**Sam Shepard: True West**

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Writing a plot usually involves giving the narrative an initial exposition which gradually leads to a climax followed by an anti-climax and a resolution. Writers can sometimes shake up this straightforward approach to have a unique edge in their story. It does not necessarily mean that this unorthodox technique for devising a plot is bound to work. Sam Shepard has penned a unique literary treasure in ‘True West’ precisely by upsetting the normalized method of writing a plot. There are several themes to this story that exist to explain why Shepard chose the play to have a climactic face instead of giving it a mainstream story.

It is quite easy to notice that the play has a climactic plot. The play does not move along in an episodic or non-linear fashion with snippets of information gradually being fed to the audience complete with an anti-climax and a resolution. Rather, it simply gives away information in a chronological manner while building up towards the climax. Austin is the living embodiment of the apparent American dream. He lives a comfortable married life, has a college degree and has a respectable job as a screenwriter. His end of the deal is representing the sane America; the one which stands upon the global food chain and proudly presents its lifestyle as one to be envied. Lee stands on the other extreme of the spectrum. He represents the underbelly of the American dream. The unhinged cowboy who has completely lost his way and carries out criminal activities while he lives away from civilization ‘in a desert’. The plot lies in the idea that brothers are two sides of the same coin. The gradual transformation of the brothers into each other defines the story as they struggle to find and lose themselves by reflecting each other. (Williams) Just as the confusion and conflict builds to its highest point, Shepard simply cuts the supply and the play ends right there. There is a very important reason why it was necessary to end the story like this. The plot clearly highlights the unresolved discord between the two sides of the American man and the lack of any certainty regarding the brothers’ identity because it is a metaphor for the identity of the American man. (Rabillard) It was significant to keep the conflict unresolved because a resolution would have defied the intent behind the whole premise of the story and the purpose behind the characters.

Another one of the foremost reasons for making the play climactic is, therefore, in the appeal of the story itself. From the get-go, the plot of the play depends on obscure imagery which only continues to get weirder as it moves along. There are mythic elements in the central theme of the play which simply adds to its inscrutability. Proof of mythic themes lies in the apparent materialistic heaven where Austin lives but he is, at the same time, devoid of human feelings. (Orbison) The riddle of the play’s story and its characters continues to complicate as it proceeds. Lee becomes a rather insane version of his brother as he struggles to write a screenplay. Meanwhile, Austin comes undone to become an even more insane version of Lee. The unannounced arrival of their mother appears to take the story towards a resolution of sorts. It seems that she can resolve some of the tension that has built up like gas around the house while the brothers were holed up there. In reality, the story becomes even more disconcerting when their mother claims she came back early because Picasso was coming to town. Picasso was obviously dead in the setting of the play. Her house is a havoc and her sons are raging at each other while she continues to ask them to take the fight outside. The mother simply runs away. This relates to the absence of parents in their lives and why ancestry has led the two sides of the American dream to lose their sense of self so profoundly. Insanity only brews to even more baffling levels up until the last second. The fact that the ending is open to either of two extreme interpretations is what makes the whole story so excessively perplexing and mysterious to its audience. It is to keep up with the theme of this absurdity that choosing a climactic ending fits so well.

I personally believe that Shepard did the story absolute justice by giving it a climactic ending. Everything about the ending, from its unresolved conflict to the feral tension between the brothers to the lone coyote that howls, is amazingly placed. From the exact moment that the curtains are drawn, the brothers can go on to either kill each other or resolve the dispute or simply go back to attempting to write a screenplay while being drunk amidst total chaos. There is a sea of possibilities. Just like a person forever elusive to their real identity because of an obscure ancestral figure, the brothers never decide who they really are because of their father who abandoned them to live in the desert. This loss early on in their life is also why they never realize that they are simply two parts of a whole and hence share the same insecurities. (Mehrabi) I hence believe that all of these themes go amazingly well with the climactic ending.

# References

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