

Pleasure and Happiness Leading to an Imaginative World

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Abstract

The motivation behind each act of human is the desire for pleasure and satisfaction. This desire when left unfulfilled leads to escapism or to a life where man uses illusions, dreams and lies as props. The root of this escapism and our tendency to have props of illusions can be witnessed in Freudian theory i.e., in the concepts of ‘Pleasure Principle’, ‘Self-Deception’ and ‘Dream Theory’. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud has mentioned that the aim of our mental functioning is pleasure, the reduction of tension and suffering. This continuous craving for pleasure and happiness leads us to an imaginative world which is full of self-deception where we deceive our self and others, and by doing so we start living a life replete with lies and repress truth and reality. This repression is nothing but “the struggle against acceptance of a painful part of reality” (Freud 85). We weave lies because we desire to withdraw from the unwelcoming thoughts, as says T.S. Eliot, “Human kind cannot bear very much reality” (quoted in Kramer 77). This is why, we all love to have props or shields of illusions, lies and dreams.

Introduction

What we desire and what we get is mostly different and whenever this happens we just fulfill our wishes and desires by dreaming or by lying. Paul Kline asserts: “The basis of theory . . . is that ego seeks to avoid pain. Instinctual drives are warded off to avoid anxiety or guilt by certain characteristics processes. In addition the ego attempts to avoid feeling of guilt and anxiety” (156).

In this mad race for futile joy man has neglected the real joy. He has forgotten the aim of his existence and is running after the finite illusion and satisfaction. For example, the instruments of man’s necessity assert that he must have food, shelter, clothes and convenience; but man spends an immense amount of time and resources in contradicting this assertion by living a life as a catalogue of endless wants. This is the basic reason that life’s tragedies occur, not to demonstrate their own reality, but to reveal that eternal principle of joy in life, which man has ignored. Finally, unable to face the tragic part of life’s drama man starts using props.

Freud, so to say, when first stepped in America, was welcomed as an optimist because all of his theories and concepts gave a clear-cut presentation of American life and mind and helped them to overcome the deep-rooted ‘American Dream’ which was making their lives a nightmare. Americans are in a habit to live in a “Utopia” where ‘all is well’. This Utopian thought, vision and imagination has shaped and is

shaping human history and life since the very beginning of human civilization. But Thomas More's *Utopia* which came out in 1511 drew our attention towards this. Though we all know that 'Utopia' literally means 'no where' and it, in reality, does not exist, yet still every human being is an ideal dreamer, so he dreams and desires for such a place. This preoccupation with the ideal and perfect signifies man's desire to overcome his limitations, and his will to live in a better place or world. If we re-evaluate human history, we will see that in the projection of religious beliefs, in the formation of myths and in every story of human courage there is a realm of 'Utopia'. Time and again, this 'Utopia' has been portrayed in literature such as – Voltaire's *Candida* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* depict such fanciful world which exists nowhere. This Utopian Presentation has been criticized by a number of realist writers, such as Samuel Johnson has declared that fantasy is 'dangerous' in *Rasselas*. In twentieth century Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) portray a dystopia which has come to serve as the false symbol for any regime of universal happiness.

Edward Albee, too, unveils the danger of running after fantasies and exposes that "how we lie to ourselves and to each other" (quoted in Roudane, *Understanding* 23). We have witnessed so many situations in his plays where characters escape from reality and use illusions as props and tell lies not for deceiving others, but to deceive themselves. Albee's characters actively direct their 'Life-Lies' and use this as a screen. Albee's aim, by demonstrating 'Life-Lies', is to give the theatergoer a harsh dose of truth which gives his plays a lasting worth. This chapter will focus on the plays which deal with the various situations in which man needs as well as uses shields of illusions. Though it is true that a battle between illusion and reality is the central theme of Albee's each and every work, yet in some plays this idea of 'lies as props' is used in a wider sense. These four plays – *The American Dream* (1961), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), *The Play about the Baby* (1998) and *Me, Myself and I* (2008) use the theme of illusion as prop at its fullest. Though all these plays deal with the concept of 'Life-Lies' where characters are living in an imaginary world yet every play deals with a different idea of using lie as a screen. Albee showcases many forms in which illusions can intervene in our lives. In all the plays, the biggest truth of any couple's life i.e., their child (son) is just a lie which is used as a prop to escape from the bitter realities.

The American Dream exposes the absurdity of American civilization. It is an attack on an issueless American couple – Mommy and Daddy – who can do anything to fulfill their American Dream of having a young "bumble of joy" i.e., son. Albee remarks in the preface of *The American Dream*:

This play is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, 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. (Quoted in Rutenberg 61)

This examination is done by the modes of relationship which is nothing but a prop or an instrument to fulfill the American Dream. The elements of Albee's adoptive-parents can easily be seen in the characters of Mommy and Daddy; and his maternal grandmother, Grandma Cotta, is presented through the character of Grandma. "The bumble of joy" is none other than Albee himself, because just like the adopted child in this play Albee, too, proved to be a good-for-nothing deal for his parents.

This play attacks on family relations, and this criticism is made bitter by giving them identity (names) through their kid, whom they have already discarded from their lives. Anne Paolucci remarks, “Mommy and Daddy are shown in their eternal wait for the image, certainly, the Dream in us all” (29). They call each other Mommy, Daddy and Grandma though there is no child. Even when there was a baby that was not their own but was an adopted one. Thus, woman becomes Mommy without conceiving the baby and without having the love of a mother; and man becomes Daddy without having the characteristics of a father. The couple is representing the barrenness and hollowness of relations. Mel Gussow comments:

In *The American Dream*, everything about the unnamed couple is American, and in the American tradition, they call each other Mommy and Daddy, though there are no offspring in this American household. The parents have already mutilated and dismembered their own child. The sterility of the characters is mirrored in the fact that there are no pictures in the frames on the wall. (140)

So, Mommy and Daddy represent the barrenness of American civilization. Albee’s examination of American life is appreciable, as the play is a mirror to the escapists Americans. Walter Kerr wrote, “Mr. Albee has taken a good nasty look at most of our success images and found them marvelously empty”. (Quoted in Rutenberg 61).

The very first interaction between Mommy and Daddy is an attack on the unending craving for satisfaction in the lives of Americans. Mommy tells Daddy that she has brought a new beige hat and was completely ‘satisfied’ until the chairman of the woman’s club asked her from where she had obtained that wheat-colored hat. Mommy was so angry at listening wheat-coloured rather than beige that she returned to the store demanding satisfaction. The fact that she liked the hat was not important at all, but she was more concerned about her friend’s eyes. Mommy went back and “made a scene right there” (*AD* 1504). In the end, however, Mommy let herself be sold the same hat again; but she feels better because the salesman had to apologize for making a mistake. Mommy and Daddy, while contemplating on the idea of “getting satisfaction” these days, expose the dissatisfaction of American civilization:

DADDY (Clearing his throat). That’s the way, things are today, you just can’t get satisfaction.
MOMMY. Well, I got satisfaction. (*AD* 1504)

Mommy is proud because she thinks she has attained satisfaction, just to stave off, temporarily, her daily failures. Even Grandma taunts on this and says “People being sorry. Makes you feel better; gives you a sense of dignity, and that’s all that’s important . . . a sense of dignity” (*AD* 1505). This hollow sense of dignity is troubling their absurd life. The futile dignity is a prop which is used by Mommy to escape from a number of other failures of her life. Mommy, like Martha, is the boss of the house. She orders Daddy to pay attention again and again and soon she begins to question her husband to be sure that she has his undivided attention. Michael Rutenberg comments on the role of submissive Daddy and says: “Daddy, naturally, will pay strict attention because he fears his wife and, ironically, needs her support, though it is she who has dismembered him psychologically. [. . .] Albee carries the American Mom’s need to be boss to its logical and ridiculously grotesque conclusion.” (65)

After diagnosing these troubled relations Albee moves ahead to satire the inhumanity of this couple and their craving for “American Dream” of a smart, intelligent child. We are told that Mommy has called Mrs. Barker, the owner of the Bye-Bye Adoptive Company, at her home, but no one (not even Mrs.

Barker) knows why she has been called there. When Mommy and Daddy disappear and Grandma is left alone with Mrs. Barker. At that moment Grandma enlightens her about the object of her mission – twenty years earlier, Mommy and Daddy had adopted or to be specific brought a baby with Mrs. Barker’s help, but they are not satisfied with the baby so they have called Mrs. Barker for compensation. Grandma explains:

GRANDMA. . . . Daddy, couldn’t have a bumble; and the man, who was very much like Daddy, said that yes, they had wanted a bumble of their own, but that the woman, who was very much like Mommy couldn’t have one, and that now they wanted to buy something very much like bumble. [. . .] But . . . things didn’t work out very well. (*AD* 1519)

To punish child’s endless “misbehavior”, Mommy and Daddy put its eyes out, castrate it, cut off its hands and finally they cut its tongue out. When the baby dies, they want compensation. Here Albee has parodied the ‘American Dream’. The Mommy and Daddy, who themselves are unable to have a child, adopt a child and in that child they have been searching for a ‘bumble of joy’ but they do not ‘get satisfaction’ from him. Thus, they demand refund of the amount they have paid for the American Dream of a smart, good-looking and emotionless boy who will fulfill their futile dreams and desires.

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