

**PARADOXES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN SELECTED
AMERICAN PLAYS**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the Thesis:

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is a record of the original research carried out

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Late **Issa Olalekan Bello** whose companionship in several ways energised my instinctual drive towards a life of an academic. You were the only one who seemingly understood me then, so painful you are not here to witness this academic height.

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ABSTRACT

The study explicates the paradoxes of the American Dream that are revealed through the experiences of the characters depicted in eight contemporary American plays. The plays are: (Tony Kushner's *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*; Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *A View from the Bridge*; August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and *Fences*; and Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* and *The America Play*). The research demonstrates how characters represented struggle to achieve success and prosperity in diverse spheres of life of the American environment. It shows that they are motivated by hopes of living "the good life" and attaining a measure of happiness that they feel the American Dream promises. The Dream is revealed in the study as a template with complex material and non-material implications, plagued by incongruities, contrarities, and paradoxes which the plays imaginatively focus on.

In this research, characters' experiences are underscored by seeming contradictions emanating from their perceptions, interpretations and attempts at the actualisation of the American Dream idealistic and non idealistic or material elements. Concepts in literary theories, "Social Conflict Theory", "Ideology", and theory of "the Conscious" and "the Unconscious" derived from Marxism and Psychoanalytic postulations, are deployed in the analysis of the texts. Three scenarios of contending interests in the American society depicted reveal the Economic, Political, Moral, and Cultural paradoxes of the American Dream in these plays. These include: The national American society's interests, individuals' personal interests and racial and/or groups' interests. Outcomes of the research seem to sufficiently support the thesis statement of the study; that the American Dream is an idea plagued by interpretable incongruities when it is being translated, interpreted or applied to specific or practical situations.

The thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter One is the introductory section in which the Background to the Study, Statement of Research Problem, Research Objectives, Significance of the Study, Research Questions, Scope and Delimitation of Study, Definition of Terms, Methodology are presented. In Chapter Two, the Literature Review encompassing a critique of extant scholarly views, is presented. The Chapter also presents the Theoretical Framework, in which concepts from two literary theories, Marxism and Psychoanalysis are critically reviewed and engaged to justify a theoretical basis for the study. Chapter Three focuses on textual analysis of three texts, *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika* and *The America Play*. This is followed by Chapter Four where a further textual analysis of *All My Sons* and *Fences* and *Topdog/Underdog* is carried out. The last textual analysis in the thesis is the focus of Chapter Five. In the chapter, an explication of *A View from the Bridge* and *The Piano Lesson* is presented. Finally, Chapter Six which is the Findings and Conclusion of the thesis is presented through a focus on Summary of Findings and Contributions to Knowledge.