A Lie of the Mind

by Sam Shepard

Theatre Pro Rata
September 12-27, 2015
Performing at Nimbus Theater
About the play

*A Lie of the Mind* premiered on December 5, 1985 at the Promenade Theatre in New York City. It considers the stories of two families related by the marriage of Jake and Beth after Jake’s abuse of Beth results in her hospitalization. The parents and siblings in each family are profoundly affected by this event and their subsequent interactions. The play won the Drama Desk Award, the New York Critics Circle Award, and the Outer Critics Circle Award in 1986. A major off-Broadway revival of the play was produced in 2010.


Shepard’s epigraphs for *A Lie of the Mind*

Something identifies you with the one who leaves you, and it is your common power to return: thus your greatest sorrow.

Something separates you from the one who remains with you, and it is your common slavery to depart: thus your meagerest rejoicing.

—Cesar Vallejo

Most were bankrupt small farmers or down-at-the-heel city proletarians, and the rest were mainly chronic nomads of the sort who, a century later, roved the country in caricatures of automobiles. If they started for Kentucky or Ohio, they were presently moving on to Indiana or Illinois, and after that, doggedly and irrationally, to even wilder and less hospitable regions. When they halted, it was simply because they had become exhausted.

—H. L. Mencken, *The American Language*

Critical observations

“The selectivity of memory and the passing of blame are themes which recur throughout the play, often to highly comic effect, but the cumulative results are far from funny: the play presents yet another bewildering array of subjective accounts and denials which function to destabilize each other.”

Bottoms, Stephen J., *The Theatre of Sam Shepard* (p. 237)
“In an interview with Jonathan Cott, Shepard explained his inspiration for the play came from ‘the incredible schism between a man and a woman in which something is broken in a way that almost kills the thing that was causing them to be together. The devastating break—that was the lightning bolt.’”


“This being a Shepard play - even if in his recent, relatively realistic mode - the story of how Jake gets from where he is to where he ends up is not about one man’s travels between two geographical or even psychological points. Indeed, after Act I, Jake’s pivotal position in the play is usurped by his younger, milder brother. Once the author reaches his final curtain - a domestic tableau of familial and romantic love lost and found, as eternal as a homecoming in a John Ford western - our vision has widened beyond both brothers, their phantom father and Beth to take in a larger landscape. Mr. Shepard has illuminated those archetypal genetic fates we all share, finally to transcend them to find that urge for salvation, that hunger for love, that allows us, like Jake, to go on.”


“As Mr. Shepard reminds us that some major American artists still choose to devote their greatest energies to the theater, so his play is a reminder of why they do so. Some art can only happen on a stage; some experiences are available to audiences only in a playhouse. Where but in a theater can a small gulf of stage space separating a pair of bedrooms (one in California, one in Montana) stretch in our minds until it carries the spiritual and geographical weight of a continental divide? Where else can an actor in the role of a son, by blowing a puff of a dead father’s ashes into the air, make us shudder in recognition of a family’s eternal, inescapable continuum? One won’t find such a moment in a book or movie, even Mr. Shepard’s own.”

American playwright, actor, and director Sam Shepard was born November 5, 1943 in Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He received the 1979 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Buried Child*, and the PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater Award as a master American dramatist in 2009. He has also written short stories, essays, and memoirs.


“You get to the point where you say, ‘But there’s this whole other territory I’m leaving out.’ And that territory becomes more important as you grow older. You begin to realize that you leave so much out when you go into battle with the shield and all the rest of it.... You can’t grow that way.... There just comes a point where you have to relinquish some of that and risk becoming more open to the vulnerable side, which I think is the female side.... It’s much more courageous that the male side.”

Sam Shepard


Interviewed by Michael Almereyda (Interview magazine, October 2011)  
Resources

STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience)
www.emu.edu/cjp/star

The Domestic Violence Intervention Project
http://www.dvip.org

Domestic Abuse Interventions Programs (the Duluth model)
http://www.theduluthmodel.org

Traumatic Brain Injury

About 20 percent of traumatic brain injuries are caused by violence, such as gunshot wounds, domestic violence or child abuse. Shaken baby syndrome is traumatic brain injury caused by the violent shaking of an infant that damages brain cells. From
The Edwin Smith Papyrus, the oldest known surgical treatise on trauma, written between 1650-1550 BC, describes various head injuries and symptoms and classifies them based on their presentation and tractability.


Trepanning: a historical treatment

Contemporary resources
[http://www.traumaticbraininjury.com](http://www.traumaticbraininjury.com)
Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance
[http://braininjurymn.org](http://braininjurymn.org)

“Caregiving family members and traumatic brain injury (TBI) survivors often significantly alter their familial roles and responsibilities following injury, creating significant change and strain on a family system. Typical challenges identified by families recovering from TBI include: frustration and impatience with one another, loss of former lives and relationships, difficulty setting reasonable goals, inability to effectively solve problems as a family, increased level of stress and household tension, changes in emotional dynamics, and overwhelming desire to return to pre-injury status. In addition, families may exhibit less effective functioning in areas including coping, problem solving and communication.” Kreutzer, J, Kolokowsky-Hayner, S, Kemm, S & Meade, M (2002). "A structured approach to family intervention after brain injury". *Journal of Head Trauma and Rehabilitation* **17** (4): 349-367

"People with severe brain injuries will always have some persisting deficits, although the challenges may not be readily apparent to other people. When the challenges are hidden, we often say the person ‘walks and talks,’ because he/she will appear normal to lay people, but actually has many hidden cognitive and psychosocial impairments.”

Prof. Karen Hux, a TBI expert at the U of Nebraska