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Writing Samples

### Writing Sample # 1

Note: This Review was published in May 2019 in *Pinyon Poetry*.

*The Blues Drinks Your Dreams Away* (Stubborn Mule Press, 2018) is John Macker's most recent publication of poetry. His other works include *Woman of the Disturbed Earth*, *Underground Sky*, and *Disassembled Badlands*. *The Blues Drinks Your Dreams Away* is a unique collection featuring select poems from 1983-2018, and contains a narrative seamlessly connecting history, memory, and humanity across time. Macker offers an homage to the American West by delightfully weaving history, geology, culture, and the vibrant voices of who preceded there. His work is elevated by enjambment, inventive punctuation, wit, and memorable allusions. This ambitious poetic tapestry allows Macker the freedom to project the hopes, longing, concerns, and deep found desires of a culture across time.

In "Angels Broke Down In Denver," Macker connects present day Larimer Street to the city's rich and violent history. Stanzas such as "boxcar woman sprawled by the railroad tracks,/ I could see her head wound from a/ block away, her hair a ghost crow frenzy of black feathers,/ downwind from Wind River, out of the cold, / in and out of Indian time, / her blood flowed into the DNA of Larimer Street" explore a common thematic thread that permeates throughout, that the actions and desires of the past have a very real and phantom like tangibility in the present. Another poem focused on the repercussions of the past is "Mexican Elegy" in which the poet discusses the forced conversion to Catholicism in Mexico. The poem's final line, a proclamation from a Mexican shaman, "the mermaids have come to the desert" reiterates the complete and utter disconnect between the two cultures. Another powerful line from Macker, "Nothing would ever heal me if not for these unraveling threads of our common spirit" suggests that acknowledging the past of our southwestern culture allows for a therapeutic cleansing.

However, Macker's interest not only resides in the past, but in the present and future as well. These poems juxtapose ideas of predestination, fate, and freewill. There is a sense of responsibility and stakes within each individual's actions. In "After the Fall of America" the actions have already been completed, and all that remains is a grim result. Macker states, "Take solace in Ginsberg's/ dispatches from all over/ this indocile planet &/ solitary autumn leaf/ New England/ trembles over/ Kerouac's/ grave". The allusion to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg makes the exact temporal existence of this poem hard to pinpoint, but suggests these events can occur in the foreseeable future. Yet, *The Blues Drinks Your Dreams Away* is not a collection of existential despair, and includes fantastically hopeful poems about seeking human connection. "Another Morning on Earth," for example, suggests that the bonds between like-minded souls can connect themselves across oceans: "maybe/ there's a woman,/ map of the

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world on her knees,/ her fingers drop off the coast &/ finds the ancient narwhal/ from there she follows the blue/ highway to my home town,/ her imagination finds my street". The poem's final lines, "& in her mind's eye she smells the/ coffee & knows we're not alone" demonstrates the antithesis of the work. All life, past present and future is interconnected, each action has consequences, and in the nonsubstantive vapors of modern life, we all hope that we are not alone.

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## Writing Sample #2

Note: This review was published in May 2020 in *Pinyon Poetry*.

*Asbestos Brocade* (Salmon Poetry, 2017) is A.E. Stringer's fourth book of poetry. His collection, divided into three sections, explores human greed in a rapidly depleting material world. Stringer's work reflects on the manipulation of surroundings, the raping of land for profit and the consequences of apathetic actions. In addition, the poet focuses on the relationship between man and nature and the impact of the past on the future. Yet, within all of this selfish interaction with the world, Stringer explores an unquestionable human desire to find meaning in the most mundane of activities. Utilizing free verse, enjambment, and clever symbolism, Stringer seamlessly condemns human nature and cherishes it. *Asbestos Brocade* dives headfirst into the human experience and refuses to shy away from the negative aspects of human nature without compromising an appreciation for rare moments of wonderment and compassion.

In the first poignant section of *Asbestos Brocade*, entitled *Earth Tones*, the poet paints scenes of nature and a human response. Complacency, sorrow, and grief lace throughout his nature poetry, an acknowledgement of the natural world that has been lost — and the rest that is quickly fleeting. “Here’s a thrill: let/ your own eye zoom in as the planet/ swells like a tattered balloon. Hard/ homeward, meteoric, you pass through/ the ages, dust and infrared, ozone,/ and high clouds”. The most critical poem in this section, “Kill Fees” condemns human greed with the stanza: “When they bought and/ killed the solar car, the good/ air went *kiss*, out of the future’s balloon.” “Kill Fees” caustically rejects the excuse of corporate greed quenching sustainable human progress, and stands as the darkest poem in *Asbestos Brocade* with its implications for the future.

Stringer shifts his focus to human experiences in the civilized world with his next section, *Artifactual*. “At the Happy Dragon” recounts the speaker's experience at a Chinese restaurant where children climbed up a porcelain statue of Buddha. Regardless of the fact that the statue has holy connotations and is being used as nothing more than a plaything, the speaker finds it fitting. “I’ll have/ what he’s having, who adjures all/ but being a playground, all but bliss.” The Buddha, whose purpose is to bring prosperity and happiness, is being used in an unconventional manner, and is yet fulfilling a desire for the children. For example, “At the Happy Dragon”, Stringer’s poetry centered in the civilized world focuses on humans repurposing their surroundings, in order to find greater meaning. Another poem, “Contact Lenses”, is a clever work about human perception and the all too relatable panic when someone loses their contact lense, a “curved world floating on a tear.”

In *More Allure*, Stringer’s poetry becomes more abstract and emotionally charged. In a painfully relatable poem about unrequited love, entitled “F---ing Angel”, Stringer writes: “all the way through/ to our defective hearts, *I love you*. There,/ fallen flat. I’ll not say it to your face, /

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but whisper your name in lieu, and this/ perpetuity of endearments, from which/ there way arise a mystic chant/ that stays the moment". Utilizing an overanalyzing speaker, Stringer hilariously captures the emotional whirlwind of being inconveniently personally attacked by cupid's arrow.

Cumulatively, Stringer does not hesitate to be critical of his surroundings nor the humans responsible for them. His collection intricately explores man's relationship with the secular and spiritual levels of his reality. Regardless, upon completion of *Asbestos Brocade*, the reader cannot help but feel enraptured by a poet so dedicated in finding bliss in the most mundane of life's fleeting moments.

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Writing Sample # 3

Note: The below paper was my senior thesis for my undergraduate degree.

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Dr. Phillis

ENGL 494

22 November 2019

Momma Drama: How Albee's *The American Dream* Dismantles the 1960s Nifty Dream  
Institution

Edward Albee's *The American Dream* debuted off-Broadway in 1961. The play featured a too close to home treatment of the nuclear family through the cliché portrayals of Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, and the Young Man. The character of Mommy was particularly offensive as she was portrayed as a hysterical, baby killing narcissist focused solely on status and wealth. Albee clarified in the 1977 preface to a collection of his work that he viewed *The American Dream* as "an examination of the American Scene, as an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slippery land of ours is peachy-keen" (Preface). In his preface, Edward Albee details the subject of his scathing criticism as an exposé against a collection of cultural mandates and ideals that coagulated in the 1960s to form a new cultural institution here referred to as the Dream Institution. This new Dream Institution solidified its power in the Post-war era as the nation turned to recovery from World War II that at once dictated a homogeneous and fertile home front while simultaneously promoting excessive

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consumerism and homeownership. Tracking the shift of the American Dream from an idealized myth surveyed by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and James Truslow Adams to a fully fledged institutionalized reality will help demonstrate how Albee capitalizes on the American Absurdist movement in order to “turn the mythology upside down as a critique of bourgeois values and domestic life” (Samuels 61). This contextualization will reveal how no other character in *The American Dream* perpetuates the criticism of the decade better than Mommy. Albee maneuvers Mommy as the point of convergence for his kneecap shattering attack on the ethos of the 1960s. Albee demonstrates that everything is not “peachy-keen” as Mommy wreaks havoc on nearly every tenant of the new Dream Institution; consumerism, home-ownership, marriage, geriatric care, and motherhood. In addition, Albee condemns the contradiction of the Dream Institution that what the American public is demanded and what they can deliver are irreconcilable.

The American and European Absurdist movements are distinguishable through their approach to cultural institutions. Institutions are well-established customs, traditions, or practices that inform social behavior. The five main social orders often are classified as family, religion, education, the economy, and government. European Absurdist reject these conventions and their connections to purpose, rationality, and meaning. Prominent mid-century playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett utilize time, self-contained settings, and round-about dialogue to stuff their characters into airtight Tupperware containers where no adherence to faith or country could save them from a trivial existence. European Absurdist explored the inherent meaninglessness and dissonance of the universe by pitting their trapped characters against an unestimated enemy — ennui. The common verdict reached by these playwrights was that there was “nothing to be done” (Beckett 11). The only outs for European Absurdist were through self distracting rituals or suicide. On the other hand, American Absurdist work to rationalize, or at

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least cope, with an absurd reality through engaging with these social orders. Engagement functions as a coping mechanism for the characters of these works and additionally allows these authors artistic liberty to satirize, parody, and attack their institutions. Demonstrating that character *x* is faithfully clinging to institution *y* but still leads a life of boredom, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness allows “American dramatists [to] turn the absurd into political statements” (Krasner 64). To clarify, while Americans tinker with time, alter setting, and employ roundabout dialogue their end result was to satirize, parody, and attack their absurd institutions whereas Europeans regarded this move as futile.

In order to connect Edward Albee’s *The American Dream* to the American Absurdist movement, it is necessary to identify where the Dream Institution originated from and the values it propagates. An excellent place to begin such a survey is through J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur’s 1782 work *Letters From an American Farmer*. The section “What is an American?” provides valuable insight into early thought on American exceptionalism. It is also one of the first explanations of the American Dream put into writing. Crèvecoeur defines American national identity as a “strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country” resulting from a combination of European cultural backgrounds. Crèvecoeur states that mixed blood conditions this new man to be loyal to his new country as “[h]e is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds” (Crèvecoeur). Through newfound and fervent patriotism the reward for buying into this new government was the ability to exercise self-interested industry. Crèvecoeur’s newfound American had economic opportunity that his European forefathers did not, and this chance to be “rewarded by ample subsistence” was

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possible through hard work and fidelity. Therefore, The American Dream was closely tied with the ability to exercise self-interest and that freedom demanded the payment of national fidelity.

James Truslow Adams provides an early-twentieth century iteration of the American Dream. At the arrival of the twentieth century, the United States struggled to balance the principles of consumer-happy capitalism against the spartan work-ethic championed by previous generations of pioneers and frontiersmen. In 1931, historian James Truslow Adams attempted to consolidate these values in his book, *The Epic of America*. Adams wrote:

But there also has been the *American Dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams 413)

Adams broadly envisions a society in which social, economic, and personal accomplishments could be obtained and acknowledged for each American citizen regardless of social rank. Adams additionally suggests that it is the American Dream that is America's "distinct and unique gift to mankind" (413). In other words, The United States provides the foundation for which an equal society could one day be achieved through the means of the American Dream. In comparison, Crèvecoeur's American Dream existed solely in terms of economic autonomy. Adam's iteration contributed facets of racial, gender, and class equality to Crèvecoeur principle of fierce individualism. Combined, the American Dream functions as an economic pinnacle achievable for both men and women, regardless of race or creed, to achieve through self-interest based industry.



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However, over the next subsequent decades, political and social trends pushed this desire for an equal social order aside to regain national economic security. The Great Depression forced Adams' overly optimistic social order to the back burner of public consciousness as Americans suffered the consequences of the previous decade. The cultural practices of the Roaring 20s — buying on credit, excessive spending, an overindulgence in growing consumer culture — crafted a false reality of opulence and comfort. To refer back to Crèvecoeur for a moment, Americans arguably exercised their self-interest to a dangerous degree and the result was economic starvation. The period forced Americans to “reexamine their bedrock concepts of individualism and freedom, as well as highfalutin notions of the ‘self-made man’, [and] ‘pioneer’” (Krasner 4). These concepts were painfully addressed and as a result the nation reverted to valorizing hard work and patriotism. At the arrival of World War II, the American Dream went to war; now refurbished to best suit the needs of a homogeneous home front. The United States no longer celebrated the “strange mixture of blood” its citizens carried and instead viewed this difference as a threat to national security. Contribution to the war effort realigned self-interest to a communal goal — winning the war. Outward opulence and comfort was unpatriotic and frowned upon. The end of World War II found Europe bombed flat while Americans ushered in a new age of prosperity. As victors, Americans did not suffer the same loss of purpose and meaning as their European allies, nor did their Dream suffer as a consequence of the violence (Esslin 311). On the home front, the nation turned to recovery through compliance, military supremacy, and anti-Communist sentiment. Krasner observes that “the end of the war catapulted the nation from the periphery of international politics to the position of global superpower. Upward mobility was a fact of economic life, and returning soldiers demanded their share of the American Dream” (29). Fifteen years after the publication of *The Epic of America*,

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Adams long awaited social mobility was finally achievable, but the Post-war era dictated that it was not afforded to everyone.

In the Post-war era, newfound social mobility transitioned Adams' American Dream from an ideological possibility to an institutionalized concept that was harnessed by the United States government as a prescriptive treatment for economic and social recovery for the middle class. Furthermore, during the Cold War (1947-1991) the military harnessed the American Dream as a secret weapon to fight communist ideology. Presenting a prosperous, homogeneous, patriotic home front functioned as an ideological counterpoint to champion capitalistic society. In essence, the American Dream no longer was individualistic; it became communal and mandated. The Dream Institution demanded rigid conformity, permanence, and formality. As the United States projected on the national scene a healed and successful home front, its citizens were to likewise follow suit. Home ownership became essential for "the establishment of the self as determined by communal ties and a social respectability within your community... a sort of symbol for the status quo to separate the 'haves' from the 'have-nots'" (Varro 348). Home ownership indicated respectability, permanence, and economic security. Mass produced suburbs arose as affordable and conformist housing for the middle class. Along with the affordable housing, an influx of disposable income allowed for the revitalization of consumer society where the buying and selling of goods became the most important social activity. Success could once again be defined by material abundance, and this outpouring of cash granted Americans the ability to flaunt their dollars.

Increased standards of living had unintended consequences, and people were living longer. By the late 1940s the average lifespan of an American citizen was well past sixty-five. In comparison, at the beginning of the twentieth century the average adult only made it to

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forty-eight. This longevity challenged the very notion of what an individual should do with their remaining years (Samuels 63). The growing acceptance of the nuclear family required a new solution for the elderly and this solution became retirement. Retirement served as the end goal or reward of the American Dream, allowing Americans to spend their final years in comfort. The Dream Institution therefore demanded permanence, promoted consumerism, and promised comfort.

I argue that during this period the Dream Institution mated with arguably the oldest institution in the United States — Motherhood. During the early Revolutionary War and its following decades, Motherhood became a profession. Linda K. Kerber, an expert on the early Revolution, writes that, “[m]otherhood was discussed almost as if it were a fourth branch of government, a device that ensures social control in the gentlest way possible” (200). Motherhood became an extension of the United States government, a fourth branch that was stationed inside of the household. The job of these young mothers was to work to alleviate the anxieties of a patchwork society that required homogeneity in order to survive. While Crèvecoeur championed the “strange mixture of blood” it was the job of this fourth estate to transition these separate cultural groups into the communal identity of being an American. To this effect, these agents of the fourth estate trained a new generation of Americans to be loyal to the United States, and not to the country from which their family immigrated. I propose that when thrust into a similar situation as their revolutionary fore mothers, Post-war women were reclassified as agents for the home front. As agents of the Dream Institution, it was the job of young women to once again raise a homogeneous generation and it was viewed as a matter of national security.

However, twentieth-century women were not going to be pushed back into the kitchen as timidly as their revolutionary fore mothers. During World War II women were in the workforce

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funding the war effort, but the national victory meant that men demanded their jobs upon return. Across the board women became bound by Victorian stereotypes of dutiful housewives and doting mothers. With this loss of professional freedom, psychiatry emerged as a tool to contain and discipline women and “those who did not behave ‘properly’ risked ending up in psychiatric care... Freud’s focus on sexual fantasies, and the fact that most patients were women, rehashed old ideas. It was similar to hysteria being labeled a ‘women’s problem’ that should be cured by finding a man” (Women and Psychiatry). In an era with the emergence of psychiatric asylums, homemakers were disciplined through the threat of psychiatric care and reconditioned by Victorian stereotypes. The emergence of minor tranquilizers known as mother’s little helpers arose to address the revitalized belief in women’s hysteria. Hysterical women were classified by their mental vacancy, brash and abrasive nature, and the inability to conceive. Nothing threatened the Dream Institution more than crazy, baby-less women.

The new Dream Institution provided the perfect punching bag for American Absurdist, and the American Dream received a startlingly different treatment in the drama of the 1960s. Instead of being approached as the solution, the American Dream became a sick problem. In particular, dramatists radically discussed the nuclear family through “clichés rather than with the individual, and their satirical approach towards national ideals and ideologies took on metaphorical significance implying generalized lessons targeted at an entire generation” (Varro 344). The increase of stock characters were utilized to highlight the consequences of wanton materialism to the American public. In the national trend towards homogeneity, the American public was losing touch with individualism. Edward Albee provides a brilliant example of absurdist techniques to attack the Dream Institution through the allegory of Mommy. Albee’s

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Mommy represents an enforcer of the Dream Institution's tenants, yet it is her accordance with mandated consumerism that reveals the contradiction of the new social order.

Albee utilizes the first conversation of *The American Dream* to convey Mommy as a crazed materialist. In the living room Mommy badgers Daddy to listen to her roundabout story about the purchase of a hat. Mommy rants about how the leader of the women's club called her hat wheat-colored instead of beige which caused Mommy to return to the hat store furious. Mommy recounts that she returned to the store "[a]nd they said to me, 'How could you tell that when you had a hat on top of your head?' Well, that made me angry, and so I made a scene right there; I screamed as hard as I could; I took my hat off and threw it down on the counter, and oh, I made a terrible scene" (Albee 101). Mommy's over dramatic response to a rude comment is indicative of her character as an unchecked consumer. Her long-winded monologue about her outing functions as a parody of superficial fashion-worship and consumer consumption (Varro 345). Even more ridiculous is that Mommy resorted to such lengths after receiving the rude comment from the leader of her women's club who she abhors because "she has dreadful children, a dreadful house, and an absolutely horrible husband who sits in a wheelchair all day" (Albee 200). Mommy's dislike of the other woman likely results from Mommy's jealousy over her social status. The women's club lady has achieved the American Dream promised by the Dream Institution; she has a house, children, and a husband. Mommy's monologue therefore "bec[o]mes a dramatization of the ridiculousness of a society conditioned to expect satisfaction in every detail and that society's willingness to go to the extremes of rudeness in their pursuit of frivolous goals" (Youngberg 108). Due to the comment from the women's club leader, Mommy felt compelled to return to the store and demand a refund for her lack of satisfaction with the product. Her violent outburst represents the dangers of excessive and superficial American

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capitalism; particularly when combined with the influence of social narcissism and status fulfillment.

Albee further criticizes social prostitution through Mommy's unquenchable thirst for status. In a society obsessed with projecting success through material abundance, consumer culture only perpetuates the effects of viewing all relationships as transactional. Status fulfillment is bought, or paid for, through the exchange of goods. Social prostitution was regarded by many dramatists as a synonymous with spiritually bankruptcy. In *The American Dream* Grandma alerts Daddy on how Mommy has valued money and social standing over personal relationships since early childhood:

she used to climb up on my lap and say, in a sickening little voice, 'when I gwo up, I'm Going to maywy a wich old man; I'm going to set my wittle rear end right down in a tub O' butter, that's what I'm gonna do.' And I warned you Daddy, I told you to stay away from her type. I told you to. I did. (Albee 107)

This backstory reveals Mommy's eyes have always been trained on comfort and status.

Grandma's statement serves to connect social prostitution and material obsession as a spiritually bankrupt practice that leaves fulfilling personal relationships in the dust. Mommy approaches marriage as a pathway to comfort, status, and wealth rather than love, family, and happiness. The Dream Institution provides a model to attain economic security through the method of consumerism and Mommy is willing to sell herself to attain these goods. The extremes of Mommy's consumerism—to the point where she is even willing to sell herself through social prostitution comes at the cost of personal relationships.

Albee satirizes the subjectivity of the Dream's demand for home ownership by situating *The American Dream* inside a small cramped apartment. As mentioned earlier, homeownership

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was prescribed as a symbol of material abundance, respectability, and homogeneous conformity. Home ownership was equated with being American. The Dream Institution, however, did not account for economic disparity or alternative housing. The apartment, just as with Mommy's hat, merely exists as an object with a price tag to criticize Mommy's material depravity. Daddy passively comments that, "[w]hen we took this apartment, they were quick enough to have me sign the lease; they were quick enough to take my check for two month's rent in advance" (Albee 99). Daddy complains that their landlord hustled the couple into the apartment and then quickly began to exploit Daddy for his money. Instead of owning a home the couple lacks the asset, and the status, that it provides. Mommy's anger at the women's group leader's comment begins to make more sense when considering her materialistic nepotism and cramped living situation. Yet, Mommy and Daddy never work to improve their situation nor do they save to buy a house, they expect it to be given to them. This entitlement makes the home "cease to represent the longed-for-togetherness envisioned in the glamorous, smiling, happy American family; instead it serves as a very practical and pragmatic end in the character's strife for financial fulfillment" (Varro 349). To that effect, the apartment becomes a trap from which Mommy continues to spiral down the path of spiritual bankruptcy. As an agent of the Dream Institution Mommy is supposed to be a homemaker watching after her husband and kids to ensure a new generation of patriotic conformists. However, Mommy lacks the children, and even the home, to make this happen. As a result, Mommy turns to the one tenant of the Dream Institution within her grasp — and that is consumerism. However, consumerism fails to purchase intangible goods, such as relationships. By situating *The American Dream* in an apartment, Albee emphasizes the contradiction that what the Dream Institution demands and what we can deliver is unviable through practicing consumer culture.

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Mommy additionally fails her role as a homemaker and as a provider for her mother, Grandma. Women were expected to upkeep the home, entertain guests, and provide for the home's residents. Beyond the absence of a home, Mommy fails her role as homemaker in spectacular fashion. At her arrival, Mrs. Barker slyly comments, "oh, we're still here. My, what an unattractive apartment you have!" to which Mommy defends, "[y]es, but you don't know what a trouble it is. Let me tell you..." (Albee 113). Mrs. Barker's dig at the condition of the apartment immediately makes Mommy slide into the role of homemaker in order to maintain social dignity. However, Albee constantly reminds his audience that it is Grandma, not Mommy, who takes responsibility for his household. Later in conversation with Mrs. Barker, Mommy slips that "Grandma loves to do little things around the house; it gives her a false sense of security" (Albee 124). This patronizing comment provokes curiosity because it demonstrates how far removed Mommy is from the Dream's expectations of her. For one, Mommy insists on using the term "house" as a substitute for "apartment" in a vain effort to maintain social face with Mrs. Barker (despite the fact that both women are fully aware of their setting). Secondly, Mommy's disparaging remarks about Grandma reveal that Mommy has handed off her homemaker responsibilities to her mother all while treating her as an ungrateful servant. When entertaining Mrs. Barker, Mommy orders Grandam, and in the final scene the Young Man, to perform the role of hostess. Albee even goes so far as to imply that Mommy is unable to locate her things within the apartment (Albee 130) to show how separated Mommy is from her job as an agent of the Dream Institution. Mommy's negligence directly results from conditions where material depravity and social prostitution is the only out for fulfillment or assumed happiness.

Albee subverts the Post-war template for the husband and wife dynamic by portraying Mommy's ruthless and demanding behavior for Daddy. The Dream Institution calls for a clear



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patriarch of the household, whose wife serves as a dutiful and loving maidservant of his domain. In order to contextualize this marital guide it may be useful to look at an article for *The Saturday Evening Post* that was published in 1957. The article discussed how young women were to achieve husbands and was targeted towards teenagers. *The Saturday Evening Post* clearly states that “it is the duty of every girl to talk to boys on the telephone, kindle romantic sentiments, round-up potential husbands and thus help perpetuate the race by assuming that by and by she will become a homemaker” (Edelstein). This article helps to contextualize that young women's aspirations were forcefully narrowed to the home, their husbands, and child rearing for the betterment of a conformist society. Men were to be the breadwinners and waited on hand and foot in their homes.

In contrast, Mommy crowns herself as a classical matriarch who functions as a container for all of the Post-war anxieties over a rebellious housewife: she is loud, domineering, sexually dominant, badgering, powerful, and most of all, infertile. She belittles Daddy to such a degree that he becomes a servant to her needs for “satisfaction.” The result is an emasculated spouse who dissociates with his reality — he cannot find Grandma’s room, or the icebox, or even the doorbell — to such a degree that he is a more bewildered guest than king of his own domain. Mommy also establishes her dominance over her spouse by rigging their communication. A fantastic example is wherever Mommy prods Daddy’s masculine insecurities. Daddy hesitates to open the door for Mrs. Barker and Mommy strokes his ego with falsehood stating “you made up your mind; you were so firm; you were masculine and decisive... Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and I fainted” (Albee 100). Mommy turns Daddy’s need to present himself as the patriarch and maneuvers him to her own needs. In essence, Mommy constantly is summarizing conversations that never occurred to make Daddy feel as if he got his point across.

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The near constant beratement of her spouse dissolves the line of communication between them.

The Dream Institution would allow this verbal thrashing if done by a husband to a wife as a form of discipline. However, Albee handing Mommy the lashing stick only provokes Post-war anxieties about abrasive and dominant women.

Money, status, and comfort override any iota of desire that Mommy has for a meaningful relationship with her husband. Albee reminds us that even within the context of the Dream Institution, marriage is purely transactional. Mommy reminds Daddy, “I have a right to live off of you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and bump your uglies; and I have a right to all your money when you die” (Albee 107). She asserts that she is allowed to use Daddy as her personal piggy bank to fund her materialistic crazes due to the fact that they used to engage in sexual activity. Marriage for Mommy is purely contractual — an exchange of sexual services for materialistic goods. Daddy’s traditional monetary hold over the lifestyles of his female relatives is usurped because of the breakdown of communication. In addition, Mommy refuses to engage in sex with Daddy constantly emasculating her spouse by asserting that “Daddy doesn’t want to sleep with anyone. Daddy’s been sick” (Albee 108). Mommy strips Daddy of his sexual and monetary power, making him fail as a patriarch. Mommy breaches the Dream Institution’s contract for marriage. She does not serve as a homemaker, she does not engage in sexual intercourse in order to reproduce, and she definitely does not idolize her husband. Instead, Mommy manipulates Daddy’s masculine insecurities so that she can achieve safety, comfort, and status, without needing him. Albee attacks the Post-war hyper consumerism that views everything, even interpersonal relationships such as marriage, as a give and take. Transactional marriage, Albee argues, robs couples of communication and sexually fulfilling relationships. In addition, Mommy’s manipulation of the marriage contract directly

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threatens how the Dream utilizes marriage as a means to police women's behaviors. When Mommy rejects her responsibilities to maintain a home and raise children, it allows her free rein to manipulate her husband in the pursuit of wealth, status, and comfort.

In *The American Dream*, Albee places an elderly individual as a stand-in child for an infertile couple that works to criticize how the consumer culture conditions selfish and cold-hearted behavior to the elderly. The Post-war era prescribed a nuclear household consisting of parents and their immediate children. The elderly were presented with the option of retirement, yet providing for an older relative requires selflessness and sacrifice, two concepts that Mommy does not possess. Instead, Mommy only thinks for her own needs and satisfaction and thus abuses her mother. Hypocritically, Mommy gets irritated with Grandma for performing her role as homemaker, one that she avoids at all costs, because it contradicts her desire to present herself as a dutiful wife to people such as Mrs. Baker. Mommy simultaneously wanted her mother "earning her keep" (Albee 106) and to disappear, "I wish somebody would do something with her!" (Albee 106) is explored throughout *The American Dream*. Any sincerity Mommy has towards her mother is manufactured and faked "Mommy's treatment of Grandma throughout the play underscores the brusque insensitivity of a society in which individuals are conditioned to think of their own satisfaction" (Albee 109). In a society founded on consumerism and reliant on instant gratification, taking care of the elderly and weak falls low on the priority list. Mommy's inability to provide geriatric care for her mother directly results from her continuous participation in consumer culture. Grandma cannot provide anything for Mommy that she desires and so Mommy would simply rather be rid of her, than have to sacrifice her time, energy, and money when she would receive no return.

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Albee presents Mommy as hysterical to attack the Dream's underpinning need for fertility. To clarify, the Dream Institution needed mothers to propagate its tenants of conformity and consumerism to create a new homogeneous generation. The Dream fails when these mothers have no one to condition. In addition, when money, power, and status are the merits for success in life, Mommy and Daddy's two children become props in their pursuit for a "bumble of joy". Mommy and Daddy's first adopted child, the bumble, was initially bought because of their inability to reproduce (Albee 126). However, lacking any maternal instincts and inherently selfish, Mommy aborts the infant piece by piece after the baby seeks the attention of its father. The infant sensing that Mommy is devoid of anything maternal, nurturing, sends Mommy into a rage. Mrs. Barker agrees with Mommy's actions stating, "[w]hy, any self-respecting woman would have gorged those eyes right out of its head" (Albee 128). Mrs. Barker's defense that Mommy was acting out of a place of self-respect. Mrs. Barker assures Mommy that she conformed with societal norms and assumes that it is the baby, not Mommy, who is defective. Mommy kills the child because it was a product that did not meet her standards for "satisfaction." Albee implies that a child raised by selfish materialism fails because children require selflessness and attention, which, ironically, the Dream Institution conditions mothers to lack.

In true American fashion, Mommy and Daddy solicit Mrs. Barker for a refund bumble from the Bye-Bye Adoption Service. Grandma catches on to their attentions, and warns an unfazed Mrs. Barker, "so, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That's what they wanted" (Albee 129). Mrs. Barker's concern likely derives because she sees Mommy and Daddy as clients, not parents. Mrs. Barker is in the business of "selling"

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children, not of finding them loving homes. If anything, Mrs. Barker is providing Mommy a child that will fulfill her need to be a parent, and the opportunity to finally embrace her role as an agent of the Dream Institution. The couple's second child, Young Man, is everything Mommy would ever want. The Young Man describes himself as a “clean-cut, Midwestern farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile” (Albee 133). The Young Man here sells himself based off of his looks, having no skills to speak of, and is ultimately useless. The Adonis-like figure exemplifies Mommy’s vanity, and selfishness, making him the perfect product to purchase. After Mrs. Barker passes the Young Man to the couple, Mommy is quick to remind her store bought son that “we’re a wealthy family” (Albee 147), and ushers him to gather sauterne for a toast for a drink “to celebrate. To satisfaction! Who says you can’t get satisfaction these days!” (Albee 147). The “satisfaction” of having a beautiful and soulless son makes Mommy overjoyed. Albee gifts Mommy a prostitute to sate her desire to be a mother in title only. The son presents Mommy a new possession, and a status symbol to play with.

The comparison of the Young Man to a prostitute makes Albee’s criticism of the Dream Institution all too clear. The Young Man serves as a byproduct of social prostitution, wanton materialism, vapidness, and superficiality. When talking to Grandma, The Young Man confesses that “[he has] no talents at all, except for what you see... my person; my body, my face. In every other way I am incomplete, and I must therefore... compensate” (Albee 137). In other words, the Young Man can only service people through his body and is intellectually and emotionally vacant. He serves to highlight that the Dream is nothing but a glamorous facade only attractive in concept and not in practice. When Grandma nicknames the Young Man as the American Dream (Albee 137), she identifies the personification of emotional and spiritual emptiness in the face of

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consumer culture. With this institution, Albee seems to argue that “its value lies in its very existence, which is bound to bring about centripetal ideologies affirming the core. The dream must be, and it must be related to, for the nation to survive” (Varro 355). Depicting the Young Man as a prostitute affirms that it is the Dream Institution — the attempt of making the American Dream a prescriptive reality that informs social behavior — is fundamentally corrupt and corrosive. Albee provokes the tenants of the Post-war Dream Institution as the corruptive influence on the potential underneath. The ability to pursue economic and social mobility as proposed by Adams and envisioned by Crèvecoeur gets lost in a generation hyper fixated on self-interest and personal “satisfaction.” When too much emphasis is placed on unregulated consumerism, interpersonal relationships and empathy suffers as a result.

Albee’s *The American Dream* tears through the shiny packaging of the Dream Institution and rips straight to the hollowness underneath. The American household transforms into a torcherous den of verbal, physical, and emotional abuse. Albee exposes the contradiction that threatens the structural integrity of the Dream Institution through a character that elicits the most anxiety out of his Post-war audience, a hysterical, baby-less woman. Mommy threatens how the Dream Institution polices women’s behavior by failing to be a homemaker, failing to be a dutiful wife, and by failing to conceive. Regardless, even after Mommy bought the Young Man, she could not ever fully transform into the agent the Dream Institution required her to be. Mommy’s unchecked consumerism indicated her spiritual bankruptcy that made it difficult, if not impossible, for her to maintain interpersonal relationships. Mommy could not simultaneously maintain a household and raise a new generation of conformist children when she was also mandated to engage in consumer culture. At its root, *The American Dream* responds to a dangerous institution that conditions people to be complacent, cruel, and vain for the sake of

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appearances. Albee identifies the contradiction that the Dream Institution demands Americans squeeze out their individuality in order to achieve the American Dream. For both Crèvecoeur and Adams, individuality *was* the American Dream, and success was achieved through individual self-interest and hard work. This contradiction is irreconcilable for Albee. What the Dream Institution demanded and what people could deliver was unviable. Then again, it is called a dream for a reason — it is nonexistent — and Albee suggests that it should stay that way.

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