



Shoppers: Two Plays by Denis Johnson

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"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.

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