



## **ALBEE'S THE SANDBOX THE STUDY ABOUT FAMILY DISINTEGRATION**

**Atheer Makki Abd Ali Al-Jasim**

Atheermakki@hilla-unc.edu.iq

Kerbala University

**Yaseen Khudhair Obayes**

Yassankh86@gmail.com

Al-Mustaql University College, Hilla, Iraq

### **Article history:**

**Received:** 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022

**Accepted:** 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Published:** 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023

### **Abstract:**

Albee's characters usually pay a high price in some interpersonal connections for their emotional distancing from others in his plays. So, behind the emotional distance of the modern man is desperation caused by the lack of a personal connection with his family. That is why these plays end with suicide, murder, and death, which are all metaphors. In order to demonstrate that the loss of human values and the negative attitude of the younger generation towards the older generation led to dramatic effects in American society, especially after World War II, this study uses Albee's The Sandbox to cast a matter of style on the family relationship.

**Keywords:** Albee, Elderly Care, Frustration, Ingratitude, Cruelty

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is Albee's most minor and beloved play, The Sandbox (1959). The Sandbox, according to Albee, "is a perfect play." Thankfully, it is brief enough that I will not have time to mess up... Outstanding performance in a play (11). As Albee puts it, "this work is an examination of the American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in their society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation, and emptiness, and a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of there is peachy-keen" (Amacher 61).

There are three central characters in this piece. Her daughter, Mommy, a harsh, vicious, and the authoritarian lady in her fifties, brought Grandma to live with her in the city. She also provided her with her dish and a blanket worthy of the army. Even though he is pushing sixty, Daddy is a frail little man with a fat bank account, which is why Mommy married him. A farmer in his seventies is married to his eighty-six-year-old, gaunt grandmother with glamour eyes. Her husband abandoned the family when she was in her thirties, leaving her to raise Mommy alone. The play also features two supporting characters: the Young Man, who is attractive and between the ages of twenty-five and thirty (he represents the Angel of Death), and the Musician, who is kind but has no lines and only plays and holds music as directed by the other characters.

For Albee's purposes in this play, he developed these five characters thoughtfully from a literary and artistic perspective. There is no better representation of the conflict than Grandma. She acts as the stage manager, directing the other actors' lines. She gives the Musician some advice on how to play his music, telling him to "keep it lovely and quiet" (135). Albee is eager to place the Young Man next to Grandma. At the same time, he continues his athletic training to attract the audience's attention to Grandma, who is half-buried in the sand, so the Young Man's placement on stage has a dramatic function. In addition, Albee uses the musical character in redundant to emphasize how the play's events affect the emotions of the other characters.

Albee avoids repetition in his character development by having Grandma communicate solely through her sandbox presence, which stands in for both the coffin in which a deceased person is laid to rest and the cradle in which a newborn child is held. To sum up, Grandma's speech is an amalgam of the baby's cradle behavior and an older adult's after death. In this specific setting, Gussow describes Grandma's voice as a "hybrid of a baby's giggle and scream" (11).

Although Albee names some of his characters (such as Grandma, Mommy, Daddy, and the Angel of Death) by their roles in the play, he never reveals their actual names. He makes Grandma the protagonist to show how she struggles to overcome her loneliness within the context of her family. The playwright shifts the focus to Mom and Dad as they struggle to survive due to their avarice. Both are prepared to bury Grandma in the play sandbox to get their hands on her money. The sandbox is a metaphor for her tomb. Hence the activity is symbolic rather than literal.

The play's opening scene is set on a bright, beautiful day. On the beach, the Young Man does calisthenics as his parents, Grandma in their arms, put her down on the sand and take seats nearby. The mother and grandmother, among others, instruct the musician when and how often to play his music. The Young Man maintains his good looks

and cheerful demeanor throughout the play. Grandma acts childishly by initiating a discussion with the Young Man in full view of the audience. Then, Grandma's face and hands emerge from the sand as Mom and Dad pile more sand on top of her. The death of Grandma has now hit home for Mom. Mommy and Daddy are waiting for Grandma at the airport. The sand has rendered Grandma immobile, but she has seen what Mommy and Daddy are weaving.

Mommy and Daddy realize that Grandma's old age makes this a good moment for her to pass away. She is consequently relocated to the playground's sandbox. They take her to the beach, holding her under her arms like a baby, ignoring her basic need for autonomy. There is no mistaking the blatant exhibition of ageism. By saying, "GRANDMA: Very old people have perceptions..... they keep to themselves because if they expose them to other people...well, you know what ridicule...neglect is," Grandma is trying to forget that she and the audience have a secret relationship and to pique their interest while also justifying her true feelings about her daughter and son-in-poor law's treatment of her. (113)

It is clear that Grandma has opinions on aging and is aware of the stereotypes about the elderly. While it is true that death awaits everyone at some point in their latter years, other people begin to dishonor one's dignity by labeling her or him useless. As a result, many people go deaf, so they do not have to listen to criticism, and many more wish they could die in the blink of an eye. Grandma's feelings of alienation and loneliness contribute to the communication breakdown between her and Mom and Dad. Her fight against the unfairness and brutal treatment she receives from them is more significant than her fight against the Young Man who comes to an end in her life. After concluding that her parents had conspired to throw her in the sandbox, the "small, wizened woman with sparkling eyes" (Albee, 167) goes completely rigid out of dread and uncertainty (171). No one in her family talks to her or pays her any mind, and the Angel of Death is the only one who can understand what the older woman wants or needs at this point in her life.

"He inspires in her the feeling of a mother talking to her son, where she says: "Boy,... oh boy; I'll say...Pretty good" (150) And "You're welcome... dear ..." (158).

Stenz says, "Albee deliberately parodies theatrical conventions to satirize the vacuity and hypocrisy of a death watch" (34). Thus, this play focuses on the disintegration of the family and the lack of passion among its members because each family represents a basic unit in any society which can lead an individual to perform his role in society perfectly. Through the bad treatment of Grandma, Albee gives an example of the empty relations which ultimately lead to the disintegration of the family.

GRANDMA: Honestly! What a way to treat "an old woman.... Drag her out of the house ... stick her in a car ... bring her out here from the city ... dump her in a pile of sand ... and leave her here to set... I'm eighty-six years old!" (149)

Grandma often likens her relationship with her daughter's family to the plight of the misbehaving kid, saying that the family first wants her gone and then treats her like a pet. Although Grandma understands that Mommy wants to plan for her funeral, she refuses to give a specific time or location. She prepares herself to wait for the time of death by suddenly throwing sand at her parents when she realizes they have begun celebrating her death: "I cannot get up. Sorry, I am stuck here (156). She is gently interrupted by the Young Man:

YOUNG MAN: "Uh...ma'am; I ... I have a line here." (157)

Right now, Young Man has abandoned his workout to lean on Grandma's sandbox and tell her that he is the Angel of Death and that he has come for her. It is true that "I am coming for you" (159). Grandma requires such care because she has gone without it for quite some time. Grandma finds closure from a long life filled with uncertainty, unhappiness, and loss in the brutal honesty of her death at the play's conclusion (Stanza 36). When she finally nods off, Young Man puts his head on her forehead and leaves a grin on her face. The angel of death is shown as a kind of rescuer who helps the needy, and Grandma demonstrates that having a conversation with the angel of death, and even death itself, is more merciful than the brutality of her family (Gussow 2-3). To put it bluntly, the death and destruction of any emotional connection among family members directly result from such violence.

Grandma rejects her relatives' unkind treatment and keeps on making fun of Mommy and Daddy, expressing her true feelings about the bad treatment she has had from them. Because Grandma's emotions are a strange mix of irony and melancholy, they make this occasion very challenging for her. She gives up and calmly embraces death, despite the harshness of her own family. Though most people believe that pursuing happiness through life and avoiding death is why we are all born on this earth, she takes solace in the prospect of dying.

The duty of self-aware living is at the heart of all of Albee's plays. Institutional pressures and the walls people erect between themselves and the world encourage the development of delusions that lead to more isolation and suffering (Stenz, 132). Albee uses the plight of the elderly to critique society's worth and people's treatment of the aged. A lack of emotional connection with those closest to them contributes to the elderly's loss of motivation to live, as seen by their hope in death as an escape from the abuse they have endured at the hands of their relatives.

Many people in contemporary American society choose suicide to end their meaningless existence and prevent further embarrassment within their families. The Sandbox, then, has an undercurrent of meaning about the importance of respecting the needs of the elderly. Grandma, according to Amacher, "is one of the major characters in his works because she reflects both the energy and morality of the ancient citizens of America: she is what remains of the past, but is no longer entwined with the present crumbling generation" (58). Albee's goal is to establish peace between the family's oldest and youngest members since we all know that the elderly are particularly vulnerable and deserving special care. One of the key themes of the play is "shameless systematic exploitation" that "encourages the survivors to buy peace of mind about the deceased, they have abused or ignored while they were alive" (Debusscher,32).

Grandma always acts like a doting mom when it comes to her granddaughter. Sadly, Mommy's mother never received any love or attention from her. She chooses to bury her mom in a beach sandbox. When parents and children are emotionally distant from one another, as in Mommy's harsh treatment of Grandma, it is because of the breakdown of the familial bond, which is caused by the absence of the instinctual emotion that unites family members in the first place. The emotional distance among family members is just one symptom of the underlying problems contributing to emotional distancing.

Grandma in *The Sandbox* has it rough; her husband dies when she is in her thirties, leaving her to raise their daughter alone. The family she gave everything to turned around and treated her poorly. Thus, internal strife is caused by feelings of reflection, frustration, and mistreatment. She gave her all for them, but they are not giving her the love and compassion she needs in her old age. In the play, Grandma is captivated by the Angel of Death, despite knowing that he is the angel of death and is there to take her soul. The acceptance of death as a release from her pain reveals the emotional dryness she felt.

## **CONCLUSION**

Albee makes it abundantly evident that the leading causes of emotional distancing lie in the deteriorating situation in America, when family members adopt harshness and inhumane treatment of each other, especially the elderly. Albee stands for the strength of the family unit and believes it is a moral obligation to care for the elderly. In this case, the fact that the older adult prefers death over his or her current situation indicates a condition of emotional detachment from the world around him; the poor treatment he receives from his family members is shocking enough to drive anyone to despair. Because of this, it is hard to feel anything for the protagonist. When life loses all significance like way, the only hope left is death.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Albee, Edward. *The Collected Plays of Edward Albee*. New York: Overlook. Duckworth, 2004.
2. Amacher, Richard E. *Edward Albee*. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
3. Debusscher, Gilbert. *Edward Albee: Tradition and Renewal*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969.
4. Gussow, Mel. *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey: A Biography*. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2001.
5. Stenz, Anita. *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss*. The Hague: Mouton publisher, 1978.