

This research studies American playwright Edward Albee's one-act play *The American Dream* as an irony of the American middle class family. Though absurdism is used by the dramatist as his major technique of the play, it is used in the play in an ironic way with a clear goal to change the human conduct and society and correct its course to the right direction. Samuel Beckett, James Joyce and other writers using absurdism in their writings use it to show the futility of human life and focus on the meaninglessness of human life but in contrast to them, Albee uses absurdism in the play in optimistic way that mindless and meaningless human conducts can be changed and the life can be improved.

Albee's play *The American Dream* portrays a three-member family consisting of Daddy, Mommy and Grandma. The Daddy is an emasculate, Mommy is aggressive, and only Grandma is morally honest. Mommy and Daddy live a life without children. They believe that they can adopt or buy a child rather than giving birth to child themselves. They are planning to dump Grandma in a care center for old ones to get rid of her. They adopt a son from Bye-Bye Adoption Center. But, later they kill him because he fails to bring them happiness. At the end of the play, they adopt another boy who is named American Dream and hope that happiness will prevail in the family.

This play presents various facets of American culture like American Dream, consumerism and individualism. The playwright is critical about the cultural values of America in the play. This research studies the play as an irony of American culture and its dark sides. This play uses witty Grandma as a character who is generally and cautiously ignored. Mommy is bossy and the Daddy is emasculated. They adopt a child who was named as 'bumble of joy.' He turns out to be more trouble than he was worthy, so they mutilated and killed him.

Daddy and Mommy think everything in terms of money and believe that they can buy happiness with it. They plan to get rid of Grandma in order to avoid unnecessary expenditure and economic burden. They kill their adopted son because he cannot give them happiness or pleasure they expect from him. His name, 'bumble of joy' is a parody of the bundle of joy that suggests they expected to gain joy or pleasure and be happy adopting him. This research studies the irony underlying the mindless conduct and approach of life in American individuals and family. It critically focuses on the radical use of irony that has corrective measure to the wrong conducts of American individuals and society.

The family is materialistic and personal relations are regarded as the source of physical pleasure and happiness for it Grandma is old and she has no prospect of bringing happiness with any economic gain. She is just an economic burden as her sustenance costs Mommy and Daddy dearly. So, they try to get rid of her; at the same time, they want a young member in the family so that he could bring happiness and energy to the family. Human relations and American material values are in ironic situation in the play.

Albee's play *The American Dream* was first produced in 1960. The play became popular and it has drawn lots of criticisms. It is a chronicle of American middle-class family. Albee has pointed to his intention behind writing this play: "The play is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen" (qtd. in Lee 56). Albee's clarification of his intention of writing the play highlights his critique of the changing American values; he criticizes complacency, cruelty, emasculation of men and the hollowness in American families.

Growing hollowness or artificial values in American society becomes his central concern in the play.

Albee's powerful critique of American society as well as the family values has made the play very popular. It became a hit play in off-Broadway theater. Critic Philip C. Colin writes, "*The American Dream*, Albee's second big success, premiered off-Broadway in January 1961, when he was thirty-two, at the York Playhouse, and subsequently ran for more than 360 performances at various New York theatres" (27). *American Dream's* success in off-Broadway becomes clear with Colin's comment. It ran more than 360 shows in off-Broadway.

Colin comments that Albee's plays subvert the myth of American dreams. He is a playwright who creates counterdiscourse of American Dream. Going beyond dramatic realism and handling of absurdism are the major elements in his plays. He praises the playwright for his distinct Americanness. He writes:

If Albee rattled American dreams, he also undermined the dramatic realism that dominated the American theatre at the time. Although he incorporated techniques and ideas from the "absurdist" plays of European playwrights such as Beckett, Genet, and Ionesco, Albee's voice was also distinctively American, pressing for social change and reform. (17)

Colin points that Albee criticizes American Dream going beyond the discourse of American Dream. Though he handles absurdism like other major playwrights, he is noted for his Americanness and an activism pressing for social change.

Richard Watts praises Albee's talent and the freshness. In his review published in *New York Post*, he celebrates Albee's writings and the play *The American Dream*. According to him:

If sheer creative talent appeals to you, I recommend *The American Dream*. . . . It is packed with untamed imagination, wild humor, gleefully sardonic satirical implications, and overtones of strangely touching sadness, and I thought it was entirely delightful. . . . Mr. Albee [is] a playwright of fresh and remarkable talent. (qtd. in Preface 54)

Watts writes about Albee's talent seen in this play. He recommends the readers *The American Dream* for its imagination, humor, satire, sadness and delight. This play is the proof of playwright's talent according to Watts. Keeping these criticisms of the play in mind, this research explores the irony embedded in this play.

Basically, irony is termed as the difference between saying and the actual meaning of the saying. It began in ancient Greece in the time of Socrates and was used as a literary device. Thus, it has a long history. It is also an important rhetorical device in the modernist era. Though it is taken as a very simple literary device, it is complex according to Colebrook:

Despite its unwieldy complexity, irony has a frequent and common definition: saying what is contrary to what is meant . . . a definition that is usually attributed to the first-century Roman orator Quintilian who was already looking back to Socrates and Ancient Greek literature. But this definition is so simple that it covers everything from simple figures of speech to entire historical epochs. Irony can mean as little as saying, 'Another day in paradise', when the weather is appalling. It can also refer to the huge problems of postmodernity; our very historical context is ironic because today nothing really means what it says. We live in a world of quotation, pastiche, simulation and

cynicism: a general and all-encompassing irony. Irony, then, by the very simplicity of its definition becomes curiously indefinable. (1)

Colebrook points to complexity and vagueness of the rhetorical device of irony referring to the definition of Roman orator Quintilian that covers everything from simple figures of speech to the great historical epochs. Irony encompasses large number of phenomena of the world as it is the difference of expression, the difference between what is said and what is done through the saying. The definition is simple but the very simplicity of the definition makes it obscure and hard to define.

Irony is simple as well as complex concept. One can be easily confused and find it hard to define because of its complexity in its simplicity. In short, we can say about irony what Freud says about wit:

[The] criteria and attributes of wit mentioned by these authors . . . seems to us, at first glance, so very pertinent and so easily demonstrable by examples that we cannot succumb to the danger of underestimating the value of such ideas. But they are only disjointed fragments . . . In the end, they contribute no more to the knowledge of wit than a number of anecdotes teach us of the true characteristics of a personality whose biography interests us (605).

According to Freud, we are likely to fall in some danger of underestimating wit though we see it is persistently present in the particular writing by particular writer. Irony is similar to this observation. Samuel Johnson's attempt at explaining irony does not clarify matters very much: "A mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the words" (qtd. in Enright 5). A much more modern dictionary, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has a much longer definition of irony but it has very little amount of success:

A figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used; usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt. An instance of this; an ironical utterance or expression *fig.* A condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things. In etymological sense: Dissimulation, pretence; esp. in reference to the dissimulation of ignorance practised by Socrates as a means of confuting an adversary. *spec.* in *Theatr.* (freq. as dramatic or tragic irony), the incongruity created when the (tragic) significance of a character's speech or actions is revealed to the audience but unknown to the character concerned; the literary device so used, orig. in Greek tragedy; also *transf.* (database online)

It is even more confusing to find a paragraph by Freud which attempts to differentiate wit from irony when his summation of the writings on wit parallels the critical corpus of writing on irony: “The essence of irony consists in imparting the very opposite of what one intended to express, but it precludes the anticipated contradiction by indicating... that the speaker himself means to convey the opposite of what he says” (725). It seems, then, that Freud is in agreement with Johnson, but the definitions of irony from the two writers are narrower than the senses elaborated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Several critics who write on irony are aware of its problem, but continue bravely writing on it anyway. D.C. Muecke observes:

Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there is plenty to take hold of if only one could...

Yet if, upon examination, irony becomes less nebulous, as it does, it remains exclusively Protean. Its forms and functions are so diverse as to seem scarcely amenable to a single definition. (3)

He goes on to note that “irony, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder and is not a quality inherent in any remark, event or situation” (12). Since this apparently is the case, Muecke’s solution would be to catalogue as many definitions of irony as possible. He operates on two assumptions: firstly, that irony would become less amorphous upon closer examination and that secondly, one would be able to catalogue the number of forms that this “Protean” phenomenon takes. Doing this, of course, is like trying to enumerate all the possible shapes that water can take by attempting to take into account any thing that could act as a container for it. In short, it strikes one as somewhat futile and ironic because Muecke is simply proving that irony might be ‘nebulous’ after all.

Muecke generates a long list not only in this book but continues the task in another book, titled *Irony and the Ironic* incredibly. Muecke is, of course, not alone. In his article, “Approximately Irony,” Jonathan Tittler decides that he has to do a similar accounting of irony: “If irony is not to be crushed under the weight of its own protean polymorphism, it must be set forth systemically” (32). And just like Muecke, Tittler insists on carrying on despite the futility of his task: “[Even] if totalization is impossible (because irony is the essence of unachieved totalization), we are at present so far from threatening that limit, surely much can be gained from a rigorous failure” (32). Similar conclusions have prompted critics like Wayne Booth, Linda Hutcheon and D.J. Enright to try to record all the different forms of irony that are currently in use. If forming a list of the different types of irony is not the most feasible approach towards understanding the phenomenon, then we have to look for the ways that could help us to understand it.

Kierkegaard's book titled *The Concept of Irony* was written in 1841 in which he has discussed about his notion of irony. Kierkegaard does not talk about different kinds of ironies that might arise in different kinds of texts and/or situations in life. He thinks his study of irony is important because: "As philosophy cannot be indifferent to the subsequent history of this concept, so neither can it content itself with the history of its origin, though it be ever so complete and interesting a history as such. Philosophy requires something more..." (48). Instead of listing the various kinds of ironies that might exist, Kierkegaard tries to find out what characterizes irony by examining Socrates, whom he calls is the very first ironist in the world (47).

Linda Hutcheon's book, *Irony's Edge*, talks about effects of irony. Hutcheon believes that irony is characterized by its effect:

"Unlike metaphor or metonymy, irony has an edge; unlike paradox, irony is decidedly edgy . . . irony is a "weighted" mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and unsaid . . . irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude, and this is where the emotive or affective dimension also enters – much to the dismay of most critical discourse and most critics" (37).

Pointing to the edgy nature of irony, Hutcheon favors the position that irony can be used to create certain effect and thus, it can show certain way of human conduct. As the affective dimension of irony has not been much discussed in Albee's play, it is examined through this viewpoint in this research. This shows how irony can be used as the means to correct the course of society creating certain effect.

In this research, irony is used to criticize the discourse of American Dream. Discourse is the concept widely used in cultural and literary areas since its thrust upon the academia and literary criticism in the latter half of twentieth century by Foucault

and his rigorous studies centered upon the social institutions like prisons, asylums and clinics. To define the concept itself is very hard since it encompasses the vast range of social bodies and institutions. According to Glenn Ward, the author of the book

Postmodernism:

Discourse can be seen as a controlled system for the production of knowledge. Though regulated they are not completely closed systems and have to allow for change and limited dissent for example literary critics will disagree over the quality of a particular poem or the meaning of a particular play but this will not threaten the discourse of literary criticism itself. Indeed such internal disagreements are crucial in keeping the discourse up and running nevertheless discourses put a limit on what is sayable at any time: they define what counts as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' statements. (143)

Discourse is, thus, seen as the controlled system of production of knowledge and they go on changing and with modification whenever there is some lack of authority. Power politics is embedded in any discourse and to exercise the power the knowledge is necessary and thus, it goes on changing according to its legitimization of the authority that produces them. Discourse always serves particular groups or power structures producing particular knowledge thereby constructing the truth. Whenever a change comes inside the power structures, discourse changes and becomes modified so that it serves their interest. Thus, discourse is always controlled by the power centers and it helps them define any statement 'legitimate or illegitimate' on the basis of whether the power centers are benefited or not. Thus, discourses are constructed and they can be ironized.

American Dream is a national ethos of the United States, the set of ideals democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity and equality in which freedom includes the

opportunity for prosperity and success and upward social mobility for the family and the children achieved through hardwork in the society. In the definition of American Dream by historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth, The American Dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that ,”all men are created equal” with the right to “ life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. It is having the opportunity to come from nothing and being able to get everything.

This research focuses on the ironic side of Albee’s play *The American Dream*. From the very beginning the play is ironic. As the simple definition of irony goes, it means other than what it says. The title of the play is confused as the discourse of American Dream that has become an ideal for many of the American people since independence of America. But as the play progresses, it becomes clear that it is only the name of a child adopted by the family. The family consists of Mommy, Daddy and Grandma and it stands for any middle-class family in the play.

The study of irony helps to see a gap between a text’s explicit saying and actual meaning. It is a reading in which the meaning of the sentences, words, characters and context are seen as different from their straightforward meaning. That is why, Colebrook terms this kind of reading of the text as ironic re-reading.

Colebrook elaborates the process of ironic re-reading:

Process of ironic re-reading, where we dare to imagine a text as somehow meaning something other than what it explicitly says, characterizes much of what counts as literary criticism. Indeed, one could argue —as many twentieth-century critics were to do—that

literature is characterized by its potential for irony, its capacity to mean something other than a common-sense or everyday use of language. (5)

According to Colebrook, most of the literature has the potential for irony. They generally tend to say other than commonsense meaning or the meaning in everyday language. So, ironic re-reading is a literary criticism looking beyond what is apparent meaning in the text.

Albee's play, *The American Dream*, opens in silence. Daddy and Mommy, begin conversation are talking about some domestic problems. They have called the apartment owner and workers to fix some problem in their apartment but they are not coming on time and they are waiting for them. They ironize the human nature in their discussion that they come quickly when they have to take rent or any other charges but they are very slow to act when there is any problem in the apartment. Daddy says, "When we took this apartment, they were quick enough to have me sign the lease; they were quick enough to take my check for two months' rent in advance . . . and one month's security . . . But now, try to get the icebox fixed . . . doorbell fixed . . . they aren't so quick about that" (58-59). This observation clearly has two meanings. The surface or straightforward meaning is that people are always to gain their rights but they are slow to fulfill their responsibility. Deeper meaning of the statement is even more powerful. It suggests that people work for money and act fast if they are going to earn money. Money determines their action; they have become so selfish and irresponsible that they do not act if there is no money in particular works whatever be the responsibility. This money-minded nature of modern man has become the major determinant of the modern societies. Ironically, money has affected the way human society operates. Everything would fall in place and run properly in this world if there were no money. Invention of money is the cause behind improper functioning of the society.

Everything in the play revolves round money and human actions are determined and understood in terms of money. Money makes the world function differently and so the world has become altogether different than it would likely to be. Grandma admits the reason behind Mommy's marriage with Daddy. It is also because of money. Mommy was obsessed with money from her childhood that leads her to choose Daddy as her partner because he was rich. Grandma reveals:

When she was no more than eight years old she used to climb up on my lap and say, in a sickening little voice, "When I grow up I'm going to marry a rich old man; I'm going to set my wittle were end right down in a tub o' butter that's what I'm going to do." And I warned you, Daddy; I told you to stay away from her type. I told you to. I did.

(69)

Grandma points out money being the primary factor behind Mommy's marriage to Daddy. The persons running after money are selfish and they can do anything. Grandma is aware of this and does not like that type of people. The reason behind her dislike to this type of people is very strong: she herself is beyond the age to earn money and let anyone any economic advantage. This fact is likely to reduce her to an economic burden. Money-minded people do not like the economic burdens and can do anything to dump them.

Mommy says Daddy clearly that she married to him only because of money too:

I have a right to live off of you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and bump your uglies; and I have a right to all your money when you die. And when you do, Grandma and I can live by ourselves . . . if she's still here. Unless you have her put away in a nursing home. (67)

Mommy also claims she got married to Daddy only because of money and she has rights to live off of him. She has his money now in exchange of her physical relation to him. She is rightful owner of his money and can live anyway she likes. It is also a situational irony; a person who is living on other people's money constantly taunts and tortures the real owner and the owner has to bear the insults without questions.

As the play progresses we see number of ironic situations. The irony of the play is irony of the middle-class American family in particular and a materialistic family everywhere. There are many ironic situations Mommy praises Daddy for his masculinity when he decides to go to open the door when there is a doorbell ringing and some people they expect arrive. She encourages him saying "WHAT a masculine Daddy! Isn't he a masculine Daddy?" (74). She is excited that he is being decisive and direct by taking charge of the situation. It is very ironic because Daddy is only going to do very simple job, just to respond to the doorbell. Masculinity is ironized to be useless concept and it is used in so simple cases is ironic situation. There is no place to show masculinity; Mommy is bossy and Daddy is emasculate. It has to be proved in so simple decisions. Daddy's decisiveness like a male is also in question as he decides to open the door because of his wife's pressure. When he has a sudden change of heart and does not want to go to answer the door, Mommy angrily calls him a woman, which is ironic because it contradicts what she was saying moments ago. Mommy is in controlling position over Daddy, at the same time she belittles him. He is a husband servant for her. It is ironic family situation in which many situational ironies emerge.

Paul de Man discusses the nature of irony in "Rhetoric of Temporality." He sees irony not so simple to be easily demystified according to the historical context. In case of irony, unlike allegory or symbol, we have to start from the structure of irony itself. Though irony is often claimed to stand as if the human matters it speaks are

historical matters, it is self-conscious in itself. So, it also demonstrates the impossibility of our being historical. De Man clarifies:

But in the case of irony one has to start out from the structure of the trope itself, taking one's cue from texts that are de-mystified and, to a large extent, themselves ironical. For that manner, the target of their irony is very often the claim to speak about human matters as if they were facts of history. It is a historical fact that irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself in the course of demonstrating the impossibility of our being historical. (11)

De Man demonstrates the uniqueness of irony in contrast to other rhetorical devices. Irony is hard to demystify according to our history. The problem does not lie in history but it lies within self. That is the reason we cannot escape irony by simply demystifying the ironical terms. De Man continues:

In speaking of irony we are dealing not with the history of an error but with a problem that exists within the self. We cannot escape . . . On the other hand, a great deal of assistance can be gained from existing texts on irony. Curiously enough, it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means. (11)

Thus, De Man begins with the difficulty to deal with irony in his essay. He claims the nature of irony can be understood with the help of existing texts of irony. At surface, irony appears to be simple; it appears only as a mode of language that means different things than it actually says.

Though privacy is regarded as one of the most important aspects of American culture, Mommy does not let her adopted child privacy and the time to grow up. It is very ironic. Mommy cuts off the parts of the body of the son adopted from Bye-Bye

Adoption Center so as to shape it to give them the pleasure but unfortunately he grows disgusting. Mommy and Daddy systematically destroy their child: Mommy gouges out its eyes when “it only had eyes for its Daddy” (99); they “cut its hands off at the wrists” and “cut off its you-know-what” when “it began to develop an interest in its you-know-what” (100); and “they cut its tongue out” when “it called its Mommy a dirty name” (100). When the “bumble” finally “up and died,” they “wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back” (101). The concepts of privacy desire and satisfaction are ironized in this instance. People are obsessed with personal privacy and satisfaction but they do not care about other people’s privacy, desire and satisfaction. They regard other people only come to their purpose of getting satisfaction. Mommy kills the adopted boy mutilating his body because he develops physical desire. He has all the ‘eyes for its Daddy’ suggests that he does not let Daddy a privacy and ‘you-know-what’ suggests sexual desire. The family that adopts a child, does not respect his privacy and desire and kills him in the name of not getting satisfaction is ironic in the play. It is a dramatic irony.

The family is obsessed for satisfaction. Mommy buys a hat and Daddy remarks she should have got satisfaction out of it. Mommy says she got satisfaction buying the hat:

DADDY (*Clearing his throat*): I would imagine that it was the same hat they tried to sell you before.

MOMMY (*With a laugh*): Well, of course it was!

DADDY: That’s the way things are today; you just can’t get satisfaction; you just try.

MOMMY: Well, *I* got satisfaction. (61)

Satisfaction they get buying the things is primary for them. They expect the same for the kid they adopt from Bye-Bye Adoption Center. It is a dramatic irony that buying

things and adopting a child are similar and they have to bring them satisfaction. They never think that the child is also a human being and he also has the desire similar to theirs. They never suspect he also needs privacy and satisfaction like them. They “cut off its you-know-what” when “it began to develop an interest in its you-know-what” (100). The family cuts off the genital of the boy they bought as he grows up and starts developing the interest in the sexual intercourse. It is a dramatic irony in which the characters never realize the contradiction in their action and actual truth.

Paul de Man discusses the nature of irony in “Rhetoric of Temporality.” He points out that it is a trope that exposes the madness of human beings bringing them out of their madness:

Irony is unrelieved vertige, dizziness to the point of madness. Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just as social language dissimulates the inherent violence of the actual relationships between human beings. Once this mask is shown to be a mask, the authentic being underneath appears necessarily as on the verge of madness. (13-14)

According to de Man, irony is a kind of dizziness leading us to the point of madness. The sanity of the people works in their functioning according to the conventional social language or functioning. There is only madness when irony exposes the authentic being underneath the mask. In the play, the characters appear to be socially correct but their self-contradictory beliefs are exposed and their actions appear on the verge of madness. Mommy and Daddy are so obsessed with their own desire and satisfaction that they forget the boy they have adopted also has got similar desire and want for satisfaction. He is reduced to the thing that generates satisfaction with its arrival at their home and he remains no human being.

De Man further discusses the nature of irony in relation to self. Irony arises at the cost of empirical self and absolute irony is a consciousness of madness:

When we speak, then, of irony originating at the cost of the empirical self, the statement has to be taken seriously enough to be carried to the extreme: absolute irony is a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness; it is a consciousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language: the ironist invents a form of himself that is "mad" but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified. (14)

De Man points out that irony is a consciousness of madness or end of all the consciousness. It is a reflection of madness from the inside of madness itself. This reflection comes into functioning by double structure of ironic language. The ironic writer invents his own form that is mad but it does not know his madness. When the writer thinks about a madness reflecting upon his own madness, the irony becomes prominent outcome.

The irony of American Dream is powerfully employed by the playwright in the play. Many years after the family kills its first adopted son named 'bumble of joy', a parody name that echoes like bundle of joy, they again adopt a boy from the same adoption center. The boy's name is 'American Dream' who is expected to bring the happiness the family is looking for so long. The falsehood of American Dream is ironized when the boy warns Grandma when he tells his story, "Be careful, be very careful. What I told you may not be true" (115). The Young Man cautions her of the possible untruthfulness of his story that indicates that the myth of progress, pursuit of

happiness that endows the American Dream. It is very ironic in the historical context of America and the American families' trust on it over their long history.

After the Grandma tells the story how Mommy and Daddy bought and killed the adopted kid, the doorbell rings again and the Young Man enters. He is, as he describes himself, a “[c]lean cut, midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way” (107). Grandma, who immediately dubs him “the American Dream” (108), fears that he is the van man, but he tells her he is “looking for work” and will “do almost anything for money” (108) because, as he explains, “I have no talents at all, except what you see” (113). He then reveals to Grandma that he was one of identical twins who were separated at birth and “thrown to opposite ends of the continent” (114); as a consequence, he explains, “I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. . . . I let people love me. . . . I can feel nothing” (115). After hearing his story, Grandma, who tells him he looks “familiar” (113), enlists him to pose as the van man and tells Mrs. Barker of her plan.

After Grandma leaves, Mrs. Barker, who has presumably been prompted by Grandma, introduces the Young Man to Mommy and Daddy as a “surprise,” and Daddy indicates that the Young Man is the “satisfaction” they demanded of Mrs. Barker when their “bumble” died (123). Mommy approaches seductively up to the Young Man, remarking that there is “something familiar” about him (127), suggesting that he is their “bumble’s” longlost twin. Grandma (unseen by the characters onstage except for the Young Man) observes this final scene “*stage right, near the footlights*”(122) and ends the play by observing, “let’s leave things as they are right now . . . while everybody’s happy . . . while everybody’s got what he wants . . . or everybody’s got what he thinks he wants” (127). The fulfillment of everybody’s desire in the discourse of American Dream that has been thus, ironized at the end of the play.

Irony, according to de Man, has universal significance. It is rhetoric of temporality rather than historicity according to him. So, just locating irony in its history is not encouraged. Though American Dream is a historical discourse in America and it is ironized in the play. One has to see it as general human predicament. The family stands not only for the American family but for the family everywhere. It is the reason the playwrights does not use American names for the characters rather he uses common names like Mommy, Daddy, Grandma and so on. De Man warns against its historical demystification In his book *Blindness and Insights*, Paul de Man analyzes Georg Lukacs's theory of the novel that shows how irony is beyond history.

For if irony is indeed the determining and organizing principle of the novel's form, then Lukacs is indeed freeing himself from preconceived notions about the novel as an imitation of reality. Irony steadily undermines this claim at imitation and substitutes for it a conscious, interpreted awareness of the distance that separates an actual experience from the understanding of this experience. The ironic language of the novel mediates between experience and desire, and unites ideal and real within the complex paradox of the form. This form can have nothing in common with the homogeneous, organic form of nature: it is founded on an act of consciousness, not on the imitation of a natural object. (56)

De Man contends that irony is an organizing principle and form of a novel for Lukacs that means he is going against his own belief that novel is imitation of social reality. Irony undermines mere imitation of historical characters and events as they are rather it is a reflection of what is going on under the mask. It is more a conscious awareness

of the actions rather than just being and imitation. So, we can claim that de Man sees irony beyond historical demystification of particular events.

The family relation in the family is ironized in the play and it is regarded as inhuman relation without love and emotion. Daddy does not want Grandma to go with van people to care center but Grandma's own daughter Mommy wants to send her there. Daddy complains that he has been trying to get the toilet fixed for two weeks, primarily for Grandma's sake. Now that it does not work, it makes her feel feeble-headed. Mommy says: "Of course it's for Grandma's sake. Grandma cries every time she goes to the Johnny as it is; but now that it doesn't work it's even worse, it makes Grandma think she's getting feeble-headed" (62). They complain about the tarry of the house owners again. Grandma enters with a load of neatly wrapped boxes. She dumps them around Daddy's feet and complains that he should get the john fixed. When Daddy replies that they can hear Grandma whimpering away for hours when she goes to the bathroom, Grandma and Mommy firmly reproach him. Grandma laments that when you age, people start talking to you that way. Daddy apologizes. Grandma observes that people begins sorry gives you a sense of dignity. If you do not have a sense of dignity, civilization is doomed. Mommy and Daddy rebuke Grandma for reading Mommy's book club selections again. Grandma retorts that the old have to do something. The old cannot talk with anyone because they snap at them. They go deaf to avoid people talking to them in that way; ultimately, the way people talk to them causes their death. Grandma exits to fetch the rest of the boxes.

When you're old you gotta do something. When you get old, you can't talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That's why you become deaf, so you won't be able to hear people talking to you that way. And that's why you go and hide under the covers in the big soft bed, so you won't feel the house

shaking from people talking to you that way. That's why old people die, eventually. People talk to them that way. (65)

It is very ironic to see that the family treats the Grandma as the thing without emotion. There is no place for love and feeling. She is like a thing for them. As Mommy snaps Daddy for his rude words for Grandma, he feels sorry for hurting Grandma. Mommy reassures him, saying that Grandma does not know what she means, and if he knows that she says, she will not know that soon either. Mommy recalls that Grandma has always wrapped boxes nicely. When she was a child, left poor with the death of Grandpa, Grandma used to wrap her a lunchbox every day for school. The other children would withdraw their chicken legs and chocolate cakes from their poorly wrapped boxes, and Mommy would not have the heart to rip into hers. Daddy guesses that it was because her box was empty. Mommy protests, saying that Grandma always filled it the night before with her own un-eaten dinner. After school, Mommy would bring back her lunch for Grandma to eat. "I love day-old cake" she used to say (66). Mommy ate all the other children's food at school because they thought her box was empty. They thought she suffered from the sin of pride. Since that made them superior to her, they were quite generous.

The family can be taken as an allegory to the families in the modern societies. There is a close connection between allegory and irony but de Man sees allegory having big temporal void. Both allegory and irony are related by their common nature to expose the truth:

It dissolves in the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and it can find no escape from this spiral. The temporal void that it reveals is the same void we encountered when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority. Allegory and irony are thus linked in their common

discovery of a truly temporal predicament. They are also linked in their common de-mystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide. (17)

De Man points out that irony is a narrowing spiral of linguistic signs and we cannot escape it while reading a text. There is only a little temporal void between what is said and what the actual truth is. The temporal void in allegory and irony is similar and they are similar in the nature but the only difference lies in the fact that allegory generally leads the reader to unreachable and incorrigible solution. In contrast, irony has the possibility in which the reality can be coincided with the fictional solution.

The family presented in the play is ironic. Daddy reproaches Mommy for being such a deceitful girl. She protests that they were poor; now, having married Daddy, she is rich. Even Grandma feels rich, though she does not know Daddy wants her in a nursing home. Daddy protests that he would never send her away. Mommy would however: she cannot stand Grandma's constant housework. At the same time, one cannot simply live off of people. She can, however, as she married Daddy and used to let him mount her and "bump [his] uglies" (67); she has earned the right to his money upon his death. Grandma enters with more boxes. When Daddy compliments her on the wrapping, she reproaches him anew for saying that she whimpered in the bathroom. Old people make all sorts of noises—whimpers, cries, belches, stomach rumblings, and so on. They wake up screaming in the middle of the night to discover they have not been sleeping and when asleep, they cannot wake for the longest time. "Homilies!" Mommy cries. Grandma continues, calling Mommy a tramp, trollop, and trull. Even since she was a little girl, she schemed to marry a rich man: didn't she warn Daddy against marrying her? Mommy protests that Grandma is her mother, not Daddy's—Grandma has forgotten that detail. She complains that Mommy should have

had Daddy set her up in the fur business or helped her become a singer. She has only kept her around to help protect herself whenever Daddy got fresh. But now Daddy would rather sleep with her than Mommy. Daddy has been sick, however, and does not want anyone. "I just want to get everything over with" he sighs (70). Mommy agrees: why are they so late? "Who? Who?" hoots an owl-like Grandma (71).

Mommy insists that Grandma knows 'who'. She compliments the boxes again. Grandma replies that it hurt her fingers and frightened her to do it, but it had to be done. The family relation is ironized in the play in most of the instances and thus, we can say Albee is using irony in the play in radical way that expects the betterment of family relation.

Grandma is an old woman. She feels neglected and at having insignificance in the society, she is not permitted by Mommy to talk to outsiders. It is very ironic depiction of the family relation and control. She criticizes the lack of feelings in Mommy and Daddy:

(Grandma *to* Daddy): You don't have any feelings, that are what's wrong with you. Old people make all sorts of noises, half of them they can't help. Old people whimper, and cry, and belch, and make great hollow rumbling sounds at the table; old people wake up in the middle of the night screaming, and find out they haven't even been asleep; and when old people are asleep, they try to wake up, and they can't . . . not for the longest time. (68-69)

Grandma knows that Mommy and Daddy criticize her because she has lost her efficiency due to her old age and she fails to earn money, cannot do sufficient works for them and give them the full satisfaction. So, she criticizes Daddy and Mommy having no feelings. She tells them about the reality how the old people suffer. The

need of letting the people living in the same family realize the truth about a member's situation is very ironical.

Albee's *The American Dream* represents the human society, human relation and family values ironically in dramatic form. By doing so, Albee expects some changes or corrections of the social course. He expects changes in family relation; he criticizes the so much obsession of the modern world to the material things and the dehumanization of human being is discouraged. It is a radical use of irony that expects social change. It is one of the corrective functions of irony as Linda Hutcheon suggests the function of irony is:

Arguably all irony has some corrective function . . . , and since satire is usually corrective or ameliorative in intent . . . , it frequently turns to irony as one way of ridiculing and implicitly correcting the vices and follies of humankind. Clearly there is a wide tonal range possible within this corrective function, as in all the other - from the scolding and disdainful to the playfully teasing. The classic example of the former is Swift's "A Modest Proposal", a political pamphlet whose dispassionate, business-like, grave tone is played off against the utterly immodest proposal that the situation of famine and poverty in eighteenth-century Ireland would be solved if people bred and marketed babies for food. (226)

The corrective function is evident in Albee's *The American Dream* in ironic portrayal of the middle-class American family. The play is optimistic and the people are ridiculously depicted as the creatures in need of improvement and the course of the society in the need of correction. The writer's optimism for improvement can be seen in bringing the boy named American Dream at the end of the play and Grandma's clever plan to deceive the family's plan to send her to adoption center.

To sum up, Albee's play, *The American Dream*, presents the predicament of modern human society, human beings and human relations ironically. Actions like the marriage of Mommy to Daddy not for love but for money, Mommy's attempt to get rid of her own mother sending her to care center, adopting a child not for love but for joy and satisfaction are ironic. The masculinity of the father is presented in ironic way and the discourse of American Dream is ironized. The playwright uses dramatic form so as to show the madness of the society and unmask it presenting its follies. The discourse of American Dream is presented ironically and the way the American middle-class people are bringing it into practice is criticized in the play. All the reason behind this criticism is the use of corrective function of society. It is Albee's politics of irony for the betterment of the materialistic society.

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