

Introduction edward
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treat.



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Introduction

The issue of American Dream cannot get out of picture of most Americans and aliens alike. People have come out to criticize or support it; however, Edward Albee gives it a rare treat. The satirical style of lamenting the illusions surrounding the American Dream makes Albee's work a masterpiece. Even critics would find this piece of art both interesting and informative.

According to Popkin, Albee admitted that, this is " an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen" (26). The work is rich in elements of fiction among them, theme, and imagery.

Themes

The American Dream

As the title suggest, American Dream is the most outstanding theme in this drama. This play is an apologue of how the American life has turned awry under the pretext of the American Dream. Mommy is sadistic, Daddy gelded and Grandma acerbated.

This play unveils what the American Dream left behind after its ' timely' death. Albee goes straight to the point and uses the Young Man to represent the American Dream. Though the Young Man is physically perfect, he is incompetent especially after losing his twin brother whom they separated at birth. It is important to note that, Mommy and Daddy have adopted the

Young Man who is the opposite of his brother who is headless, feetless, and spineless among other deformities. The description given to the Young Man perfectly describes the American Dream.

It was and still is perfect on paper but unattainable in practice. Many Americans thought the American Dream would bring them joy and satisfaction; however, it brought them misery. Mommy and Daddy see the Young Man as, “bumble of joy” because joy and satisfaction is what they expected from him. Unfortunately, the Young Man fails miserably. As aforementioned, the Young Man is physically perfect; however, he cannot do anything perfectly. Finally, he resorts to doing anything and everything that comes his way as long as he gets money. At this point, he becomes a symbol of ‘satisfaction’ to Mommy and Daddy.

Is this not what the American dream turned out to be? Americans quickly forgot what the dream was all about; corrupted it with materialism, mutilated and killed it before it ever matured to reality. Albee knows exactly what happened to the dream. He knows that the dream was perfect just like the Young Man; however, those supposed to nurture it became too engrossed in material world that they forgot the real meaning of the dream. Logically, the American dream was and is not an ideology; it is a person and possession; it needs ‘life’ for its realization.

Nevertheless, the Americans got the idea of American Dream wrongly. They thought that the dream was something that lived on its own, forgetting that they were the one to make it alive. The twins in this play symbolize the real American Dream and the ideological one.

The Young Man (the American Dream) is like a mask without someone behind it. The murder of the twin brother of the Young Man represents the death of the person behind the mask. After the death of this person, what remains is the 'lifeless' mask; the Young Man. Albee's theme here is to show how misconceived Americans were concerning this dream. Americans were the people supposed to drive and realize the American Dream; unfortunately, they withdrew to pursue material things forgetting their responsibilities in realizing the dream. In essence, Albee insinuates that, without the person behind a mask, the mask can never do anything.

Unfortunately, the American dream has remained as such, a mask without 'life' behind it.

Emasculation

Albee brings out the issue of emasculation in this play. Daddy is emasculated and probably this gives Mommy a foothold to assault him.

"As with many of Albee's female characters—Martha from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* perhaps being the most memorable—Mommy is the consummate "bad mother": sadistic, jealous, greedy, and onward" (Esslin 45). Daddy is a victim of Mommy's sadism and violence. For example, as Daddy wakes up to answer the door call, Mommy derides him with her hyperbolized encouragement for she knows this hurts his masculinity.

Elsewhere in the play, Mommy mangles the 'bubble of joy'; that is, the Young Man. This too is emasculation. In most of Albee's works, he continually viewed women as threat to society especially if they gained power.

Disfiguration and Deformity

Disfiguration and deformity stand out clearly in this play. Actually, Grandma declares, this “ is age is an age of deformity” (Albee 16).

Almost everyone is deformed in this play. At birth, Mommy had cone-shaped head, the Young Man’s twin brother bears all forms of deformation, Daddy is disfigured through emasculation, and Mommy continually disfigures the Young Man while Grandma claims that old people are persistently becoming ‘ twisted.’ These disfigurations and deformities symbolize what Albee calls the ‘ slipping land’ that America has become. Mayberry posits that, “ these corporeal disfigurements involve a disfigurement of language as well” (69). For instance, Mommy subterfuges the bumble after realizing that it “ only had eyes for Daddy” (Albee 26). In this case, Mommy not only disfigures the bumble’s body, but also defaces language by violently making literal trope and placing it onto the body.

Defense

According to Esslin, “ Psychically, the logic of much of The American Dream’ s touted ‘ absurdity’ is that of defense” (69).

This comes out clearly in the way Mommy, Daddy, and Grandma react towards Mrs. Barker’s visit. For instance, Daddy is torn on whether to answer Mrs. Barker’s door call or not. Throughout the play, Mrs. Barker appears new to Mommy and Daddy despite the fact that they have known each other for a longtime; actually, they share the same history of the ‘ bumble of joy’. On the other hand, even after Grandma ‘ hints’ Mrs. Barker about their history, she does not seem to understand anything and this is probably a cold

defense for she does not want to remember the past; so she deliberately feigns misunderstanding.

“ These supposedly absurd dodges are due to the traumatic nature of the party’s shared past, the memory of the ‘ bumble of joy’. Though no one has forgotten this past...the characters keep it from immediate consciousness nevertheless” (Hirsh 46). These characters are defensive for they do not want to remember the good old days, which appear ‘ traumatic’, compared to the present situation.

Imagery

Grandma’s boxes are the only images used in this play. Albee suspends the revelation of the boxes’ contents or their role in the play. Daddy and Mommy are ever helping to wrap the boxes but no one is concerned about knowing its contents. Interestingly, Mommy is not even curious of knowing the contents and when Grandma tries to expose the inside of the boxes, Mommy stops her.

Finally, Grandma reveals the contents; long lists of items that she owned in her life. To this imagery, Mayberry notes that, “ In a play where an outwardly perfect Young Man becomes the son who provides satisfaction, it is perhaps easiest to consider Mommy and Daddy’s patronizing emphasis on the boxes’ wrapping as indicative of their satisfaction with surfaces” (184). Gussow adds that, “ they allegorize the composition of the play, which largely consists of apparent and perpetually surprising diversions that keep the audience from the gist of the matter” (63). Whatever the purpose they play, these boxes are not ordinary boxes; they are images.

Conclusion

Whilst a lot has been said about the American Dream, Albee gives this subject a rare treat by dramatizing the misconceptions that surround this valuable dream to Americans.

Through satire, Albee reflects on the aftermath of the much-publicized American Dream. He uses fictional elements richly and among them is the element of theme and imagery. The most outstanding theme is the theme of the American Dream.

Many Americans could not realize that the dream was not an ideology that would survive on its own; it needed some 'life' from Americans.

Unfortunately, many Americans, just like Mommy, were busy mutilating this dream. Eventually, the dream became a 'mask', a 'lifeless' mask.

Emasculation could not miss in Albee's work given his views on women as portrayed by female characters in his works.

He portrays women as 'bad' and Mommy emasculating Daddy resonates well with this. Almost all characters in this play are defensive for they do not want to remember their past. Finally, Albee employs imagery by using grandma's boxes to signify the contents of the American Dream.

Works Cited

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