical catch phrases like "the birth of rock and roll" or the "death of the American West."

To both Presley and Shepard is attached the idea of "the noble savage." They both apparently came from nowhere, reached the top of their professions with no formal training, rapidly became the stuff of popular myth. But beneath each persona lies an objective, calculating artist who has basically altered the way we look at things.

Unfortunately, we Americans like to think of our artists this way, appearing as they often do to us as sort of inspired flower children or imaginative iconoclasts who are floating through the tree tops dreaming their little other-worldly dreams and keeping us pleased and entertained. The simple unassailable truth is that there is no country in the world that places so little value on the enormously

Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*, opposite page, with Will Marchetti, Paul Richard Connell and Kathy Whitton Baker, was directed at the Magic Theatre by John Lion, inset. The playwright's acting career in films continues this year with the release of *Country*, above left, with Jessica Lange. Alfred Wertheimer's provocative photo of Elvis Presley and a companion made the *Fool for Love* poster, above, controversial.

Now the book has arrived at the theatre in the