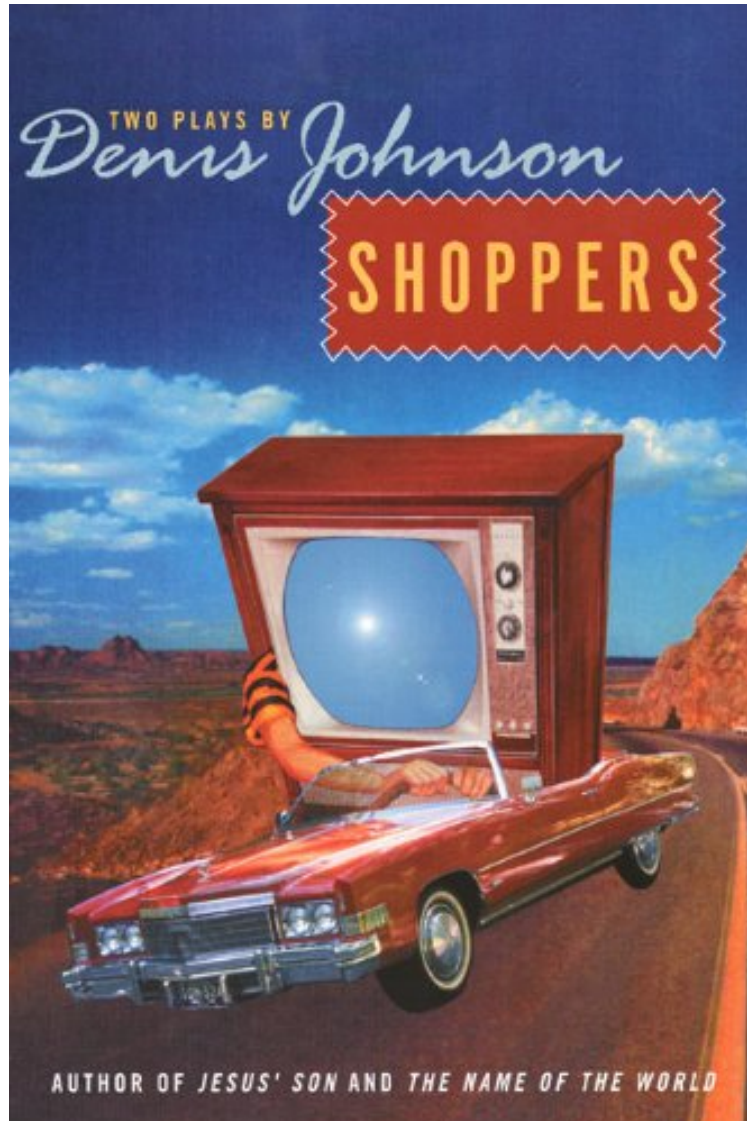


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Shoppers: Two Plays by Denis Johnson

Denis Johnson

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Denis Johnson : Shoppers: Two Plays by Denis Johnson before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shoppers: Two Plays by Denis Johnson:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Positive side of the grimy castBy CustomerJohnson's riff is a trashy crew who reveal noble thoughts even in feeling forced to bad ends or less than positive decisions to be made. Both in fiction and plays, you'll find this. It should make you feel better about your growth past your own poor decisions, and empathy with others. He comes up frequently with character monologues that are so grabbing, you'll hear them in your head for days, even though you'd find it difficult to explain why to your friends. Check out the woman marrying up from her class describing her upbringing.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not so greatBy Nuri KThe

plays in this book are more effortless/streamlined, and more fun than the two in *Soul of a Whore*/Purvis, and clever/witty in the way Johnson almost always is, but read a little confused as to the overall organization/conclusion. As a devoted fan of Johnson, I would say that if you're looking to get into his work, start with the novels (my fav.s being 'Angels' and 'Already Dead', which two are way more brilliant IMO than the more famous story collection of his), and save his plays for later. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Second-Rate Sam Shepherd--With Promise By T.S. Peoples You have to hand it to the author, he's found a rich vein of critically acclaimed theater to ape in his debut as a playwright. These two plays, with shared characters between them, pluck some of the most pleasing tropes of Sam Shepherd's more cogent writing (criminal brothers, abusive mothers, emotionally paralyzed fathers, powerless clergymen--heck, almost all of *Buried Child*, though in this case it would be *Flattened Child*) and make them more amusing than mysterious. However, while the elements are often unoriginal and somewhat out of date, Johnson has a knack for understanding what makes a scene dramatic. His characters almost always want something and take risks to get it. As a result, the plays are conflict driven and offer actors meaty motivations to chew on. That's more than what often passes for playwrighting today, so there's promise here. Like the writer's novels, the tone is Western noir, with some biting wit carrying the banter. The reader, like the performer, will certainly be amused, though may not find that the works create any lasting impact. *Hellhound*, the first play, is a series of mildly absurd two-person scenes that reveal their interconnections gracefully if without surprise. *Shoppers*, the second play, hews more strictly to unities of time and place, but erupts in a more theatricalized style (subverting stage realism with an invisible dog and a television that interacts with the "real" world--a device that even the characters remark upon for its novelty). Stage directions by the author insist on only the music he indicates and realistic set pieces. That's a shame, because Johnson's at his best when he takes off on original, unrealistic flights of fancy--finding his own dramatic style and inching beyond realism, Shepherd, and watered-down cultural criticism. The strength here is in images, particularly in unusual juxtapositions. Sample these for the potential hinted at, and let's hope that the author has more dream-poetry-drama to come, particularly in the third play in this series, which centers on a character oft-mentioned but not seen in these works. Act one of that work, *Soul of a Whore*, is published in the latest edition of McSweeney's.

"Perfection is not the basis of what I'm talking about," says a member of the Cassandra family, which forms the center of Denis Johnson's plays, *Hellhound on My Trail* and *Shoppers Carried by Escalators Into the Flames*. The character could be speaking for his creator, because human imperfection is one of Denis Johnson's specialties -- in his critically acclaimed novels, short stories, and nonfiction, and, now, in two brilliant new plays. These two works present a dramatized field guide to some of the more dysfunctional and dysphoric inhabitants of the American West: a sexual-misconduct investigator who misconducts herself sexually; a renegade Jehovah's Witness who supports his splinter Jehovean group by dealing drugs; the Cassandra Brothers and their father and their grandmother, thrown together at a family reunion/wedding/melee at their shabby homestead in Ukiah, California. When *Shoppers Carried by Escalators Into the Flames* was performed in San Francisco in 2001, the *Chronicle* said, "There's an enormous appeal in Johnson's bleak-comic vision of a semi-mythic American West." That appeal derives from the author's perfect vision of imperfection, embodied with such energy and courage in these marvelous pieces of theatre.

From Library Journal The author of short stories (*Jesus' Son*) and novels (e.g., *The Name of the World*), Johnson is also playwright-in-residence at the Campo Santo theater company at San Francisco's Intersection for the Arts. Here he presents two plays, both of which focus on the dysfunctional Cassandra family and are linked by one minor event: Marigold Cassandra's suspension from her job at the Agriculture Department. None of the three acts of the first play, "*Hell Hound on My Trail*," is related except for the mention of some characters from act to act. The second play, "*Shoppers Carried by Escalators into the Flames*," is situated in Ukiah, CA, at the beginning of the third millennium. It is more coherent than the previous play, as a continuity of action is sustained by all three acts. However, neither play concludes anything, and nothing is resolved. These plays are somewhat entertaining to read and may be enjoyable to see performed because of their colorful characters, but they are best at demonstrating Johnson's versatility as a writer who can change genres easily. Of interest to dramatists; academic libraries and large drama collections will want to consider purchasing. Robert T. Ivey, Univ. of Memphis Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From the Back Cover "Perfection is not the basis of what I'm talking about," says a member of the Cassandra family, which forms the center of Denis Johnson's plays, *Hellhound on My Trail* and *Shoppers Carried by Escalators Into the Flames*. The character could be speaking for his creator, because human imperfection is one of Denis Johnson's specialties -- in his critically acclaimed novels, short stories, and nonfiction, and, now, in two brilliant new plays. These two works present a dramatized field guide to some of the more dysfunctional and dysphoric inhabitants of the American West: a sexual-misconduct investigator who misconducts herself sexually; a renegade Jehovah's Witness who supports his splinter Jehovean group by dealing drugs; the Cassandra Brothers and their father and their grandmother, thrown together at a family reunion/wedding/melee at their shabby homestead in Ukiah, California. When *Shoppers Carried by Escalators Into the Flames* was performed in San Francisco in 2001, the

Chronicle said, There's an enormous appeal in Johnson's bleak-comic vision of a semi-mythic American West. That appeal derives from the author's perfect vision of imperfection, embodied with such energy and courage in these marvelous pieces of theatre. About the Author Denis Johnson is the author of *The Name of the World, Already Dead*, *Jesus' Son*, *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, *Fiskadoro*, *The Stars at Noon*, and *Angels*. His poetry has been collected in the volume *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*. He is the recipient of a Lannan Fellowship and a Whiting Writer's Award, among many other honors for his work. He lives in northern Idaho.