

I. Consumer Culture and Its Critique in *The American Dream*

This research is an attempt to study Edward Albee's second play *The American Dream* as a critique of consumer culture and capitalism in American society. The play depicts the social, political and cultural aspects affected by the capitalist consumer culture and the characters see more importance in the material gain than the gain of love and the harmonious relationships. In the American society, the profusion of materiality and consumerism is resulting in social fragmentation and lack of communication among the various characters and there is no existence of morality and rational logic behind the things the characters choose.

Albee's play *The American Dream* is a one-act play in which a family consisting of Daddy, Mommy and Grandma has been brought to the stage. The Daddy is an emasculate, Mommy is aggressive, and only Grandma is morally honest. Mommy and Daddy are plotting to send Grandma away to care center for old ones to get rid of her. They adopt a son from Bye-Bye Adoption Center and kill him because he fails to bring them happiness. Finally, they again adopt another boy who is named American Dream and thus, the play ends with hope that happiness will prevail in the family.

To avoid the burden of expenditure in keeping the Grandma with them, the Daddy and Mommy of the American family staged in the play plan to get rid of her. They kill their adopted son as he cannot give them the bundle of joy. To study the attitude of the family, its hollowness and the lack of love among the family members is the main concern of the research. This research critically focuses on the problem why the American family plans to get rid of Grandma and kill their adopted son.

Albee is the critic of the disorder and fragmentation of the American society of mid-twentieth century. His first play *The Zoo Story* is the story of alienation of the

people like Peter and Jerry in the life sphere of American society. The alienation shapes the characters and finally leads them to condemn life. He criticizes American society for its lack of love and humanity and the lack of communication among the various social strata, in terms of class, race and gender. In the play *The American Dream*, he criticizes the materialistic upbringing of the American society due to the influence of capitalism and the American Dream of material progress advocated by the various leaders, politicians and litterateurs. The play revolves around an American family consisting a couple- Mommy and Daddy and Mommy's mother, Grandma. There is no harmony in the family and love between the mother and daughter, Mommy and Grandma. When the play opens, the couple is seen waiting for the owner of the apartment they live because "the icebox", "the doorbell" and "the leak in the Johnny" need the repairing (58). Thus, we see the house not in order and the American cannot live without the excessive help of the materials like icebox and doorbell. The owner of the apartment does not arrive in the expected time because the work to fix the things does not give him the income rather he needs to spend on it. He generally comes quicker than expected if he has to collect the rent. Thus, the play depicts the characters in their materialistic mindset and satirizes them from the very opening of the play. Later, we see, the couple plan to sell Grandma to avoid the expenditure of her keeping.

The American family staged in the play is entirely concerned with the material gain and the relationships are calculated according to material values of the relatives. The characters of the play are dissatisfied and unhappy and they think they can buy even happiness. Study of their overt materialist, monetary concern with critical study into the instances like the plan to dump the Grandma, the killing of an adopted son and adopting another one in the hope of gaining bundle of joy and so on, this research

reaches to the conclusion that consumerist American society has been criticized by the dramatist in the play.

Albee's play *The American Dream* was written in 1959-60 and first produced in 1960. Since the premiere of this play, it invited the large number of criticisms from various quarters. It is a theatrical fable concerning the drift of the classical American middle-class family into insanity, trivia, into an environment of death-in-life. Albee has set down his intention writing the play as follows: "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).

The clarification of Albee himself about his play is very remarkable as he highlights his intention to write the play. He criticizes the artificiality, complacency and hollowness of American life in the play. So, the play becomes very successful in theater off-Broadway. The success of the play is highlighted by critic Philip C. Colin as he 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).

Critic Kolin sees the subversion of the myth of American dreams in the plays of Albee. He sees counterdiscursivity as well as the dramatic realism and absurdism in the play. 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)

Progressive attitude and the writing for social change are also valued by Kolin in the play.

Another critic of the play, Richard Watts, Jr., hails Albee's talent and the freshness he exhibits in his plays. Commenting on *The American Dream* in *New York Post*, he observes:

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)

The sardonic, satirical vein of the play has been implicit in the comment made by Watts, Jr. He sees the play entirely delightful one and recommends it to the readers who are seeking the sheer creative talent.

Taking all the criticisms into consideration, this research will be devoted to examine the other dark sides of American society namely consumerism in the play. Though critics talk about its subversive tendency, no clear studies about its critique on consumerism can be found. So, this researcher will study the critique of the consumerist American society. It is fruitful to discuss the basic ideas about consumerism and the tendency of the consumer culture that pervades the society to examine the play.

In their book *Consumer Culture: A Reference Handbook*, Douglas J. Goodman and Mirelle Cohen analyze the present predicament of the culture as a whole and its inevitable tendency to consumerism:

We live in a consumer culture. Consumption pervades our everyday lives and structures our everyday practices. The values, meanings, and costs of what we consume have become an increasingly important part of our social and personal experiences. Occasionally, we may wonder at the amount of time we spend consuming, thinking about consuming, and preparing to consume. (1)

For Goodman and Cohen, people of the present world are busy consuming as the rapid proliferation of capitalism and the extension of open market have turned them as the consumers. They do not see their identity without consuming though the capitalist mechanism of the advertisement actually cheats the customers selling the rubbishes made by the capitalists as Adorno and Horkheimer would argue in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Consumer culture is best seen as “the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption” that have been researched from a “family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings” (Arnould and Thompson 868). As such, it addresses exactly those dimensions of consumption that have been neglected in more traditional work on behavioral consumer decision-making, micro-economics, and consumer psychology. This has typically used rational choice models of how consumers supposedly maximize utility when they decide which products to purchase, or cognitive psychology, which maps the (often faulty) information- processing that happens during purchase.

In contrast to these perspectives, the profound role of symbolic, experiential, and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption have been recognized for some time in diverse social science disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, human geography, history, communication, and media studies. Their main concerns have been with analyzing links between consumer culture and broader social, cultural, and ideological structures. Notwithstanding the importance of this work, the main concern in this book is somewhat different: it is to understand the psychological impact of consumer culture ideals specifically on the identity and well-being of individual adults, adolescents, and children. Given this concern, relevant aspects of consumer culture theory and research are pinpointed here in terms of five interrelated themes.

The first theme concerns methods used when conducting research, where qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis have been central to consumer culture research, such as in-depth interviews with consumers, or deconstructing popular culture texts as lifestyle and identity instructions to consumers, such as advertisements or comics analyzed by Belk and other scholars of the consumer culture. Yet consumer culture can, and should be, researched by a diversity of methods, including also quantitative methods, such as surveys or experiments. This is an important point to emphasize; the tools adopted make contributions to a critical analysis of consumer culture so as to document its impact on us through rigorous empirical research that offers a direct and precise assessment of psychological processes and outcomes. We use experiments because they allow us to demonstrate unambiguously that exposure to idealized media models actually causes dissatisfaction with our own bodies, through showing that those people who have seen such “body perfect” depictions feel significantly worse about their body than a

comparison group of people who have not seen these depictions, but have been treated identically in all other respects.

Second, consumer culture's concern with the symbolic, experiential and socio-cultural meanings and functions of consumer goods is not limited to the purchase of products but spans the whole consumption cycle that includes acquisition, consumption, and possession. A related point is that consumer culture abounds with symbolic messages associated with material goods and "ideal" people. In brief, a symbol is an entity that stands for another entity, and—most importantly—it can have meaning only to the extent that it has a shared reality among people. Having a "fashion" designer briefcase can only be an effective symbol of being "trendy" if others (at least those in the owner's social reference group) share the belief that the briefcase is, indeed, fashionable. Our most obvious system of symbols is language, both written and spoken. However, there is increasing evidence that we can and do use material objects as a kind of quasi language, although there are limitations to this analogy.

Third, through the advertising and fashion industries, consumer culture presents individuals with images that contain "lifestyle and identity instructions that convey unadulterated marketplace ideologies (i.e. look like this, act like this, want these things, aspire to this kind of lifestyle)" (Arnould and Thompson 875). The symbolism inherent in consumer goods can be defined as the images of "idealized people associated with [the good]" (Wright, Claiborne, and Sirgy 316), and the message is that buyers not only consume the actual good advertised, but also its symbolic meanings like successful, happy, attractive or glamorous, thus moving closer to the ideal identity portrayed by media models. Although there is diversity in

the nuances of idealized imagery, they seem variations around prominent themes, with the “body perfect” and the material “good life” as central.

Fourth, given that global connections are expanding, predominantly through the mass media and the internet, it is important to consider increasing globalization of consumer culture, which penetrates into, but also interacts with, local culture. This aspect of consumer culture is relevant to this book in two ways. First, the internet is offering a new buying environment that is fast becoming a serious alternative to shopping and browsing in conventional shops and stores. With limitless access 24 hours a day 7 days a week, a rapidly growing number of “[c]onsumers can shop the globe from the convenience of their homes” (Lyons and Henderson 740). These buying motives online have become prominent in recent time, and their relationship to dysfunctional, excessive buying behaviour on the internet has been flourished.

Fifth, consumer culture does not determine our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a direct way: there is no simple stimulus–response causal chain. Rather, the way in which consumer culture encourages, and makes more likely, certain patterns of interpretations, feelings, and behaviors penetrates to the very fabric of our experience and understanding of the world: “Much like a game where individuals improvise within the constraints of rules . . . , consumer culture—and the marketplace ideology it conveys—frames consumers’ horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought” (Arnould and Thompson 869). Thus, there is a powerful framing effect of consumer culture, alongside related developments, such as the construction of self as entrepreneurial project, within neoliberalism. Yet, through the ideal images, practices, and lifestyles that are associated with material goods, consumer culture simultaneously offers a set of symbolic resources individuals can draw on when

defining their personal and social identities, using their symbolic dimensions to express, maintain, and transform aspects of their selves.

Some of these aspects concern more private and personal parts of identity, such as beliefs, values, and our personal history, whereas others refer to more public and social parts of identity, such as social status, or the groups and subcultures we belong to.

The main objective of this research is to explore the consumerist American lifestyle and its critique in the play. The study of monetary concerns as the shaping factors of people's relationships and its consequences will be the objective of the study. Even though this research primarily examines the issues related to consumerism in capitalist society and its impact to the life of the characters, the analysis will be totally textual. Only the textual evidences will be drawn into the discussion.

Even though, this research uses the theoretical basis of the theorists and critics of consumer culture and the neo-Marxist perspectives to understand the consumerism, it does not clarify all the aspects of consumerism due to limitation of time. Only the supportive theoretical premises will be used. This research will be remarkable contribution for the study of consumerism in the modern American society. Further, the future researchers will be benefitted and encouraged to study consumerism and its ironic sides in the other texts with the framework of this research.

The present research work has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter fundamentally deals with introductory outline of the present study. It introduces critical review and the writer and her characters in relation to their social, historical and cultural context. Thus it presents the bird's eye view of the entire research. The second chapter aims at providing the theoretical methodological reading

of the text briefly with both the textual and theoretical evidences. It attempts to examine the writer's critique of consumer culture and their pivotal role to demarcate the basis for the characterization of the characters who are grounded in American history and culture. On the basis of the theorists of consumerism, neo-Marxism and the critics of capitalism on mid-twentieth century American society, the play has been analyzed in this chapter. It further sorts out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the research. This part serves as the core of the present research. The third chapter concludes the ideas put forward in the earlier chapter, focusing on the outcome of the entire research. Various logical conclusions are summarized as the proof that the American Society is diseased due to the rapid expansion of capitalism and the consumerist culture. The characters are consumers who want to buy everything for their well-being and thus, do not care about the healthy and loving social and familial relationship which is the backbone of the play.

II. Critique of Consumer Culture in Albee's *The American Dream*

This research focuses on the study of American dramatist Edward Albee's fifth and the last one-act play *The American Dream* as a critique of materiality and consumer culture that has profoundly affected the American society. Due to focus of the discourse of American dream on the material wellbeing and progress in the society, people are reduced to the consumers and they think they can buy anything as a consumer for their happiness however absurd the things they buy are. At the core of the play, we see, how a couple attempts to send their mother, Grandma, to nursing home to reduce the expenditure keeping her and buy a son from Bye-Bye Adoption Centre so as to gain satisfaction and eventually kill him because they feel they could not get the joy they had expected from him. *The American Dream* illustrates the tastelessness and destructive power of American family life through its depiction of a couple who, although childless, call themselves Mommy and Daddy, and Mommy's mother, Grandma, who lives with them. Mommy and Daddy make Grandma do the cooking and housework and continually threaten to put her in a nursing home. The obsession to the materiality and consumerism is profoundly seen in the American family Albee stages in his play.

Grandma claims that her daughter married Daddy only because he was rich. From the very childhood Mommy was so attracted to the money and riches that she wanted to marry a rich man as Grandma says to Daddy:

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 gwo up I'm going to mahwy a wich 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)

Thus, from the difficult growing up in poverty, Mommy has developed the desire to be a rich woman. She is the desiring machine who only desires and seeks the satisfaction in the continual consumption of the material goods. For her, even the husband and the mother are the commodities of the desiring production.

Mommy is the desiring machine who, in the desire of the money, lets her body be consumed by her husband and claims the rights to use his money only because she has given him her body for the fulfillment of his sexual desire as she says to Daddy, “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).

The concept of desiring production and desiring machine forms the basis of schizoanalysis as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. They see the individual as the assemblage of multiple machinic parts that constitute or produce him/her a desiring machine. In the opening lines of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari claim the machinic assemblage:

Everywhere *it* is machines— real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ machine is plugged into an energy source machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts” (1).

Through the connection of one machine to another, desire produces reality. But we should not believe that they fall into a naïve realism of concrete identities. Rather,

because all machines consist of other machines, which consist of other machines...*ad infinitum*, there is never any whole that actually unifies an object in a complete way. Identities are only “produced as a residuum alongside the machine, as an appendix, or as a spare part adjacent to the machine” and subjects are, following Lacan, “not at the center...but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states” that they pass through.(20)

This internal reversal and radicalization of Lacan’s theory of desire forms one of the core critiques of *anti-Oedipus*. If reality emerges from historically contingent formations of desire, the Imaginary and Symbolic are therefore not dimensions that obscure desire but are rather secondary manifestations of it. This allows Deleuze and Guattari to collapse the difference between the libidinal economy and the political economy—the latter being merely a more complex machine that emerges from the former and feeds back to shape flows of desire in specific ways. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

Libidinal economy is no less objective than political economy, and the political no less subjective than the libidinal, even though the two correspond to two modes of different investments of the same reality as social reality. There is an unconscious libidinal investment of desire that does not necessarily coincide with the preconscious investments of interest, and that explains how the latter can be perturbed and perverted in "the most somber organization," below all ideology. (345)

While organization is imperative for the productive capacity of desire to function—unbound energy falls back on “the body without organs” and becomes unproductive and “sterile”—codification that is too rigid likewise prevents desire from proliferating:

“the body suffers . . . from not having some other sort of organization . . . Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (8).

The idea of the body without organ is very important one to examine the desiring production in the play because Mommy cuts off the parts of the body of the son the family adopts 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 boy they adopt is thus, made the body without organs and got killed because he becomes the commodity that cannot give the satisfaction to the consumer, the American family. It is the right of the consumer to handle the commodity they buy whatever way they like. It is very ironical to see the human being made a commodity and the consumer, in the quest for the satisfaction, mutilating him and finally killing him. The commodity’s sexuality is controlled by the consumer of the commodity as the consumers “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 on the sexual intercourse. Roberta Sassatelli, in her book *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics* talks about the view about the consumption of the commodity as private and the pursuit of happiness as its primary goal and criticizes it:

Consumption was defined as a private matter, constructed as
opportunely opposed to production, and envisaged as the pursuit of

private happiness indirectly but firmly linked to virtuous mechanisms in the public. . . . Within this framework consumers were thus constructed as private economic hedonists, preoccupied with individual pleasures and doing all right – for the common good and themselves – provided they behaved in disciplined ways within the rules of the market. (41)

For Sassatelli, the consumption has been regarded as the private matter and the pursuit of happiness is regarded as its basic goal ultimately giving rise to the economist hedonists in the name of the consumers. This spirit is clearly expressed in Albee's play as he shows how the consumer culture is responsible for the dehumanization of human beings as the commodity. Further, Albee implicitly charges the discourse of American Dream that has the slogan of the pursuit of happiness through the material progress as it is responsible for making the Americans pleasure-seeking, and hedonist. The American consumerist values and the American Dream are indicated as the absurd ones by Albee in his play with their satirical representations.

According to Albee's biographer, Mel Gussow, *The American Dream* is the play that qualified its author "as a charter member of the Theatre of the Absurd" (141), the movement described by critic Martin Esslin in his 1961 book of that title. Esslin claimed that, with *The American Dream*, Albee translated the Theatre of the Absurd's "sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition" (5) into "a genuine American idiom" (267). The play also looks forward to Albee's later longer works, especially *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), his next play, in that both plays depict an emasculated male and a childless couple, but, more importantly, in their portrayals of what C. W. E. Bigsby calls "a linguistic world constructed to deny the power of reality" (263). As the Young Man cautions after he

tells Grandma his story, “Be careful, be very careful. What I told you may not be true” (115). The Young Man, referred as the American Dream by Grandma, thus, cautions her of the possible untruthfulness of his story that indicates that the myth of progress, pursuit of happiness that endow the American Dream the backbone are absurd and cheating the public turning them the consumers.

The reference to the American Dream as the commodity to generate pleasure in the consumer recurrently comes in the play. 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 sidles 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 has been thus, ironized at the end of the play.

It is due to consumption of the boy named American Dream by the society, he has become devoid of feeling. Society only looks at him from the perspective of the utility he generates and satisfaction he provides. Consumption is deep-rooted to the American society which is clearly observed by Douglas J. Goodman and Mirelle Cohen in their book *Consumer Culture: A Reference Handbook*:

Consumption is central to our society. It is an essential part of the values and concepts through which individuals understand their place in society. However, before we can understand the culture, we first must understand the economic system that is the basis of our consumer culture. Following an examination of that economic system, we will look at some of the contradictions of consumer culture- its contradictions with the demands of production with bourgeois culture and the contradictions in the view of the consumer. (27)

Consumption is, according to Goodman and Cohen, the determinant of the individual status in the society. In the Albee’s play *The American Dream* most of the characters seem to understand this. Mommy has married a rich man so that she can consume anything she desires. Grandma is but a thing to consume for her as she survives on the family working in the kitchen and cleaning the house of her own daughter Mommy. She understands the consumerist tendency and frequently charges Mommy and Daddy not being sensitive enough to treat the old people. Since she is old her utility is going

to end soon which results in the consideration that she needs to be dumped away from the family. Daddy is also the thing to act accordance with the Mommy's desire. The American Dream, a boy who is under consideration to be adopted to the family, also understands the utility the family and the society demands from him and it is due to the consumerism, he says he can do anything for the money. The economy and the economic system itself give encouragement to the consumerist behaviour that forms the basis for the consumer culture. This consumer culture is the result of the bourgeois production which shows the promise to fulfill the desire of the consumer and gives them the satisfaction but as the consumers fail to get satisfaction as promised, they start to feel that there is the contradiction between the promises of satisfaction and the production of the goods that never fulfill the desire of the consumers. American Dream is ironized in the Albee's play as the similar production, a bourgeois production that never gives the satisfaction to its consumers fulfilling their desire and the promise it has made to the people.

From the very beginning of the play, we see the consumerist tendency. As the play opens, Mommy and Daddy sit in armchairs on either side of their living room, facing each other diagonally out toward the audience. They complain that they, that is, the visitors they expect, are late. Certainly they were quick to get them to sign the lease, but now it is impossible to get them to fix anything. People can get away with anything these days. Daddy complains about their getting late to Mommy as "They were quick enough to check my references; they were quick enough about all that. But now! But now, try to get the icebox fixed, try to get the doorbell fixed, try to get the leak in the Johnny fixed! Just try it . . . they aren't so quick about that" (58). The people of America are very quick to take the money but very miser to spend the money in the works that don't give them the immediate benefits. The house owner of

the house takes the rent very quickly but he doesn't appear to fix the problems of the house. It shows the growing materialistic, consumerist approach of the American people.

In the West, Europe and America, the people are molded with the consumerism from the very childhood as capitalism has matured and the markets are well developed there. Roberta Sassatelli, in her book *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*, discusses the circumstances of a person grown up in the Western society:

Growing up in most contemporary Western contexts, the average individual will be confronted not only with a cornucopia of commodities and commercialized services but also with a variety of discourses and institutions identifying such a context as 'consumer society' or 'consumer culture'. More or less explicitly, these discourses and institutions will address people as 'consumers'. (1)

The people are the consumers and the market is intent on selling the commodity to the consumer at any cost with the promise of the satisfaction to them. Mommy recounts her purchase of a hat the in the market the day before, chastising Daddy for his inattentive listening. She was quite happy with her new beige hat until meeting the chairwoman of her woman's club, a dreadful woman who insisted her hat was wheat. Mommy returned to the store and made a scene until given a new beige hat, which looked wheat in the store but became beige outside. Daddy remarks that it was probably the same hat and Mommy confirms his guess with a laugh. In any case, she got satisfaction.

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)

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 lateness 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)

The family treats the Grandma as the thing. There is no place for the love and feelings. She is like a thing for them. As Mommy snaps for his rude words for Grandma, Daddy feels sorry after he hurts 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 eat 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.

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. Mommy orders her to bed; Grandma responds that she wants to stay and watch.

The doorbell rings. Grandma asks who is it again: is it the "van people" (72), finally come to take her away? Daddy assures her that it is not. The bell rings again, and Daddy wrings his hands in doubt—perhaps they should reconsider? Mommy insists that he made up his mind, that he was "masculine and decisive" (74). At her prompting, he opens the door. "WHAT a masculine daddy! Isn't he a masculine Daddy?" Mommy explains (74). Grandma refuses to participate in the spectacle.

Mrs. Barker enters. Remarking on her lateness, Mommy reminds her that she was here once before. Grandma insists that she does not see "them". Barker assures her that they are here. Grandma does not remember her.

Daddy invites Mrs. Barker to sit; Mommy offers her a cigarette, a drink, and the opportunity to cross her legs. Being a professional woman, Mrs. Barker only opts for the latter. Grandma asks if "they" are still here. Mrs. Barker comments cordially on their unattractive apartment. As she was listening outside—"they" must keep track of everything in their work— she knows of their maintenance problems. Mommy and Daddy ask what Mrs. Barker does. She responds that she chairs Mommy's woman's club. After some hesitation, Mommy recognizes her, remarking that she wears a hat like the one she purchased yesterday. Mrs. Barker replies that hers is cream. Mommy invites her to remove her dress; she readily follows. "I just blushed and giggled and went sticky wet" chuckles Daddy (79). Mommy notes that Daddy is a "caution" (80). Mrs. Barker offers to smoke if that will help the situation, but Mommy violently forbids her. She asks why Mrs. Barker has come. As Mommy walks through the boxes, Grandma warns her against stepping on them: "The boxes...the boxes" she murmurs (80). Daddy asks if Grandma means Mrs. Barker has come over the boxes; Grandma does not know, though that is not what she thought she meant. Mrs. Barker asks if "they" can assume Mommy and Daddy have invited them over the boxes. Mommy asks she "they" are in the habit of receiving boxes. Mrs. Barker replies that it depends on the reason why "they" have come. One of her activities involves the receipt of baskets, though "more in a literary sense than really". They might receive boxes in special circumstances.

Her answer does not help. Daddy asks if it might help if he shares that he feels misgiving and definite qualms—right around where his stitches were. He had an operation: the doctors removed and inserted something. Mommy remarks that all his life he wanted to be a Senator but will now spend the rest wanting to become Governor—it would be closer to the apartment. Praising ambition, Mrs. Barker tells

of her brother who runs *The Village Idiot*—indeed, he is the Village Idiot. He insists that everyone know he is married; he is the country's chief exponent of Woman Love.

Grandma begins to speak, and Mommy abruptly silences her. Miming Grandma's epigrams, she declares that old people have nothing to say; if they did, nobody would listen to them. Grandma admits that she has the rhythm but lacks the quality. Besides, Mommy is middle-aged.

To illustrate, she intones: middle-aged people think they can do anything but cannot as well as they used to. They believe themselves special because they are like everybody else. "We live in an age of deformity". Daddy wishes that he were not surrounded by women. Finally, Grandma says her piece: the boxes have nothing to do with Mrs. Barker's visit. She offers to explain the boxes' presence, but Daddy asks what that has to do with "what's-hername"'s visit (87). Mommy responds that "they" are here because they asked them. Grandma offers to explain the boxes again but Mommy silences her.

Mommy appeals to Daddy to have Grandma taken away. The apartment has become overcrowded with her enema bottles, Pekinese, the boxes, and everything else. Mrs. Barker remarks that she never heard of enema bottles. Grandma replies that Mommy means enema bags. She cannot help her ignorance; she comes from bad stock. Indeed, when she was born, she had a head shaped like a banana.

Mommy accuses Grandma of a capacity to just say anything. The other night she called Daddy a hedgehog—she probably picked up the word from television. She commands Daddy to shake her television's tubes loose. Daddy asks that she not mention tubes to him. Daddy has tubes now where he once had tracts. Grandma announces that she knows why Mrs. Barker has come to visit. Mrs. Barker begs her to give up the secret, but Mommy declares that a revelation would not be fair.

Mrs. Barker remains puzzled: she is such a busy girl with many committees and commitments. Mommy and Daddy mock her: they have not invited her to offer her help. If she need help, she could apply for a number of fellowships. Speaking as a representative of the Ladies' Auxiliary Air Raid Committee, Mrs. Barker asks how the family feels about air raids. Mommy and Daddy reply that they are hostile.

When Mrs. Barker comments on the surfeit of hostility in the world, Grandma rejoins that a Department of Agriculture study reveals an excess of old people as well. Mommy calls her a liar, commanding Daddy to break her television. He rises; Mommy cautions him against stepping on Grandma's blind Pekinese. Once he leaves, she sarcastically muses on her good fortune in marriage: she could have had a husband who was poor, argumentative, or consigned to a wheel chair.

Apparently recalling Mrs. Barker's invalid husband, Mommy recoils in horror, Mrs. Barker forces a smile and tells her to not think about it. Mommy pauses and announces that she has forgotten her *faux pas*. As she invites her guest to some girl talk, Mrs. Barker replies that she is not sure that she would not care for some water. Mommy orders Grandma to the kitchen; having quit, Grandma refuses. Moreover, she has hidden everything. Mrs. Barker declares herself in a near-faint, and Mommy goes for water herself.

Mrs. Barker relates her disorientation to Grandma and implores her to give up the secret of her visit. Grandma relishes in being implored and asks her to beg again. After some resistance, Mrs. Barker beseeches her anew.

Grandma offers Mrs. Barker a hint. About twenty years ago, a man very much like Daddy and a woman very much like Mommy lived in an apartment very much like theirs with an old woman very much like Grandma. They contacted an organization very much like the nearby Bye- Bye Adoption Service, requesting a

blessing very much like the "bumble of joy" they could never have on their own (101). The couple very much like Mommy and Daddy revealed their intimate lives to the adoption agent who was very much like Mrs. Barker and had something very much like a penchant for pornography.

Ultimately they bought their bumble but quickly came upon trouble. Grandma hastens her tale as she is preparing to leave soon. First the bumble cried its heart out. Then, it only had eyes for Daddy. The woman like Mommy gouged its eyes out, but then it kept its nose up in the air. Next, it developed an interest in its "you-know-what"—its parents promptly cut it off. When the bumble continued to look for its you-know-what with its hands, they chopped those off as well. Its tongue went as well when it called its Mommy a dirty name. Then, as it aged, its parents discovered it had no head, guts, or spine and had feet of clay. Finally it died. Throughout the anecdote, Mrs. Barker coos in delight and titillation, cheering on the child's mutilation enthusiastically.

Wanting satisfaction, its parents called the adoption agent back to the apartment to demand their money back. Suddenly Daddy cries from off-stage that he cannot find television, Pekinese, or Grandma's room; Mommy cannot find the water. Grandma has hidden things well indeed. Mommy sticks her head into the room and threatens Grandma with the van man. How can she be so old and smug at once? She has no sense of proportion. Grandma is unmoved. Mommy insists that the resistant Mrs. Barker join her in the kitchen.

Grandma asks Mrs. Barker not to divulge the hint she has provided. Of course, Mrs. Barker has already forgotten it. Moreover, she cannot understand its relevance. Though she volunteers for the Bye-Bye Adoption Service and remembers Mommy and Daddy visiting her twenty years ago, she cannot recall anything like the Bye-Bye

Adoption Service or a couple like Mommy and Daddy. Mulling the matter over, she leaves to fetch her glass of water.

The doorbell rings, and the Young Man enters. Grandma looks him over approvingly and asks if he is the van man. He is not. Grandma compliments his looks—she could go for him if she was 150 years younger. He should go into the movies. The unenthused Young Man concurs and muses flatly on his face: "clean-cut, Midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way". Grandma announces the boy as the American Dream. Still off-stage, Mommy and Daddy ask who has rung; Grandma informs them the American Dream has arrived. The Young Man explains that he has come for work. He will do anything for money. Nervously keeping him at bay—it would look awful if they got too close—Grandma wonders if he can help with the household's dilemma. Daddy has much money; she has put some away herself as well. This year Grandma won \$25000 in a baking contest under the pseudonym Uncle Henry (after all, she looks as much the old man as the old woman) and a storebought cake. She dubbed the recipe Uncle Henry's Day-Old Cake.

Suddenly Grandma notes that the Young Man looks familiar. He replies that he is a type. She then asks why he says he would do anything for money. The Young Man replies that as someone who is incomplete, he must compensate—he can explain his lack to Grandma partially because she is so old. The Young Man's mother died at his birth; he never knew his father. However, though without parents, the Man was not alone in his womb, having an identical twin with whom he shared an unfathomable kinship. They felt each other's breath, heartbeat, and hunger. Tragically, they were separated in their youth. In the passing years, the Young Man suffered

losses: "A fall from grace...a departure of innocence...loss...loss" (114). He lost his heart and became unable to love.

He lost his eyes and the ability to see with pity and affection. An agony in his groin left him unable to love anyone with his body. He has been "drained, torn asunder, disemboweled" (115), left without emotions or feeling. He lets others love him. As he confesses: "I accept the syntax around me, for while I know I cannot relate...I know I must be related to". "Oh, my child", murmurs Grandma in pity (115). She remarks that she was mistaken when she thought she knew him: she once knew someone very much like him or perhaps like who he once was. The Young Man warns her that what he said may not be true. After all, in his profession— Grandma hushes him. The Young Man bows his head in acquiescence. To be more precise, Grandma notes that this someone she knew was one who might have become very much like him might have turned out to be. She suspects the Young Man has found himself as job. The Young Man asks about his duties, and Mrs. Barker calls from off-stage. Grandma has to go into her act now—the Young Man will have to play it by ear unless they get a chance to speak again.

Mrs. Barker emerges and, stunned by the new arrival, asks who the Young Man is. Grandma announces him as the van man; after a glance at Grandma, the Young Man plays along. Upon her request, he takes her boxes out to the "van". Mrs. Barker consoles Grandma: the man who carted off her own mother was not half as nice. When Grandma appears surprised that Mrs. Barker sent her mother away, Mrs. Barker cheerfully confesses she assumed she did as well. Grandma cannot recall.

Forcefully taking Mrs. Barker aside, Grandma whispers a solution to Mommy and Daddy's dilemma into her ear. Mrs. Barker exits to find them. Now alone, Grandma looks about and sighs "Goodbye". The Young Man returns and reports that

all the boxes are outside. Sadly, Grandma wonders why she takes them with her. They contain little more than the "things one accumulates"—old letters, a blind Pekinese, regrets, eighty-six years of living, sounds, her Sunday teeth, and so on. She instructs the Young Man to stay, and they slowly exit to the elevator. Mrs. Barker, Mommy, and Daddy return, celebrating the resolution of their dilemma: they will get their satisfaction after all. Suddenly Mommy exclaims that Grandma and her boxes are missing: she has left and stolen something no less. Mrs. Barker informs her that the van man claimed her. Near tears, Mommy replies that this is impossible: the van man is their invention. She calls to Grandma.

While Daddy comforts Mommy, Grandma emerges at stage right, near the footlights. She hushes the audience, declaring that she wants to watch the events to ensue. Motioning to Mrs. Barker, she tiptoes to the front door: the Young Man appears framed within. Mrs. Barker joyfully announces Mommy and Daddy's surprise.

They introduce themselves. Truly pleased with her replacement, Mommy calls for a celebration. Now at least they know why they sent for Mrs. Barker. She asks Mrs. Barker the Young Man's name; Mrs. Barker invites her to name him as she will—perhaps he can have the name of the other one. Mommy and Daddy cannot remember his name, however. The Young Man appears with a tray, a bottle of sauterne, and five glasses. Mommy chastises him: there are only four present. Grandma indicates to the Young Man that she is absent, and he apologizes. Mommy notes he will have to learn to count: they are a rich family. They toast satisfaction. Her voice a little fuzzy from the wine, Mommy promises to tell the Young Man of the disaster they had with the last one. She muses that there is something familiar about him. Grandma interrupts and addresses the audience. We should leave things as they

are and go no further while everyone is happy or has what they want or has what they think they want.

In the capitalist Western societies, consumerism is growing dominant day by day. So, the study of consumerism has become prominent issue of the present time. Not only the culture promotes the material goods rather to large extent it also tries to sell the symbolic goods. The vision of American Dream, the vision of the material prosperity of the American people itself is the example of such symbolic good or commodity sold to the American people which is criticized and allegorized by Albee in his play. About the nature of the symbolic goods, Professor Mike Featherstone in the book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* argues:

. . . growing prominence of the *culture* of consumption and not merely regard consumption as derived unproblematically from production.

The current phase of over-supply of symbolic goods in contemporary Western societies and the tendencies towards cultural disorder and de-classification (which some label as postmodernism) is therefore bringing cultural questions to the fore and has wider implications for our conceptualization of the relationship between culture, economy and society. (13)

It is due to the promotion of the symbolic goods in the society, the dream of material progress, the cultural economic and social relation among the people is strained. In the play, the relation between Mommy and Grandma is strained and Daddy has been emasculated in the strict discipline and control of consumerist Mommy and her relationship with Daddy is no more than the relationship of commodity.

Among the characters of the play, the character of Mommy has the largest inclination to the consumerism. She is the bad mother and an avid consumer of the

products of consumer society. She is household's sadistic disciplinarian, dismissing Grandma and infantilizing Daddy at every turn. For her the human relations, her relation to her husband and her mother are no more than the relations with the commodities. She matches with a number of other of Albee's female characters, most notably Martha from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Like Martha, Mommy's speech is distinguished and has a violent tone; it is full of sarcasm, shrillness, scorn and contempt. As Grandma makes clear, Mommy is a deceitful gold-digger who has married Daddy for his money. Her sadism runs unchecked. At some level, the play leaves the viewers enthralled with Mommy's violence.

Mommy is the outcome of consumerist American history. She seeks satisfaction by the means of the consumption. The advertisement in the media played the significant role to give rise to the consumerism strategically captivating the psychology of the public. Jacqueline, Botterill's observation about the development of the consumer culture in the 1920s America in the book *Consumer Culture and Personal Finance: Money Goes to Market* is very insightful to see how the minds of the consumers were arrested by the media:

The headlines for a Buick ad from the early 1920s, for example, boldly claimed: 'Your car is part of your home. Get it the same way'. The pitch draws a parallel between hire purchase and mortgages claiming, 'Houses, and even large estates, are obtained out of income. Why not motor cars?' The advertising text suggests GM marketers deflected the moral taint of hastily buying before you can afford to, with the legitimacy of homeownership: 'If you had waited till you could buy your home outright you might still be without one. But your home has brought you comfort and satisfaction. So would a car'. (91)

The house is the symbol of comfort, protection and social prestige. The media advertizes the car as if it is just the extension of the comfort, protection and social prestige and tries to manipulate the mind of the consumers even though it is full of danger. The comfort and satisfaction have been promoted and the public is molded as the consumers. The consumers have the right to treat the commodities they buy modify or do whatever they like so that they could get the pleasure, comfort and satisfaction. In the play *The American Dream*, as the household disciplinarian, Mommy emasculates Daddy relentlessly, mocking his aspirations, ridiculing his manliness with her encouragement, prompting and repeating his speech in a patronizing fashion, terrorizing him into obedience, and onward. She also of course mutilates the couple's first child, the so-called "bumble of joy", in the course of disciplining him (101). The husband and the child whom the couple buys from an adoption center are the commodities for her and she uses them and even mutilates the child so that it enhances her satisfaction and gives her comfort.

The character of Daddy is the commodity serving the will of Mommy. Under Mommy's reign of terror, Daddy is a negative entity. Early in the play Mommy reduces his speech to the echo of hers speech. He has to be bent to Mommy's will, he relies on her entirely for the confirmation of his masculinity which is seen in the extended scene at the door when Mrs. Barker rings, which Mommy poses as a test of his manliness. As they are talking to

MOMMY: (*Still to GRANDMA*) Just you wait; I'll fix your wagon.

(*Now to DADDY*) Go let them in Daddy. What are you waiting for?

DADDY: I think we should talk about it some more. Maybe we've been hasty . . . a little hasty, perhaps. (*Doorbells ring again*) I'd like to talk about it some more.

MOMMY: There is no need. You made up your mind; you were firm; you were masculine and decisive. (73)

We see that Daddy wants to talk to Mommy even to decide on opening the door.

Daddy's masculinity needs confirmation of Mommy and he is no more than what his wife wants him to be. Daddy's masochism also appears clearly in the opening of the door, in which he submits to the demonstration of manliness that Mommy demands. Mommy tells him about her and Grandma's poverty and her reason to marry him. She married him just because he was rich and she could buy the satisfaction and comfort from her riches. She says, "We were very poor! But then I married you, Daddy, and now we're very rich" (66). Daddy also displays a disturbing tendency for infantile behavior. Thus, when Mrs. Barker removes her dress, Daddy mumbles: "I just blushed and giggled and went sticky wet" (79). Whereas Mommy becomes the tyrannical sadist, Daddy characteristically becomes childish commodity before the women.

Mommy uses grandma as a commodity, machinery who works for her satisfaction. And comfort in the house. She makes her do all the household works and yet loathes seeing her own mother working for her. Her relation to Grandma is, thus, devoid of feeling and love to her mother rather it is highly commodified and mechanical. She proposes Daddy to send her to a nursing home so that her expenditure of keeping her mother would reduce and she would not feel discomfort looking her at work:

MOMMY: No but you've been so good to Grandma she feels rich. She doesn't know you'd like to put her in a nursing home.

DADDY: I wouldn't.

MOMMY: Well, heaven knows, I would! I can't stand it, watching her do the cooking and the housework, polishing the silver, moving the furniture.... (67)

Grandma cooks and does many household chores like polishing the silver, moving the furniture and so on. She is the critique of the consumerism and lack of love in the relationship in the play. She lives in continual fear that she is about to be sent to the nursing home and the van people would come to take her because Mommy always threatens her to send her away with the van people.

Grandma regards herself as an old person, and thinks herself as neglected and at the margins of social intercourse. For example, social intercourse is violently fatal: old people die as a result of the way people talk to them. Grandma's marginality necessarily sets her apart from the spectacle before her. She criticizes the consumerist tendency and 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)

Since Grandma is aware that Mommy and Daddy criticize her because she has lost her efficiency due to her old age and she fails to give them the full satisfaction like a new commodity, she criticize them back. She realistically delineates the mindless behaviors people show to the old persons.

Grandma packs the things in the boxes and wraps them nicely. Cluttering the stage, Grandma's boxes are enigmatic and symbolic objects in the play. In much of the play, Albee plays with the spectator's desire to discover the box's contents and function. Mommy and Daddy continually compliment the boxes' wrapping but do not consider its interior. When Grandma almost reveals the boxes' purpose, however, Mommy silences her. Ultimately the audience learns that the boxes contain the haphazard list of objects—the enema bottles, the blind Pekinese, and so on—that Grandma has accumulated over the course of her life. 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.

The consumers of the modern societies never consider the inherent qualities of the commodities rather they only focus on the outer surface of the commodities is evident with the symbolic boxes in the play. Thus, the boxes serve as the symbol for the commodities of the modern market. As Mike Featherstone observes:

a bottle of vintage port may enjoy a prestige and exclusivity which means that it is never actually consumed (opened and drunk), although it may be consumed symbolically (gazed at, dreamt about, talked about, photographed and handled) in various ways which produce a great deal of satisfaction. It is in this sense that we can refer to the *doubly* symbolic aspect of goods in contemporary Western societies: symbolism is not only evident in the design and imagery of the production and marketing processes, the symbolic associations of goods may be utilized and renegotiated to emphasize differences in lifestyle which demarcate social relationships. (16)

As we compare the boxes wrapped by Grandma to the Featherstone's example of the bottle of vintage, we come to know the symbolic nature of the modern time consumption. Apart from the boxes, the Young Man, the symbolic American Dream, is also the commodity for the American people made for their satisfaction.

The Young Man is a blond, Midwestern beauty who describes himself as a "type" (107); upon their introduction, Grandma dubs him the "American Dream" (108). He is the product of the murder of his lost identical twin who stands against him in his physical deformity—as Grandma notes, the party knows him as the "bumble" (101). Appearing toward the end of the play as the solution to Mommy and Daddy's dilemma, he introduces a break in the household's violent intercourse with the story of his losses. This story recounts his progressive loss of feeling and desire, losses that, unbeknownst to him, correspond to the mutilations Mommy inflicted on his brother to punish his bodily excesses. These losses have left the Young Man a shell, physically perfect but a void within. Ironically, he ultimately becomes the child that Mommy believes will provide her with satisfaction, replacing the murdered bumble.

One possible reading of this admittedly strange allegory of the American Dream focuses on the notion of commodity that is culturally produced. In some sense, the two twins, the child killed by Mommy earlier in the name of molding him to give her the satisfaction and the Young Man who is going to be adopted again for the satisfaction of the family, stand for the man and his outward, surface feature. It suggests that the perfect form of the American Dream requires the murder of the unruly body, the human bumble.

American Dream is the commodity that is culturally produced and the dominant groups are always involved in its production. As Mike Featherstone talks about the cultural goods:

Dominant groups, therefore, seek to possess or establish what William Leiss (1983) calls 'positional goods', goods which are prestigious because an artificial scarcity of supply is imposed. One of the problems generated by the dynamic of consumer culture is that inflation is constantly introduced as scarce and restricted goods become marketed to the wider population or passed down the market causing a leapfrogging social race to maintain recognizable distinctions. Satisfaction depends upon possession or consumption of the socially sanctioned and legitimate (and therefore scarce or restricted) cultural goods. (86-87)

The American Dream embodied in the Young Man is, thus, allegorical or symbolical good that is legitimized by the dominant group of the society as the antidote to the unhappiness and lack of satisfaction in the society. In the play, the American Dream is personified by the Young Man, a clean-cut, Midwestern beauty, a self-described "type" (107). Though physically perfect, he remains incomplete, having lost all feeling and desire in the murder of an identical twin from which he was separated as a child. This twin Mommy and Daddy's first adopted son—stands against his brother as a consummate deformity. He lacks a head, spine, guts, feet of flesh, and onward. Moreover, he suffers a progressive disfigurement under Mommy's sadistic tortures, punishments specifically directed at each of his bodily excesses and infantile desires. Thus: an eye for only having eyes for Daddy, his "you-know- what" for masturbation (100), and onward.

In his unruliness, this child, the so-called "bumble of joy" (101), fails to provide Mommy and Daddy what they demand above all: "satisfaction". The result of these tortures is the Young Man, a man disemboweled, voided of interiority but perfect in form, a figure who cannot relate to others but accepts the "syntax" around him in knowing that others must relate to him (115). Thus he becomes the son who provides Mommy and Daddy the satisfaction they believe that they have long desired. Doing anything for money, he is in some sense their perfect commodity, the merchandise they wanted all along.

Albee's allegory of the American Dream is certainly strange. The American Dream does not appear as that which one lives out or even as ideology, but as a person and possession, a commodity. One possible reading of this allegory involves the all-important theatrical concept of the mask. Linked indissolubly, the twins are in some sense figures for the actor and his mask. The Young Man as American Dream is a mask without a man behind it, a personification without a person. As he tells Grandma, he is a type. The murder of his double is the murder of the man behind the mask, the elimination of the unruly body that can only mould itself into the perfect form through its mutilation. The product of this mutilation is the Young Man. Thus Albee offers a sinister account of the American Dream, imagining it as a mask disemboweled of man and his excesses. Thus, American Dream as the commodity has been bitterly criticized by Albee with the portrayal of the consumerist American family.

In her book *Contemporary American Drama* Annette J. Saddik talks about the criticism of empty American middle-class values as she writes:

In *The American Dream*, the American worship of the superficial, empty of any genuine content, is explored through the presentation of a

family who, after having lost the the adopted child they mutilated for failing to live up to expectations, are confronted with a Young Man at the end of the play. This character is apparently the twin of the lost child, but he no longer has the capacity to feel anything, making him a perfect addition to the emotionally dead and sanitised American family. *The American Dream* proposes that the goal, rather than the unfortunate product, of American identity is deliberate emptiness and superficiality. For Albee, the achievement of the American dream requires a denial of the messy complexities of being human, and therefore the 'successful' characters in his plays deliberately seek out inanity. (36-37)

The emptiness and lack of emotion in the seemingly human characters in the play is deeply rooted to the tendency to consumerism. The character American Dream is the boy devoid of feeling and emotion and so are Mommy and Daddy. The characters empty of human feeling and sentiment serve Albee's proposal to prove the vacuity and superficiality as the idol of the Americans chasing the unreal, utopian notion of American Dream not maintaining the social and familial harmony based on feeling and love rather looking for the satisfaction in the commodities they buy worshipping the almighty material goods. Thus, Albee is successful to criticize the rampant consumerism that has engulfed the human-side of the American middle-class people. As Saddik argues *The American Dream* proposes the goal of American identity is deliberate emptiness and superficiality, we also see that the American middle-class is heading not to the utopia and so-called national sentiment and optimism embodied into the very fabric of the discourse of American Dream rather it is constructing its identity in the deliberate construction of emptiness and superficiality. So, Saddik

rightly claims that Albee, for the achievement of the hollow American Dream that is far removed from the reality of American society, has truly understood his requirement that a denial of the messy complexities of being human is necessary. It is because the emptiness of the so-called American Dream followed by the American middle-class is demonic, killing the human feeling and sentiment. With the portrayal of the characters devoid of human emotion and gratifying their needs from the commodities they buy, Albee has successfully pointed to the evils of so-called American Dream shaped by the consumerism.

III. American Dream as the Agent of Consumerism in American Society

We notice the discourse of American Dream full of the negative consequences as we study the play as the critique of consumerism that is prevalent in the American society being valued as the identity of the American middle-class. American Dream promoted the optimism of material progress and happy life of the people, but the very notion of American Dream developed the materialist culture ultimately making the people consumers devoid of feelings and sentiment. Due to unbound optimism on American Dream that shows the utopia of material wellbeing and progress in the society, people are converted to the senseless consumers. They think they can buy happiness and pleasure that appears hollow and ridiculous. At the center of the plot, we see, the couple of Mommy and Daddy desperately attempt to send their mother, Grandma, to nursing home to reduce the expenditure keeping her at home and taking care of her. They, even foolishly, buy a son from Bye-Bye Adoption Centre so as to gain satisfaction. Mommy eventually kills him because they feel they could not get the joy they had expected from him. Mommy and Daddy make Grandma do the cooking and housework and frequently threaten her that they would put her in a nursing home. Thus, the obsession to the materiality and consumerism is profoundly seen in the middle-class American family staged in the play.

Representative American middle-class character, Mommy, is the desiring machine created by the capitalism who only desires for the commodities and tries to get the satisfaction and happiness in the consumption of the material goods. For her, even the husband and the mother are the commodities of the desiring production. She is a desiring machine, lets her body be consumed by her husband in the desire of controlling his money. She claims her rights over his money only because she has given him her body for the fulfillment of his sexual desire. She does not hesitate to

clarify that she is married to her husband not because of her love to him rather she married him for his money. She lacks the feelings and emotions and emptied of the human qualities. For her, her own mother, Grandma, is just a commodity to consume for she makes her work in the kitchen and clean the house and so on. Grandma is aware of her daughter's consumerist tendency and frequently criticizes Mommy and Daddy not being sensitive enough to treat the old people. Since she is old her utility is going to end soon in the consumerist society. It results in the consideration that she needs to be thrown away from the family. Daddy is also the commodity to act accordance with the Mommy's desire. The American Dream, a boy who is under consideration to be adopted to the family, also understands the utility the family and the society demands from him and it is due to the consumerism, he says he can do anything for the money. He says he lacks the feeling and emotion because he has never got the love. His organs to feel are already cut off. This ironizes the discourse of American Dream to be hollow and insensitive and is not adequate to create the utopian society to which it is associated. Thus, Albee charges ground the very notion of American Dream to be unreal, only creating the insensitive, hedonist consumers in the name of prosperous American society.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. trans. by John Cumming. London: Allen Lane, 1972.
- Albee, Edward. *Two Plays by Edward Albee*. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Arnould, E. J. and Thompson, C. "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research." *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(March, 4, 2005) 868–882.
- Bigsby, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume Two—Williams/Miller/Albee*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Rev. ed. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1968.
- Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage, 2007.
- Goodman, Douglas J. and Mirelle Cohen. *Consumer Culture: A Reference Handbook*. Oxford, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004.
- Gussow, Mel. *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.
- Kolin, Philip C. "Albee's early one-act plays: "A new American playwright from whom much is to be expected." *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*. Ed. Stephen Bottoms. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 16-38.
- Lee, A. Robert. "Illusion and Betrayal: Edward Albee's Theatre." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 59. 233 (Spring, 1970): 53-67.
- Lyons, B., and Henderson, K. "An Old Problem in a New Marketplace: Compulsive Buying on the Internet." *ANZMAC: Visionary Marketing for the 21st Century*, (2000)739–744.

- Saddik, Annette J. *Contemporary American Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Sassatelli, Roberta. *Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics*. London: SAGE, 2007.
- Trentmann, Frank. 'The Modern Genealogy of the Consumer: Meanings, Identities and Political Synapses.' Eds. J. Brewer and F. Trentmann. *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives. Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges*. Oxford: Berg, 2006.
- Wright, N. D., Claiborne, C. B., & Sirgy, M. J. "The Effects of Product Symbolism on Consumer Self-Concept." *Advances in Consumer Research*, 19, (1992) 311–318.