



# TRUE WEST



**ROUNABOUT  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

**UPSTAGE GUIDE**

A publication of

**EDUCATION AT  
ROUNABOUT**

# UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



## TRUE WEST

By **Sam Shepard**

Directed by **James Macdonald**

Opposites attack in Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize-nominated play about two brothers with more in common than they think. Holed up in their mother's California house, lowlife Lee (Ethan Hawke) and screenwriter Austin (Paul Dano) wrestle with big issues—and each other. Order vs. chaos. Art vs. commerce. Typewriter vs. toaster...Shepard's rip-roaring classic returns to Broadway, gleefully detonating our misguided myths of family, identity and the American Dream.

## A NOTE FROM **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES**

*True West* (originally produced in 1980) deconstructs every concept it touches: brotherhood, talent, creativity, integrity, perseverance. In their feverish battle to sell a screenplay to a Hollywood producer, Austin and Lee dismantle these all-American values one after another and reshape them into a distorted caricature of the rags-to-riches success story. Nothing works as it is supposed to in the dark and twisted world of *True West*, and this mesmerizing descent into mayhem is what has drawn me back again and again to Sam Shepard's play throughout the years. *True West* reminds us that order is just a human invention, as fallible as anything else. As Shepard explodes our agreed-upon definitions of achievement, purpose, and failure, we watch order fall away—and what lies beneath is just as spellbindingly surreal as it is eerily recognizable.

## WHERE

The kitchen and adjoining alcove of an older home in a Southern California suburb, about 40 miles east of Los Angeles

## WHO

**Austin:** A screenwriter in his early thirties

**Lee:** His older brother, a small-time criminal in his early forties

**Saul Kimmer:** A Hollywood producer in his late forties

**Mom:** Austin and Lee's mother, in her early sixties



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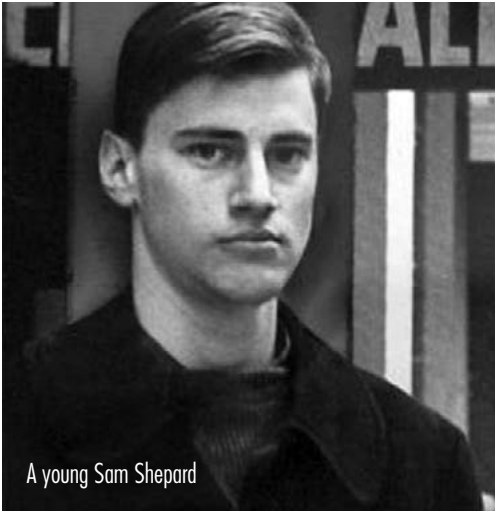
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# THE FACES OF SAM SHEPARD



A young Sam Shepard

## THE FARMER'S SON

Born in Illinois in 1943, Samuel Shepard Rogers III (known as Steve Rogers as boy) was the son of a former Army pilot and a teacher. His family moved frequently and eventually settled on an avocado farm in Duarte, California, a small town 25 miles east of Los Angeles. Duarte would become the suburb where *True West* takes place. Shepard's father grew more alcoholic and nomadic, like the absent father that hovers over *True West* and other Shepard plays. Shepard worked as a stablehand, orange picker, and sheep shearer while attending Duarte High School, then studied agriculture at nearby Mt. San Antonio College. But he dropped out of school to join a travelling theatre group, which allowed him to see the country; after the tour, he moved to New York.

“I DON'T WANT TO BE A PLAYWRIGHT,  
I WANT TO BE A ROCK AND ROLL STAR...”

(SAM SHEPARD, 1971 INTERVIEW)

## ROCK AND ROLL PLAYWRIGHT

In New York, 19-year-old Shepard found inspiration in rock, jazz, and Samuel Beckett's plays. He worked as a waiter at the Village Gate nightclub, shared an apartment with the son of jazz legend Charles Mingus, wrote songs with John Cale and Bob Dylan, and played drums for a rock group called The Holy Modal Rounders. Reflecting on this time, he later told an interviewer: “I got into writing plays because I had nothing else to do. So I started writing to keep from going off the deep end.” In 1964, his first play *Cowboys* received a favorable review from *The Village Voice* and

launched his theatre career. Informed by Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionism and science fiction, his early plays were poetic and hallucinogenic, often incorporating rock and jazz music. He worked in experimental downtown spaces such as La Mama, Cafe Cino, and the Open Theatre, winning six Obie (off-Broadway) Awards over the next few years. In 1969 he married actress and musician O-Lan Jones, and their marriage lasted until 1983. His passion remained divided between theatre and music, and in 1975 Shepard joined a group of musicians (including Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez) to tour with Dylan's Rolling Thunder Road.



### PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE

Theatre ultimately won out when Shepard opted to settle in San Francisco as playwright-in-residence at the Magic Theatre in 1975. Over the next 10 years, he wrote his most seminal plays, including *Fool for Love*, *True West*, and *Buried Child*. Shepard recalled his father coming to a performance of the latter play and berating the actors on stage. "He took it personally and he was drunk...he was kicked out and then was readmitted once he confessed to being my father. And then he started yelling at the actors again." By the mid-1980s, as he reached his forties, Shepard was the second most widely-performed American playwright after Tennessee Williams.

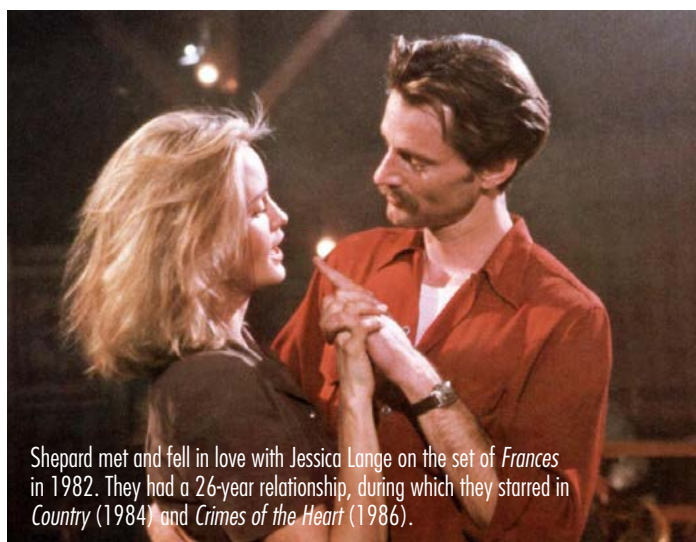


Sam Shepard during his time as playwright-in-residence at the Magic Theatre.  
Photo: Steve Ringman/SF Chronicle/Polaris

### THE INTREPID ARTIST-COWBOY

In addition to playwriting, Shepard had a successful career as an actor. His first film role was as a dying farmer in *Days of Heaven* (1978). His breakthrough came playing Chuck Yeager, the first pilot to fly at supersonic speed, in *The Right Stuff* (1983). Biographer John J. Winters wrote that this role established Shepard's on-screen persona as "the intrepid artist-cowboy of popular imagination," which would blur with his writing. Other notable movies include *Baby Boom* (1987), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and the Ethan Hawke *Hamlet* (2000) in which he played Hamlet's father. He was last seen as the family patriarch in the 2017 Netflix series "Bloodline." He also wrote several screenplays, including Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984 Cannes Film Festival Winner) and *Silent Tongue* (1994), a Western that he also directed.

**You can see a preview of *Silent Tongue* [HERE](#).**



Shepard met and fell in love with Jessica Lange on the set of *Frances* in 1982. They had a 26-year relationship, during which they starred in *Country* (1984) and *Crimes of the Heart* (1986).

### A WESTERN SUNSET

In 2000, Shepard bought a small farm in Kentucky, where he raised horses, continued writing, and enjoyed a low-profile life. His last plays were seen in 2012 and 2014 at New York's Signature Theatre, where he is a "Legacy Playwright." (*Curse of the Starving Class* is slated for revival at Signature in spring 2019). Shepard died in 2017 from complications of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease. He left behind more than 55 plays, two collections of short stories, and a novel. Loretta Greco, the Magic Theatre's current Artistic Director, remarked: "His timeless impact is indelible in every new script that lands on my desk to this day; his blood is coursing through generations of playwriting."

**You can learn more about Shepard and his life from [THIS TRIBUTE](#).**

**"THERE ARE THESE TERRITORIES INSIDE ALL OF US, LIKE A CHILD OR A FATHER OR THE WHOLE MAN, AND THAT'S WHAT INTERESTS ME MORE THAN ANYTHING: WHERE THOSE TERRITORIES LIE."**

**-SAM SHEPARD**

# SAM SHEPARD: NOTABLE WORKS

## **OH! CALCUTTA!, 1969**

Shepard contributed sketches to this watershed 1969 Off-Broadway revue, which featured nude actors and an in-your-face exploration of sex. A Broadway revival ran from 1976 until 1989, making it the longest-running revue in the history of the Great White Way.

## **COWBOY MOUTH, 1971**

Shepard and his then-lover Patti Smith collaborated on a play about a woman (played by Smith in the American premiere) who kidnaps a man (Shepard) at gunpoint in order to turn him into a rockstar. The two fall in love and fight, eat, and occasionally sing their way through this avant-garde one act.

## **CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS, 1977**

This black comedy revolves around the four members of the Tate family as they struggle with poverty on a California farm. First produced in London, it had its American premiere at the Public Theater in New York. James Woods and Kathy Bates starred in the 1994 film version.

## **BURIED CHILD, 1978**

*Buried Child* won the 1979 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. A surrealistic family drama, the plot focuses on the return of Vince to his grandparents' farmhouse and

the secrets buried there by his deteriorating family members. Originally produced at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco in 1978, *Buried Child* was revived at Steppenwolf in Chicago in 1996. That production transferred to Broadway and was nominated for five Tony Awards®.

## **FOOL FOR LOVE, 1983**

*Fool for Love*, set in a motel room in the desert, is about half-siblings who began a relationship before knowing about their blood ties. It opened at the Magic Theatre and was a Pulitzer Prize Finalist. The production, directed by Shepard and starring Ed Harris and Kathy Baker, opened off-Broadway that year and ran for 1000 performances. Shepard himself starred in the 1985 film adaptation. It was revived on Broadway by Manhattan Theatre Club in 2015.

## **A LIE OF THE MIND, 1985**

Shepard's longest play, *A Lie of the Mind* clocks in at nearly four hours. The plot revolves around two families brought together by domestic abuse: the son of one has nearly killed his wife. The original off-Broadway production starred Harvey Keitel. In 2010, Ethan Hawke directed a revival at The New Group.



Ethan Hawke and Paul Dano in *True West*

# FRATERNAL RIVALRY AND RESPONSIBILITY



Sam Shepard's *True West* plunges the audience into the tension and turmoil of the relationship between feuding brothers. Modern psychology connects sibling competition to personality development and acceptance of familial duties, which correlates to birth order. As siblings compete for parental favor, they adopt different strategies based on their status in the family. Firstborns tend to be strategic and step into the role of surrogate parents. Conversely, younger siblings are generally more agreeable and

nonconforming. Though these behavioral traits can be unlearned or reversed, they often return in situations or around individuals reminiscent of the environments in which they were learned.

Sibling dynamics have captivated storytellers throughout history. The archetype of feuding brothers is both familiar and relatable, and therefore has been used as a metaphor to explore other issues and ask moral questions. •

## **CAIN AND ABEL**

Where did the concept of brothers at odds begin? In Judeo-Christian scripture, the first brothers on Earth also were the perpetrator and victim of the first fratricide. Cain's guilt over murdering his younger brother, Abel, prompts him to ask the enduring question,

**"AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?"**

Line engraving  
by Jan Harmensz  
Muller, Holland,  
1571-1628



## **ROMULUS AND REMUS**

In Roman mythology, the fabled twin founders of the Roman Empire, Romulus and Remus, argue over the site on which to construct their new country. After Romulus receives a sign of favor from the gods, Remus' jealousy leads him to mock his brother. In retaliation, Romulus murders Remus and establishes himself as the indisputable leader of Rome.

## **HAMLET**

Shakespeare's most recognized fratricide occurs offstage before the play begins, when Claudius murders his brother, the king, and takes his throne as well as his queen. Claudius' murderous deed haunts him throughout the play, tears apart his kingdom, and ultimately leads to his death, leaving audiences to ask: what is the price of power?

## **BLOOD KNOT**

South African playwright Athol Fugard used the struggle of sibling responsibility and rivalry to examine racial dynamics during Apartheid. Mixed-race brothers Morris and Zachariah live together and care for each other. As tensions rise around how each is perceived by the outside world, the brothers turn on each other, resulting in a fight that highlights the struggle and violence of race relations at the time.

## **TOPDOG/UNDERDOG**

In Suzan-Lori Parks's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Lincoln and younger brother Booth's commiseration over their financial struggles turns to conflict when Lincoln hustles Booth in a game of cards and wins his inheritance. The brothers' mortal competition implies that individual success often comes at the cost of someone else's sacrifice.

# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JAMES MACDONALD

Director James Macdonald was born in London and studied English at Lincoln College at Oxford University, in addition to studies at Lecoq Mime School in Paris.

**Ted Sod: Did you always want to be a theatre director?**

**James Macdonald:** I got the bug when I was about 16. I discovered that there was this really cool arty thing that meant you could be in a room with lots of people who were much cooler than you, and you could feel like you were all creating something together. Without having to make a fool of yourself in public. So, I started directing then, and I went on doing it through university, and I just kept going.

**TS: Did you meet any of your current contemporaries who are still working in the theatre when you went to Lecoq? And did you have any teachers who you feel had a profound influence on you?**

**JM:** I met Simon McBurney—he’s certainly still working! Both at Lecoq and at Oxford, my teachers had a huge influence on me. I just did an interview with someone who’s working on a new edition of Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, which was a play I directed recently. And I ended up talking a lot about my tutor, Anne Barton, who was a marvelous woman and a brilliant mind. She’s the one who got me interested in that repertoire and the plays of that era.

**TS: Why did you choose to direct Sam Shepard’s play *True West*?**

**JM:** I got to know Sam over quite a long period of time. I first directed one of his plays in the late ‘80s—I directed *Fool for Love* as a double bill with a piece he wrote with Joe Chaikin entitled *Savage/Love*. So I first talked to him on the phone when I was working on that. And then a while later I directed the British premiere of *Sympatico*. I talked to him quite a lot around that one; we had really delightful phone chats. And then he was in London for a while because Jessica [Lange] was cast in some plays here, and I got to know him a bit more. I invited him to do a reading of his stories at the Royal Court as a fundraiser, and we also had a dinner with all the *Sympatico* actors. And then this strange and wonderful thing happened. I was casting Caryl Churchill’s *A Number* for the New York Theatre Workshop, and I got wind of the fact that he really liked that play; that somehow he’d come across it and was a fan. So, we asked him if he wanted to be in it and he said, “Yes”—which was a huge sideways jump for him at that point in his life. He’d never really done theatre acting, but he was obviously fascinated to have a go. He described Caryl’s play as the best play since *Endgame*—which was really his favorite play—and he just dived right in. To have the chance to really get to know him in the rehearsal room and work on that play together was wonderful. Then when I was talking to Todd Haimes about which play I might want to direct at Roundabout, I said, “Well, I’d love another go at one of Sam’s plays, I haven’t done one in a very long time.” By that point it was about 20 years. *True West* seemed to me to be the one to do; it’s my absolute favorite.

**TS: What made you decide to cast Ethan Hawke and Paul Dano as Lee and Austin, respectively?**

**JM:** Of course, at Roundabout you cast in collaboration with the marvelous Jim Carnahan and with Todd as well. And with a small-cast play like *True West*, those decisions are the biggest decisions



James Macdonald

you’re going to make on the whole show. I totally lucked out getting these two extraordinary actors to play the brothers. And Marylouise Burke—who I’d just done Annie Baker’s brilliant play *John* with in London—and the great Gary Wilmes to play the mom and Saul, the producer guy.

**TS: Paul and Ethan are really very different, so I can’t wait to see them working together.**

**JM:** I think that is in the play, isn’t it? The brothers, Austin and Lee, are like chalk and cheese. They are complete opposites, and they undergo a kind of transmutation during the play. It was important to me to get two people who were very different. Also in the last Broadway production, Philip Seymour Hoffman and John C. Reilly swapped roles—which I think is a clever idea for a lot of the themes of the play, but the one thing it didn’t acknowledge is the fact that there’s a ten-year age gap between the two brothers, and I really want to explore that.

**TS: How does this play have personal resonance for you?**

**JM:** Well, on one level, that has to do with my relationship with Sam. But also, at its center, it’s a very witty and painful play about identity and how stable or not that identity might be. I think it’s Sam’s purest expression of that idea. I know this writer quite well because I’ve directed his plays before, but the question that’s new to me here is how to animate this battle between the two brothers, that’s slightly different from any of the other plays by Sam that I’ve worked on. Also, how to animate it on a big stage, because the



“THE BROTHERS, AUSTIN AND LEE, ARE LIKE CHALK AND CHEESE.”

—JAMES MACDONALD

play was written for a small stage, for a black box theatre in San Francisco. So there's a technical challenge in this which fascinates me—how do you translate all the psychological detail and tiny moments of imagery and language in the script into something that comes across in a large Broadway house?

**TS: Did you read all Sam's plays that are of the same ilk?**

**JM:** Yes, *Buried Child*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, and *Fool for Love* are all closely related. I knew those plays already, but it was useful to go back and see how the writing develops from one to the next.

**TS: What is your understanding of Sam's uniqueness as a writer? It seems to me that he was a maverick, and when he started out, he was writing in a way that no one else was at that time.**

**JM:** I think you're absolutely right. And I don't think that comes out of a vacuum. I think he looked very carefully at what was going on in the early '60s when he arrived in New York, and he was drinking all that stuff up. He loved drumming. He was working in a jazz club downtown, and he was seeing all the jazz greats of that era. He was living in an apartment with his school friend Charles Mingus III. There's a lot of music and improvisation in his work that's new to theatre but that comes out of the culture of the time. And one of his mentors was Edward Albee, whose foundation gave him money to write some of the earlier plays. Albee and Shepard are both writers whose work demands actors to be incredibly brave and emotionally free in performance. They're both writers who ask for there to be no safety net on stage.

**TS: What do you think the play is about? Do you have an understanding of what Sam intends the title *True West* to mean?**

**JM:** I think it's about the instability of identity, which is something that fascinates us all at the moment. Mental illness is on the rise; we're all super-aware of that. I think it's about how fragile our grasp of identity is. The play also suggests that things might well be in the blood—that there's a genetic element to our makeup. Both the brothers are troubled by that. Sam is also playing games in this play with meta-fiction—as he goes deeper into the play, he starts stripping away reality or heightening it. A story eating its own tail...

As far as the title is concerned, that's the other thing the play's very clearly about—how true is the west? Not only the American West, but also the western world. Or are those notions somehow false? And in film, how much truth was there to the genre of the Western? What was true in American culture as it developed—and what was invented, mythological? The play is asking big questions about the truth of the American dream and the mythology of success. The title refers to an idea and a place. It's about both. The brothers are inventing a new Western movie together and arguing over the reality of that. But it's also about what Americans live for and by. And lastly it's—and this I love—Sam's most personal play, because it's about writing, it's about making up stories and characters. It's very much a play about how we all invent ourselves through stories.

**TS: How do you understand the relationship between these two brothers?**

**JM:** Perhaps due to the age gap, they've had totally different upbringings. The older one, Lee, has always been troubled and has had a deeply problematic relationship with their father. I would say they share the same intelligence, but they've had very different life experience. So Austin, the younger brother, has had some kind of Ivy League education. If you wanted to be geographical about it, you could say the older one is a West Coast cowboy and the younger one is more of an East Coast intellectual.

**TS: Will you talk a bit about collaborating with your set designer, Mimi Lien?**

**JM:** I'm a huge fan of Mimi's work and have wanted to work with her for years. The thing with this particular Broadway theatre—so much wider than almost any London stage—is that it allows us to refer to the world of film, which of course is the story heart of *True West*. We thought, let's make it widescreen. Let's make a space that's like a letterboxed movie screen, so the imagery that the audience is looking at corresponds in direct ways with the story that the brothers are inventing.

**TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?**

**JM:** I always try to take in new art, new politics, new people. To look beyond the theatre bubble. It's important for me to have periods where I'm not directing plays, when I'm reading other stuff and traveling instead.

**TS: Is there a question you wish I had asked that I didn't?**

**JM:** No. But I should just say I'm thrilled to be at the Roundabout. It's an exciting moment for me to have a go at interpreting this play of Sam's—which I love—with four actors I'm hugely excited to be working with. •



Paul Dano and Ethan Hawke in *True West*

# PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Though Sam Shepard's *True West* premiered nearly 40 years ago, the image of Austin typing furiously in his mother's house in the outskirts of Hollywood was already familiar to us, and continues to be recognizable today. We see characters like Austin in everything from *Singin' in the Rain* to *La La Land*: the scrappy, maverick innovators who "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and represent America's most valued traits and tenets.

Established in the late 1800s, Hollywood's beginnings resemble an old Western movie: its founders were literally on the run from the law and trying to strike it rich in the emerging film industry. Back on the East Coast, Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company had a stronghold on patents for film camera design. If filmmakers didn't use Edison-brand equipment, they were subject to heavy fines and were frequently sued, bringing production to a halt. In an effort to dodge Edison's lawyers, most filmmakers moved west. Sheer geographic distance effectively prevented litigation.

In 1917, Hollywood entered its Golden Age, named so for its incredible innovation: over just half a century, Hollywood saw its first "talking film," color film, the implementation of the Oscars®, and extraordinary advancements in animation and special effects. This period saw the creation of some of America's most influential films, from Disney's delights and Hitchcock's horrors to MGM's array of movie musicals (spanning from *The Wizard of Oz* to *Brigadoon* and



1937's *Born to the West* starring John Wayne and Marsha Hunt

beyond). This prosperity stretched through the 1960s, and by the time Austin was trying his hand, most of Hollywood's Western beginnings had been forgotten. Though Hollywood still had ruthless varmints, they were the briefcase-carrying type. And while coyotes still circled the hills at night, Shepard noted that these were "city" coyotes, capable of carrying off a cocker spaniel at best. The spirit of the West that created Hollywood had been stripped away, or hidden, or made invisible by modern invention; that is, until Austin's brother Lee arrives.

Fresh from a three-month solo journey through the Mojave Desert, Lee's entrance electrifies the atmosphere of his mother's suburban home. His presence evokes a cowboy movie, where vandals step into saloons they know full well aren't big enough to contain them. Lee is representative of the old American West: less of a trickster, his arrival signals the appearance of a real and present danger. While Austin is dressed in clean clothing, Lee is in "tatters," shoes scuffed with dirt and cheeks covered in days-old beard growth. In the latter half of the play, when Austin suggests that perhaps he, too, could make it in the desert, Lee scoffs: his younger brother, soft and inexperienced, would "burn up."

A John Wayne-type, Lee brings to mind the boisterous side of America's vision of the West. Often, this period in the United States's history is seen through rose-colored glasses, and countless 20th century scripts and comic books serve as proof of a nation's obsession with Manifest Destiny, the right to bear arms, and vigilante justice. In the span of time



The Hollywood sign originally read "Hollywoodland" and is seen here just after its construction in 1923.



“THIS SENSE OF FAILURE RUNS VERY DEEP—MAYBE IT HAS TO DO WITH THE FRONTIER BEING SYSTEMATICALLY TAKEN AWAY, WITH THE GUILT OF HAVING GOTTEN THIS COUNTRY BY WIPING OUT A NATIVE RACE OF PEOPLE, WITH THE WHOLE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC...I CAN’T PUT MY FINGER ON IT, BUT IT’S THE SOURCE OF A LOT OF INTRIGUE FOR ME.”

— SAM SHEPARD



Mojave Road Photo: Jim Choate

between 1930 and 1954 alone, approximately 2,700 Western cowboy films were produced in this country. Most of these were filmed on the lot at various Hollywood studios, but as the genre became popular, producers filmed in places ranging from Arizona to Montana, Wyoming to Mississippi. These dramatic landscapes captured imaginations across the country, reinforcing America’s rugged cowboy mythology. Affirming a national sentiment of entitlement to the land, these films showed damsels being rescued by dirt-smeared heroes, and they depicted white men riding into sunsets they knew belonged to them alone.

When we remove our rose-colored glasses, however, we can see that the mythology of the American West was built on policies of violence enacted by the American government against Native peoples, women, immigrants, and the land itself. And while both the mythological and true American Wests of the 1800s may not exist temporally anymore, their echoes are with us today. Frustrated with his brother’s fixation, Austin explodes, proclaiming, “There’s no such thing as the West anymore! [...] it’s dried up.” But the audience knows this isn’t true—for some, like Lee, it still exists inside. And as he brings the unpredictability and venom of the desert into Austin’s suburban way of life, the audience is left to consider what’s truth, what’s fiction, and how history may be chasing us much closer than we think. •



This 1895 illustration by European-American painter Frederic Remington shows a moment of interaction between a cowboy and Native Americans.

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR ETHAN HAWKE

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor Ethan Hawke about his work in *True West*.

**Ted Sod:** Where were you born and educated? I believe you started performing onstage at age 15 in Princeton, New Jersey. Did you go for traditional training as an actor or did you learn on the job? Were there other actors or any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

**Ethan Hawke:** Much like Trofimov in Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, I seem to be the "perpetual student." Perhaps because I have little formal education, it has never really stopped. I did my first professional play when I was 12 years old at the McCarter Theatre of Princeton. I played Dunois' Page in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. The actress playing Joan was named Stacey Ray and she was absolutely incandescent. Listening to all of the professionals around me discuss the nature of faith, war, politics, and love—it seemed like acting was the most amazing job a human being could have. My informal education continued with the various actors and directors I worked with. Because I was so hungry for learning, I turned everyone I worked with into a mentor. The names that come to mind especially are Jack O'Brien, Gary Sinise, Sam Shepard, Jonathan Marc Sherman, and Tom Stoppard

**TS:** What attracted you to the role of Lee in *True West*? How is this character relevant to you? What do you find most challenging/exciting about this role? Is it difficult to play a character who seems to become a completely different personality during course the play?

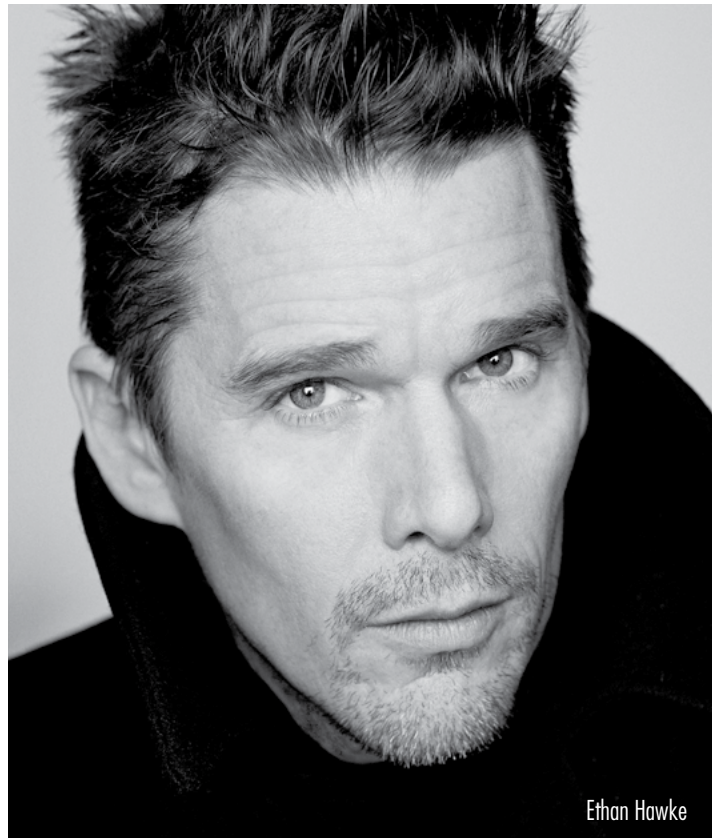
**EH:** I like playing people who change. A lot of dramatists make the mistake of having their characters be only one thing. Sam Shepard speaks a lot about the "divided self," the battle between "the masculine and feminine" that exists in every person, regardless of their gender. It's a pretty ancient theory, whether it's yin and yang, night and day, or Jekyll and Hyde—many people have struggled with the nature of identity. Right now the American male's divided self is on full display and our nation is struggling with its own identity—this is a perfect play to do right now.

**TS:** What kind of preparation or research did you have to do in order to play this role? Can you give us some insight into your process as an actor?

**EH:** I've been researching Sam Shepard since 1984 when my mom let me stay up late to watch a televised production of *True West* with John Malkovich and Gary Sinise. As an actor with a secret dream of writing, Sam Shepard has always been a special inspiration to me because he acted AND wrote at such a high level. The film *The Right Stuff* had come out the year before, and to see an actor write at such a high level was an inspiration to me.

**TS:** Can you talk about your understanding of Lee's relationship to his father, whom he refers to as the "Old Man"? Why do you think the Old Man haunts the brothers, especially Lee?

**EH:** In all of Shepard's writing, there is a fear, love, and respect of a father character. In a lot of his prose writing, he is particularly revealing about his fear of insanity and alcoholism. It seems there was a wildness to Sam's own father—that both called to him and



Ethan Hawke

repelled him—which he made vivid in the portrait of Lee in *True West*.

**TS:** Do you believe there is such a place as *True West*? How would you define that term?

**EH:** There is a speech in *True West* where Lee talks about the Kirk Douglas movie *Lonely Are the Brave*, where a man dies for the love of his horse. In a lot of Sam's work there is a longing for an idealized America that just doesn't exist. He searches for a version of the American male that can be admired, whether it's John Wayne, Gary Cooper, or Gregory Peck. But there is a disappointment suffered when you realize those characters are iconic, but not real. "True West" is about the brothers' longing for a father worth admiring, to be men worth admiring themselves, and their inability to manifest either of those things.

**TS:** You have worked with the author Sam Shepard on a film version of *Hamlet*, and you also directed his play *A Lie of The Mind*. What did you learn from those two experiences that you are willing to share with our readers?

**EH:** I truly feel that Sam Shepard is of the first order of American poets. He was a true maverick and, to risk being cliché—a true original. I remember every second we spent together because he was so interesting and always surprising, whether he was talking about artistic theory, how to grow a strawberry, or playing the piano. I remember once walking into a bookstore in Portland,



Oregon and I found Sam sitting on the floor reading "Spanish for Dummies." He's a legend, and legends are bigger than life.

**TS: Have you ever worked with Paul Dano before? Was this a project you brought to Roundabout together—or were you both cast without one another's knowledge?**

**EH:** I first met Paul Dano when I was directing Jonathan Marc Sherman's play *Things We Want*. Paul came into the audition room and blew us all away, and he's been an immense talent since he first arrived on the scene. I loved directing Paul, and watching his career unfold has been thrilling. When our director James Macdonald first called me to discuss *True West*, his idea was to move away from what the Philip Seymour Hoffman and John C. Reilly production did, which was to create mirror images of Lee and Austin. James Macdonald wanted to go back to how the play was scripted, with Lee in his 40s and Austin in his 30s, at least a decade apart. This felt exciting to us and Paul was the first name we discussed after going forward in that direction. Luckily, I had his phone number.

**TS: What do you look for from a director when working on a revival of a play? What are the challenges of working with a director when you've directed plays yourself—or does it make it easier?**

**EH:** Interestingly enough, I saw James Macdonald direct Sam Shepard as an actor in Caryl Churchill's play *A Number*. It was brilliant and simple, and I know Sam loves simple. He loves clean lines. In truth, I've worked often with a small number of people. I'm very excited to get the opportunity to work with a director I've never worked with before, who is a director that Sam really admired. I also had the luxury of being directed by two of the greatest Sam Shepard interpreters ever, Gary Sinise and Joe Chaikin, and their voices will always be in my head when I work on this material.

**TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?**

**EH:** Any answer I can give to this will probably seem cliché. But the truth of it is I love telling stories, and using stories to make sense of our lives. Stories have great value. ♦



Paul Dano and Ethan Hawke in *True West*



# TINSELTOWN TRANSFORMATIONS: HOLLYWOOD IN THE 1970S



Set in the late 1970s, *True West* follows its main characters' competing journeys to sell a screenplay to a major Hollywood producer. Some of the biggest turning points in Hollywood history took place during this time period; as studio executives' priorities changed, so did the types of films considered "hits." An exploration of the shifting focus of the film industry during this time can illuminate the obstacles that characters Austin and Lee encounter in their quests to write and sell a screenplay.

## THE NEW HOLLYWOOD

The late 1950s and early 1960s are generally considered a low point in American cinema. With some exceptions, films of this time followed predictable and widely-used formulas. Many were war movies or Westerns featuring recycled plots and stars, and all were under threat of censorship by the Hollywood Production Code, which at that time set strict limits on the content allowed in motion pictures. What resulted was a decade of movies—including such big-budget behemoths as *Cleopatra* and *Mutiny on the Bounty*—that, in hindsight, are generally considered stilted and uninspired.

But the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967 ushered in an era that would later be dubbed "The New Hollywood." *Bonnie and Clyde*, alongside a handful of other 1967 films, flouted traditional moviemaking practices, experimenting with plot structure, camera work, and subject matter. Drawing inspiration from the films of the "French New Wave," a period of boundary-pushing French cinema that had begun in the 1950s, the works of "The New

Hollywood" embodied the transgressive counterculture of 1960s America. Out of this era of American filmmaking emerged such young directors as Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather*), Mike Nichols (*The Graduate*), and Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*), whose films explored the taboo and embraced the uncomfortable.

## THE NEW NEW HOLLYWOOD

The era of "The New Hollywood" all but ended in 1975 with *Jaws*, a summer release that shattered box office records and introduced America to a new kind of film: the

blockbuster. (The term "blockbuster" was originally used in World War II to describe massive bombs that could level entire blocks.) Blockbusters like *Jaws*, *Star Wars* (1977), and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) changed the DNA of Hollywood, as the promise of never-before-seen profits sent film executives scrambling to produce the next megahit. Spawning action figures, theme park rides, McDonald's Happy Meal toys, video games, and more, films like these became brands unto themselves.



Many lament the rise of this "New New Hollywood," claiming that the obsession with blockbuster profits has resulted in decades of films made for money rather than for art. In 1980, *The New Yorker* published an exposé on the film industry titled "Why Are Movies So Bad?, or, the Numbers" by film critic Pauline Kael. In it, Kael—who had

spent months studying the inner workings of Hollywood—describes an industry run not by artistic producers but by advertising executives, who had the final say in which films to produce based on which stars were interested in them and how profitable they were predicted to be. To this day,



Blockbuster franchise *Star Wars* has become a cultural icon, spawning exhibits, memorabilia, parades, and re-enactments. Photo: jmm

blockbusters (and, increasingly, blockbuster franchises) create massive profits for Hollywood studios. Though Hollywood's investment in blockbusters only seems to be growing, the cash generated by these films allows studios to fund their less-lucrative projects.

As *True West* takes place during the rise of the "New New Hollywood," characters Austin and Lee unwittingly find themselves playing out this larger debate over the integrity of filmmaking: can the artistic and the commercial ever be one in the same? In approaching this question, it is important to remember that what constitutes a "good" film is always subjective. It would be an oversimplification to say that the most financially successful movies are always the "worst" ones—a box office success is, after all, a film that many people want to see. "Quality," as *True West* explores, means something different to everybody. •

## THE LIFESPAN OF A FILM

How exactly does a movie go from an idea to the big screen? While no two film production processes are the same, below is a basic outline of how present-day movies progress through the pipeline at major studios. Today, there are six major film production studios in Hollywood (known as the "Big Six"): Warner Bros., Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, and 21st Century Fox.

### 1. MAKING THE PITCH

Filmmakers pitch their idea to film studio **executives**. If the studio is interested in the project, they **greenlight** it, thereby agreeing to fund and manage the production of the film.

### 2. PUTTING TOGETHER A TEAM

Producers at the film studio hire a **creative team** for the film—a director, screenwriter, cast, cinematographer, etc.

### 3. MAKING THE MOVIE

The film is written, then shot, then edited into a final product. While the director serves as the leader of the project during this creative process, they must often balance the desires of the studio with their own artistic goals for the movie.

### 4. FINDING A DISTRIBUTOR

The film studio makes a **licensing agreement** with a **distribution company**, which is responsible for marketing and distributing a film to the public. The "Big Six" production companies serve as their own distributors.

### 5. DISTRIBUTING THE FILM

The distribution company sets a **release date** for the film and books it into movie theatres, creating and sending out the **prints** (film copies) of the movie. The distributor also prepares for the eventual release of the film on DVD and/or to streaming services like Netflix.

### 6. WATCHING THE FILM

Audience members see the movie in theatres and later at home. Their dollars go back to the film studio and distribution company, making future projects possible.

A screenplay page. Photo: Joe Flood

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR GARY WILMES

**Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke to actor Gary Wilmes about taking on the role of Saul Kimmer in *True West*.**

**Ted Sod: Why did you choose to play the role of Saul Kimmer in Sam Shepard's *True West*? What do you think the play is about?**

**Gary Wilmes:** When I was in college, I got my hands on a VHS copy of the 1982 Steppenwolf recording of *True West*. Until then acting was something I certainly gravitated toward, but watching that production emboldened any inclination I had to make a career of it. The performances were fearless, visceral, and raw in a way I hadn't seen before. Like wild animals forced to inhabit the same cage, it was as if the characters in a Sam Shepard play required a certain behavioral approach that other plays didn't. I've performed in countless plays since then, but none were written by Shepard. When Roundabout offered me the chance play Saul, I didn't hesitate. If you had asked me what I thought the play was about back then, I might have said it's about two brothers who embody the Hollywood writer's struggle and the deadening effects Hollywood has on them. But if I had to take a swing at it today, I'd say it's more of an exploration of Western civilization, our shared heritage and shared culture and the possibility that it could be wrecked by the actions of simple men.

**TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do in order to play Saul? Please give us some insight into your process as an actor.**

**GW:** To prepare for rehearsal, I try to get my hands on as much material by and about the playwright as I can. I like to read the play in fits and starts, on and off, on the subway or over lunch—whenever I get a free moment. I prefer to just simmer in it, so as not to make any decisions or choices that might backfire before I get into rehearsal. The same goes for learning lines. It's good to be familiar, but I don't like to have them memorized until rehearsals begin when I'm face-to-face with the cast. I want to be as open-minded as possible going into rehearsal, so that my choices are informed by the other actors and the director as well.

**TS: How is this character relevant to you? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share with us some of your thoughts about the type of person Saul is? What do you find most challenging/exciting about this role?**

**GW:** Producers are risk takers by nature. So, my gut reaction is that Saul is a bit of a gambler. What's curious is that we find him not in Hollywood proper but some 40 miles east of Los Angeles in an uncelebrated writer's mother's suburban home with hopes of hitting a jackpot. And then within 24 hours he's up at the crack of dawn making bets on the golf course with some drifter he's met the day before. Playing detective early on when you're building a character is helpful. The challenge is to reach some sort of authenticity by the time you get to the stage.

**TS: Have you ever met any producers like Saul? Do you play golf? It seems to be a pastime that producer types in L.A. enjoy—do you find that aspect of the storytelling valuable to your process?**

**GW:** First off, producers should be admired immensely. Without them, I wouldn't be employed. Thank you very much. And every great work, be it play, movie, concert, etcetera, was produced by someone. Without them where would we be? Remember the Dark Ages? Of course, you don't. Thank you, producers! Fortunately, the producers



Gary Wilmes

with whom I've worked have been intelligent, generous, even visionary, but lately we've been made aware that some may have a darker side and others are just outright monsters. Where Saul lives on the producer spectrum, I'm not quite certain. It all depends on what story we decide to tell. But as someone who plays golf and is pretty much a "Sunday Duffer" like Saul, I can tell you that golf isn't the only thing that gets played on a golf course. My mom and I took up the sport when I was around 13. She had decided to go into business for herself, and when she discovered that the golf course was where business deals get made, she was determined not to be left out of the action. I'm sure L.A. golf is no different.

**TS: Can you tell us some of your preliminary thoughts about Saul's decision to abandon Austin in favor of his less dependable brother, Lee?**

**GW:** Saul's gamble is if he finds the right story, it'll land him a movie deal with a big Hollywood studio. And he's betting on Austin's talent as a writer to provide him that winning ticket. That is, until he hears Lee's story. Now let's imagine that Austin and Lee are race horses instead. And we're at the race track perusing the daily racing form. Stay with me here. On paper, Austin looks like a safe bet. He's a fine horse, well groomed, has a decent track record, and by all accounts is the odds-on favorite to win at 2/1. But as we're walking up to the betting window, a whinny catches our ear. We look over and see a horse on its way to the starting gate. We notice that it's attentive and observant without being unsettled. But more importantly, it has, what's called by anyone who knows horses but can't put into words, "The Look." We refer back to our racing form. Lee is an unknown, he has no record,





and he's a dark horse whose odds are 19/1. The return on those odds for the same investment would be much higher and potentially a bigger payday for Saul.

**TS: What do you look for from a director when rehearsing a role?**

**GW:** Trust is essential. Getting on stage in front of an audience of people you don't know and speaking lines isn't easy. And allowing myself to be vulnerable in that setting is even harder. And being vulnerable is a requirement of any good actor. Knowing the director has your best interest at heart is vital. The last thing I want to overhear after a show is, "That guy was terrible!"

**TS: Where were you born and educated? Where did you get your training? What motivated you to become an actor?**

**GW:** I was born and raised just outside of Chicago. My first taste of things to come began in the 5th grade when I got cast to play the lead role in *Tom Sawyer*. Perhaps it says more about what I was like as a kid than it did about my acting talent. But I took to it in a big way. By the time I finished high school in Chicago, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, known for their intense, highly physical, inventive productions, had achieved international fame. Its core ensemble members had met at Illinois State University, which is where I ended up. After four years of required studying, I was invited to attend what was known as "Animals Class." The idea was that you chose an animal and behaved like that

animal for an entire semester until your final exam. At the exam you were asked to confront the same imaginary species as yours and kill it. You were to be judged by your peers. If they didn't unanimously agree, you'd fail the class. When I got to Chicago after graduation, my hopes of working at Steppenwolf were quashed. There were just too many actors my age and not enough roles to go around. I did, however, land my first job in their new 500-seat theatre. As a bartender. So, to keep myself engaged and creative, a few friends and I started our own theatre company on the South Side of Chicago. We rented a 2000-square-foot loft in an old DeSoto car dealership and converted it into a living space and a theatre. We all had day jobs to make ends meet, and then we'd rehearse and perform at night. Eventually, many years later, while living in New York, I got my chance to act at Steppenwolf, and it would prove to be my big break.

**TS: Public school kids will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor—what advice can you give young people who want to act?**

**GW:** When you're a kid, you enjoy playing. You explore. You make believe. The best and most successful actors I've worked with never lose their sense of playfulness. We do call it a play after all. My firm belief is that if you enjoy what you do and keep doing it, the work will find you. •



Paul Dano and Gary Wilmes in *True West*

# DESIGNER STATEMENTS



Set Model for *True West*

## MIMI LIEN—SET DESIGN

When I first read the play, I felt that the house was a battleground and that, though we probably wanted to be in a room with all the trappings of a kitchen, the volume of space needed to be tweaked in some way to achieve that. I ended up making the house very shallow and pretty much bisected down the middle, so there is a sense of the two sides sparring. There are also a lot of binaries in the play—wildness/domesticity, success/failure, male/female, so this bifurcation of space felt right. I wanted to create a space that has a sense of menace within an atmosphere of domesticity. One of the reference points I landed on was the work of David Lynch, who really excels at creating that very subtle sense of menace in an otherwise rather ordinary-feeling room. There is a carefully calibrated level of stylization which subconsciously gives an uncanny feeling to the environments. The director, James Macdonald, and I decided that we wouldn't hew to a particular time period but that the props and stuff of this world would be archetypal. The visual and tangible world of the play is a combination of old school Hollywood, the myth of the American West, and the memory of your mom's house. I researched log cabins, 1950s kitchens, and deserts. My way into the design was through this particular green 1970s sculptured carpet that I found one day, a crazy cherry wallpaper, and a visit I made a few years ago to Marfa, Texas, which is probably the most remote place I've ever been.

## KAYE VOYCE—COSTUME DESIGN

I discovered Sam Shepard's plays when I was in college, and I binge-read everything I could. I don't remember my individual response to *True West* on first read, but my cumulative first response to his work was that Shepard writes about the America I know, an America that is messy, desperate, patriarchal, and absurd. For me, *True West* is about family and the fact that you can run, but you ultimately have to come to terms with that psychological inheritance. I realize more every year how formed I am by my family and what they all have gone through. I believe the brothers in *True West*, Lee and Austin, are still coming to terms with that inheritance. In order to design costumes for this production, I read the play—a lot. I let the stage directions and text simmer as clues. Then I look at many different photos and films, and those images inform the conversations I have with the director and actors. After that, it's about trying to find the perfect clothes that will continue the conversation.

## JANE COX—LIGHTING DESIGN

I'm writing this about two months before our first audience will walk in the door. As a lighting designer, I'm in the process of putting together my light plot, which is really a tool kit, or perhaps a painter's palette, for lighting the show. I'm trying to imagine what the scenes will feel like when they've been staged in the rehearsal room. Who and what do we want the audience to look at, and when? How do we want the audience to feel about these characters at any given moment? How do we want the audience to experience the space? What is the rhythm of the piece? Lighting participates in subtle ways in all of these decisions.



Set Model for *True West*

I've always loved Shepard's writing, mostly for his use of language, but this play has always seemed to me a particularly male investigation. Perhaps *True West* is a play about male dominance, perhaps it's about traditionally male fantasies of ambition, success, and failure. I've also thought of his work as speaking to a particular kind of American experience very directly. So, when I was asked to work on this show with such a strong team of creative women—set designer Mimi Lien and costume designer Kaye Voyce—and a director from England, I wondered if we might bring something new to the show, if we might see it from a slightly different angle. I hope we will!

I can't give away the technical secrets of the show that we've been researching and developing these last few months; but I can say that it's a challenge to light a box with a roof on it! Figuring out how to successfully create the journey from heightened naturalism to surrealism that I think the show demands, while being restricted to the ways you can get light inside something with a lid on it, poses particular challenges to a lighting designer. I hope I'll be able to create the range of times of day, moods, and styles that I think this piece requires!

### BRAY POOR—SOUND DESIGN

I first read *True West* in high school. I had gone to see all those plays one saw on field trips as a kid: Shakespeare, *Our Town*, *Cyrano*, but *True West* was like punk rock to me. I had no idea a play could be that visceral and weird and funny and angry all at the same time. Only later did I begin

to understand the form that Shepard was toying with and inverting: a primordial, familial struggle wrapped inside Western movie tropes. Much of Shepard's work is a public wrestling of a man's attitude toward his father. This play grazes many feelings for me as a son and a parent. Shepard writes very specific design notes for his play. It's as if he knew the bare, open nature of the play would invite conceptual overlays and theatrical tinkering. He very clearly states that all the design elements should remain realistic. That nothing should take away from the evolution of the characters. He even tells you what the coyotes of Southern California sound like. In order to design sound for this production, I watched some classic Westerns. I wanted to play with a soundscape of classic Western tropes, especially while the men are on stage narrating the Western screenplay they are working on.

Research on this production was essential. It grounded me in a specific tone, so much so that whenever I began to design sound that felt outside the world of the play, I knew immediately it would not work. James Macdonald, the director, and I have also been talking a great deal about using the one song called for in the script, "Ramblin' Man" by Hank Williams, as a base for transitions. We have been trading emails and song ideas, as well as deconstructions of this archetypal song. I'm writing this before we start rehearsals, so we will see what makes the cut. •

## HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT WRITE A SCENE TO EXPLORE SIBLING RIVALRY?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA.W11-12.3.B)

Before seeing Sam Shepard's play, students explore playwriting, inspired by the play's central conflict.

**PREPARE** Read "Fraternal Rivalry and Responsibility" on page 7. Discuss the archetypes of sibling rivalry in the examples, or other stories students may know.

**BRAINSTORM** Ask students to think about their own relationships with siblings, if they have them. Make a list of traits that describe how they see themselves as siblings and how they would describe their siblings (e.g. protective, competitive, etc.). They will select from these traits to create two sibling characters.

**WRITE** Students may work in pairs or independently. Using the script template provided **HERE**, have students sketch their characters, identify a conflict, and choose a setting. A suggested opening line is provided, or they may choose their own. Provide a minimum of how many lines their scene should be (8-10 speeches per character is a good start, but you may extend or shorten).

**SHARE** Have students read or act out their scenes.

**REFLECT** What traits did they choose to give their sibling characters? What types of conflicts are explored in the scenes? How are these conflicts similar to, or different from, the examples they read about in the article?

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## HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT TURN THEIR REACTIONS TO A LOCATION INTO A STORY THEY CAN SELL?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D)

Before seeing *True West*, students immerse themselves in the unique imagery of the American West and explore one part of the filmmaking process.

**ENVISION** Distribute or project photos of American Western deserts. You may choose to utilize the images of the American West provided **HERE**. Encourage students to envision themselves in the photos. What does the landscape feel like? What can you hear? How far away is the closest person? What is exciting about being in the desert? Are there any potential threats around you?

**PREPARE** Share an example of a film treatment provided **HERE** with students. Highlight defining aspects of a treatment such as the use of present tense to describe action, precise and detailed descriptions of the visuals of the scene, and references to the envisioned style of production.

**WRITE** Ask students to individually write treatments for a short film that takes place in the American West. Remind them that successful treatments are filled with enough detail for the reader to clearly envision the world and feel as if they are a part of it.

**PRESENT** Allow students who are willing to share their treatment to pitch it to the rest of the class. Encourage students to go beyond reading their treatment and elaborate on how they envision it looking on a screen. The students who chose not to share their treatment take on the role of the producers who get to select which treatment they would like to turn into a movie.



FOR EDUCATORS

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

## HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT USE A REVERSAL TO COMPLICATE A SCENE ABOUT SIBLING RIVALRY?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA.W.11-12.3.B)

After watching *True West*, students explore the dramatic device of reversal in their own scenes.

**NOTE:** This activity builds on the pre-show playwriting activity on the previous page. If your students did not begin a sibling conflict scene, take them through the first steps of creating characters before introducing their reversal.

**DISCUSS** Explain that in theatre, playwrights use a reversal of fortune, or change in circumstances, to raise the stakes for the characters. Discuss Shepard’s use of reversals throughout *True West*. How do Austin and Lee reverse roles as the play moves forward? How does the balance of power between them reverse?

**WRITE** Revise the sibling conflict scene they’ve started (using pre-show instructions on the previous page) and add a reversal into the scene. The goal is to change the direction of the scene and potentially reverse the power dynamic they have set up, just as Austin and Lee change roles in the play.

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## HOW DOES AN AUDIENCE MEMBER USE RESEARCH AND IMAGINATION TO INVESTIGATE THE PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR’S CHOICES IN *TRUE WEST*?

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(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A)

After watching *True West*, students use elements of the playwright’s biography and the director’s statements about the play to unpack production choices.

**BRAINSTORM** Working as a whole class or in small groups, generate a list of questions about the play. Encourage students to think about the choices made by the playwright and production-specific choices made by actors, director, and designers.

**RESEARCH** Divide the class in half. Have one group of students read the Sam Shepard biography and notable works list found on pages 4–6 of this guide. Have the other half of the class read the interview with director James Macdonald found on pages 10–11. Ask students to highlight or annotate sections that speak to the questions brainstormed.

**INTERVIEW** (This section of the activity can be done in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class.) Select one student to take on the role of Sam Shepard and another to take on the role of the interviewer, possibly choosing a specific interviewer to ground the improvisation. Stage a talk show interview, in which the interviewer poses the questions generated to Shepard and Shepard answers, using information gleaned from the biography and making inferences. Repeat with a student in the role of James Macdonald.

**REFLECT** How did learning about the playwright’s life change how you understood *True West*? How did exploring the director’s perspective clarify what you saw on stage? Would you have liked to read these articles before you saw the production, or was after better? Why?



# GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES

- BONE CHINA:** Serving dishes made from hybrid hard-paste porcelain containing bone ash in the early 19th century  
*When Lee decides to return to the desert, he takes his mother's bone china plates with him to help him feel civilized.*
- CONTRIVED:** Obviously planned or forced; strained  
*Austin tells Lee that his idea for a chase scene is contrived and won't make for a good movie.*
- GERONIMO:** A leader of the Bedonkohe Apache who fought against Mexico and the United States during the Apache Wars  
*Lee compares the way that Austin used to play in the desert to Geronimo's battles.*
- HANDICAP:  
(IN REGARDS TO GOLF)** A numerical measure of a golfer's potential playing ability  
*Lee asks Saul what his handicap is to get a sense of how skilled he is at golf.*
- HOPALONG CASSIDY:** A popular fictional cowboy hero who was the central figure of a series of short stories, novels, films, television and radio programs, and comic books from the 1930s through the 1960s  
*Austin is shocked that Saul wants to continue with Lee's cowboy story because he thinks it is as stereotypical and fake as Hopalong Cassidy.*
- MOJAVE:** A desert in southeastern California  
*Lee and Austin used to play in the Mojave as children, and Lee now visits the desert to find comfort.*
- PALM SPRINGS:** A city in the Sonoran Desert known for its hot springs, golf courses, and spas  
*When Saul hears that Lee lives in the desert, he assumes that he lives in the upscale area of Palm Springs rather than the literal desert.*

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# ABOUT ROUNABOUT

## ROUNDABOUT ARCHIVES

### PEEKING THROUGH THE CURTAIN: STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES

The complex subject of brothers has been addressed in plays throughout Roundabout's history. Most recently, in the 2017 production of Arthur Miller's *The Price* (which had an earlier revival at Roundabout in 1992), we examined the fraught relationship between the Franz brothers as money and parental caretaking set the siblings at odds. In our 2016 staging of Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, brothers James and Edmund Tyrone exposed the ways brothers can be opposites in term of temperament, looks, and ambition, but still care deeply for one another despite those differences. And perhaps the play that examines the brother dynamic most powerfully was the 2013 production of Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews*, one that gives voice to the unspoken conflicts that can exist between brothers, when Liam and Jonah (with cousin Daphna as the catalyst) explode in a debate arising from differences in religion, politics, and world-view.



Mark Ruffalo and Tony Shalhoub in Arthur Miller's *The Price*

For more information on the Roundabout Archives, visit <https://archive.roundabouttheatre.org/> or contact Tiffany Nixon, Roundabout Archivist, at [archives@roundabouttheatre.org](mailto:archives@roundabouttheatre.org)

### STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO ROMERO, REPORTING & ANALYSIS ASSOCIATE

**Ted Sod:** Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the marketing department's Reporting and Analysis Associate?

**Antonio Romero:** I was born and raised in North Bergen, New Jersey. I went to college at Monmouth University, where I gained a bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts. Upon graduation I moved to Washington, D.C. and spent a year doing an apprenticeship in theatre, where I learned more about ticketing. Once my apprenticeship ended I started a position as a sales office representative at a theatre company. After four years in Washington, D.C. I moved back to New Jersey, and I came to work at Roundabout.

**TS:** Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

**AR:** As the Reporting and Analysis Associate, I support other departments by presenting them with sales information. I also report on how our marketing efforts perform. In addition, I pull statements each morning reporting what sales were made the previous day. My position is a different side of marketing—it is a numbers and charts side.

**TS:** What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

**AR:** The best part of my job is being able to help inform decisions with the knowledge of past information. It helps us project sales and trends to the best of our ability with factual data. The hardest part is realizing not everything can be accounted for. There are outside influences we cannot always predict that can change the plan that we have set.

**TS:** Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

**AR:** Roundabout is a great place to work. Not only is it at the forefront of theatre, but it has such rich history. I also love its dedication to new works and fostering relationships with the next generation of artists. There are also so many great people who work at this institution. •

Learn more at [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org). Find us on:



# WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

## TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

## PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

## ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY • 2018-2019 SEASON



Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO), a not-for-profit company founded in 1965, celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org).

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ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY