



## Dehumanization in Edward Albee's Play "The Sandbox"

**Gazang Saedgul Babashekh**

Erbil Polytechnic University

### Article Info

Received: April, 2019

Revised: May ,2019

Accepted: June ,2019

### Keywords

Hedge, Political Debates, Pragmatics, Grice's Cooperative principle.

### Corresponding Author

[gazang.barzanji@gmail.com](mailto:gazang.barzanji@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The Sandbox, a very short one-act play, is written by Edward Albee (1928-2016) who was a particularly skeptical observer of American society and the non-mutual pursuit of the mythical American Dream. It is a play that elucidates an underlying message of elderly care, senility and death. The characters of the play view a personal outlook and each with a role in life.

The study, thus, attempts at uncovering the dehumanized scenes and feelings in various situations are shown in the play through the dialogues among the same members of a family, and the sandbox itself symbolizes Granma's facing of her own children's cruelty and tough dealing that existed during the reign of the flourishing of American Dream and its negative sequences for the modern life in American community. The study starts with an introduction regarding the theory adopted with referring to some significant aspects of Albee's life and contribution to American drama following by the analyses of selected relevant quotes from the play, and it ends up with conclusions and works cited.

### Introduction

The modern American theater travelled a long way to attain its maturity starting from the early periods of twentieth century and lasted till the end of WWII, Edward Albee and his companion dramatists draw the frames of contemporary American consciousness and its shifting from the psychological to the social and moral ethics. Albee dramatizes social and individual complacency, false values, and the empty American dream clearly in his plays and narrows down to the family segments and how a forged familial relationship is easily observed in the life of modern American society (Meserve 356).

Karl Marx (1818-1883), the German philosopher, stressed on class conflict as constituting the dynamics of social change, his awareness was not arbitrary but the outcome of a conflict of interests, and his view of social relations as based on power were contributions of the first immensity. Class stability has been charged lesser by the progressing of a large middle class and considerable social adaptability rather than increasing extremes of wealth and poverty (Guerin et al 127).

Albee insists in condemning the hollow relationships within the American family, and that one hostility devoid of any true feeling provides a rich source for his satire, Among the defects of family that Albee attacks is the

severe treatment of those who are called "Senior Citizens". In this play, Grandma is considered as useless, imperceptible, and expendable as she is an old woman! (Pandey 109).

The Sandbox conveys isolation which happens within the social arrangement; it also shows individuals separation from responsibility and reality. As Albee himself said: "...it is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real value in our society... a stand against fiction that everything in this sleeping land of ours is peachy-keen" (Amacher 61).

#### **Albee's Contributions to American Drama**

Edward F. Albee was born in Virginia on March 12, 1928. Her early famous one-act plays, such as *The Zoo Story* (1959), presented him as a critic of American values. He was best known for his first full-length play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962). His plays display a penetrated and inordinate sense of loss, probably activated by his own unpleasant childhood, and he is concerned with the illusions that reserve people from seeing reality. He believes that he lives in a time when religious, moral, political, and social structures have been disintegrated. Albee received Pulitzer Prizes for *A Delicate Balance* (1966), *Seascape* (1972) and *Three Tall Women* (1994). He passed away on September 16, 2016 (Singh 125).

#### **Analysis of Scenes of Dehumanization**

"The Sandbox" is the shortest play of Albee's one-act plays, it's an attack on the substitution of artificiality for real values in their society, and a denunciation of self-satisfaction. He considers it his favorite play as he states "Sandbox is a perfect play. Unfortunately it's short enough so that I can't make any mistakes in it. It's...a very good play ...a damn good play. It's a good fourteen minutes" (Qtd in Haymen 27). Grandma's daughter and her son-in-law wait for her to die.

In this play, Albee draws his characters with no specifying personal names: each one is named depending on his/her position, such as Grandma, Mommy, Daddy and the Young Man as the Angel of Death. He concentrates on Grandma as being the main character to reveal her struggle with loneliness within the family. He depicts Mommy and Daddy as fighters for their existence through greediness. Both are willing to bury Grandma alive in the sandbox to gain her wealth. It is really a figurative action because the sandbox refers to her grave (Stenz 57).

The strain, here, occurs in the sentimental trace on Grandma because her passions are a mixture of irony and sadness. Despite the inhumanity of her family, she embraces and consents her death peacefully. She finds redemption in her death, and when the Young man puts his hands on top of Grandma's hands, she happily states (Mishra 173):

Grandma: You're....you're welcome....dear. (Albee 6)

She was always a mother, who was caring and affectionate to her daughter, but Mommy never returned any kind of love or care to her aged mother, and instead, she is even burying her living mother in a seaside sandbox and in an airless apartment room (Solomon 89). She ironically cried and felt unhappy when Grandma was about to die, and dramatically, her fake sentiment wears away swiftly as she ends her mourning as soon as the lights come up, but the Grandma mocked her by normalizing the situation as she clearly understood their dehumanized behavior by putting her in a sandbox and waiting her agonies of death:

Mommy: (barely able to talk) It means the time has come for poor Grandma ... and I can't bear it!

Grandma: (mocking) That's right, kid; be brave. You'll bear up; you'll get over it. (Albee 12-14)

The Sandbox displays Albee's critique of American society, indicting bourgeois values and the cruelties licensed by privilege.

Further, The Sandbox continues Albee's inclination to leave his characters unnamed, making them embodiments of their life roles rather than particularized individuals.

Grandma: they fixed a nice place for me under the stove...gave me an army blanket...and my own dish...my very own dish! (Albee 24)

This is to observe more dehumanizing scenes, the Grandma admits that they moved her into their house when both Mommy and Daddy bring her in to live with them but place her underneath their stove with only an Army blanket and a dish, and she has become a pet to them. And this is an explicit picture that she has been treated one like a dog and like a child in other occasions (Smith 38):

In this playlet, Albee considers the family as something that no longer anything but words, and a hollow institution, and an outmoded convention, he often attacks the ideals of family life and again resembles it as a form without content. He tries to exhibit it in the specific situation of the family confronted with old age and death, in the play, the Mommy treats her Grandma as an object, relegating her to a sandbox and these all represent dehumanized scenes (Singh 126).

At the early beginning, the Grandma appears with a load of boxes, some of them big and neatly wrapped, then she utters her speech rather diffusively that shows the melancholic inner passions of old member within the American family in the terms of caring and house-keeping in the views of Albee (Fromm 88). The Grandma expresses her miserable condition clearly and wordily through stating the same words repeatedly and needlessly to elucidate the dehumanized sort of dealing that the olds get, and she connects the death of old people with the ill-treatment by their families as she says:

Grandma: Because I am old! when you are old you gotta do something. When you are old, you can't talk to people because they 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 I've got to go and get the rest of the boxes. (Albee 36)

In scene five, a new day comes and the Grandma is seen lying propped on an elbow with her body half covered with sand, and this makes the Mommy think wishfully that Grandma is finally buried, she brightens and feels happily as a post-funeral mood attained which exposes the blatant materialism and mercilessness with opportunism tainting the system of the family life (Amacher 131). This shows the dehumanized reaction that goes oppositely with the traditions abided by a death of a member in a certain family, she glides when she observes what she wished and waited for and she reckons her life with Grandma like a long night that never comes to an end:

Mommy: So it is! Well! Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning... and face the future. It's our duty. (Albee 41)

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes the following points:

1. The title itself holds a symbolical issue to denote the dehumanization, in which a very old woman rudely kept in a sandbox and ignored till her fatal moment.
2. A typical scene of dehumanization is perceived through the behavior of both Daddy and Mommy by having reduced the level of Grandma to the level of a domestic animal during her life, and their need to hire a musician to honor her death.
3. Also a complex of lost attitudes and ideas are handed down mechanically from one generation to another, in the play, Mommy treats her Grandma as an object and relegates her to a sandbox and pays no attention to her. They were waiting for her death to start their future and considered Grandma a barrier to

continue. Here, home becomes an arena for reconstituted of spatial area which will accomplish the same offense of generation after generation upon their familial relationships.

### References

- 1- Amachar, Richard E. Edward Albee. Boston. 1962. Print.
- 2- Fromm, Erich. The Act of Loving. London, Penguin. 1962. Print.
- 3- Guerin, W. Labor, E. Morgan, L. A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature. New York Oxford University Press. 2005. Print.
- 4- Haymen, Ronald. Edward Albee. New York, Frederic Anger. 1973. Print.
- 5- Meserve, Walter J. An Outline History of American Drama. New Jersey, USA, Adams Co. 1965. Print.
- 6- Mishra, Poonam. The Art of Edward Albee. Nagpur: India, Dattsons. 2004. Print.
- 7- Pandey, Anshu. Social Realism and Fragility of Aging in Albee's The Sandbox, India. 2016. Print.
- 8- Singh, Abha. Contemporary American Drama. New Delhi, Sangam Books. 1998. Print.
- 9- Smith, John David. When Did Southern Segregation Begin. USA, Macmillan. 2002. Print.
- 10- Solomon, Rakesh. Albee in Performance. Indiana university Press. 2010. Print.
- 11- Stenz, Anita M. The Poet of Loss. USA. 1985. Print.