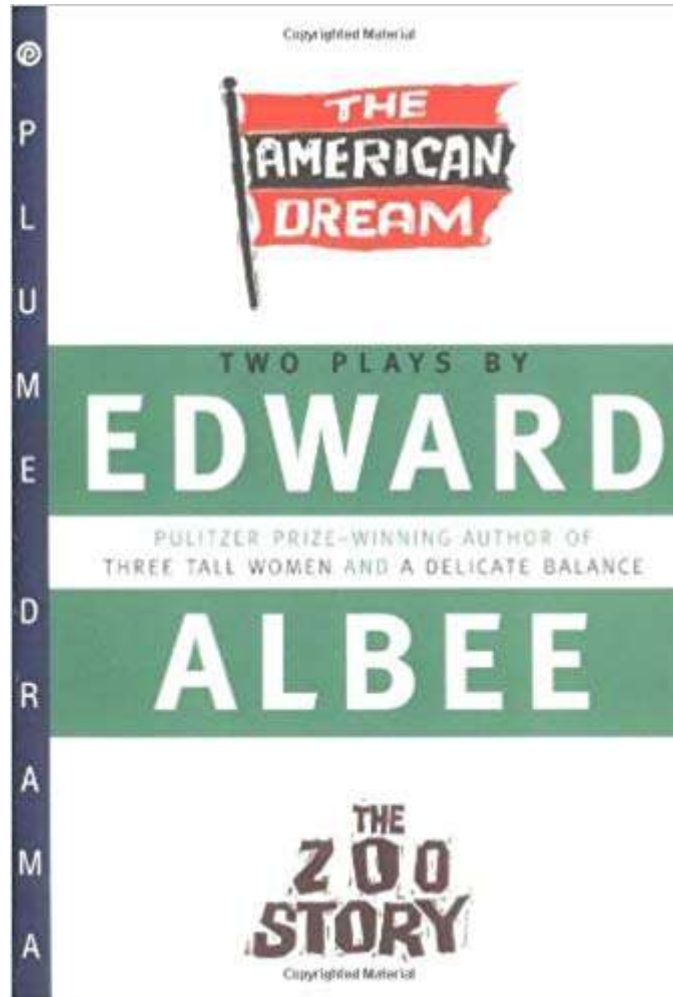


Cruel Dreams: Formation of Contemporary Theatre of Cruelty in Edward Albee's *The American Dream*

Nandini Saxena, Ph.D.



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Abstract

Edward Albee's *The American Dream* (1961) mirrors the degenerative contemporary American society, which was then living in the false shadow of much touted 'American Dream'¹. Action of the play moves through the narration and execution of cruel intentions of the characters,

¹ American Dream is a phrase that depicts America as a land of growth, prosperity, and equality. In general terms it signifies a 'life' which is materialistically affluent. It frames the picture of 'a perfect nuclear family' having caring husband/wife, obedient children. Albee's play *The American Dream* attacks the myth of 'American Dream' and presents the truth of American society.

who are chasing a materialistically fulfilling life. The employed cruelty functions as a source to keep the audience glued to the events of the play. Albee's effort to impact the viscera of the audience by creating a sensitive physical language that includes bodily movements, loud expressions, gestures, grunts, screams, and sonorous effects sets parallels between him and French theorist Antonin Artaud. Artaud formulated the theory of Theatre of Cruelty, in which he considered cruelty to be the essential part of theatre. He distrusted language for the purpose of establishing a meaningful communication and advocated a concrete language of stage with is accentuated with gestures, sound, music and lights to hit the nerves of the audience.

This paper aims to examine Edward Albee's *The American Dream* in the light of Antonin Artaud's theory of Theatre of Cruelty. The theoretical lens of theory of 'Theatre of Cruelty' provides a broad spectrum to investigate and understand how cruelty is employed in the play in order to awaken the audience against the crude realities of American society.

Keywords: Antonin Artaud, Concrete Language, Edward Albee, Theatre of Cruelty, Violence.

1. Introduction

Edward Albee was one of the most iconoclastic playwright of America, who revolutionized American theatre through his innovative dramatic art. Albee has attacked the degrading human values held by the materialistic, and emotionally barren American society very much in the Artaudian style.

Antonin Artaud was a French actor, director, and theorist, whose radical ideas about theatre are contained in his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1931). His ideas of Theatre of Cruelty are quite eccentric and could not be well understood by the contemporary theatre personalities however, after his death, his ideas were embraced by many poststructuralist intellectuals of twentieth century. He has influenced modern theatre artists "who have sought to eradicate the traditional viewpoint of text as supreme authority in an effort to establish a more immersive relationship with audience" (Delano 1).

Artaud repudiates the concept of theatre as a means of entertainment and amusement. In the theory of Theatre of Cruelty Artaud states that "our longstanding habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theatre" (Artaud 64). Artaud's approach to the theatre was a total rejection of methods and techniques that a conventional theatre employed. According to him, the ultimate goal of theatre is to wake up spectators' nerves and consciousness as well as their heart and conscience.

Albee reverberates Artaud's notion in *The American Dream*. Critic Mathew Roudane observes, "Albee staged original, challenging productions that define selected public issues of the nation as reflected through the private anxieties of the individual" (3). The play is a scathing attack on the futility of the myth of "American Dream". Albee himself describes his work as:

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" (Albee, *The American Dream* 4).

The American Dream

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The American Dream is set in a middle-class living room and features five main characters; Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, Mrs Barker and Van man. Mommy is a classical matriarch. She is a bitter, incessantly chattering and domineering woman, who clearly holds the position of being the 'head of the family'. In contrast to her "Daddy is a subservient husband who has to agree with "whatever Mommy says because he can't deal with her belittling sarcasm and judgment. He has no mind, or ball, of his own" (Hilton). He functions as an ATM machine for the family, whose job is to constantly supply money. The couple adopted a child who is treated as an unsatisfactory piece of merchandise and as a consequence he is progressively mutilated to diminish its ability to annoy Mommy and Daddy. Grandma is the only sensible and wise character; however, she is considered as a useless commodity. Mrs Barker is an outsider who is an ally to Mommy and exhibits the same materialistic attitude. One more character Van man comes as a spiritually devastated version of the dismembered child.

This research paper aims to investigate *The American Dream* in the light of theory of Theatre of Cruelty. The paper is divided into three parts, first part explores various forms of cruelty that Albee has incorporated in the play through linguistic manoeuvring of characters. Second part investigates Albee's methods, exemplifying Artaudian concept of concrete language for theatre. Third part deals with Artaudian views about importance of participation of audience in the theatre, and Albee's dramatic techniques to ensure audience engagement in the theatrical performance.



Edward Albee 1928-2016

Courtesy: <http://edwardalbeesociety.org/biography/>

2. Cruelty as a Necessary Element of Theatre

The American Dream is an unconventional presentation of human relationships, which is tinged with substantial use of violence and cruelty. Such a depiction of cruelty has been taken negatively by some audience and critics. John Skow considers Mommy and Daddy, of *The American Dream*, crippled the adopted son "with psychological torture of a classic Freudian kind" (Skow 2016). However, another group of the critics saw Albee's "dramatic violence both as metaphoric of sublimated social violence and as an alarm to wake somnambulant audience from their complacency to the social injustice around them" (Bennett 148). Mathew Roudane has closely

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examined the role use and function of violence and cruelty in Albee's plays, and he considers Albee "as leading proponent of using cruelty as a method of purging oneself of demons, of effecting a sense of Catharsis, factors which seem germane to Artaud's "theatre of Cruelty" (66).

For Artaud, cruelty is the most necessary ingredient that is required to generate apocalyptic revolt within the audience. The cruelty that Artaud wished to deploy is more of a cosmic and metaphysical kind, that works to sever an individual's illusions. Artaud's influence on Albee's *The American Dream* in terms of the use of psychological, physical and metaphysical violence on stage is quite evident. The play presents deteriorated familial relationships where characters assault each other physically, verbally, psychological, and are ready to tear apart each other breaking all delusions of an ideal mother, father, daughter, husband and wife.

2.1 Depiction of physical cruelty

Language is used to infuse cruelty into the action in order to remove demons from the minds of characters and audience. Albee employs "a dialogue of cruelty to shock us into an awareness of ourselves, paring away our habits and defences" (Cohn 84). The 'words' either in the form of narration or dialogues are used to portray physical cruelty. The adopted child, which is referred as 'bumble of joy', did not fit into Mommy and Daddy's expectations of an ideal son and was eventually murdered by them. The horrifying narration of disfiguring of the adopted son in *The American Dream* is an admirable example of portrayal of verbal, psychological and physical cruelty.

Grandma calls the process of the mutilation and eventual dismemberment as "Grand Guigol". (Stenz 29). The process of 'mutilation' is not narrated but actually acted out violently and physically, through carefully woven words exhibiting cruelty. It implies the murder of 'bumble of joy', but on the concrete level, it is directly seen as the mutilation of 'American Dream' of materialistic prosperity and ideals of a perfect family.

Murder of the adopted child is introduced to the plot through discussion, in which Grandma and Mrs Barker talk about a past event. Grandma starts the exposition in a very subtle manner. The solemnity of her voice is in contract with the devilish story of mutilation that she actually told. She minces her words and starts telling the incident that happened in the past as people tell stories, "once upon a time". Through her verbal mastery, Albee makes Grandma mouth a source for the narration of psychological cruelty that the little child went through.

GRANDMA. But that was only the beginning. Then it
turned out it only had eyes for its Daddy.
MRS. BAKER. For its Daddy! Why, any self-respecting
woman would have gouged those eyes right
out of its head. (99-100)

Mommy and Daddy try to fulfil their dream with wealth and 'a child' who could complete their ideals of 'all American life'. Mommy's psyche was completely dominated by exterior world, where material satisfaction is the only way to measure success of life. She always looked for contentment in everything, whether living or non-living. In materialistic society the children are not born because of love and care. Such a society is based on money and power; it suffers with sterility. The progeny "do[es] not happen, because intelligence at the peak of intensity can no longer find any reason for their existence" (Bloom 142).

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Mommy would not hesitate to go to any depth for the fulfilment of her desire. After having eliminated the boy's eyes, the parents move on to another monstrous action with no plausible reason for it; they decide to castrate the child. The story of mutilation is certainly horrible but it illustrates, the fact, that the “paradox is that human reality can best be apprehended today by indirection, by inhuman’ method” (Gilman 175).

GRANDMA. That's what they thought. But after they cut off its you-know-what, it still put its hands under the covers, looking for its you know-what. So, finally, they had to cut off its hands at the wrists.

MRS. BAKER. Naturally!

GRANDMA. And it was such a resentful bumble. Why one day it called its Mommy a dirty name.

MRS. BAKER. Well, I hope they cut its tongue out!

GRANDMA. Of course. And then, as it got bigger, they found all sorts of terrible things about it, like: it didn't have a head on its shoulders, it had no guts, it was spineless, its feet were made of clay ...just dreadful things.

MRS. BAKER. Dreadful.

GRANDMA. So, you can understand how they became discouraged.

MRS. BAKER. I certainly can! And what did they do?

GRANDMA. What did they do? Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. So, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction, they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted (100-101)

Mrs Barker’s comments; ‘Naturally’, ‘dreadful’, ‘A much better idea’ portrays the spineless American society who anticipates, agrees and confirms the monstrous act of mutilation for the attainment of their desires.

2.2 Depiction of psychological cruelty

Later, when ‘Young man’ comes as the replacement of ‘mutilated and murdered’ child. His ‘hollow and beautiful body’ depicts the wider implication of cruelty. Physical cruelty accomplished the physical death of the adopted child and spiritual death of the ‘Young man’. The young man and his twin brother were separated and “thrown away in the opposite ends of the continent” (36). He was not aware of the fact that his twin brother has gone through horrible disfigurement, but his body reflected his brother’s pain and agony. The physical cruelty turned the adopted child just a body of flesh, not capable of executing any desires of his own and ultimately resulted in the spiritual hollowness of the twin brother. Young man describes his helplessness to feel this world. The manner in which Young man describes his “suffered losses” (36), his words are redolent of the "lightly stretched web of anaemic words" (Tharu 76) of Artaud’s own plays.

My heart became numb ... almost as though I ... almost as though ... just like that ... it had been wrenched from my body ... and from that time ... I have been unable to love ... Once ... I was asleep at the time ... I awoke, and my eyes were burning. And since that time, I have been unable to see anything, anything with pity, with affection ... with anything but ... cool disinterest. And my groin ... even there ... since one time ... one specific agony ... since then I have not been able to love anyone with my body... I have no emotions, I have

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been drained; torn asunder... disembowelled... I let people love me ...I let people touch me ... I let them draw pleasure from my groin ... from my presence ... from the fact of me ... but, that is all it comes to... I am incomplete (36-37).

The 'bumble of joy' finally thrown like a 'bundle' because it was not able to fulfil Mommy's expectation. His twin brother although hollow from inside, but physically beautiful seems to be a satisfactory piece of merchandise as he looks like a 'perfect American man'. The physical cruelty wielded in language, certainly gain the attention of spectators. It is employed to highlight the baselessness of America's society and examines their moral bankruptcy.

Not only Mommy but Mrs Barker also has a craving for violence. This is evident in her eagerness in the story told by Grandma, she finds it very engrossing. It seems that the narration of mutilation of child's body satisfies her own fondness of cruelty, in Synge's words she relishes the "delightful sympathy with the wildness of evil" (qtd. in Whitaker 15). The pain of Young man is certainly terrifying but renders awareness towards the existence of evil in the society, that is why Albee considers cruelty as a "teaching emotion" (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 4).

3. Distrust on Language

Language is considered as primary source to express human feelings. It contains set of words that have capacity to lend certain meaning, however according to Antonin Artaud static words whether they are written or spoken cannot convey complex human feelings in a comprehensible manner. That is why in his theory of Theatre of Cruelty he expresses his disagreement on dominance of text and wishes to free theatre from the "dictatorship of speech" (Artaud 40).

Characters of *The American Dream* suffer with the problem of alienation and find it difficult to express themselves meaningfully. Albee "reveals the corruption of conventional patterns of friendship, love, and family allegiance and the terrifying process, in which language becomes a barrier rather than an aid to communication" (Esslin 21). Although the characters, of *The American Dream*, yearn for companionship, contentment and love, yet their relationship is devoid of mutual understanding. The husband-wife relationship suffers from a severe collapse, which on the fundamental level signifies failure of communication between them, and on the philosophical level it is indicative of Albee's agreement with Artaud's thoughts, who also questions the ability of language for the purpose of meaningful communication between individuals.

The American Dream portrays familial discord. Carl G. Jung considers marriage as a relationship in which, "a woman to be wholly contained spiritually in her husband and for a husband to be contained emotionally in his wife" (qtd. in Jacobi). However, in *The American Dream* husband and wife continually try to contend each other and exist individually. Sometimes this is intentional and most of the time they react without any emotion, even in circumstances where they should have reacted strongly, their throat seems to be have been choked. It seems that the characters in the house have some secret desires, but something keeps them from revealing these to each other. They just fail to communicate.

Daddy in *The American Dream* is an extremely successful businessman and banks on his success however, as a husband, he is typically reluctant to enter into any kind of conversation. There is a strange lapse in the communication that looms largely in the play. Daddy ultimately accepts, every time, whatever Mommy utters, requests, or commands which shows how exactly Daddy enjoys, accepts and understands Mommy's words. However, in his heart, he does not have any

intention of listening to Mommy's request nor he is interested in paying attention to her. Both of them appear to be 'two different' individuals travelling in two different orbits.

Daddy. Oh! Yes ... Yes.
Mommy. Pay attention
Daddy. I am paying attention, Mommy.
Mommy. Well, sure you do.
Daddy. Oh! I am.
Mommy. All right, Daddy now listen.
Daddy. I am listening, Mommy.
Mommy. You're sure!
Daddy. Yes... yes, I'm sure. I'm all ears. (16)

4. Formation of Concrete language.

Although Albee's characters can't communicate through ordinary words, still communication happens through "language of signs whose objective aspect is the one that has the most immediate impact upon" (Artaud 107) the audience. Albee employs the Artaudian theatrical language, "giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams" (94). Artaud purposed to enhance the power of words, by accentuating them with intonations, pitch, groans, grunts, screams gestures and bodily movements to express the complex human issues. To put it other way he means to enlarge "the theatre's vocabulary" (Bermel 15.) He advocated creating a concrete language for the stage which is "intended for the senses" (Artaud, 67).

A concrete language for stage means to augment the effect of language by adding physicality to it. Such an expressive language is a combination of words with sonorous effects, body movements and visual effects. Words should have suggestive sounds which are sensuous and explosive. The words should then be charged with appropriate pitch, intonation, and pace putting stress on vocal chords. Text must be shouted, whispered, wheezed, howled and groaned, in abstract meanings of the words and sentences. Codified body language, gestures and facial expressions should be able to convey that the ordinary words might not be capable of.

4.1 Incorporation of Physicality in language

Mommy and Grandma in *The American Dream* produce a poetry of verbal offensiveness on stage. They play with the pitch of the sound and intonate the words to express their disdain with each other. Whitney Balliet's has given an elaborate depiction of the character of Mommy, "thin lipped and snake faced, she speaks in a voice that alternates between needles and syrup. She moves her shoulders in witch fashion in a series of sharp Zig-Zags and is smartly over-dressed in a purple velvet suit, pounds of gold jewellery, and ugly harlequin glasses" (qtd. in Stenz 28). Her sharp piercing voice deadens the ears. Her voice and body movements clearly portray her as an opportunistic and shrewd woman who always looks for "Get[ting] satisfaction".

Mommy and Grandma are always ready to hit each other through verbal attacks. Mommy is a devil for Grandma, she insults, hurls cruelties and threatens her to be thrown away to a nursing home. Grandma, on the other hand, does not leave any chance of hitting her through her wit and revealing her hypocrite aspirations. Rakesh Solomon's study of Albee's directorial attempts provide details about his approach of directing the play *The American Dream*. According to Solomon, Albee

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“devised a series of minor climatic moves” (32) and asked the characters to express themselves with expressions and gestures. Directing the “seesaw battle” (Solomon 32), between Mommy and Grandma Albee instructs in the following manner:

In the first beat, Albee asked Mommy to sniggeringly imitate Grandma’s voice and, towards the end of her speech, rise from her armchair triumphantly with “you see? I can pull that stuff as easily as you can “(85) ...in retaliation Grandma should rush up to her side of the sofa, lean forward, and hurl a sting of personal insults at her. Mommy should then react with a “large gesture” conveying “social embarrassment”. (Solomon 32)

Albee’s approach in writing as well as directing the plays is best explained by Albee himself, he says, “Well there has to be a sound. There has to be a sense of sound... the fact I do hear very precisely and hear a kind of musical quality and rhythm to my characters as they are speaking... When I am writing a play, I hear it and see it as performed piece on stage” (Mann 133). Albee’s helps his actors to grasp the character. He also pays attention on pattern of speech, intonation, pauses and rhythm. He tells his actors that “rhythm is adversely affected by an inappropriate pause, business, or movement” (Solomon 29). Albee gives attention to add physicality to words to enhance their function to hit the nerves of the audience. Solomon has described the way in which Albee guides his actors to create a physical language on stage:

After Mommy Gaffe, her exclamations, “Oooooohhh! what have I said? What have I said? (92) should have an extremely exaggerated, “overly unctuous” tone, but without any hint of “sarcasm or irony”, ... at the end of his emotionally draining autobiographical account to Grandma, the Young man’s “And so ... here I am ... as you see me” (115). Must echo the falling rhythm after a release of pent-up feelings ... Mrs. Barker [when] quot[es] her brother’s favourite line, “Of course, I am married” (84), Albee specified “a hoarse, guttural voice, with a very low pitch” (Solomon 30).

4.2 Powerful Dialogues

Albee dialogues are reflection of Artaud’s vision of using words to hurl scathing attack on contemporary issues. Dialogues are pungent, sharp, and powerful that hit hard on the nerves of spectators. They deliver more than their denotative meaning. Albee’s character’s do not talk in the manner ordinary people do. They raise audience’ temper, hurt, confuse and sometimes they make them laugh also. The language they speak is incomprehensible but still, they signal the audience to ‘see whatever is overlooked’ by them. The audience quickly grasps the hidden message that “we live in the age of deformity” (Albee, *The American Dream* 119). Grandma in *The American Dream* delineates the experience of life and comments on the process of ageing, she says “old people wake up in the middle of the night screaming and find out they haven’t been asleep; and when old people are asleep, they try to wake up, and they can’t... not for the longest time” (107). She speaks about the irony of being old in the following manner:

When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That’s why you become “dear, so you won’t be able to hear people talking to you that way. That’s why you go and hide under the covers of big soft bed, so you won’t feel the house shaking from people talking you that way. That’s why old people die eventually (46)

4.3 Dynamic Mise-en-scene

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For a complete concrete language of stage Artaud advocates reinterpretation and reorganization of mise-en-scene. The theatrical devices should not be used just for the sake of static decoration of the stage. Sound effects, lights, scenery, props, costumes and other adornments should be utilized to mobilize the action on the stage. Albee has been extremely innovative and serious in using the stage and other theatrical devices and ensures that dynamics of the play go with the settings of the stage.

Albee reduces his sets to the barest minimum in *The American Dream*, and in this manner, he brings out the isolation and emptiness of relationships of the inhabitants. The living room in *The American Dream*, has just enough furniture for all those present to be seated. The set in the living rooms is marked by the atmosphere of depression and decline. The degenerating civilization's reflection is seen in the settings of the stage. Albee innovatively tries to accommodate various objects to aid the subject of the play, like in New York presentation of *The American Dream*, an empty frame was hung on the wall of the room, depicting the bareness in the relationships of the inhabitants.

Albee makes use of lights in his sets not merely as a structural device but also as a means to suggest an inner state of mind of the characters. Rather than illuminating a realistic scene, lighting is intended to overwhelm an audience with fluctuations of shade and colour. In *The American Dream*, man-made glittering artificial light of the departmental store signifies the deceptive nature of modern man, which seems brighter, sometimes completely different, under the lights of arc lamps. Modern people are hypocritical, shrewd and lack the warmth and genuineness of the natural light.

The consumeristic attitude of American society is depicted by repetitive logorrhoea by Mommy, where the colour of the hat is given so much importance. Her more than required attitude towards the colour of the hat is used by Albee to show thoughtless consumerist attitude.

MOMMY. And then they showed me one that I did like. It was a lovely little hat, and I said, "Oh, this is a lovely little hat; I'll take this hat; oh my, it's lovely. What color is it?" And they said, "Why, this is beige; isn't it a lovely little beige hat?" And I said, "Oh, it's just lovely." And so I bought it. (59)

Albee has brilliantly used Grandma's boxes as stage props to depict communicative disarray among family members. Boxes are "empty" but "nicely" wrapped. They suffice two purposes; first, making the audience keep guessing about the probable mystery associated with them. Secondly, they also signify the hollowness that exists in the relationship among family members. The basic element in marital life, love and communication is completely missing still, Mommy and Daddy maintain a 'nicely' framed wedded life. The child is needed for exhibition not for affection and care, that is why the first adopted child was discarded and murdered and other in the form of perfect American Young man was accepted. Mommy is Grandma own daughter, but as a monstrous villain she always spouts disgust towards her and wants to send her away. All three relationships; husband-wife, parent-child, mother-daughter are 'empty' from inside and 'nicely wrapped' from outside like Grandma's 'boxes'. Grandma's remark "Everything is hidden" (Albee, *The American Dream* 38) is an extremely strong statement, that indicates the root cause of dead communication among family members of the play and American families in general.

5. Techniques to Engage the Audience

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The American Dream portray the story of the American couples, who are cruel and venomous. They shock us by launching strikes at the core of our being, implicating us in action and affecting the very marrow of our being. Shocking audience in this manner is directly related to Albee's desire to invite the audience to engage in a complex spectatorial process, that may prove astonishing, depressing, life-affirming and anxiety-inducing. Albee affirms by saying, "I want the audience to run out of the theatre, but to come back and see the play again," (Weber *New York Times*). The structure and the language of the plays conspire to assault the audiences' individual and collective sensibility. He delineates his views in the following manner:

I don't like the audience as voyeur, the audience as passive spectator. I want the audience as participant. In that sense, I agree with Artaud: that sometimes we should literally draw blood. I am fond of doing that because voyeurism in the theatre lets people off the hook (qtd in Roudane 41).

Albee approves Artaud's suggestion of considering the theatre as mesmerising and hypnotic as a snake charmer's act, in which the snake charmer does not utter a single word still keeps the snake charmed by the back and forth movement of the musical instrument. Albee gives utmost importance to the connection of "the spectators with the spectacle" (Artaud 93). According to Roudane Albee tries to "break down, or at least minimize, the barrier between itself and the actors, thus creating a more intimate, and dangerous, theatre experience. The emotional effect is to involve the audience directly, as participants in the action" (Roudane 41). Albee employs various techniques to engage spectator's senses in the action of the plays.

5.1 Nameless Characters

Albee creates a nameless family in *The American Dream*. Such characters evoke curiosity in the audience's mind. The characters are given generic names Mommy, Daddy and Grandma. Albee deliberately keeps them nameless. Firstly, it helps audience to identify with them because of generic nomenclature they possess, and secondly, namelessness depicts the psychological inexistence of the characters. Such a dramatic art brings Albee closer to Artaud's dramatic technique. Artaud also used generic names of the characters, 'Young man' and 'Girl', in his play *The Spurt of Blood* to show lack of individuality in them.

5.2 On stage audience

One more technique that Albee successfully employs to engage the audience is by presenting the audience, a character, who represent them on the stage and interact with other characters closely. Grandma in *The American Dream* is an "onstage audience" (Krohn and Wasserman 9) and serve as "a barometre" (Krohn and Wasserman 9) for the actions happening on the stage.

Grandma is old, and her age sets her as a marginalized on-looker watching the "American scene". Her marginal position makes her act as a mediator between the spectator and spectacle. The satire of Grandma renders the catalytic effect on the senses of the audience. She is witty, sharp and sensible. She lives with Daddy and Mommy and moves around wherever they decide to go, still she has self-respect and considers herself as "a resourceful person" of proud "pioneer stock" (Albee, *The American Dream* 112). She reveals about the illusions of Mommy and Daddy's life, that they wished to have a perfect "bumble of joy". She also brings out the cruel act of dismemberment of adopted child, and tells us, how much the worm of materialistic attitude has nibbled the society. She bridges the gap between an actor enjoying the joy of acting and an ordinary person who has concerns for

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deteriorated society. On her departure from the Mommy and Daddy's house she addresses the audience as an external commentator.

Grandma. (interrupting the audience.) Well, I guess that just about wraps it up. ...while everybody got what he wants...or everybody's got what he thinks he wants ... Good night dears. (60)

To Conclude

In sum, an Artaudian study of *The American Dream*, allows us to understand the various levels on which the cruelty acts on both the characters on stage and spectators in the theatre. The play “demonstrate the cathartic principle that destruction and violence are not ends in themselves, but purge both the actors and the spectators, and prepare the way for rebirth” (Norton). Albee has raised some of the most troubling questions about American families and society, including disintegration, alienation and cruelty. As a playwright and director, Albee innovatively modifies ‘words’ to make them sound much more than their denotative meaning. The effective utilization of sound, colour, lights and stage settings make Albee’s language a ‘concrete language for theatre’. The cruelty both in verbal and psychological forms certainly generates a distressing effect on the senses of the audience. Albee’s protean dramatic art makes *The American Dream* an exemplary play to construe Artaudian concept of Theatre of Cruelty.

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