

# True west

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The play True West by Sam Shepard follows the lives of brothers Austin and Lee. The two lead entirely distinct lives. Austin is a screenplay writer living in southern California, while Lee is an alcoholic vagabond. The two brothers embody the idea of the American dream, although Shepard describes it in a different context than Miller in Death of a Salesman. Shepard contends that the American dream is not reached through wealth, but is more personal. As the play progresses, both characters realize their lives are missing substance.

Austin's inability to find meaning in his life causes him to spiral out of control, ultimately attempting to murder his brother. Lee slowly begins to imitate Austin's life, but realizes that it is too rigid and returns to his destitute lifestyle. In the opening of the play, Austin is working on his screenplay. The scene describes both characters. Austin is a family man, he has a wife and children, and a successful job. Lee continually refers to Austin's education and the fact that he never went to an Ivy League. He is content with his life, and has no restraint with his words.

Lee taunts his brother continually, berating his job as well as his subdued lifestyle. Rather than pursuing the conventional American dream like his brother, Lee finds solace in continually moving from place to place. His reasoning for returning to his mother's place is to rob the affluent neighborhood. Lee is relentless in harassing his brother, until the point that he offers him money for him to leave. This suggestion causes Lee to violently grab his brother as he views it as an attack on his pride. He says, " Don't you say that to me! Don't you ever say that to me! /You may be able to git away with that with the Old Man.

But not me! I can git my own money my own way. Big money! " (1443). Lee is offended by Austin's sympathy plea and feels demeaned. His violent response also demonstrates his savagery . The topic of their alcoholic father is also a sensitive subject between the two. Austin and Lee continually dispute over the nature of the old man. Austin believes he will " never change," and deserves to be abandoned in the desert. He previously donated money to his father that he squandered away on liquor. Lee supports his father as he identifies with him. They both depend on alcohol and have abandoned their families.

Austin values his work as well as his lifestyle, but Lee exposes a different side to his life. Lee mocks the repetitiveness of his life as well as the nature of his work, and Austin just accepts it. Lee says, " I could be just like you, then, huh? Sittin' around dreamin' stuff up. Gettin' paid to dream. Ridin' back and forth on the freeway just dreamin' my fool head off," (1449). Lee ridicules Austin for his easy life as well as his escapist mentality. As Lee is introduced to Saul, his attitude toward writing changes. He begins to imitate his brother, attempting to pitch an idea.

His idea lacks any depth or intelligence, but Saul loses a bet and is forced to accept the idea. At this point, Austin begins spiraling out of control as he believes the world is trying to punish him. He begins to mirror his brother's behavior by constantly drinking, and even steals the neighborhood toasters. Lee exposes the fallibility of Austin's life, which angers his brother. Both men are satisfied with their lives before their reunion, but during it, begin to

question the lack of substance. They both believe they have achieved some semblance of the American dream.

Lee is happy with his simple life and after having success in Austin's field still says, " I'm clearin' outa' here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane. Look what it's done to Austin there," (1461). Austin is angered by his brother's dismissal and chokes him with a phone cord. The chaos of the final moments exhibits Austin's descent . He is unable to fill the void in his life that his brother suggests, which forces him to retaliate violently. Austin embodies the failed American dream. He has achieved some financial success, but it is at the expense of his humanity. Lee helps him realize this, which causes him to rebel.

As the play develops, the roles of Austin and Lee change. They each emulate each other, but fail to find happiness. Shepard suggests that the American dream is not solely defined by having a family or being wealthy, but is an internal frame of mind. When their mom returns prematurely from Alaska, she is shocked by the absurdity and disorder. Like Lee, she attempts to escape the problem by running off. The brother's relationship is completely strained by the end of the play, and Austin is left completely dissatisfied with his living. Their relationship is pathetic, and continually gets worse throughout the play.