



# Understanding Sam Shepard (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)

*James A. Crank*

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**Understanding Sam Shepard (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)** James A. Crank  
Understanding Sam Shepard investigates the notoriously complex and confusing dramatic world of Sam Shepard, one of America's most prolific, thoughtful, and challenging contemporary playwrights. During his nearly fifty-year career as a writer, actor, director, and producer, Shepard has consistently focused his work on the ever-changing American cultural landscape. James A. Crank's comprehensive study of Shepard offers scholars and students of the dramatist a means of understanding Shepard's frequent experimentation with language, setting, characters, and theme.

Beginning with a brief biography of Shepard, Crank shows how experiences in Shepard's life eventually resonate in his work by exploring the major themes, unique style, and history of Shepard's productions. Focusing first on Shepard's early plays, which showcase highly experimental, frenetic explorations of fractured worlds, Crank discusses how the techniques from these works evolve and translate into the major works in his "family trilogy": *Curse of the Starving Class*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Buried Child*, and *True West*. Shepard often uses elements from his past—his relationship with his father, his struggle for control within the family, and the breakdown of the suburban American dream—as major starting points in his plays.

Shepard is a recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, eleven Obie Awards, and a Chicago Tribune Literary Prize for Lifetime Achievement. Augmented with an extensive bibliography, *Understanding Sam Shepard* is an ideal point of entrance into complex and compelling dramas of this acclaimed playwright.

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