

# Aporetic Interpretations of Postmodern American Dream

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## Abstract

*This research aims to explore and analyze the Aporetic interpretations of various versions of the American Dream in the selected plays of Edward Albee (1928-2016). Albee's world of drama is different from that of other postmodern American playwrights. His major focus is on the various interpretations of the American dream and expounding the different issues and ideas that have changed the Postmodern American perception of American ideology. This is qualitative research as Jacques Derrida's deconstructive term Aporia has been applied to the selected plays of Edward Albee. Various books and articles related to Aporia, the American dream, and the selected plays of Edward Albee have been discussed to explain the relationship between Derridean deconstruction, the American dream, and postmodern American drama. Edward Albee's approach to the American stage makes the reader understand the alienation, disintegration, and disillusionment within American society. Aporia focuses on the ambiguity in the language that offers the reader a diversity of interpretations, and those interpretations can be found entirely within themselves. This research aims to explore and analyze the Aporian expression and Albee's selected plays simultaneously.*

**Keywords:** American Dream, Disintegration, Ambiguity, Disillusionment.

## Introduction

This study would facilitate the researchers to explore the difference between the old and new American dreams, and this would help them to understand the usage of language and the different linguistic techniques (such as coherence, cohesion, fragmented discourse, ellipses, repetitions, and incomprehensible mumblings) to expose the malaise, confusion, alienation, trauma, and disillusionment in the American society. The primary purpose of this research is to explore the concept of Aporia, a significant term/concept used in the deconstructive approach. The term means the moment of undecidability, perplexity, and doubt that will be applied to Albee's selected plays. The Aporia will be discussed in the course of this study. It will be analyzed along with the concept of the American dream and Albee's approach toward the postmodern American dream and society. Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) deconstructive term Aporia has a significant place in this research as it would help the reader to understand the deceptively simple language Edward Albee used in his plays. Derridean deconstruction puts the idea of instability within the language and indeterminacy of interpretation. Aporia focuses on the ambiguity within the very understanding of the word. This paper aims to identify indeterminacy and ambiguity in the diverse interpretations of the American dream while evaluating the selected plays of Edward Albee.

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The roots of the American dream can be traced in the works of classical American writers like Thomas Jefferson's (1743-1826) Declaration of Independence, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the 16th President of the United States of America, poems, and essays of Emerson (1803-1882), and in Whitman's (1819-1892) poems celebrating America and American selfhood. These discourses and texts are the first-ever documents in creating and shaping the American dream. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson says:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness – ..., it is the Right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety happiness and prudence...(1776, para 2).*

The Declaration of Independence is not only a document to chart out the exigencies of freedom but also an important manuscript to construct and shape up the vision of the American Dream. The major constituents of American dream are *Life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness*. According to this script, masses, irrespective of class and race, had the potential freedom to take part in the formation of a government and in exercising their rights to stop government from making changes as per its interests. Barack Obama, in his book, *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) asserts, "Those simple words are our starting point as Americans; they describe not only the foundation of our government but the substance of our creed. .... the essential idea behind the declaration that we are born in this world free..." (2006, p.8). According to Obama, the words of Declaration of Independence are simple but meaningful since they motivate the Americans to utilize their abilities and skills and assure them freedom of choice and expression. These reassurances are regarded as an important milestone towards the accomplishments of American dream in which independence, emancipation, liberation, egalitarianism, and righteousness would be the significant features of American society and lifestyle. He believes that declaration is not only a document rather it provided the Americans codes of ethics and life, which will always help them whenever they get lost, confused, or disillusioned. To strengthen his point of view Obama also quotes a famous historian Joseph Ellis: "a transformative moment in the world history, when all laws and human relationships dependent on coercion would be swept away forever" (2006, p.24). This declaration led to the American constitution of 1787 which began its affirmation according to which the people of the United States hoped to establish Justice, peace and equality while working together for social harmony and individual contentment (1787, p.1). Jennifer Hochschild quotes the speech of Bill Clinton that he delivered at the council of democratic leadership, "The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given-ability will take you" (1995, p.18). There is certain irony in Clinton's address; to get opportunity varies from class to class, as this is not as easy to achieve or grab as presented in the quote. If opportunity is the foundation of *American dream*, (my italics) then this becomes improbable to acquire for the people who are considered outcast, irresponsible by the social classes who controls and sets the social norms for them. Deconstructing the linguistic aspect of Clinton's address reveal that his over simplified expression represents social and economic paradox prevalent in the American society.

The phrase in the American constitution, "we the people," strengthens the notion of equality, justice, self-reliance, and self-realization. General welfare, securing the blessing of liberty, domestic tranquility, and societal harmony were the American government and society's top priorities and aspirations. The combination of American culture and government was meant to

project the vision of the initial founders, who vehemently believed in equality and cohesion in social structure. The American society and government had been assigned the duty to develop egalitarianism between different races and religions and to promote self-assertion, self-awareness, self-recognition, and self-sufficiency among its members. Obama asserts, which may be questioned, that the “constitution itself proved a sufficient defense against tyranny” (2006, p.13). He strongly believes in the constitution of America and claims that this document strengthens the typical American and solidifies their status in America. Regrettably, this solid and positive discourse of democracy and the pronouncement of freedom turned hope into disillusionment, opportunity into deception and selfishness, and equality into racial and cultural bigotry. George Floyd’s last words, “I Can’t breathe!”, who was murdered by one of the racist police officers, can be taken as a perfect example of disappointment, intolerance, and insecurity in the current American society. George Floyd, a black truck driver and a father of five children, was killed by the Minneapolis Police officer while getting arrested on the alleged accusation of forging the twenty-dollar bill on the 25th of May 2020. This act of brutality by the police instigated American people to protest and fight against the racial inequality, insensitivity, and diffidence prevalent in the current American scenario. This violent incident exposes the deteriorated significance of the proclamation and the Constitution of America. The primary purpose of this sad incident is to tell the different aspects of American society that have failed to follow the components of the American constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

### Literature Review

This research includes aspects of the American dream while considering the Derridean deconstructive term *Aporia*. Derrida’s book *Aporias* (1993) is an essential source for understanding the initial definition of *Aporia*, its development, and its application while exploring and analyzing the language of the text. This has been a helpful manuscript to examine the language and structures of Edward Albee’s plays. Jennifer Hochschild’s book *Facing Up to the American Dream* (1995) focuses on the birth, progression, and different forms of the American dream and how this dream has influenced the lives of modern and postmodern American societies. This book will help the reader understand people’s ambivalent approach towards the American dream. This indecisive attitude of the American people is also embedded in the thematic structures of Edward Albee’s plays. Ex-President of American, Barak Obama’s book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006), is both autobiographical and political in its very form and function. Obama puts forward the chameleonic status of the ideology of the American dream in postmodern American society, and this discussion has a significant place and space in understanding the varied expressions of the American dream. This is a helpful source to understand the comparative study of the American dream. These sources will be helpful for the reader to understand the idea of American Dream and its deconstructive analysis. Another essential source to understand postmodern American theatre is Kerstin Schmidt’s *The Theater of Transformation, Postmodernism in American Drama* (2005), as this book focuses on various theatrical aspects of American drama. This is a helpful source to redefine and revise the postmodern components in American dramaturgy, and this will motivate the reader to analyze the theatre in general and American drama in particular.

### Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research study as it involves diverse literary points of view to bring forward different approaches toward the American dream in particular and Albee’s plays in general. This

research also involves a Postmodernist point of view and Jacques Derrida's Deconstructive term Aporia to investigate into the different aspects of postmodern American drama. This study has also established a significant research relationship between the deconstructive point of view and the multifaceted approaches of American drama.

## Discussion and Analysis

The Declaration of Independence is an essential document for understanding the American dream, as this declaration has provided the basis of the American dream. American Dream believes in self-realization, self-exploration, and hard work of all men, as all men are created equal. Gilbert Keith Chesterton states, "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed, and that creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence" (2008, p.7). The attributes of the American Dream have given its people a reason to struggle and inspiration to work hard. Nevertheless, the foundations of the American Dream and the Declaration of Independence lost their significance and utility in modern American society. The reason for choosing the Declaration of Independence for this paper is to reveal the true spirit of the American Dream and how contemporary American culture has contaminated and disfigured its spirit and struggle. The twentieth-century American culture has made several changes in the American dream, which once used to be the genuine quintessence of the Declaration of Independence, and which has now been turned into the futile, stagnant, and morbid presentation of the American people and society.

The philosophy of the American dream is to provide an excellent new world to an individual where he/she can spend his life with their free will. This philosophy of the American dream has been misunderstood in the 20th century; the idea of "from rags to riches" has been sidetracked towards materialism, selfishness, and purposelessness. The American dream's significant aspects are individuality and optimism, which have been replaced by pessimism and alienation, and these dystopian characteristics of modern America are the most predominant themes in Albee's plays. Albee's works have been taken as a case study to analyze and understand the disparity within the philosophy of the American dream. Deconstruction's primary concern is to understand the language used in the texts from different perspectives. The purpose of this exploration is not only to locate the meaning but to reveal the displacements, undecidabilities, confusion, and chaos without seeking help from the author. According to Derrida, the impermanence of meaning makes language challenging as this confusion motivates readers to understand the text more emphatically. In this regard, Spivak writes:

*The desire for unity and order compels the author and the reader to balance the equation that is the text's system. The deconstructive reader ...[seeks] the moment in the text which harbors the unbalancing of the equation, the sleight of hand at the limit of a text which cannot be dismissed simply as a contradiction (1976, p. 10).*

Spivak's assertion regarding the relationship between the text and the author is significant as it does not preclude the reader from the speculations and confusions rather it teaches him/her to be deceptive towards the text to draw boundless interpretations. Aporia, as one of the most important terms in Derridean deconstruction, focuses on impermanence, undecidability, and paradox. In his book *Aporias* (1993), Jacques Derrida differentiates between an Aporia and a problem and argues,

*the [former] is "the experience of the non-passage ...What, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where it would be no longer be possible to constitute a problem, a project, or a projection (1993, p.12).*

According to Derrida, Aporia questions the systems and rules that solve the problems and focuses on the impossibility and undecidability of the language and its structure. According to Derrida, “The ultimate Aporia is an impossibility of the aporia as such. The reservoir of this statement seems to be incalculable (*Aporias*, 1993, p.78) and “it does not conceal itself” (1993, p.21). Undecidability involves interrogation that helps the reader to understand and investigate the text. According to Derrida, Aporia is “an interrogation of all that which is more than interrogation” (Malpas & Wake, 2006, p.10), which puts the reader in a position to make a connection between the text and its surroundings. Etymologically, Aporia is from Ancient Greek ‘aporos’ which means way or passage. In his view, “Aporia entails an interminable experience” (*Aporias* 1993, p.16). Exploring the text is an endless experience; when a reader explores the text, his experience derives him to the non-roads where he treads according to his own choice and makes his own way. However, that path is just a gateway to the other paths. This process makes this reading experience more challenging as well as undecidable. Derrida projects the undecidability inherent in the text in which meaning is analyzed, destructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed. This approach of Aporia leads the reader to explore and expose the multiplicity of the interpretation within the text to derive an interpretation according to his/her point of view.

Aporia’s definition helps the reader to understand the connection between Derridean deconstruction and the American dream, the dream, whose followers used to believe in life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness but this notion had been altered into discrimination, disillusionment, and malaise. This deplorable status of American dream has been an important and essential inquiry in the plays of Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O’Neill. In Albee’s *The American Dream*, it is obvious that Young Man, Mommy, and Daddy are misplaced characters as they project nothingness and empty behavior. The discourses among the characters are pointless and void of any sense of belonging, Daddy’s masculinity needs Mommy’s assurance all the time as his behavior is jelly like. Very precise daily routine seems to be of great importance for Albee’s characters; as Daddy in *The American Dream* gets over excited on opening a door, and during this insignificant action, he keeps asking mommy about his manhood and will power. Such a trivial act by daddy assures him as a *man* (my italics) and solidifies his masculinity.

*Daddy: Was I firm about it? Mommy: Oh, so firm; so firm.*

*Daddy: And was I decisive? Mommy: So decisive! Oh, I shivered.*

*Daddy: And masculine? Was I really masculine?*

*Mommy: Oh, daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted. (Albee, 1961, p.21)*

Grandma is an unnecessary and useless object in the house and both Mommy and Daddy want to leave her at some old home. Grandma represents old American dream and this needs to be destroyed or put in a dumpster. *The American dream’s* text represents the American dream as a myth and as a false ideology that has turned American society in a disillusioned mob. This is the American discourse which reveals the sad predicament of the American society as well as exposes the multiplicity of the interpretations and realizations. As Iser (1978) asserts this point, “one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading ever exhausts the full potential for .....[the] reader [who] will fill in the gaps in his own way” (1978, p.271). Albee’s text is full of potential, and this leads the reader to analyze the text differently and derive his own meaning. Iser’s assertion reveals the importance of the reader and his/her relationship to the text. Every expression of Albee’s *The American dream* is deceptively simple as young man in the play warns Grandma, “Be careful, be very careful. What I have told you may not be true” (Albee, 1961, p.55). Derrida believes that text puts forward the challenging discourse that wants its reader to



appreciate it differently and define his own interpretation. Mommy's, Daddy's, and Mrs. Barker's discourses in *The American dream* project meaningful interpretations muffled in vague and meaningless expressions:

*Mrs. Barker: Now, now; you seem to forget who I am*

*Mommy: Yes, I do, don't I? Are you sure you're comfortable?*

*Won't you take off your dress?*

*Mrs. Barker: I don't mind if I do (She removes her dress)*

*Mommy: There. You must feel a great deal of comfort.*

*Daddy: I'm going to blush and giggle...*

*Mrs. Barker: You're lucky to have such a man for a husband (p.79)*

Illogical actions and meaningless discourse of Mommy, Daddy, and Mrs. Barker project the chameleonic status of discourse, which challenges the reader to interpret the text by his context. Derrida asserts, "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse" (1967/1980, p. 354). Albee's approach in his plays exhibits the inner conflicts of the American people as they are individuals and the representatives of society. They are lost, bewildered, and indecisive. This phenomenon is not only found in Albee's plays; other American playwrights also focus on this sad predicament. Injustice has been an essential feature in *The American Dream*, as this reveals the rotten relationship within the society. Old and new generations both fail to understand each other. The sinister sense of injustice is prevalent in their behavior as Grandma believes a generation younger than her won't listen to her.

In contrast, Mommy, Daddy, and Young Man believe that the old generation has nothing to offer and older adults should be dumped like useless articles. Both are doing injustice to each other. They all "mumble" to each other, unable to understand their situation and failing to become one family.

Derrida calls Aporia "the ghost of the undecidable" (1993, p. 24). A decision begins with the initiative to read, to interpret, and even to calculate. But to make such a decision, one must first experience what Derrida calls "undecidability" (*Stanford*, Para 2). Characters are lost and confused, like young man in *The American Dream*, who is unsure about himself. According to Grandma, he is the *American Dream*. Still, according to young man, the American Dream is materialistic, selfish, and cruel. In Albee, Aporia can be traced within the text while exploring the characters and their bewildered approach to the old American Dream and the generation that knows how to understand the status of this dream. Characters have not been given names, and they don't have any feelings or sentiments; they call each other by their familial identity, and this identity is superficial. Grandma puts this situation into words, saying that Mommy and Daddy are confused and in a dilemma; they cannot decide, do something creative, and make meaningful movements. The dilemma is not what they want to do; the dilemma is that they are lost in the misapprehension and misinterpretation of the American Dream. For Mommy, Daddy, and Young Man, the American dream has been turned into a dream of materialism and money-mindedness and it has made them insensitive, unhappy, and disappointed.

In *A Companion to Derrida* (2014), Zeynep Derik and Leonard Lawler explain the paradoxical situation of Aporia; it is both possible and impossible: "For Derrida, there is no decision and no responsibility without the confrontation with the aporia of undecidability. "Undecidable" does not mean the impossibility of decision, but its paradoxical condition, that is, its condition of possibility and impossibility" (p.423). Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) and *The American Dream* (1961) assert the issues of dead twins, missing sons, and loss of manhood. Grandma narrates the story of a twin whose was killed by Mommy and Daddy: "What did they do? 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...they wanted their money back” (1961, p.101). Insensitivity and cruelty of both Mommy and Daddy to the child are evident from Grandma’s dialogue, and these lines also expose American society’s attitude towards the American dream. The old American dream (Grandma) is being sent to an old home while the new American dream has been murdered as it disturbed them. Grandma, during this whole discourse, keeps repeating this discourse: “a man very much like Daddy” (1961, p.99) and “a woman very much like mommy” (1961, p.99). Grandma’s expression projects a certain ambiguity and controversy in the characters of mommy and daddy. They both represent the vagueness and generalization of the American attitude.

George and Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962) mourn over the death of their son, who was never born. They assume that conversation about *their son* (my italics) as a refuge, “George: Just do not start in the bit about the kid, that’s all. Martha: ...it is the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads” (1962, p. 40). This is quite paradoxical as both George and Martha talk about the son, but that discourse does not show their love or affection towards him; instead, they get disturbed and exhibit malaise in their actions and words.

Albee’s discourse mocks masculinity and the American dream. Mrs. Barker’s humor exposes the reality of American society. She makes fun of her brother and his manhood and ridicules the social classes. In his plays, Albee aims to tell his reader the different codes of American society so he can decipher his interpretations. In his book, *The Role of the Reader* (1979), Umberto Eco puts forward the notion of the organization of the text: “To organize a text, its author has to rely upon a series of codes that assign given contents to the expression he uses. To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by the possible reader” (1979, p.7). Eco unconsciously and inadvertently relates the relationship between the text, reader, and author to Derridean Aporia, which develops undecidability and challenges both the author and the reader to derive their codes as much as they desire. Albee’s *The American Dream* puts the reader in a position to extrapolate his interpretation and explication. While applying Aporia to Albee’s *American Dream*, language becomes a code that exposes American society’s hatred, anger, and malaise as daddy tries to discover why Mrs. Barker is here: “Daddy: Besides, she knows why she is here; she is here because we called them” (Albee, 1961, p.88). This excerpt exemplifies the bewilderment and sense of loss among the characters. This rootlessness has made their life absurd. Mrs. Barker’s false sense of responsibility, Daddy’s distorted showing off his masculinity, Mommy’s two-faced behavior, and Young Man’s perfidious exposition of his kinesthetic skills reveal the unconscious mind of loss and the utter presence of disbelief within themselves. Albee’s language in this text is different, easy to read yet challenging to comprehend, reducing the status of language to nothingness.

Albee’s text communicates the nothingness and despair within American society. Iser asserts the communicative status of the text, “Communication in the literature...is a process set in motion and regulated not by the given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interpretation between the explicit and implicit, between revelation and concealment” (1979, p.111). Iser puts forward the relationship between clarity and confusion and between reality and obscurity. Albee’s *The American Dream* makes this relationship implicit and explicit to make the reader realize his position within the text, leading to Derridean undecidability. Undecidability and impermanence develop a sense of satire and sadness as Grandma ridicules the condition of other characters by saying that they (Mommy and Daddy) have moved a lot from one place to another, and they behave like animals, as they have no sense of destination, goal, and purpose in life.

Grandma expresses the cataleptic culpability of Mommy's and Daddy's cruelty towards the infant that was adopted and then killed by them. The Young Man in the play shows undecidability through his behaviors and dialogues. He shares his experiences with Grandma by admitting he is a type, "Young man: Well, I'm a type...No, it's part of the interviews; I'll be happy to tell you. I have no talents except what you see...my person, body, and face. In every other way, I am incomplete and must therefore...compensate" (1962, p.113). Young man exposes the undecidability of the *new* American dream; he has no purpose or plan and is confused.

American dream, from its very inception, had a contradictory status, though this dream promised its followers the ambitious fulfillment of the dream of upward mobility; however, it and its creators failed to involve the masses and to bridge the gap between this notion of *Americanism* (my italics) and everyday individuals. As Jim Cullen puts forward in his book, *The American Dream* (2003): "Ambiguity is the very source of its mythic power" (2003, p.7). No doubt, this dream proved itself the bedrock for the American ideology and Declaration of Independence, and this provided certain impetus to Puritan's religious endeavors to achieve a sense of promised land, but ironically, this dream had been used by its weavers as a shield to cover the slaughter and massacre of native Americans. Cullen also puts emphasis, during his book, on evolution, development, and the chameleonic approaches to the American dream through the centuries, and he postulates that the American dream has been a symbol of national identity and unity, and this identity has had the religious, political, social, and economic connotations. These connotations make the dream flimsy, strong, vulnerable, resilient, and myth and reality (2003, p.26). The nineteenth century was the time of festivity and merriment for the American dream. Still, as this philosophy reached the threshold of the twentieth century, these festivities started turning into confusion, degeneration, and chaos. The slogans of equality, justice, and pursuit of happiness started losing their significance and charisma. Marxism, capitalism, economic depression, class, and race consciousness in America changed the shape and form of the American dream; this dream became a question- a kind of interrogation about the reality and practicality of this dream. Jennifer Hochschild, in her book *Facing Up to the American Dream* (1995), observes: "The idea of the American Dream has been attached to everything from the religious freedom to a home in the suburbs, and it has inspired emotions ranging deep satisfaction to disillusioned fury" (1995, p.15). Though Hochschild's primary focus is on black Americans, their lives, and their economic struggle, she exposes the reality of the American dream and the status of black people in American society pursuing the American dream. Hochschild tries to reveal the transformation of the American dream from contentment to discontentment, from social realization to indifference, and from working together for the betterment of American society to eternal greed for money and ruthless competition for materialism.

A culture of wealth and capitalism mitigated the glory of the American dream and people's strong belief in it in the early decades of the 20th century. The conflict between the idealized American dream and the capitalistic American society could be easily observed in Arthur Miller's (1915-2005) *Death of a Salesman* (1949), where Willy Loman is unable to make a connection among his life, the American dream, and the superficial American society. American dream, which has had an unwavering belief that all men were created equal, and everything was possible if they worked hard, has been inverted in the case of Willy Loman. Arthur Miller, in *Death of a Salesman* (1949), exposes the spuriousness of the American myth and the American dream by depicting the insecurity and the failure of Willy Loman in facing business pressure. Though Willy Loman wants to prove himself a flourishing salesman, he cannot fight with the absurd and murky system of the American nation that has been given the title of the American dream. Miller himself states,



*That homely, ridiculous little man had after all never ceased to struggle for a certain victory, the only kind open to this society – selling to achieve his lot as a man with his name and his son's name on a business of his own (1974, p.12).*

One can expect wealth, achievement, success, failure, or contentment from good business. Still, unfortunately, Biff (Loman's son) represents the hollowness and the barrenness of society and system. In contrast, Willy Loman represents the futility of his efforts to live a happy and contented life. Willy wants to achieve his lost *self* - the self that had been glorified and puffed up once in defining the American dream and society.

The tragic collapse of the American dream was a major concern during the 1960s by writers like Edward Albee, Sam Shepard (1943), Arthur Miller (1915-2005), and Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953), who were perturbed by the displacement and disorder of the American dream and American society. Albee's play, *The American dream* (1961), which has been selected as the key text in this study, reveals the multiple realities of the American dream. Characters, i.e., Grandma, Mommy, Daddy, and Young Man, have been repeated in another play of Albee, *The Sandbox* (1959); both represent a generation of the American dream and demonstrate the contrast between the old and new American dreams. Grandmas have propounded the old American Dream, the senior individual is in both the plays, while the new American dream is caricatured by Mommies, Daddies, and Young Men who are perplexed. Although she forgets many things, Grandma remembers the regretful collapse of the American dream and the American family system. Her boxes remind us of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of Salesman* (1949) when he enters the stage carrying suitcases, burying the American dream in them. Both the boxes and the suitcase represent the old American dream. At the beginning of *The American Dream* (1961), Albee reveals the actual reality of this dream, which is relatively opposite to the definition provided by those who consider themselves the precursor of society. Albee's play *The American Dream* exposes this vision's current reality that mirrors everyday individuals' agony. Albee emphasizes that his play presents the individual's pain and bewilderment in society.

The play presents the ideology of the American dream as ghoulish and morose. Albee also exposes the emptiness, pain, anguish, hypocrisy, and mendaciousness in *American society* (my italics), as this society uses the American Dream as an excuse for its vested interests. Grandma in the play feels lonely and is being taken as lumber, and Mommy and Daddy want to shift her to an old home as soon as possible. Yet, she is the only figure in the drama who wants to uphold the old view even in her mentally imbalanced condition. In *The American Dream*, Young Man symbolizes health, strength, and kinesthetic skills, yet he is confused about where he belongs to and what the purpose of his life is. He is in search of his twin, who had been adopted by Mommy and Daddy and killed by them and disfigured by both of them. Grandma assumes Young Man is the American Dream, making him realize he is the American dream (1961, p.80). However, young man fails to understand grandma's definition of self-realization and self-dependence.

But young man is the new American dream who believes in materialistic pursuits, "Oh, almost anything.... almost anything that pays. I'll do almost anything for money" (Albee, 1961, p.82). This is the difference of approach and the understanding of life between the old and new American Dreams. Grandma is wrong to believe that young man can change the nation's course. Regrettably, he is an epitome of superficiality, emptiness, degeneration, and deterioration of all the values and morality in American society. The same degeneration and deterioration can be seen in the other plays of Edward Albee, whether one finds a lost character named Jerry in *The Zoo Story* (1959), George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962), or A, B, & C in one of his most

autobiographical plays, *Three Tall Women* (1991); all these characters are lost in history, and they feel displaced and dislocated in the modern world of selfishness and self-centeredness.

This research aims to project the development and progression of the ideology of the American Dream and its gradual deterioration and disintegration. The primary focus of this thesis is to expose the dwindling relationship between the American dream and its followers and its impact on modern and postmodern America. Edward Albee's *The American Dream* is the primary text to put forward the new connotation and pragmatic interpretations of the American Dream. Albee's other plays and selective significant works of other modern and postmodern American playwrights have also been cross-referenced to strengthen the analysis. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction has been applied to understand both the development and deterioration of the history and philosophy of the American dream in the modern and postmodern American world. Application of this theory can help fellow and future researchers understand the chameleonic nature of the reception of the American dream. This study would facilitate the researchers to explore the difference between the old and new American dreams, and this would, in turn, help them to understand the usage of language and the different linguistic techniques (such as coherence, cohesion, fragmented discourse, ellipses, repetitions, and incomprehensible mumblings) to expose the malaise, confusion, alienation, trauma, and disillusionment in the American society. Deconstruction's prime concern is to locate the inconsistency within the language, not to make it consistent but to highlight its complexity and undecidability. This study has discussed the language used in Edward Albee's *The American Dream* and his other plays for the prominent and complex representations of American society. Paradox, inconsistency, aporia, difficulty, erasure, and contradiction are the most focused concepts in this research regarding the American dream and its blurred boundaries. This research will be helpful for fellow researchers to recognize and analyze the multifaceted features of the American dream and its self-alienated *disciples*.

The American Dream in Postmodern American society is a burden and "bumble" (Albee, 1961, p.39) of modern American culture. Postmodernism borrowed disintegration, sense of loss, and futility of existence from modernism but has blurred the line between reality and fantasy. American drama exhibits modern and postmodern characteristics to expose the truth of the American Dream and its dwindling importance in American society. Schmidt reveals this phenomenon in his book on Postmodernity in American Drama by arguing that "...the fragmentation of the self is inherent in the dramatic form at large, postmodern drama uses and thrives in the space that the actor/character split opens up" (2005, p.44). Fragmentation and split personalities are essential in postmodern American drama as all the characters of Albee's *dream*, including grandma, reveal their fragmented souls, which cannot gather themselves. According to grandma, American society is ironically satisfied in spending a worldly life void of all social and familial values. Both generations (old and new) believe in their values and have no intention of cooperating.

Youth has been an important subject and character in Albee's plays, whether one discusses *The American Dream*, *The Sandbox*, or *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. All these plays represent youth in terms of fake exposition of strength, hope, power, and agility and this has been presented as a pessimist, an escapist, a liar, or even a symbol of death. Young men in both plays of Albee symbolize death for the old generation as they want to remove grandma from the scene as she is no longer needed. Similarly, the old American Dream has also been removed from the American people's lives as it has become obsolete. According to Grandma, American society is symbolically satisfied with spending a materialistic life void of all social and familial values. Both generations (old and new) believe in their values and have no intention of cooperating.

Roland Barthes emphasizes in his essay “Death of the Author” that “A text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination can any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology...” (1967, p.3). This statement syncs with the principles of Aporia. Likewise, the various interpretations of the American Dream kept changing their approach with time, and due to this, the American Dream became unpredictable, disoriented, and ambiguous. The primary purpose of discussing the association between the American Dream and Aporia is to depict and project a society that aimlessly oscillates between success and failure, money and happiness, and materialism and contentment. Derridean Aporia exposes the flaws and gaps in the formation and development of the American Dream. In this paper, Aporia will explore and analyze the discursivity of language used by Albee and the other dramatists to reveal the actual status of the American dream in twentieth-century America.

## Conclusion

This research has discussed and evaluated the diverse aspects of the American dream and Edward Albee’s plays while considering Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive term aporia. This study has explored Albee’s approach to the American dream and postmodern American drama. This paper will be helpful for fellow researchers to recognize and analyze the multifaceted features of the American dream and its self-alienated disciples. This study has focused on various aspects of old and new American dreams, along with postmodern American playwrights and Edward Albee. As this study describes, Albee, in his plays, focuses on the Postmodern American condition in which American society struggles hard to exist and where individuals are alienated and experience malaise and a lingering sense of unease. These attributes turn these individuals’ lives into limbo and desperation, which is pivotal to understanding the social and economic issues prevalent in postmodern American society. This study has tried to approach these specific issues and put an effort to explore and analyze them with the help of the Derridean deconstructive point of view.

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