

# RHYTHM & TRUTHS

**A**s you are writing a play, do you have a certain idea of what the play's ending will be? No. I think for me, every play has its own force, its own momentum, its own rhythm and tempo. That's the fascination of it. It's like people who hear music in their heads, or in the air, or wherever. They attract it in a certain way and it begins to speak to them. It has its own peculiar set of rules and circumstances, and complicated structures that you can't necessarily dictate. I think a play is like that. What you're trying to do, in a way, is have a meeting. You're trying to have a meeting with this thing that's already taking place. So, I can't really say that I have a beginning, middle and end every time I sit down to write a play. Every *moment* of the play is a beginning, a middle and an end.

**So, it's a very ephemeral process?**

Yeah, it is. A play's like music—ephemeral, elusive, appearing and disappearing all the time. You never reach a final point with it.

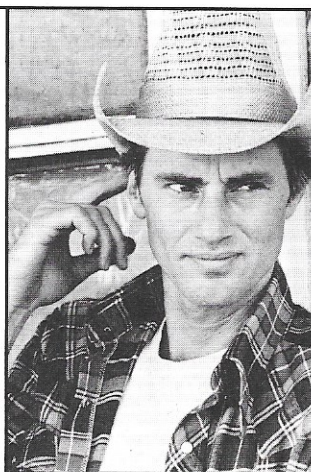
**Do you see productions of your own work?**

No. For the most part, it doesn't interest me, no. The initial production is very exciting because you're involved, you're engaged in it. After that point, though, I'd just as soon let it go and go on to the next play, because the next one's going to be even that much more exciting than the one before it. Once that first production happens, then I don't care what happens to it really. I'm not concerned in tracking it down, in following it around like an ex-lover or something.

**Critics of your plays such as *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child* and *True West* have often referred to them as chronicling the break-up of the American family. To what extent is that a legitimate reading of those plays?**

I'm not interested in the American social scene at all. It totally bores me. I'm not interested in the social predicament. It's stupid. And the thing you bring up about the break-up of the family isn't particularly American; it's all over the world. Because I was born in America, it comes out as the American family. But I'm not interested in writing a treatise on the American family. That's ridiculous. I mean, that's not fair or unfair to read that into my plays. It just seems an incomplete, a partial way of

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**“The first rodeo team roping that I won gave me more of a feeling of accomplishment and pride than I ever got winning the Pulitzer Prize.”**

looking at the play. People get off on tripping out on these social implications of the play and how that matches up to contemporary America. And that's okay. But that's not why I'm writing plays.

**So, why are you writing plays?**

I have to. I have a mission (*laughs*). No, I don't know why I do it. Why not?

**You collaborated on the writing of two of your collected plays, *Tongues* and *Savage/Love*.**

Yeah, the ones with Joe [Joseph Chaikin]. Well, that was a very unique circumstance, working with someone that I'd known as a friend for a long time and never really had a chance to work intimately with, one on one. I was hanging around the Open Theater and I knew Joe. We had a lot of things in common. So we just sat down and collaborated on this thing, just cooked it up. The thing that was unique about them, I think, is that they were designed for one performer, for him in particular. That was the impulse behind the whole thing. It's very different from writing by yourself.

**Do you consider your work to revolve around myths?**

Well, so many people have different ideas—of what the word means.

**What does it mean to you?**

It means a lot of things to me. One thing it means is a lie. Another thing it means is an ancient formula that is expressed as a means of handing down a very specific knowledge. That's a true myth—an ancient myth like Osiris, an old Egyptian myth that comes down from antiquity. The thing that's powerful about a myth is that it's the communication of emotions, at the same time ancient and for all time. If, for instance, you look at *Romeo and Juliet* as a myth, the feelings that you are confronted with in a play like that are true for all time. They'll always be true.

**What relationship does that have to your plays?**

Well, hopefully in writing a play, you can snare emotions that aren't just personal emotions, not just catharsis, not just psychological emotions that you're getting off your chest, but emotions and feelings that are connected with everybody. Hopefully. It's not true all the time; sometimes it's nothing but self-indulgence. But if you work hard enough toward being true to what you intuitively feel is going down in the play, you might be able to catch that kind of thing. So that you suddenly hook up with feelings that are on a very broad scale. But you