

Reading Homework

The Stump



So, did you finally figure out what the stubborn old tree stump symbolizes? Of course, it was not always a stump. It is quite large so we know that at one time it must have been a mighty tree. Mr. Starrett has chopped it down and used the wood to build his new home in the valley and now the stump is simply in the way. As Starrett says, “I have been fighting this tree off and on for two years now”. What other stubborn old thing has he been fighting for two years? Rufus Riker. Riker was also at one time tall and strong like the tree. But the age of the open range for cowboys and ranchers is passing. The farmers are chopping down the trees to build homes and they are fencing the range for their farms.

Starrett alone was unable to remove the stubborn old stump by himself. But with Shane’s help he was finally able to “beat it”. Yet, by helping Starrett to defeat the stump (and Riker), Shane is helping not only to end the open range that allowed the cowboys and ranchers to exist but also allowed the *gunfighters* to exist. *Shane* is a film filled with nostalgia for the old West. When we consider how quickly the West was settled (a mere

twenty-five years from 1865-1890), it is little wonder there is a national feeling in America of something having been lost too quickly. Shane is actually helping to end the world he is a part of.

The conflict in *Shane* is between the old West and the new West symbolized by two different ideals of America: the fierce masculine individuality of the rancher/cowboy/gunfighter and the ideal of the American family consisting of a man, his wife and their children (yes, both these ideals are extremely sexist). By the time this film was made in 1953, the "American dream" was for a man to have a good job and for his wife to stay home the care for their children in their comfortable home in the suburbs. Little boys like Joey would watch their favorite cowboy or gunfighter heroes at the movies or on TV. but they would know that those were only characters in a story. In other words, the ideal American family of the 1950s is the Starretts sixty years later. No wonder the film takes their side! No wonder the audience in the movie theater took their side! The audience was made up of people like the Starretts.