

Materialism in Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy* and Edward Albee's *The American Dream*

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Abstract

The degradation in the modern pattern of heroism during the 20th century America started with the advent of science and materialistic look of life. Modern scientific studies proposed that "man is alone, absolutely alone in a universe in which his very appearance is a cosmic accident" tending, at his best, towards an animal ancestor. Man was not cared for by spiritual or moral providence. The over soul, which the American hero was supposed to melt in, was replaced by the machine which ironically metamorphosed his significance. Modern American's pursuit of worldly gains was ultimately made at the expense of his essential spiritual and moral priorities as any material gain must be balanced against a spiritual loss. This fact is made concrete in the dehumanized character of Joe, the protagonist of Clifford Odets's *Golden Boy* (1937), through his aggressive anti-social behaviour. He is characterized by a lack of community. *Golden Boy* shows how the Americans are increasingly enervated by economic strains, racist tensions and political intimidation. Almost everywhere was the lost sense of community, a sense of inner defeat and lost self-esteem. The lost sense of community was very harmful as the Americans started looking for survival at the expense of society itself; social and economic injustices arose. Odets introduces such a motif in the character of Joe.

Edward Albee (1928) is one of the significant American dramatists of the 20th century, uses the dramatic forms that were prominent on the postwar European stage to articulate an unsettling vision of the United States. He wrote about the emptiness of American cultures and the uncertainties of human existence. His work castigated what he sees as a blindly materialistic society devoid of any real sense of values and national purpose. He is against the materialism in the society which goes along with consumerism. The characters in *The American Dream* (1961) are materialistic. Mommy represents women's addiction to shopping. She assesses her marriage in a materialistic way.

Keywords: Materialism, Clifford Odets *Golden Boy*, Edward Albee *The American Dream*.

الخلاصة

مع التراجع في النمط الحديث للبطولة خلال القرن العشرين، بدأت أمريكا بظهور العلم والنظرة المادية للحياة. وقد اقترحت الدراسات الحديثة بأن الإنسان وحيد بطبعه، وحيد تماماً في الكون الذي تكون فيه هيئته عبارة عن حدث كوني، كما أنه وفي أفضل حالاته يميل نحو الاصل الحيواني. إن الإنسان لم يعر اهتماماً للعناية الالهية والروحية والمعنوية، كما إن الروح التي كان من المفترض على البطل الأمريكي أن يذوب فيها قد استبدلت بالماكنة التي حولت اهتماماته بصورة ساخرة. إن السعي الأمريكي الحديث للمكاسب الدنيوية في النهاية قد تم على حساب اولوياته الروحية والاخلاقية الاساسية، بينما الربح المادي يجب ان يكون متوازناً مع الخسارة الروحية. إن هذه الحقيقة ملموسة في شخصية (جو) بطل مسرحية (الفتى الذهبي) للكاتب الأمريكي كليفورد أوديتس من خلال سلوكه العدوانى المعادي للمجتمع، حيث يوصف من خلال النقص في التواصل الاجتماعى. إن مسرحية الفتى الذهبي تبين كيف إن الأمريكان يرهقون انفسهم بشكل متزايد بواسطة الضغوطات الاقتصادية والتوترات العنصرية والترهيب السياسى. تقريباً وفي كل مكان كان هناك شعور بفقد المجتمع، وشعور بالهزيمة الداخلية وفقدان احترام الذات. إن فقد الشعور بالمجتمع كان الاكثر أذى حيث بدأ

الأمريكان بالسعي وراء النجاة على حساب المجتمع ذاته، وعليه فقد بدأت المظالم الاقتصادية والاجتماعية بالنشوء. وقد أدخل أوديتس مثل هذا الحافز على شخصية (جو).

يعتبر ادوارد البّي ١٩٢٨ واحداً من بين كبار المسرحيين في القرن العشرين حيث انه يستخدم الاشكال الدرامية التي كانت بارزة على الساحة الاوربية بعد انتهاء الحرب العالمية لبلورة رؤية وضع الولايات المتحدة. وقد كتب عن الفراغ في الثقافات الامريكية وعن عدم اليقين بوجود الانسان. ان عمله انتقد ما يراه كمجتمع مادي أعمى خالٍ من أي شعور حقيقي للقيم والغرض الوطني. كما انه ضد المادية في المجتمع الذي يسير جنباً الى جنب مع النزعة الاستهلاكية. ان الشخصيات في مسرحية الحلم الامريكي (١٩٦١) هي شخصيات مادية، حيث تمثل الام ادمان المرأة على التبضع كما انها تقيم زواجها بطريقة مادية. الكلمات المفتاحية: المادية ، كليفورد أوديتس *الولد الذهبي* ، إدوارد ألبّي الحلم الأمريكي.

Introduction

The industrial and technological mania represented by competition and class struggle in the wake of the 20th century worsened America's spiritual life too. Business and the myth of material success augmented, to threatening levels, the old American dream and the get-rich quick ways. The new American identified himself with "freedom, the joy of life, self-expression, self-development, fullness of the progress".¹ Instead of the heroic will to sacrifice, a barbaric Nietzschean will to live rose as a dominant principle. Compassion, love, humility and the claims of universality – which transcendentalism wished the New Adam to achieve – were just dismissed from the contemporary competitive sense which was haunted by heartless profiteers. The result was the despair and fear of the modern American "whose ideal realms", John Dewey comments "has suffered a radical change in character and function"²

An obvious atmosphere of impotence and futility characterized most of the post-war literature in America, let alone its drama. More to the point, expatriation added a troublesome experience to post-war Americans due to an internal claustrophobic sense of a lack of space in the life of almost every American. Generally speaking, modern American life after the war, as Harold Durfee believes, "has all the characteristics of fear and it betrays the immediate consciousness of being under threat"; it is quite normal, Durfee resumes, that post-war America should have hailed"³

A bitter disillusionment was the reaction on the literary level paralleled by isolationisms on the political one. Under isolationism, Americans succeeded to turn their war pains at home into the production of economic welfare. The effort exerted in that direction proved fruitful as they led to the financial boom of the early Twenties. Yet, as the nation headed towards material ascendance, a deeper spiritual and moral decadence was to be expected. The overwhelming spiritual impoverishment showed itself in the form of "a tendency to seek relief from remembered horror in unbridled drinking and [sex], and to swing from a harsh facing of reality into an over-indulgent escapism"⁴

Social responsibility, moral commitment and sacrifice withdrew before "the crafts of survival".⁵ Generally, the industrial American was motivated by a state of "a-humanity" which necessarily portended a future "breakdown of human qualities and values"⁶ In Odets's *Golden Boy* and in Miller's *All My Sons*, this epidemic is developed by Joe and Keller respectively. Both protagonists arrive at such a dehumanizing antiheroic "a-humanity" through their aggressive anti-social behaviour. They are characterized by what Eric Bentley calls "a lack of community [as] a

problem ... of our whole civilization".⁷ The gradual decadence in the value and meaning of man-community relationship is defined by Robert Nisbet in his *Quest for Community* in terms of maladjustment:

If in renaissance through, it was the myth of reasonable man which dominated; if in the eighteenth century it was natural man; and in the nineteenth century, economic or political man, it is by no means unlikely that in our own age it is alienated or mal-adjusted man who will appear to later historians as the key figure of twentieth century thought.⁸

The defeated character of the modern protagonist is to be accepted as part of a period which is, in Lewis Mumford's description, one of

Paralyzing economic depressions ... unrestrained butcheries and enslavements, and of world-ravaging wars... a loss of communion between classes and peoples, [and] a breakdown in stable behaviour.⁹

Odets's plays were studied at other times in terms of the proletariat, the Depression and Communism which were realistic rather than symbolic phases for the 1930s' social, economic and political life. Odets was also considered as the precursor of the drama of the common man, which later became Arthur Miller's achievement instead. Miller's early plays, Ellen Schiff supposes, would not have become what they are had if not been for Odets's earlier efforts to write for and about the common American.¹⁰

The Depression which hit America created a sense of fear among the citizens. To scatter that sense of fear, Americans developed a view of life based on greed and materialistic success. A strongly competitive atmosphere posed a very hard reality for the common man to cope with. Christopher Herr conceived of the Depression reality to be the "Second Fall"¹¹ as it was the heaviest experience America had suffered since reconstruction. "Twelve" to "sixteen million" workers found themselves destitute overnight.¹² The fall of the rich necessarily meant the fall of the poor into worse conditions. Even those workers who managed to keep their jobs had to sacrifice their former wages for smaller ones.

It was in such an economically confusing era that Odets emerged as a leading dramatist. His foremost goal was "to reveal America", the broken nation, "to itself", as he explained.¹³ As the depression period proved "fertile for writers" to focus on contemporary ills,¹⁴ a new drama with new concerns was born. What Odets's plays introduced was a social and political treatment of reality which was shared by almost every writer in that period.¹⁵

In *Golden Boy*, Odets shed light on other immigrant minorities in America. The characters in that play were subjected to psychological pressures alongside economic ones. Odets's focus was placed on the deep injury a racist look of society could inflict upon a man's psychology. Joe Bonaparte, the protagonist of the play, is so deeply hurt by the way people look at his Italian, his name and his optical difficulties. He, as a result, turns into an iconoclast deriding all American's social values. He develops an aggressive antisocial spirit which critics held as the worst form of anti-heroism that modern protagonist ever developed.¹⁶ As such, Odets's old plays told the stories of young protagonists overpowered by economic and psychological conditions that turned them into defeated, broken characters. The main obstacle impeding them from setting heroic paradigms for others, was their lack of "fulfillment" which Odets considered as a touchstone for a heroic in a man's life.

Golden Boy represents a shift from the agitation-propaganda play which Odets develops in *Awake and sing!*. Gabriel Miller regards the play as a development

towards deeper character study.¹⁷ In the play, both personal and general economic problems form the background of the conflict as a major interplay in the protagonist's antiheroic career. The search for security confused by psychological tensions and economic crisis ends up with the protagonist's moral and spiritual collapse.

Another view of the play provided by Harold Clurman, Baird R. Shuman and Louis Harap who look at it as an autobiographical piece of writing. The play, according to them is not more than the playwright's attempt to exorcise some sort of discomfort that has actually developed into deep feeling of guilt. This autobiographical bearing of the play is explained in terms of Odets's departure from The Group for Hollywood money. Hence, the play comes to underline Odets's "own travail over the rival claims of art [The Group] and money [Hollywood]".¹⁸

Such an accusation emanated from the fact that the 1930s witnessed the rise of Hollywood as a major challenge to American theatre. Then, Hollywood provided a newer option for actors, playwrights and producers alike to join the art of film-making. Even theatre audiences found themselves attracted to that art of the moving picture. It was at that time that a considerable number of playwrights worked as screen writers for Hollywood. Therefore, the playwrights who left the theatre for Hollywood financial lure "were seen as traitors".¹⁹

Odets himself felt disgraced for his temporary stay there. When he came back to The Group with *Golden Boy*, he was aware of the difference his return meant for them. He was quoted as saying

... going to Hollywood was the most immortal thing I could do, and yet who wouldn't want to go to Hollywood? When I finally went, it was with a sense of disgrace almost.²⁰

Golden Boy was received within the context of guilt and expiation; the protagonist is a violinist who is destroyed for leaving his art. The play was therefore said to have had documented the dramatist's conflict in a modern landscape governed by money temptation and "fear for defeat".²¹

Odets's, more than once, tried to justify his choice of Hollywood as a way to raise money for the bankrupt Group itself.²² He blamed the economic stress of the time for his departure. It was just a desperate option to stick to one's own art in times of economic need. Similar justifications are voiced by Mr. Carp, a cynical character in *Golden Boy*, who questions the possibility of success a young artist may have during the Depression; "... nowadays, is it possible for a young man to give himself to the Muses? Could the Muses put bread and butter on the table?" (249). However, Odets's justifications did not seem convincing for The Group, particularly for Harold Clurman who dismissed them as mere excuses.²³

Golden Boy opens with a family scene much at odd with that of *Awake and Sing!*. The two poles of action are set into a father-and-son conflict. The forceful Bessie of *Awake and Sing!* Is replaced by a meek father, Mr. Bonaparte. Instead of Ralph there is a much audacious son, Joe Bonaparte. And since the present play does not preach "the mass as a hero", it becomes clear that the center of the play is the individual as a social entity. Joe, the protagonist of the play is fed up with his life as a whole: "Do you think that's a life for a boy my age? Tomorrow is my birthday! I change my life ... I have to tell you – I don't like myself, past, present and future", he yells at his father (252).

In return, Mr. Bonaparte tries his best to make it possible for Joe to change his life as a violinist; an option which Joe considers as useless and unrewarding. Hence, against his father's wish, he joins an extreme alternative as a prizefighter – a boxer. As he progresses in the boxing business, his materialistic dreams grow alarmingly

larger than mere money. He thinks of dominating the whole boxing scene. To achieve this, he murders a boxer as he beats him to death. Having had no place to turn to for fear of arrest, he drives his car speedily and ends with a violent death in a car accident.

Joe's quick rise and fall is emblematic of an age known for its speed and mobile values. He represents a nation whose individuals seem to place all their trust in get-rich-quick schemes. Odets's views his protagonists as caught in an amalgam of personal complexes that are turned by the society into social tensions. He is single-handed in his fight to neutralize such tensions. He wants to accomplish some sort of social acceptance according to society's terms that soon became his own terms too. Joe reacts violently to his society's humiliation. He feels deeply injured by an unhappy childhood as well as present ethnic discomfort related to his family's Italian line.

As a child, his school mates exclude him as they make fun of him and call him a cock-eyed boy. A sense of alienation is implanted in him very early in life. This sense endangers his normal adjustment to the society and develops hatred against the "people [who] have hurt [his] feelings for years"(264), as he explains. Instead of looking at the better side of his character as a violinist, he lets himself become an easy prey to "a deeply rooted inferiority complex... to fight back blindly".²⁴ In other words, his optical deformity is worsened when he loses his ability to focus on what is much important for him. He cuts all ties with the society which has belittled and considered him apart from it.

Bearing all this experience in mind, Joe has no choice but to behave as a fully-blown social iconoclast who coils into his own self or the "me, myself and I" (265). The boxing career which he chooses activates such an unconscious retaliatory spirit to inflict the deepest-felt pains upon his persecuting society as represented by the rival boxers at the boxing ring.

As an image of the "dominator mythos", Joe is linked in this respect to Napoleon Bonaparte, as both men represent imperialistic wishes and aggressive self assertiveness.²⁵ These are the main psychological problems that form Joe's basic attraction to self-achievement through retaliation. Being so radical in his thinking, the goals he has to accomplish appear radical too. Christopher Herr explains accurately what goes on in Joe's mind as a radical character: "achievement" for Joe should be "measured by *its distance* from the achievement of others".²⁶ When he appears in the first scene of the play, he has already broken a boxer's arm just to prove to moody that he outrivals trained boxers themselves.

However, Joe's aggressive behaviour is not attributable only to psychological problems related to his social rejection, but to some other general economic apprehensions as well. In the Depression scene where almost everybody struggles to survive and\ or make the best of economic competition, Joe finds it entirely absurd to sit down and play the violin: "Could a boy make a living playing this instrument [the violin] in our competitive civilization?" (249). The economic factor therefore plays a significant role in the protagonist's spiritual and moral instability. For Joe, lost self-esteem is restorable not through an artistic career, but through an economic achievement which should lead to fame. It is true that he used to create his own private world in music which guards him against the world outside. Yet, he breaks with such a private world considering it a hiding place which he must leave for retaliation and materialistic success.

Joe finds it degrading to amuse people with his music. He instead wishes "if music shot bullets I'd like to better – artists are freaks today. The world moves fast and they sit around like forgotten dopes" (264). He ill-rationalizes his passions to

believe that music is just a feminine tool that is easily defeated by the masculine aggressive world outside. Having arrived at this point of thinking, he sacrifices his identity and ideals for fame. Thus, he neglects the fact that he might have excelled everybody through art which is part of his nature; "there's a olda remark", his father warns him, "never interfere in the laws of nature and you gonna be happy" (248). Otherwise, Joe is "gonna be" just "foolish", as his father later confirms (250).

Opposite to the virtues of the world of music envisioned by his father, the world of boxing and prizefighting offers a better promise of success for Joe. The fingers that could have put in harmony the scattered musical notes,²⁷ are clenched by Joe to make a strong fist to devastate and waste. The idealist father knows exactly what this metamorphosis means; the boxers' hands are for him "so strong [but] so useless" (302). Mr. Bonaparte calculates that his son is a mean hero as he fights for mere money not for a "cause or woman" (300). This meanness in the modern antihero is foreshadowed previously by Jacob's advice to Ralph to keep his girlfriend in *Awake and Sing!*. Nevertheless, Joe defies his father; "I have to fight no matter what you say or think. This is my profession! I'm out for *fame* and *future*..." (298). He sees himself pitted against a life depicted in its "most brutal... battle for gain [and in its] most lucrative and spectacular".²⁸

In the play boxing symbolizes capitalism as both fields are dominated by self-interest and the survival of the fittest.²⁹ Almost everybody is involved in the fight for material gain without considering the harm inflicted upon those inside the ring of competition. Hence, Joe, the musician at home is not Joe the boxer at the ring. Idealism is replaced by a real loss of humanity and spiritual commitment. His alienation as a musician manifests itself first by breaking his hand which has kept reminding him of a tender past. At that accident, he cries "*loudly, victoriously, exultantly*", in triumph over his better self "Hallelujah!! It's the beginning of the world" (300). This masochistic cry frees him from any past commitment to "the violin and the ideals of his father".³⁰

George Groman criticizes the protagonist's lack of clear vision of the future when it is "predicated on the yells of a mob ... the quick bucks, and tabloid headlines forgotten at a glance."³¹ What Groman accurately underlines is the transient and uncertain achievement of the protagonist at the end of the play. Joe revises his past career to arrive at a similar conclusion; "... now I'm hung up by my fingers' tips – I'm no good – my feet are off the earth" (315).

The end of the play assures its audience that Joe, as an American "hero", has achieved nothing worthwhile. Odets recommends that, in times of social and economic difficulties, the heroic American individual "must be able to make his living in such a way that his own *ideals* will not be compromised".³² Odets's statement is a clear condemnation of Joe who leads an antiheroic career wherein his moral and spiritual ideals are metamorphosed and replaced by materialistic and selfish ones. Joe comments on this shift in his own ideals at the end of the play; "Now I'm smashed! That's the truth. Yes, I was a real sparrow, and I wanted to be a fake eagle" (315). This neither-nor identity confirms the state of self-dividedness of the modern antihero. He laments his present achievement and deems it as the attribute of "half a man, nothing, useless..." (316).

The play transcends the limitations imposed on it as an autobiographical play and a play about an ambitious boxer. It is instead a strongly worded indictment of America's growing materialistic spirit. The protagonist of the play represents, in this respect, the collapse of such a spirit which more Americans assume as their national identity. Joe's rejection of family ties and values is more than a personal flaw. His

break with this social institute is symbolic for an entire young generation's protest against traditional sensibility and common sense.

It should be noted, Odets's *Golden Boy* introduces psychological case studies of abnormal protagonists. They struggle with inferiority complexes, related to a wretched childhood and contemporary social tensions. Their reaction to confront reality appears abnormal too. Joe cultivates an aggressive character to destroy whoever causes his psychological littleness. The protagonists do not support any suggestion that they are special men with real achievement as they are distracted by an indifferent life around them.

Edith Isaac observes that Odets's protagonists "end as they begin".³³ They do not even succeed in regaining the self-esteem and respect they lose at the beginning. This failure remains always attributable to the malicious influence of the social and economic circumstances which definitely overpower them. It is ironic that even when they become financially secure, they are denied the initiative to reform their life. Instead, their capacity for reform is often minimized to further withdrawal blind relation and vindictiveness.

Albee uses Absurd drama to mirror his social concerns. He believes that his plays should reflect the society with all of its follies and shake the minds of his audience in order to force some change in the deteriorated social order. "Albee has a philosophy of the theatre which entrusts it with vital functions in society".³⁴ While dramatizing the human condition, he does not skip criticizing American society that is formed of problematic, irresponsible and unaware individuals. He explains his aim: "the function of the theatre as a form of art is to tell us who we are: that is its first value; and the health of the theatre depends on the degree of self-knowledge we wish to have".³⁵ So, Albee is first of all a social critic. He does not just satirize the society. He urges his audience for self-awareness, for innovation since he believes that "change is possible".³⁶ Thus, while following Beckett in the explanation of the human condition, as Kolin asserts, he remains "distinctively American, pressing for social change and reform".³⁷ The main social concerns of the playwright are materialism, loss of values and the broken human relationships.

Albee is against the materialism in the society which goes along with consumerism. In the society he depicts the characters take money and wealth as the major criterion. Money plays a major role in their lives. They believe that happiness is related to wealth. Consumer society was a common phrase of the 1960's, and many playwrights regarded consumerism or materialism as "spiritual bankrupt".³⁸ Albee is one of those playwrights who is against excessive consumption. According to Kolin, "Albee targets the depraved power of money to set moral standards in America".³⁹ He satirizes the greedy American society through his materialistic characters.

In 1961, Edward Albee produced *The American Dream*, which is a satire on American family life and a social commentary concerned with the loss of American values. It was firstly staged at the York Playhouse in New York and regarded by critics as "a bizarre comedy on family relationships".⁴⁰ On the surface level, Albee's title refers to ideas and feelings associated with the hopes of participants in the American experience, both historic and contemporary. But deeply, Albee explores not only the falsity of the American Dream but also the American family's status quo.⁴¹ However, Albee himself describes the play in his preface to it, as "an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in his society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation, and vanity".⁴² It attacks the ideals of progress, optimism, and faith in the national mission, and pours

scorn on the sentimental ideals of family life. Arthur Miller calls Albee's portrait of the "American family home" as a "modern prefabricated chamber of horrors".⁴³

The setting and the plot of the play are simple. As a domestic drama, the events of the play are run in a living-room. Traditionally, a home is an expression of a family's stability, uniqueness, and individuality. But amid the general air of familial frustration, everywhere in the house, things are breaking down. The refrigerator, the doorbell, and the bathroom need repair. Symbolically, the refrigerator represents our hunger drive, which is at the moment not being taken care of adequately. The broken doorbell symbolizes the family's isolation. Mommy and Daddy are completely removed from their immediate surroundings. Significantly, the particular apartment in the play is in a state of decay-everything needs fixing.⁴⁴ Evidently Albee has decided to begin his expose of the American scene at its roots: the family unit. And according to Albee, it is breaking down, in need of immediate repair."⁴⁵

The American Dream shows an American family which consists of a dominating Mommy, an emasculated Daddy and a clever and witty Grandma. They are visited by Mrs. Barker who, like the others, does not know why she has come. Grandma apparently knows why Mrs. Barker has been asked to come, and explains to her that Mommy and Daddy adopted a son from her many years previously. As the parents objected to the child's actions, they mutilated it as punishment, eventually killing it. Now a Young Man appears at the door looking for work. Grandma at first takes him for the "Van Man" Mommy and Daddy are always threatening to call to take her to the rest home. After hearing his life story, we are informed that the Young Man is the twin of Mommy and Daddy's first child. Because the first child was mutilated, the twin has experienced all of its pain and has been left physically beautiful, but also a psychological cripple, completely superficial and completely empty. The young man will do anything for money; so, he will even consent to become a member of the family.⁴⁶

Passing over the directly sexual and material sides implicit in the personalities of Mommy and Daddy, Albee tries to examine their marriage relationship, the main relationship in *The American Dream*. Practically, there is no marriage, at least not in the traditional sense of partnership and companionship between two people. The arrangement between Mommy and Daddy is, moreover, quite perverse. Daddy neither holds nor assumes his place as head of the household; rather he is submitted, completely dominated by his wife. In everything from making the most important decisions to deciding when Daddy will be permitted to speak in support of her, it is her authority that is unquestioned. More precisely, the play exposes a marriage relationship based on materialism and sterility, themes which reflect the sterile way of life in the new American society.

Daddy and Mommy's marriage is based on materialistic purposes. Their conversation reveals the materialism and the opportunism that are built into the family system. It shows that Mommy had married Daddy for his money: "You can't live off people. I can live off you because I married you... I have a right to live off you because I married you... and I have a right to all your money when you die" (p. 106). Apparently, Mommy has always been-in Grandma's words "a tramp and trollop and a trull to boot" (p. 107). At school, she used to pretend that her lunch box was empty in order to get food from the other children. The point about her is reinforced by Grandma, who says that when Mommy was no more than eight, she announced her intention of marrying a rich old man. In fact, *The American Dream* is a savage attack on the American way of life."⁴⁷

It should be noted, moreover, that "Marriage is seen by Mommy as no more than a social contract in which she bought wealth and security with sexuality. It is a commercial transaction."⁴⁸ And Love becomes impossible and absurdity is accepted as the norm. As the play goes on a little further, it can be noticed that the characters are isolated from each other in separate worlds, where there is no love, no care and no warmth of human relations. This reflects Albee's concept of the American marriage relationship within the American family, where love has disappeared in favor of materialism and has been substituted by sexual sterility. Marriage, which is supposed to be a sacred tie, has degraded and become a means of gaining worldly benefits and physical desires. Albee reveals the "failure of human feeling and contract"⁴⁹ through the images of sterility by exchanging love words in a mechanical and meaningless way:

Mommy: you're my sweet Daddy; that's very nice.

Daddy: I love my Mommy. (118)

George Wellwarth suggests that Albee takes the traditional elements of the happy family and the idealistic hero and displays them in a distorted form that he feels they have assumed: "the happy family becomes an emasculated money supplier dominated by an emotionally sterile, nagging wife; the idealistic hero becomes a handsome, empty-headed, hollow shell of a man with the outlook and philosophy of a professional pimp."⁵⁰

The other face of family relationships in *The American Dream* is represented in the mother-daughter relationships. After all, Mommy has definitely rejected Grandma and her humanistic American Dream, and, at the end, chosen the Young Man and his materialistic American Dream. Mommy would like to get rid of her, but she cannot bring herself to give up the free maid service. Mommy even "cannot stand it, the cooking and housework, polishing the silver, moving the furniture" (p. 105), the things Grandma used to do. Actually, Mommy wants everyone to be completely dependent on her; it keeps her in power. If Grandma has her own money, she can gain independence and be free of her daughter's authority.⁵¹ The only reply Grandma receives to her monetary complaints is that she ought to go to bed. Mommy insults her mother violently as the latter tries to say any word: "don't you dare say a word" (p. 109) or "be quiet" (pp. 112, and 118). Even when Daddy tries to listen to grandma, Mommy objects, saying: "nonsense. Old people have nothing to say: and if they did have something to say, nobody would listen to them" (p. 118).

David Reisman points out the same problem in American life, when he writes the grandmothers cannot "any more than the children themselves, find a useful economic role."⁵² This realization of rejection and ungratefulness fills Grandma with anger and inspires her emotional outburst in the play. She arranges her boxes to leave, as she knows that her daughter is about to put her in a nursing home. On a literal level, the boxes are simply the belongings that Grandma takes with her as she leaves the apartment. As Mommy finds out when she looks in the bathroom, Grandma is really emptying the apartment of all of its contents, even water. These "contents" are, in effect, the "contents" of the American Dream.⁵³

Notably Mommy's own relationship with Grandma is defined by bitter debts, rivalries, and resentment. Throughout the play, Grandma offers a number of sardonic epigrams on the condition of the elderly: "Most people think that when you get so old, you either freeze to death, or you burn up. But you don't. when you get so old, all that happens is that people talk to you that way" (p. 104). She also bitterly remembers Mommy's childhood and how Grandma used to deny herself dinner to provide her daughter with tomorrow's lunch. Mommy's lunch means Grandma's deprivation and

her indebtedness to her mother. But, as Mommy grew up and became rich, this relation involves deceit and ingratitude.⁵⁴ According to Brian Way, in "Albee and the Absurd", Grandma "is the only character in *The American Dream* with any vitality and attractiveness – she is 'rural', from an older way of life. The way in which she is juxtaposed against the Young Man who is the American Dream seems to symbolize a society in which the natural order of life has been reversed, in which the younger one is the less chance one has of being alive."⁵⁵

The substitution of Grandma by the Young Man comes as a substitution of the old traditional values of the American family and American society by the superficial and shallow modern picture of the American Dream. Despite her senile decay, and her childishness, Grandma was lively and moving like old age itself. "In place of her, the family is adopting the American Dream – clean – cut, Midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile (133) – the monstrous caricature of the American Dream of a better, richer and fuller life for all."⁵⁶ And thus, Grandma, who represents the old generation, and who possesses energy, courage, and honesty, in all these things is a direct contrast to Mommy, the new generation.

Indeed, despite a number of signs of love for Grandma, it is obvious from the moment of Grandma's entrance that the old lady is not loved, and the relation between mother and daughter is devoid of love and based on interest. Through Grandma's character, Albee intends her to be more humane – perhaps he pictures her as an incarnation of the nineteenth-century liberal American values, which were still alive earlier in the twentieth.⁵⁷

Young Man is another character that is fond of money. When Grandma asks him whether he could help her with the problematic uncertainty in the house, he says: "I hope so... if there's money in it" (135). He can help her only if she pays for it. Besides, he implies that he does all kinds of demeaning works for money: "I let them draw pleasure from my groin... from my presence... from the fact of me" (139). He possibly works as a male-prostitute. In order to have more money, he disgraces himself. Mrs. Baker helps people with suspicious adoptions for money although she seems to be a responsible citizen "who did all sorts of Good Works" according to Grandma (126). When she introduces Young Man to Mommy and Daddy, Mommy is satisfied and she thanks her. Mrs. Baker tells her that Mommy is to send her a bill (146).

True to his character as American Dream, the Young Man will "do almost anything for money" (p. 137). The play ends with Grandma addressing the audience directly: "No, definitely not. So, let's leave things as they are right now... while everybody's got what he wants... or everybody's got what he thinks he wants" (p. 148). Thus Albee satirizes the American family and its values, but he does not give any solution to the problem of ruthlessness, savagery and disintegration within the American family. Albee tries to attack the social system which fails to create persons who accept their responsibilities towards others. Therefore, the decline of Albee's society comes as a result of the collapse of values in the American family.

Daddy and Mommy's dismemberment of their adopted child due to its being unsatisfactory reflects their materialism which becomes the most cruel in this case. Grandma tells Mrs. Barker what the couple did to the child. She says that they cut off its organ and eventually killed the child (127-128). Grandma uses the pronoun "it" when she refers to the adopted child. It reveals the fact that the family regarded the child as a property. Grandma finishes her explanation stating that the child did not satisfy his parent:

Grandma: Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. So, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted. (129)

As they paid for the adoption, Mommy and Daddy must have believed that they have a right to shape the child according to their taste. When it turns up to be a dissatisfaction, they think that they should be paid back. Their dismemberment of the child is "the unabashed response to a satisfaction guaranteed market and mentality"⁵⁸ child is killed because it was a waste of property.

Ronald Hayman, in his *contemporary playwrights*, suggests that "Albee's own experience must obviously be the source of the play's concern with the theme of a rich married couple buying a boy and then failing to love him as they would if he were their own."⁵⁹ In addition, Albee's concept of parental relationship reveals the situation of children within the American family: babies exist not as human beings in their own right, but only as extensions of adults' desires for emotional stimulation. He presents his vision of the emotional, mental and spiritual trauma in which the child either totally fulfills the parents' expectations on the parents terms, or he is rejected and destroyed as a person. Albee's burden of rejection in infancy seems heavy enough to explain his acute resentment of the cult of the family and his repeated attacks on the maternal image.⁶⁰

In conclusion, *The American Dream* deals, explicitly and implicitly, with the degeneration of the American ideal. Albee shows the moral disintegration in American society through one American family. He sees the American Way of Life as one in which normal human feelings and relationships have been deprived of meaning. The gestures of love, sexual attraction, parental affection, family feeling and hospitality remain, but the actual feelings which would give the gestures meaning have gone.⁶¹

Attacking the play, W.E. Bigsby, in his *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, criticizes "American's grand dreams which have here dwindled to mere domesticity."⁶¹ But, viewed in a larger perspective, *The American Dream* does not remain only a criticism of the American family; it becomes an incisive comment on the ties and relationships within a whole society- the American society.

Due to their materialism, Albee's characters experience loss of values. They do not trust each other. Besides, they are not respectful to elderly people. Hospitality, becomes an artificial value in their home. No one can bear presence of a visitor or even a relative in his or her house.

Notes

¹ John Herman Randal, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Day* (Boston; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 581.

² Qtd in John Herman Randal, *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Day*, p. 588.

³ Harold Durfee, *Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology II* (The Hague; Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1976), p. 85.

⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (London; Mercury Books, 1963), p. 154.

⁵ Qtd in Ernest Cassirer, *"The Most Difficult of Things"* (no page).

- ⁶ Qtd in Eric and Mary Josephson, "*Introduction*", p. 49.
- ⁷ Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theatre* (New York; Athenum, 1953), p.37.
- ⁸ Robert Nisbet, *Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethnic of Order and Freedom* (New York; Athenum, 1950) p. 1.
- ⁹ Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (London; Mercury Books, 1963), p.154.
- ¹⁰ Ellen Schiff, "Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!* And the Dawn of American Jewish Theatre". Available URL: <http://www.jewishculture.org/programs/350/icons/schiff/pdffiles> (30 Nov. 2008).
- ¹¹ Cristopher Herr, *Clifford Odets's and American Political Theatre* (Westport; Praeger Publishers, 2003), p. 67.
- ¹² See Ralph Willet and John White "The Thirties" in (ed.) Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperley, *Introduction to American Studies* (London; Longman, 1998), p. 220. Cf. John W. Frick, "Odets, Where is Thy Sting?: Reassessing the "Playwright of the Proletariat"; p. 129.
- ¹³ Odets cited in Gerald Weales, "Awake and Paint" in *American Theatre Magazine*, Vol. 13, Issue 7 Sept. 1996. Available URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/grouptheatre.htm>. (23 March 2007).
- ¹⁴ Kariton Kelm, "Brief Memories of the Great Depression" in (ed.) Walter Cummins etal. *The Literary Review* (New Jersey; Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1993), Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 12.
- ¹⁵ See Baird R. Shuman, *Clifford Odets*, p.p. 21, 39, see also William Saroyan "Memories of the Uppression" in (ed.) Walter Cummins etal, *The Literary Review* (New Jersey; Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1983), p. 9.
- ¹⁶ Emad Ibraheem Dawood, *The Antihero: A Study in Selected Plays by Modern American Dramatists*: A dissertation, (University of Baghdad, College of Arts, 2009), p. 124.
- ¹⁷ Gabriel Miller, "Odets and Tragedy: *Golden Boy* and *The Big Knife*" in (ed.,) Gabriel Miller, *Critical Essays on Clifford Odets* (Boston; G.K. Hall and Co., 1991), p. 172.
- ¹⁸ Luis Harap, *Dramatic Encounter: The Jewish Presence in the Twentieth Century Drama, Poetry and Humor and the Black Jewish Literary Relationship* for an extensive discussion concerning Odet's contribution in this field, see Jonathan Krasher, "The Interwar Family and American Jewish Identity in Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!*" *Jewish Social Studies, History, Culture*, n. s. 13, Noil, Fall 2006, pp. 234.
- ¹⁹ Cristopher Herr, *Clifford Odets and American Political Theatre* (Westport; Praeger Publishers, 2003), p. 45.
- ²⁰ Clifford Odets, "How a Playwright Triumphs" in (ed.,) Gabriel Miller, *Critical Essays on Clifford Odets*, p.86.
- ²¹ Odets "*Golden Boy*". Available URL: www.guthrietheatre.org (5th Feb. 2016). All the subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
- ²² See William Berryman, *New York Modern: The Art and The City*, (Bahimore: Johs Hopkins University press, 1999), p. 213.
- ²³ Harold Clurman (ed.,) Introduction in *Waiting for Lefly and Other Plays* (New York; Grove Press, 1979), p. 12.

- ²⁴ W. David Sievers, *Freud on Broadway: A History of Psychoanalysis and American Drama* (New York; Hermitage House Inc., 1955), p.265.
- ²⁵ Edward Murray, *Clifford Odets: The Thirties and After* (New York; F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1968), p. 58.
- ²⁶ Cristopher Herr, *Clifford Odets and American Political Theatre*, p.87.
- ²⁷ Emad Ibraheem Dawood, p. 143.
- ²⁸ Qtd. in Braid R. Shuman, *Clifford Odets* (New York; Greenwood Press, 1987), p. 82.
- ²⁹ Malcom Goldstein, *The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression* (New York; 1974), p. 31.
- ³⁰ W. David Sievers, p. 266.
- ³¹ George L. Gronman, "Clifford Odets and the Creative Imagination" in (ed.,) Gabriel Miller, *Critical Essays on Clifford Odets*, p. 102.
- ³² Qtd in Braid R. Shuman, *Clifford Odets* (New York; Greenwood press, 1987), p. 48.
- ³³ Edith Isaac, "Clifford Odets: First Chapter in (ed.,) Gabriel Miller, *Critical Essays on Clifford Odets*, p. 53.
- ³⁴ Gerry Mc Carthy, *Edward Albee* (Hong Kong; Macmillan, 1987), p.27.
- ³⁵ Edward Albee in Ibid.
- ³⁶ W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.263.
- ³⁷ Kolin Philip C. "Albee's Early One-Act play: A New American From Whom Much is to Be Expected." *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*: Steven Bottoms (ed.,). (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 7.
- ³⁸ David Krasner, *American Drama 1945 – 2000* (Great Britain: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 63.
- ³⁹ Kolin Philip C. "*Albee's Early one – Act Play: A New American from Whom Much is to Be Expected*" qtd Bottom, p.28.
- ⁴⁰ Thomas Lask, "Dramatist in a Troubled World", (New York Times Reviews, 22nd Jan., 1961), <http://www.nytime>, p. 2 of 5.
- ⁴¹ Ervin Beck, "Allegory in Edward Albee's *The American Dream*", 1996, envinb@goshen.edu, p. 2 of 8.
- ⁴² Edward Albee, "Preface to *The American Dream*", in *Two Plays by Edward Albee: The American Dream, The Zoo Story*. (New York: The New American Library, Signet Books, 1961), pp. 53-54.
- ⁴³ Arthur Miller, quoted in, Philip C. Colin, *American Playwrights Since 1954* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 195.
- ⁴⁴ Michael E. Rutenbery, *Edward Albee: Playwright in Protest* (New York: Dbs Publication, Inc., 1970), p. 64.
- ⁴⁵ Edward Albee, *The American Dream*, in *The Plays of Edward Albee* V.I (The United States: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2004), pp. 95-154. All the subsequent quotations from the play are taken from this edition.
- ⁴⁶ Michael E. Rutenbery, p. 97.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 66.

- ⁴⁸ Ronald Hayman, *Contemporary Playwrights: Edward Albee* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971), p. 15.
- ⁴⁹ George E. Wellwarth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox: Developments in the Avant-Grade Drama* (New York: U.P., 1971), p.325.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ David Reiss, and Howard A. Hoffman, *The American Family Dying or Developing* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979), p. 56.
- ⁵² Mathew C. Roudan, *Understand Edward Albee* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), p. 63.
- ⁵³ Harold Bloom, *Edward Albee* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 63-64.
- ⁵⁴ Brian Way, "Albee and the Absurd: The American Dream and The Zoo Story", in W. E. Bigsby, *Edward Albee*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 26.
- ⁵⁵ Gilbert Debusscher, *Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal* (Brussels: Macmillan, American Studies Center, 1967), p. 38.
- ⁵⁶ Ronald Hayman, p. 26.
- ⁵⁷ Michael E. Rutenbery, pp. 72-73.
- ⁵⁸ Mathew C. Roudan, p. 46.
- ⁵⁹ Ronald Hayman, *Contemporary Playwright: Edward Albee* (London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971), p.28.
- ⁶⁰ Michael E. Rutenbery, p. 37.
- ⁶¹ Anne Paulucci, p.46.
- ⁶² W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* Vol. 1 1900 – 1940, p. 157.

Conclusion

The American have become a consumerism society. The mass media and the capitalist system continually impose consumerism and materialism, which make people more and more materialistic. As they loss their power against the machines, they are depersonalized. In the dream of progress, the society gives up its traditions. The United States is one of the countries where the process of consumption has reached its highest level.

As people get more materialist, they lose values like love, respect, loyalty and create artificial values. For instance, marriage, which is one of the most important institutions of the society, is generally sought for with pragmatic intentions. People, especially women, want to marry into wealth hoping for a higher status and security.

Clifford Odet's *Golden Boy* (1937) shows how Americans are increasingly enervated by economic strains, racist tensions and political intimidation. Their self-dividedness and lack of personal integrity continue to appear in the Depression Period. Odets looks at modern America as a place where simple amenities of life are unapproachable. His protagonists do not seek a larger goal than mere survival in their economically edgy life. Joe in *Golden Boy* is so much emasculated by economic decline that he develops confused and unstable character. He feels inferior as his personal achievement has to pass the test of a life evaluated by "dollar bills". Such narrow materialistic standards of life and personal achievement prevent him from considering heroic acts as he indulge himself instead in the economic chaos that engulfs a whole society.

Edward Albee targets the materialist and consumerist society in his works. In *The American Dream* (1961), his characters regard money and wealth as the most important criterion in life. Albee displays that the marriage institution also analyzes the nature of the human relationships that are established upon other artificialities. Becoming more materialistic and having artificial values that are imposed by the modern life style, human relationships are shattered. Industrialism is one reason for the breakdown of relationships. Young people leave their homes to find jobs, and divorce rates become higher. People cannot feel sympathy towards each other.

Albee's female characters are fond of shopping, and they believe that they can relieve themselves from the deeper worries through consuming. The characters marry for pragmatic reasons. Even their children, who are expected to be a source of satisfaction, became properties. Furthermore, as they entirely depend on money, they expect to be awarded by being paid when they are asked for help. An economic problem can affect them as much as in their family.

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