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Works Cited

Taylor, Thomas J. and Roxanne McDonald. "True West." *Magill's Survey of American Literature, Revised Edition*, September 2006, p. 1. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lkh&AN=103331MSA25379830001536&site=ehost-live.

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True West

Sam Shepard

Given Name: Samuel Shepard Rogers

Born: November 5, 1943; Fort Sheridan, Illinois

Quick Reference

Excerpted from an article in *Magill's Survey of American Literature, Revised Edition*

First produced: 1980 (first published, 1981)

Type of work: Play

The Work

Part of a family trilogy, *True West* differs from Shepard's other plays in its almost lighthearted bantering dialogue between the two protagonists. Austin, one brother of a pair, is conservative and formal, fitting into society with reasonable comfort. Lee, the other brother, is the cowboy misfit character of the type that Shepard uses in virtually every drama. They are both writing a film scenario about the true West, and their conversation, wildly funny in the beginning of the play, deepening as the action moves forward, is actually a debate about what (if anything) made America great. Shepard is, in a way, having a conversation with himself in this play, taking the two

sides in the form of the two brothers.

The kitchen setting is appropriate, especially in the light of the late arrival of the mother, the actual adjudicator between the two brothers and the person whose affection they both seek. The two brothers are central to Shepard's mythology. The brief appearance of the mother at the end of the play demonstrates what the competition was really about. The kitchen is her domain, despite the fact that the two brothers have temporarily claimed it for their lives and their debate. Again, the family in disarray, the siblings at odds and representing diverging lifestyles, the homage to a lost American tradition represented by the cowboy's life — all the trademarks of Shepard — are here.

What sets this play apart from the others is the humor with which Shepard deals with the subject. The dialogue, relatively realistic and conversational here, plays the two brothers off each other both in content and in linguistic style. The proliferation of physical objects, in the manner of Eugene Ionesco, underlines the immovability and intractability of the "real" world as opposed to the world of the imagination that both brothers are seeking to portray in their screenplays.

The two brothers here bear virtually no resemblance to Tilden and Bradley from the earlier *Buried Child*. Their articulation, their energy, and their obvious partnership (despite their differences) is antithetical to the family of Dodge and Halie; here is found a masculine bonding within the combat, a family unit despite all the superficial antagonisms.

Essay by: Thomas J. Taylor updated by; Thomas J. Taylor updated by Roxanne McDonald

Sources for Further Study

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